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Christina Leadlay

Heard On The Hill

Bloc MP Denis Trudel stars in Hey Major's new music video



Bloc MP Denis Trudel, top right, plays a band manager in Hey Major's new video for *Le Comble*. Screenshot courtesy of YouTube



Now and again, Bloc Québécois MP **Denis Trudel** returns to his acting roots.

Before he was first elected in 2019 to represent the riding of Longueuil-Saint-Hubert, Que., Trudel had been featured in more than 25 films and television series. In 2021, he was involved in a dramatization of *L'Affaire Chantal Daigle*, a legal drama based on a young Québécois woman's right to an abortion in 1989.

Trudel's latest gig is of a lighter subject matter, but also inspired by a true story.

The two-term MP has a key role in the new music video for Hey Major, a Sherbrooke, Que.-based duo featuring multi-instrumentalist brothers **Mikaël** and **Raphaël Fortin**. The video is for their new single, *Le Comble*, which roughly translates to "The Height."

Speaking with **Heard on the Hill** in French on March 22, Trudel explained his character is based on Hey Major's first record label manager.

"These two men from Sherbrooke who are very, very talented. About seven or eight years ago, they participated in a national music contest in which I think 3,000 musical groups were taking part, and they won," explained Trudel, referring to the Fortin brothers winning the CBC's Searchlight contest in

2015, though under a different band name.

"And there they met a manager, someone from a record label approached them, and they signed on. But it all fell apart. I don't know all the details," he said, noting that roughly a year ago, Hey Major cut ties with that label, and went back to their roots, singing in French.

"This video is a bit of a parody about that experience with that manager. I am interpreting that infamous manager who was not good to them," explained Trudel.

The video opens with the Fortin brothers in a recording studio while the sunglass-sporting manager observes from the technical booth. The manager is distracted by a phone call, the band gets impatient, and a disagreement simmers between the three men. The manager leaves the booth and proceeds to lock the musicians in the studio. The video then cuts to a dreamlike flashback showing how the brothers ended up signing on with the manager. The scene jumps back to the studio, where the manager is now face to face with the musicians, and a physical confrontation ensues. HOH won't spoil the rest, but both the music and the video production values are very high. Hey Major's music has been described as "elegant rock" with lots of emotion and energy.

Trudel said he didn't know the Fortins beforehand, but it was the video's director, **Edouard Gingras**, who asked the MP to take part. Trudel knew Gingras from having worked in the past with Edouard's director father, **François Gingras**. Shooting took place back in February over the course of one very long day—from 8 a.m. until 1 a.m., Trudel confirmed—partially in Montreal, and also in a barn in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Que. The MP recalls it was -20 C and "disagreeable at times," but that the small, tight-knit crew provided coats, heaters, and hot coffee to keep everyone warm.

"It's very interesting and creative to take part in a film shoot," Trudel told HOH. "For me, it's an adventure, and it gets me out of the political space once in a while," he said. "It drops me into a world that I have known for a very long time, and it makes me happy. I enjoy helping up-and-coming young artists."

This isn't Trudel's first music video, though he confessed it's been a while since he last appeared in one. "I don't recall the group's name. It's been a very long time, at the beginning of the 1990s. It was a group that is no longer around, but they had one or two hits, and I was in their videos," he told HOH. Look for Hey Major on YouTube and anywhere you download music.

Clark was prime minister from 1979-80, and also served as secretary of state for external affairs from 1984-1991. He's a companion in the Order of Canada, a member of the Alberta Order of Excellence and La Francophonie's l'Ordre de la Pleiades, and has been awarded 12 honorary degrees. The event, scheduled for May 22, will be held in at Ottawa's Shaw Centre at 55 Colonel By Dr. cleadlay@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Tony Clement joins Sandstone Group

Former Conservative cabinet minister **Tony Clement** has joined the Sandstone Group, the firm announced on March 28.

"He brings a strong background in government, both at the federal and provincial level, where he took on challenging files from SARS to the auto crisis to working to balance the federal budget," said **Kevin Bosch**, Sandstone's co-founder and managing partner in a press release.

From 1995 to 2003, Clement was an Ontario Progressive Conservative MPP and served in the cabinets of Ontario Premiers **Mike Harris** and **Ernie Eves**. He was then elected federally in Parry Sound-Muskoka, Ont., in 2006, and served in **Stephen Harper's** cabinet in various roles including health, industry, and the Treasury Board. In November 2018, he left the Conservative caucus following a sexting scandal, and didn't seek re-election in 2019.



Canadian Peace Museum founder hopes for federal support

There's a move afoot to create a new national museum in a town located 225 kilometres west of Ottawa.

Bancroft, Ont., is tapped to be the future home of the nascent Canadian Peace Museum, the brainchild of Scotland-born **Chris Houston**.

According to the museum's website, Houston was motivated to create the venue based on his experience in conflict zones through his global humanitarian work through which he witnessed the impact of armed conflict.

"I appreciate the relative peacefulness of Canada, but I do not take it for granted," Houston is quoted saying on the website. "We are opening the Canadian Peace Museum to promote peace and to showcase the links between peace, conflict, equity, cohesive communities, art, activism and climate change."

On March 15, the museum published the results of a survey which found that 69 per cent of respondents think it's important for Canadians to learn about how we've advanced peace throughout our history, and that 65 per cent think that a commitment to peace is one of this country's main values.

In an email to HOH, Houston explained both Bancroft's town council and community endorse the project: "Bancroft is a small town of 4,000 residents, but has a huge regional influence with

over six million people passing [through] annually."

Houston, who resides in Bancroft, has met with the area's MP, Conservative **Shelby Kramp-Neuman**, whom he said has "expressed enthusiasm," and with Liberal parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs **Rob Oliphant**, who is "enthusiastic for the project and offered to connect us to people in Canadian Heritage and Rural Economic Development," he said. Houston also noted he hopes to discuss the project with Heritage Minister **Pascale St-Onge**.

The Canadian Peace Museum needs \$2.3-million for initial set-up costs, with annual operating costs projected to be \$900,000 thereafter. "We are on track, in the sense that we have formed our official organization, made the plans, and started the fundraising. We have received very enthusiastic support from all levels of government, but that has not turned into funding yet," said Houston.

The museum's board welcomes private philanthropy support, and has a goal to open the museum in 2025. Houston said the museum will need around 10,000 square feet of space, and he has a suitable local retail unit in mind.

"Over the years, we would love to build a custom-built museum," he told HOH.

Pearson Centre to fête 45th anniversary of Joe Clark becoming PM

The Pearson Centre for Progressive Policy will host Canada's 16th prime minister **Joe Clark** for a discussion on the 45th anniversary of his election to the nation's top job.

Winning a minority Progressive Conservative government in 1979 as the youngest person to become prime minister, he defeated incumbent prime minister **Pierre Elliott Trudeau**, bringing an end to more than 15 years of Liberal governance.



Clark was prime minister from 1979-80, and also served as secretary of state for external affairs from 1984-1991. He's a companion in the Order of Canada, a member of the Alberta Order of Excellence and La Francophonie's l'Ordre de la Pleiades, and has been awarded 12 honorary degrees.

The event, scheduled for May 22, will be held in at Ottawa's Shaw Centre at 55 Colonel By Dr. cleadlay@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

The Multibillion-Dollar Problem Depleting Canada's Productivity: Policymakers need to wake up to the economic impact of Insomnia

Meet Canada's Top Experts on Sleep & Chronic Insomnia: A major disruptor of Canada's productivity.

A reception and presentation by lead economist and author of the RAND Corporation's report "The societal and economic burden of insomnia in adults", along with the Canadian Sleep Society and a national sleep expert on the importance of tackling insomnia's negative impact on our economy.

April 9, 5pm - 7:30pm
House of Commons,
Valour Building Rm 268
RSVP:
charles@impactcanada.com

Chronic insomnia disorder is a significant public health issue that affects a considerable portion of the Canadian population, with wide-ranging implications for both individual well-being and the broader economy. Recognizing chronic insomnia as a medical condition that impairs daytime functioning and addressing it through enhanced healthcare access and effective treatments is not only a matter of improving public health but also an economic imperative.

The economic repercussions of chronic insomnia disorder in Canada are multifaceted, impacting both direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include healthcare expenses related to the diagnosis and treatment of insomnia, such as doctor visits, hospital services, and medications. Indirect costs, however, are more substantial and arise from lost productivity, absenteeism, and accidents at work or on the road due to fatigue. Additionally, there are the long-term health consequences of untreated insomnia, which can lead to more serious conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and mental health disorders, further straining Canada's healthcare system.

A new international study¹, "The Societal and Economic Burden of Insomnia in Adults," concluded that insomnia-related reduced productivity in Canada represented 1.03 percent of the GDP in 2019, which translates to CAN\$25.2 billion. It affects millions of adults in Canada with a predicted prevalence of 8.8% which is equivalent to 2.2 million working age adults.

Marco Hafner, a senior economist and research leader at RAND Europe who co-authored the study, says, "Insomnia is associated with a substantial economic burden which was estimated to equate to annual loss of up to 54 days of productivity, as a consequence of impaired daily functioning." The study was conducted independently by RAND Europe and examined the societal and economic burden of chronic insomnia among adults in 16 countries across Europe, North America, and Australia.

Understanding the true economic burden would inform policy decisions about funding and health care priorities, as sleep should be recognized as an essential pillar of health, along with nutrition and physical activity.

Canadian Sleep Society (CSS) Advocates for Change

Chronic insomnia disorder is a persistent medical condition that impacts a person's ability to fall or stay asleep and that impacts daytime functioning. Chronic insomnia disorder can be the result of neurobiological dysregulation, where wake promoting areas in the brain are active at night (hyperarousal). Chronic insomnia disorder impacts on clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, educational, academic, behavioural, or other areas.

"Sleep should be recognized as an essential pillar of health along with nutrition and physical activity," says John Peever, President, Canadian Sleep Society. "We are creating partnerships with a variety of stakeholders to support health policy improvement associated with sleep management so that all Canadians have access to care and ultimately a healthy sleep."

In 2022, the CSS conducted a burden of illness review² which included the role of insomnia on occupational health. The CSS authors stated that problems with sustained attention, concentration and difficulties accomplishing even simple tasks are among the first daytime consequences leading people with insomnia to seek treatment. It was also noted

that these problems were associated with increased risks for errors/accidents on the job as well as risks of accidents on the road which is part of multiple findings which suggest that insomnia is a robust predictor of subsequent work disability.

The CSS burden of illness review reported that, "Insomnia is a highly prevalent and often persistent condition which produces a heavy burden for the individual, their family, employers, and society at large. It is imperative to develop, implement, and disseminate evidence-based interventions to reduce or even prevent those adverse health outcomes." The CSS aims to increase awareness about sleep for the general public and government decision makers that sleep is crucial for physical, emotional and cognitive health. The CSS advocates for many sleep disorders, including insomnia, sleep apnea, REM sleep behaviour disorder, narcolepsy, restless leg syndrome, and shift work sleep disorder. The year 2019 marked the launch of Dormez là-dessus – Sleep on it!, a bilingual Canadian public health campaign to promote the importance of sleep to maintain good health: <https://sleeponitcanada.ca/>. In 2023, CSS partnered with the Canadian Sleep Research Consortium, to catalyze research focused on sleep health and foster the translation of research into practice, from surveillance and prevention to personalized care for Canadians with chronic sleep disorders. This notable led to the launch of the Week for Better Sleep, an interactive sleep health campaign: researchsleep.ca/.

Chronic insomnia disorder is a tremendous public health issue that needs more attention

"Sleep is a biological necessity that ensures optimal functioning throughout the day," says Dr Michael Mak, sleep medicine specialist and staff psychiatrist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Toronto. "Insomnia is a tremendous public health issue that deserves

more attention. Chronically poor sleep can have serious consequences for physical and mental health. It's been associated with cardiovascular problems, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, depression and risk of death."

Public health efforts are needed to reduce the prevalence of insomnia symptoms and its associated burden in the population, as well as prioritizing funding allocation for effective insomnia counseling and therapies. In the past 5 years, new estimates of the health care and health-related loss of productivity costs associated with insomnia in Canada have sparked an increase in political engagement on this economic burden. It affects a wide range of outcomes, from mental health to workplace productivity, and even impacts chronic disease rates.

"The RAND data demonstrate the significant decline in productivity and GDP losses to our economy – as well as the personal impact on the lives of Canadians," says John Peever, President, Canadian Sleep Society. "There is a massive need for the government to invest in evidence-based intervention strategies for insomnia and other sleep disorders which can reduce the major economic and health burdens caused by this persistent medical condition."

Awakening Policy Change: Charting a Course for Better Sleep Health for Canadians

Given the multifaceted nature of chronic insomnia and the breadth of its implications, there should be a collaborative effort to address the issue comprehensively. Imagine if the Minister of Health, Minister of Labour, and Minister of Education worked together to address the root causes and put in place tools and programs to mitigate the effects of chronic insomnia? Given the economic and personal impact of chronic insomnia disorder in Canada, there is an urgent need for increased governmental recognition and action across all portfolios.

Three Action Items for Government and Policy Makers:

- 1 Chronic insomnia disorder as a key health issue impacting Canadians. It impacts your constituents every day through an increased demand for healthcare services, workplace absenteeism, and mental health services. Understand and prioritize how sleep health is addressed in your ministry and/or policy frameworks.
- 2 Review current support and create a plan of action to improve access to public health initiatives, workplace wellness programs, broader insurance coverage, and regulatory support for chronic insomnia therapies.
- 3 Make sleep health a part of your ministry's overall strategy over the next 12 months before World Sleep Day on March 15, 2025. Sleep is essential to health, it is multidimensional, and we must address sleep health disparities to improve health and wellness worldwide.

The economic impact of chronic insomnia disorder in Canada is profound, affecting not only the healthcare system but also workplace productivity and overall quality of life. Recognizing insomnia as a medical condition that impairs daytime functioning is a crucial step towards addressing this issue. Addressing the challenge of insomnia in Canada is not just a health imperative but an economic one, with the potential to enhance the well-being of individuals and the productivity of the nation as a whole.

¹Hafner, Marco, Robert J. Romanelli, Erez Yerushalmi, and Wendy M. Troxel, The societal and economic burden of insomnia in adults: An international study. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2166-1.html.

²Chaput, J-P et al. National strategy on the integration of sleep and circadian rhythms into public health research and policies: Report from the Canadian Sleep and Circadian Network. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35400617/>

This article was co-sponsored by the Canadian Sleep Society and Idorsia Pharmaceuticals Canada Ltd.

The Canadian Sleep Society is a national organization committed to improving sleep for all Canadians through: support for research, promotion of high-quality clinical care, education of professionals and the public, and advocacy for sleep and sleep disorders medicine. <https://css-scs.ca>.

Idorsia is specialized in the discovery and development of small molecules, to transform the horizon of therapeutic options. With a broad, diversified and balanced development pipeline, Idorsia have molecules in CNS, cardiovascular and immunological disorders, as well as orphan diseases. With the Canadian operations based in Montreal, Idorsia is building a cross-functional team to begin commercial readiness for late-stage pipeline products. Idorsia has launched a chronic insomnia prescription medication which specifically targets a mechanism of action that decreases nighttime overactive wakefulness. For more information about Idorsia, contact Idorsia.canada@idorsia.com or visit Idorsia.com.

Canadian Sleep Society Société Canadienne du Sommeil

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News

Confronting Beijing's meddling outweighs concerns over politician participation, says Uyghur advocate

Panellists from diaspora groups provided the Foreign Interference Commission with 'courageous and heartbreaking' context to examine the full scope of the problem, says a former CSIS official.

BY STUART BENSON

Despite threatening to boycott the public inquiry into foreign election interference, prominent Uyghur rights activist Mehmet Tohti says the high personal cost he and other members of the diaspora have paid in their advocacy against Beijing far outweighs his concerns over the full standing granted to a trio of politicians he views as no different than agents of the Chinese government.

And while last-minute negotiations to allow panellists to participate in a limited capacity has shown the inquiry's commitment to letting people speak freely without getting caught in the crosshairs of trans-national repression, one national security expert says he doesn't expect the remaining witness testimony and documentary evidence will provide the "smoking gun" many seem to be searching for.

The Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions will finish off its first round of witnesses April 3, hearing testimony from current and former Members of Parliament, including NDP MP Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, Ont.), Conservative MP Michael Chong (Wellington-Halton Hills, Ont.), and former Conservative MPs Kenny Chiu and Erin O'Toole, who are expected to testify regarding their personal experiences as targets of foreign interference.

On April 2, the commission heard testimony from Independent MP Han Dong (Don Valley North, Ont.); former Gananoque, Ont., mayor Ted Lojko; Markham, Ont., deputy mayor Michael Chan; and a panel of party officials, including former NDP national director Anne McGrath, now principal secretary to party leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South,



Justice Marie-Josée Hogue will hear from nearly 50 witnesses and examine thousands of pages of documents before the first stage of hearings for the public inquiry into foreign election interference in the last two federal elections is complete on April 10, with her initial report due May 3. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

B.C.); Azam Ishmael, the federal Liberal Party's national director; and Walied Soliman, the chair of O'Toole's 2020 leadership campaign and the party's 2021 federal election campaign co-chair.

While those witnesses have direct experiences as the alleged targets of election interference by foreign governments, or, in some cases, as the subject of allegations they may have participated in or benefited from it, some of the most personal and impactful presentations were made the first day of public hearings on March 27 by a panel of individuals representing various diaspora communities for whom foreign interference is a daily reality.

Representing all of the main countries in the focus of the commission's mandate, the panel consisted of Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion, representing the Association of Families of Flight PS752, which was downed by Iran in January 2020; Yuriy Novodvorskiy, representing the Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance; Jaskaran Sandhu, with the Sikh Coalition; Grace Dai Wollensak, speaking on behalf of the Falun Dafa Association of Canada; Winnie Ng, from the Chinese Canadian Concern Group; and Tohti, representing the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project (URAP).

While not considered evidentiary testimony—unlike other witnesses, the panellists were not cross-examined by parties with standing in the inquiry, but instead answered pre-agreed-upon questions posed by the commission's counsel—each presentation detailed their own personal experiences with harassment, threats, and intimidation against themselves and their communi-

ties spanning well beyond the commission's focus on the 43rd and 44th federal elections.

Previously, Tohti and URAP had said they would boycott the inquiry over Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue's decision to grant full "party" standing to Chan and Dong, and the "intervenor" status given to Independent Senator Yuen Pau Woo (British Columbia) because of their alleged "links and support for the Chinese Communist Party" (CCP). In January, Tohti told *The Hill Times* that he found the decision "baffling" and would not allow himself to be cross-examined by any of the three, which he likened to presenting himself for questioning to the CCP.

Dong left the Liberal caucus last March to clear his name after Global News reported he

"privately advised a senior Chinese diplomat in February 2021 that Beijing should hold off freeing [Canadians] Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, according to two separate national security sources."

In a previous story, Global News also alleged that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) had warned the Liberal government about Dong's proximity to Beijing, and that Chan has been a CSIS national security target for years due to alleged links to China's Toronto consulate and associations with CCP proxies.

Both men have forcefully denied the allegations, and Dong has filed a lawsuit against Global News over its reporting.

Woo has also been criticized for what some have called his pro-Beijing stances, including his Senate vote against labelling the CCP's treatment of Uyghurs as genocide, and his criticisms of the proposed foreign agent registry.

In a statement to *The Hill Times*, Woo, who was present at the hearings for the first half of the March 27 panel presentation, said he is "glad" that Tohti is participating in the inquiry, and hopes his "reservations about the inquiry have been assuaged."

While URAP has withdrawn from the Human Rights Coalition—which is composed of various diaspora groups that have been granted full standing and whose testimony will be cross-examined by the other parties—in an interview with *The Hill Times* after the hearing was adjourned on March 27, Tohti said that following negotiations between his legal counsel and the commission, he felt that the limited panel

format had sufficiently assuaged his concerns.

Tohti said his concerns remain about the continued participation of Chan, Dong, and Woo. Still, given that they would not be allowed to cross-examine him, those concerns were outweighed by the importance of ensuring the experience of Uyghur Canadians is "on the table" when Hogue considers the rest of the evidence and testimony the inquiry will produce.

"Foreign interference isn't just terminology; it's a reality for Uyghur Canadians, and it doesn't just happen during elections," Tohti explained. "It's transnational repression. It's theft, deception, the fabrication of documents, and immigration fraud, and it can be deadly."

Tohti said he hoped he had impressed upon Hogue that the effects of foreign interference should be measured by its harmful effects on Canadians' lives, not just on their elections and institutions. While he could only say so much during the roughly 30 minutes of speaking time he was allotted—having been interrupted midway through his presentation for a mid-afternoon break in the proceedings—URAP has also submitted 37 policy recommendations to the commission, including divestment from financial relationships with Chinese-state-owned businesses, and implementing a foreign agents registry.

While the diaspora panel's presentation won't strictly be considered evidence by Hogue when she produces her final report at the end of this year, a second stage of hearings will take a deeper dive into the experiences of diaspora communities, and the impacts of foreign interference on Canada's democratic institutions sometime this fall.

Former CSIS executive manager Dan Stanton, now director of national security at the University of Ottawa's Professional Development Institute, told *The Hill Times* that the panellists had provided a "courageous and heartbreaking" framing device to give the commission needed context to examine the full scope of the problem.

"It's not just a concept, and it's not isolated," Stanton said, adding that while the remaining 46 witnesses and their evidence will focus on the federal elections in 2019 and 2021, it was important for the panel to take the commission "back in time" to fully describe the extent of the issue.

Speaking with *The Hill Times* in his capacity as the director of



Prominent Uyghur rights advocate Mehmet Tohti says foreign interference and transnational repression are a daily reality both for members of his community in Canada and their families in China. *Photograph courtesy of X*

Continued on page 20

Canada has been concerned with a lack of diplomatic access in China amid turbulent ties

Former Canadian diplomats aren't hopeful that Ottawa will have improved diplomatic access in Beijing anytime soon.

BY NEIL MOSS

Amid its continued rocky relationship with Beijing, the federal government has been concerned with the lack of diplomatic access that is granted to Canada's envoy in China.

That concern was highlighted in a briefing note—released under the Access to Information Act—for deputy minister of foreign affairs David Morrison ahead of a luncheon with Chinese Ambassador to Canada Cong Peiwu last summer.

“We continued to be concerned about continued lack of access for Ambassador [Jennifer] May in China,” reads one of the “top-line messages” for the June 21, 2023, meeting.

Other key messages for Morrison included noting that Canada “continues to seek open channels of communication” with China despite the turbulent relationship, and a request for a meeting between Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.) and then-Chinese foreign affairs minister Qin Gang last summer. Joly later held a call with Qin's successor Wang Yi at the start of 2024, and met with China's top diplomat on the margins of the Munich Security Conference in February.

The federal government appointed May as its newest ambassador to China in September 2022, following two consecutive political appointees—John McCallum and Dominic Barton—holding the post, which had only been held by career diplomats prior to 2016.

Global Affairs Canada spokesperson Charlotte MacLeod said May has met with “various representatives of the PRC [People's Republic of China] government in China, including senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”

The Hill Times understands that May has met with the director-general for North American and Oceanic affairs in China's Foreign Ministry.

“Canada remains committed to pursuing pragmatic diplomacy, including with the People's Republic of China,” MacLeod said. “Minister Joly and her PRC counterpart, Minister Wang Yi, have



Canada has continued to seek ‘open channels of communication’ with China, including a meeting between Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly and her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi at the Munich Security Conference in February. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

agreed that it is important to keep communication channels open despite challenges in the bilateral relationship.”

Gordon Houlden, director emeritus at the University of Alberta's China Institute, said when Canada-China relations have taken a downturn, Beijing has historically responded by restricting access.

“One of the easy things that you can do to punish another country is to make it tough for them to see your leadership or your people that have influence,” said Houlden, a former Canadian diplomat who was twice posted in Beijing. “All governments do it to some extent, but I think the Chinese are masters at it.”

He said that he is confident that May is having the problems that were cited in Morrison's briefing note.

Houlden said access is important both for advancing files—like economic co-operation—amid a state of lacklustre affairs, as well as being able to report back to Ottawa what is happening on the ground in China, which is aided by having conversations with officials in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other governmental departments.

“I'm a bit skeptical that it will be dramatically reversed or changed until there is a sharp uptick or sustained uptick in the relationship,” he said.

Former Canadian ambassador to China Guy Saint-Jacques, who served in Beijing from 2012-2016, said, in general, he doesn't expect May's access in Beijing to improve.

“In Beijing—especially with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—access is limited,” said Saint-Jacques, noting that when travelling outside China's capital, there is added access to governors and mayors.



Addressing Canada's concern over lack of diplomatic access in China was one of David Morrison's ‘top-line messages’ for a meeting with Chinese Ambassador Cong Peiwu, pictured, last summer. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

“In the present state of things, I don't think we have much the Chinese would find important to discuss,” he said, remarking that while it would be better for May to have increased access, it doesn't have a large impact on her ability to perform the diplomatic role.

Like May, Barton also struggled to gain formal access to influential figures in China's foreign ministry, but Saint-Jacques noted that Barton was able to use contacts he built through his years in China working with McKinsey and Company to informally pass along messages.

Saint-Jacques said since last summer there has been a slight improvement with China taking a less-strident tone towards Canada. The June 2023 meeting between Morrison and Cong was set to take place six weeks after

Canada had expelled Chinese diplomat Zhao Wei, who allegedly targeted the family of Conservative MP Michael Chong (Wellington-Halton Hills, Ont.) in China. Since then, Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.) became the first minister to travel to China since relations hit a nadir amid the Two Michaels affair, taking part in the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development last August.

The former Canadian ambassador also noted that he raised concerns about the lack of access to senior Chinese officials when he was posted to Beijing during a time of less-sour relations, remarking that in Ottawa, the Chinese ambassador can speak to cabinet ministers, but Canadian officials aren't given the same opportunity.

The briefing note ahead of Morrison's meeting with Cong highlights that Canada would welcome the Chinese ambassador's ideas on how the two countries can “stabilize” their relationship. It also noted that if Cong put pressure on Canada to fix bilateral relations, Morrison should respond: “I would challenge your government to reflect on its own responsibilities and accountabilities.”

According to the Chinese readout of Wang's February meeting with Joly, to return to a “sound and stable track” in the bilateral relationship, China wants Canada to “establish a correct understanding of China,” to “stop hyping up the ‘China threat’ theory,” to “stop spreading false information about the so-called ‘Chinese interference in Canada's internal affairs,’” and to “stop overstretching the concept of national security” in economic and science and technology matters.

A GAC readout of the meeting offered far fewer details, citing that the two discussed Canada-China relations, and the Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars.

“Both ministers agreed that bilateral issues should continue to be discussed pragmatically and constructively, in a spirit of mutual respect, with regular communication between the two sides,” the readout noted.

Last September, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) told Bloomberg that China has “made decisions over the past years” that has made it more difficult for all countries, including Canada, to engage.

The briefing note for Morrison notes that the two sides “could also look at leader-level engagement in the fall.”

Trudeau and Chinese President Xi Jinping had a short conversation at the APEC summit last November, according to a CBC report, but the two leaders didn't have a formal meeting.

Saint-Jacques told *The Hill Times* that the chill in the Canada-China relationship is unlikely to be lifted while Trudeau is still in office.

“There won't be any major improvement as long as Justin Trudeau is prime minister because the chemistry between him and Xi Jinping is very bad,” he said. “I think that Xi Jinping must feel that Canada must continue to be punished and he has no time for Trudeau.”

The discord is expected to only worsen as public testimony continues as part of the foreign interference public inquiry.

On the topic of foreign interference, the briefing note for Morrison noted that “this will get more difficult before it gets better.”

May told the CBC in January that the public inquiry will be “deeply uncomfortable” for Beijing, noting that she has held “difficult” conversations with China about foreign interference.

Saint-Jacques said China will not want to reward Canada in any way until the inquiry is over.

Former diplomat Charles Burton, who has been twice posted to Canada's Embassy in Beijing, said there should be a level of reciprocity when granting access to diplomats.

“If we're receiving their people, the expectation is that they should be receiving our people. It's just the standard practice that maintains the functioning of relations between nations,” he said.

Prior to the June 21 meeting between Morrison and Cong, Morrison met with Cong in early May before Canada expelled Zhao. Cong also held a call with Weldon Epp, GAC's assistant deputy minister for Indo-Pacific, a week before the scheduled luncheon.

Burton said China is showing that unless Canada complies with Beijing's expectations for the bilateral relationship, it won't respect international norms.

“We're left without too many options beyond exhorting the Chinese to please abide by normal diplomatic protocols. We don't seem to have much leverage to enforce that,” he said.

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News

School food advocates celebrate as Liberals serve up long-awaited \$1B for national program

While still light on specifics or agreements with the provinces and territories, Coalition for Healthy School Food co-ordinator Debbie Field says ‘the most important thing is they’re making the whole commitment.’

BY STUART BENSON

The Liberals have announced they will be dishing out the first portion of the long-awaited funding for a national school food program in their latest pre-budget appetizer, which they say could provide up to 400,000 more students with healthy school meals as early as this fall.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) announced the promised \$1-billion over five years—first promised in the Liberals’ 2021 election platform—would be included in the upcoming April 16 budget. The April 1 announcement was made at the Boys and Girls Club community centre in Scarborough, Ont., alongside Families, Children, and Social Development Minister Jenna Sudds (Kanata-Carleton, Ont.), Women and Gender Equality and Youth Minister Marci Ien (Toronto Centre, Ont.), and several other members of the Liberals’ Toronto caucus.

“We’re gonna get this done by working together with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous partners, and expanding access to schools and programs across the country,” Freeland said, adding that she wants the program to be ready to roll out by the beginning of the fall semester.

“For moms and dads across Canada, especially those who are struggling with the high cost of groceries, this will mean peace of mind knowing that their kids will have healthy foods and are well taken care of,” she continued. “For



kids, it means not being hungry at school.”

Framed alongside other pre-budget announcements, including a so-called Renters’ Bill of Rights, expanding access to the federal childcare program, and student debt forgiveness, the announcement was framed within the emerging theme of the Liberals’ budget charm offensive: economic “intergenerational fairness.”

Trudeau said that while recognizing each province and territory has their own programs, “the need is far greater than any one is able to meet right now.”

“These are choices we’re making as a government because we know that making sure that young people here get the best start in life is how you build fairness for every generation,” Trudeau said. “So we’re putting a billion dollars forward to be sent out to provinces and territories to add 400,000 more kids across the country who will have fuller bellies in class, who will be able to go to school and know that they can focus on reading and learning.”

Breakfast Club of Canada co-founder Judith Barry attended the press conference alongside several other stakeholder organizations, and said it was a “privilege” to be part of the “historic announcement.”

“Our country is finally joining the other G7 countries by implementing a national school food program, which is amazing,” Bar-

ry told *The Hill Times* following the press conference. “I think it’s a great day for our country.”

While the announcement was light on specifics about how much of the \$1-billion will be included in the upcoming budget, or how it will be distributed to the provinces and territories, Barry said that the intentions and objectives are clear.

“We don’t know everything about the rollout yet, but at least we know that it will build on the existing programs and help us to reach and feed more children,” Barry said, adding that the consultations with those provinces, territories, and First Nations will be very important to ensure those programs are maintained at their current level.

“We will be watching how each province and territory negotiates, but Breakfast Club of Canada will ensure the results are concrete to provide more quality programs and reach more children,” Barry explained.

Debbie Field, a co-ordinator with the Coalition for Healthy School Food, spoke with *The Hill Times* on March 28, before the announcement, and at the time said she was “quietly optimistic” that the government would finally include the first \$200-million in the upcoming budget. In a follow-up interview after the announcement on April 1, Field said she was “thrilled.”

“It’s everything we hoped for,” Field said. “The most important thing is they’re making the com-

mitment, and they’re making the whole commitment.”

Field also noted that besides being a “Canadian first,” the program launch would represent the largest investment in food policy in Canadian history, surpassing even the Local Food Infrastructure Fund introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This is a major new social program that will hopefully be here for decades, and that hopefully is a totally non-partisan issue everybody can get behind, like childcare,” Field said, adding that she believes the success of the negotiations over the childcare accords—however complicated—had demonstrated that a national school food program was also possible.

“We certainly don’t want the negotiations to be as tough as they were for childcare, so we’re going to urge every province and territory to make sure those agreements are signed as quickly as possible so that the money can flow just as quickly,” Field continued.

When asked whether he would support a national school food program during an April 1 press conference about his opposition to the increase to the federal carbon price, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) did not directly answer the question.

“I find it ironic that [Trudeau is] promising a federal food bureaucracy in Ottawa, the same day as he raises taxes on food,” Poilievre told reporters standing in front of a gas station sign in Nanaimo, B.C.

“His carbon tax on the farmer who grows the food, and the trucker who ships the food is a tax on the single mom who can’t afford to buy the food,” Poilievre continued. “My common sense plan is to axe the carbon tax to lower the cost of food for everyone so that we can reverse the malnutrition that [Trudeau’s] eight years have caused.”

In a virtual media availability following the announcement on April 1, Sudds also cited the negotiations over childcare as a model for reaching an agreement on school food.

“I think that is a model we will look to explore again,” Sudds told reporters. “As we work with our partners in the provinces, territories, and Indigenous govern-

Continued on page 20



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland, centre, says the announcement of a national school food program is ‘the culmination of 30 years of work and advocacy’ by the stakeholders and members of the Liberal caucus who were present during the press conference on April 1. Screenshot courtesy of CPAC

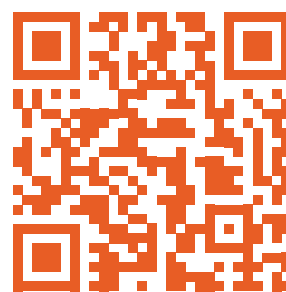


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Editorial

Pre-budget leaks for renters don't hold much water

As the Liberal government gears up to unveil its budget on April 16, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been roaming the country and dropping breadcrumbs.

He began in British Columbia on March 27 when he announced a suite of measures ostensibly aimed at all renters, but particularly those in the millennial demographic who may have soured on him and his party since lifting them to a majority victory in 2015.

The announcement included a \$15-million Tenant Protection Fund, the creation of a new Renters' Bill of Rights, and a plan for credit-score benefits for one-time rent payments.

"One of the biggest pressures on young people right now is housing. This is particularly true for renters—where it feels like the deck is stacked against them. They are facing skyrocketing rents, renovations, unfair competition, and a lack of housing options," reads a press release from the Prime Minister's Office. "While we've taken bold action to build more homes, faster; improve access to housing; and make homes more affordable, we know there is more to be done."

The proposed bill of rights will supposedly be "developed and implemented in partnership with provinces and territories" who have jurisdiction over rental housing. The plan is supposed to "require landlords to disclose a clear

history of apartment pricing so renters can bargain fairly," and the feds also aim to "crack down on renovations, create a nationwide standard lease agreement, and give renters more agency."

If the federal government can somehow convince provinces and territories to incorporate said bill of rights into their respective statutes regarding residential tenancy, it would open the door to potential issues with enforcement and efficacy.

That's not to say that since something is hard, it should be avoided—"we've tried nothing, and we're all out of ideas" isn't the way to govern.

But relying on people to "do the right thing" is rarely a sound strategy, especially when money is involved.

To wit: last year, Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne asked grocery executives to come up with a plan to stabilize food prices. Or else...? This is the same industry that has been struggling since 2021 to put together a voluntary Grocery Code of Conduct.

The Liberals are allocating money to tenant advocacy organizations. But unless money is also going to start flowing to clear the already-backlogged tenancy boards and tribunals, the bill of rights will be just one more way for people who are finding it hard to secure housing to see how they're being screwed.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

Protect kids' freedom: Ottawa reader

Re: "There are signs of resistance to the right-wing juggernaut, if you look hard enough," (*The Hill Times*, March 25, p. 15).

In her column, Susan Riley quoted Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew: "If my boys show some small measure of the courage, integrity and grace [of Kinew's transgendered colleagues] I will die a

happy man, knowing that my work as a father has been successful."

Wonderful! I was prohibited from any personal choice as a child, but made sure my children were encouraged to find their own voice from babyhood. They've turned out better than I ever could.

John Sankey
 Ottawa, Ont.

Carbon price a good start: Damus

Re: "Trudeau's carbon tax hike will hurt future generations," (*The Hill Times*, March 27, p. 15).

The opinion of author Kenneth Green's home institution, the Fraser Institute, is known to be strongly slanted along certain ideological lines. That behind us, let's look at the options: raise the carbon tax, keep it stable, or reduce/remove it. What are the alternatives?

We have recently read an opinion letter from 100 or so economists calling the carbon tax the fairest, most equitable, and cheapest way to deal with reducing carbon output. Does Green compare the cost of the tax on Canadians with the future expected cost of climate change? No, he repeats the old trope that Canada can't change global carbon levels by itself; brings up "but, but China," for good measure; and says we should stop trying. Great opinion piece? No, just repeating

what has made the rounds through his ideological camp.

I don't know if carbon pricing will save the world. Honestly, I think as a species we're just not capable of working together to solve future problems. Personally, I thought that's why we elect leaders: to make us do what's really in our best collective interest, which in this case quite literally is continued survival. But at least we'll finally have a price on pollution. We'll finally stop "externalizing" the cost of the most-damaging pollution the world has produced, and finally make those responsible for the damage pay.

And even if temperatures climb, at least we'll have set that as a very important precedent here in an affluent country that is responsible for a disproportionate-to-our-population share of the problem.

Martin Damus
 Ottawa, Ont.

Blame Hamas for Gaza food insecurity: Williams

Re: "A tale of three famines," (*The Hill Times*, March 27, p. 20).

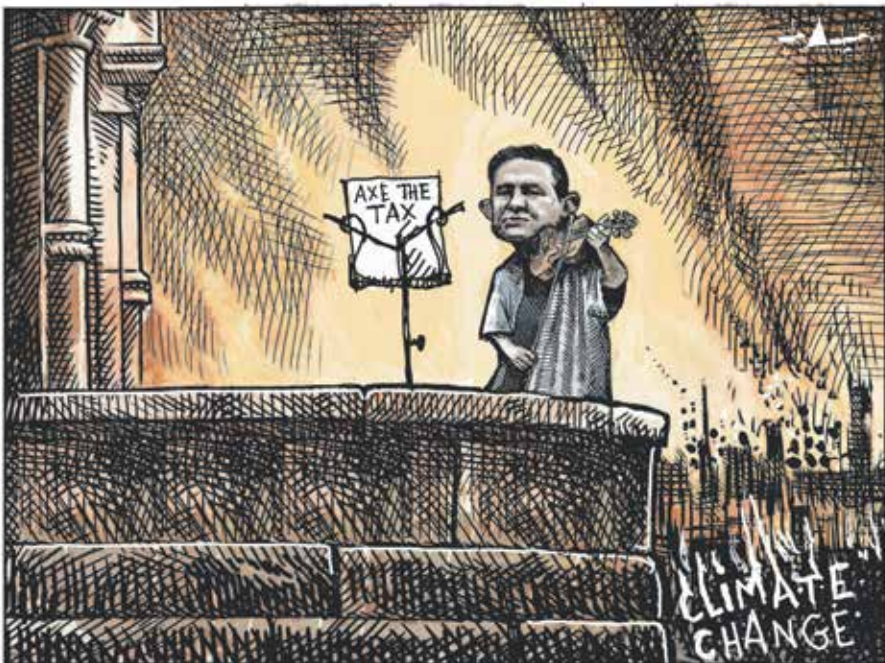
With respect to Gwynne Dyer's comments on Gaza, it's hard to follow his logic. How can he admit that "Hamas started the war," that Hamas "undoubtedly intended to trigger a massive violent Israeli retaliation," and that Hamas would use the Palestinian victims to "further its own political agenda," and when all these events occur, blame Israel?

To claim that "there is a deliberate food blockage" is baseless. Why is it that we don't hear of any Hamas terrorists lacking food or medical supplies, or why there was insufficient fuel to maintain the hundreds of miles of Hamas' underground terror tunnels? The answer is simple. Food, water, and medical supplies are getting into Gaza but are being diverted to the use of the terrorists, not to the suffering people of Gaza.

The reality is that Israel is succeeding in ensuring aid is delivered. On March 3, Israel inspected and transferred 277 humanitarian aid trucks into Gaza. Since Hamas initiated the war on Oct. 7, 2023, 280,080 tons of aid have entered on 15,207 trucks, according to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. In fact, during the war, more food trucks have entered Gaza than prior to the war—on average an increase of more than 50 per cent per day. In addition, Israel has also enabled Jordan and France to airdrop supplies to specific areas when other mechanisms to deliver aid have been unavailable.

Lastly, if Mr. Dyer really wants to end the famine, why isn't he advocating for Hamas to lay down its arms, surrender, and release the hostages? Hamas started the war, it can just as easily end it.

Alan Williams
 Ottawa, Ont.



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In a recent speech, Bank of Canada Senior Deputy Governor Carolyn Rogers dwelled on the long-standing lack of business investment in machinery and equipment by Canadian companies, but didn't mention the controversial issue of share buybacks, writes Les Whittington. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The booming use of productivity-eroding stock buybacks will come under the microscope with new federal tax

Stock buybacks have played a very significant role in the growth of income inequality and the declining economic prospects of the North American middle class.

Les Whittington

Need to Know



OTTAWA—Bank of Canada Senior Deputy Governor Carolyn Rogers set off another round of alarm bells with her March 26 speech on this country's productivity problem which she said has become an economic emergency endangering Canadians' very standard of living.

In probing the issue, she dwelled on the long-standing lack of business investment in machinery and equipment by Canadian companies. This shortcoming, as Rogers noted, deprives the economy of the improvement in labour output per hour that is the make-

or-break factor in determining our ability to create the wealth that translates into widely shared prosperity.

She said that, when the central bank conducts its periodic surveys of business intentions, corporate Canada usually says it will be increasing this crucial economic input in the near future. But it doesn't happen.

One of the key issues in this lack of business investment is something she didn't mention. This is the controversial, politically loaded issue of share buybacks. A feature in the ascendancy of neo-liberal economics in recent decades, the astronomical increase in the use of this productivity-eroding financial wrinkle by corporations in the United States and Canada is a little-talked about, but disturbing story. It has played a very significant role in the growth of income inequality and the declining economic prospects of the North American middle class.

Given the options of using earnings to make a company more productive by training employees, spending on innovative tech, expanding production, or raising wages, publicly owned corporations have instead in many cases been choosing to initiate stock repurchases, spending billions of dollars to buy up their own shares. This move—an alternative to issuing dividends—returns a bonus to stockholders

in the form of capital gains, which are taxed at a lower rate than dividends.

Since the 1980s, business evaluation standards in the U.S. have been increasingly focused on "maximizing shareholder value," a trend one well-known analyst called "the American disease," driving the reward system for CEOs in publicly traded corporations to be increasingly linked to stock performance. This gives CEOs an obvious incentive to choose buybacks above other options for deploying company earnings since buybacks quickly drive up the value of the company's shares. The practice, which was enabled during then-president Ronald Reagan's era by deregulation at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission under the direction of a former Wall Street broker, has been likened by some critics to a licence for CEOs to freely manipulate their companies' stock prices.

By now, stock repurchases have become an immense factor in the corporate world. In Canada in 2022, publicly traded companies spent a record \$58-billion in stock buybacks, and the trend is expected to continue at record or near-record levels.

Corporations justify buybacks as expressing confidence in their stock, returning capital to stockholders, and providing a viable option when profitable investment opportunities are not

foreseen. But many experts see it as a matter of highly compensated CEOs feathering their own nests at the expense of their managerial responsibilities to the corporation, its workers, and society as a whole.

"The very people we rely on to make investments in the productive capabilities that will increase our shared prosperity are instead devoting most of their companies' profits to uses that will increase their own prosperity," U.S. economist William Lazonic wrote in his seminal article, "Profits Without Prosperity," in the *Harvard Business Review*.

The long shift to buybacks has been an important element in the transformation of the Canadian and U.S. economies toward a conservative, pro-business model that has vastly expanded the wealth of the top one per cent and left the majority of citizens falling behind.

It is in keeping with the post-1970s neo-liberal political upsurge that, in essence, seeks to concentrate the rewards of capitalism for investors instead of using profits to prioritize more productive enterprises, and ensure adequate rewards as well for workers. With high earners reaping the majority of stock gains, buybacks further this unfair distribution of rewards, and complement various measures favouring business and the well-off such as reduced corporate and personal income taxes, dismantling unions, and cuts to the social safety net.

Following the Biden administration's lead, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland brought in a two per cent tax on buybacks, effective Jan. 1. It will generate \$3-billion in revenues over five years, and is intended to persuade companies to invest more of their earnings in productivity-enhancing investments rather than handing it out to shareholders. We'll get an idea of how that works this year, but so far, most analysts doubt that a two per cent tax on stock repurchases is enough to make much of a dent in Bay Street's value-extracting buyback Gold Rush.

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

The Hill Times

Making the Canadian military fighting fit again

The architects of restructuring the Canadian Armed Forces should look to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict for the future blueprint of Canada's military.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—This is arguably the lowest point in the history of the Canadian Armed Forces in terms of combat readiness.

A recent internal report was leaked to the CBC which revealed that nearly half of Canada's combat vehicles and weaponry would be undeployable in the case of war due to a lack of serviceability. This includes both the lack of available spare parts and the trained personnel required to maintain our aircraft, ships, and armoured vehicles.

Not mentioned in the report specifically was the advanced age of much of that equipment. For instance, Canada's dwindling fleet of CF-18 Hornet fighter jets are more than four decades old, and the 12 Halifax-class frigates that form the backbone of the Royal Canadian Navy have been in service since 1991.

From 2001 until 2014, Canada sent more than 40,000 troops to fight in Afghanistan. During those 13 years, the Canadian Army successfully honed its war-fighting skills, and it acquired specialized equipment and weaponry.

However, the campaign in Afghanistan was that of counter-insurgency against a primitively armed, largely illiterate Taliban. Most of the tactics learned and equipment purchased by the Canadian Army were aimed at self-protection from improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks by fanatical jihadists.

For their part, the RCAF flew its most recent combat sorties against Moammar Gadhafi's

Continued on page 10

Comment

Barbados was right to cut ties with the monarchy

We can remain on good terms with the Crown, but we can swear allegiance to Canada and its people, free ourselves of many of the anachronisms of colonialism, and be genuinely independent.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



HOLETOWN, BARBADOS—Despite my Scottish name, I like to point out my family spent almost two centuries in Barbados from 1658 to the mid-19th century. I am here for a family reunion of cousins from the United Kingdom and United States. Many of us have an interest in family history, so we decided to meet up. It is my first visit since 2007.

My first ancestor here, Captain John Caddell, was a Scottish soldier captured by Cromwell's army in the sacking of Dundee in 1651. In 1658, he and thousands of other Scots prisoners of war were sent to Barbados as indentured servants.

It was no vacation, but he survived. His descendants were clergymen and doctors. We celebrated Easter at the church of one ancestor, and were welcomed with open arms. He was a founder of Codrington College, which still stands. Although none of my ancestors ran a plantation, I regret to say one had owned two slaves. After the devastating hurricane of 1831, the family moved to England.

Because of the fascinating family history, Barbados has held an allure for us. Our family could never afford the airfare, but a photo of Bridgetown in the 1800s hung proudly in our living room in Montreal. At our Anglican church, there were many Barbadian parishioners; one had a talented niece who was looking for a job: my father hired her and proudly desegregated the Montreal Trust company in 1962. When he inherited some money, the first trip my parents took was to Barbados.

The story of this country is extraordinary: in the 19th and 20th centuries, Barbados prospered and became one of the earliest

colonies to become independent in 1966. With its reputation for excellent educational institutions and governance, it contributed significantly to the Commonwealth—and Canada—via immigration.

Therefore, it should not be surprising Barbados chose the democratic process to remove Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state. It was an idea that grew from the late 1970s, when the Cox Commission began studying the feasibility of a republican system. The process continued with prospects of a referendum in 2005, which never took place. In 2015, then-prime minister Freundel Stuart announced that Barbados would move towards a republican form of government “in the very near future,” via a bill in Parliament.

In September 2020, the Barbados Labour Party government of Prime Minister Mia Mottley announced in its Throne Speech that Barbados would become a republic by November 2021. It was done efficiently and without acrimony, and institutions were easily adapted to the republican reality. The Queen sent her best wishes: “As you celebrate this momentous day, I send you and all Barbadians my warmest good wishes for your happiness, peace and prosperity in the future.” Governor general Sandra Mason be-



Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley moved efficiently and without acrimony to lead her country away from the Crown and towards becoming a republic, which Canada should emulate, writes Andrew Caddell. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

came the new president on Nov. 30, 2021. Then-Prince Charles was present at the ceremony.

I have long advocated for Canada to become a republic in the same way: calmly, with continuity and history in mind. Barbados has an advantage over Canada as a unitarian system. In our system of federation, the King is represented by the Governor General and the lieutenant-governors, and the Constitution requires unanimous provincial and federal approval to end the monarchy. Most Canadians are indifferent to the institution; Quebec has already moved to abolish the post and the oath to the King. We have to cut the Gordian knot.

In Canada and elsewhere, we are seeing radical neo-Marxists advocating for the end of everything associated with colonialism, with the encouragement of China, Russia, and other totalitarian states. While reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and control of their lands is paramount, we cannot buy into

radical solutions. Our courts, Parliament, legislatures, and municipal councils are based on a “colonial” model, and work well. There is no need to “burn down the village to save it.”

Nonetheless, it is time we grew up. We can stay in the Commonwealth as a republic, as India and Barbados have done. We can remain on good terms with the Crown, but we can swear allegiance to Canada and its people, free ourselves of many of the anachronisms of colonialism, and be genuinely independent.

It is an idea whose time has come. We should be proud to emulate innovators like the Barbadians, who have always managed to find a better way.

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

The Hill Times

Making the Canadian military fighting fit again



A Leopard 2A4 tank is unloaded from an RCAF CC-177 on Feb. 5, 2023, as part of Canada's aid to Ukraine. *DND photograph by Master Corporal Desiree Bourdon*

Continued from page 9
Libyan loyalists in 2011, and then against ISIS (a.k.a. Daesh) insurgents in Iraq and Syria from 2014-2016 as part of Operation Impact. The RCAF didn't sustain any casualties throughout these

extended campaigns for the simple reason that the Libyans and Daesh evil-doers were without sophisticated air defences.

The last guns-a-blazing experience for the Royal Canadian Navy was off the coast of Libya in 2011 when Gadhafi loyalists opened fire

on HMCS Charlottetown near the rebel held city of Misrata.

Fast forward to February 2022 and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The heretofore unthinkable became reality as we suddenly had two near-peer modern militaries waging conventional

war on European soil. Now, more than two years into that conflict, observers can see exactly what technology has emerged as the new “queen of the battlefield.”

Turns out it is the same weapon that has dominated battlefields since the invention of gunpowder: the artillery. However, in a near-peer clash, the artillery needs to be self-propelled and armoured for the survivability of the gunners.

The M-777 155 mm howitzers that Canada obtained for Afghanistan were well-suited against a foe that possessed no fire-detection technology, nor any weapons with which to engage the Canadians in return.

Russian forces have very sophisticated counter-battery assets, which include a wealth of their own artillery and ammunition. Hence, the M-777s have proven to be a bust in Ukraine.

In the air, the drone is the master of the skies in the Ukraine conflict, with both sides employing huge numbers of remotely piloted attack drones of varying sizes. There is literally nowhere to hide on the modern battlefield.

As a result, we have seen a wave of counter-drone measures implemented by both sides, which includes everything from active air defence to additional protection on top of armoured vehicles.

In terms of manned combat fighters or helicopters, their use has been limited thus far in the conflict. There have been no swirling dogfights overhead, and due to the presence of effective ground to air defences, the Russian air force has only appeared when the circumstances have allowed them to attain a localized window of air superiority.

At sea, the Ukrainians have steadily sunk major Russian navy warships in the Black Sea with seaborne drones. This has led military analysts to question the value of manned capital ships in future warfare.

Given that the Canadian Armed Forces need to be rebuilt from the ground up, the architects of that restructuring should look to this ongoing conflict for the blueprint of Canada's future military. The fact is that the single biggest challenge crippling the current CAF is the shortfall of personnel in the ranks. The good news is that the future is headed towards an almost completely human-free battle of the high-tech machines.

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

The Hill Times

Virtual reality: COVID leaves legacy of remote work for cabinet staff



Staffers wait outside a Liberal caucus meeting in the West Block on Nov. 8, 2021, shortly after that year's election, after which the transition to increasingly in-person work began. After being normalized during COVID, some staff continue to work remotely, including from outside the National Capital Region. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

'If Parliament is able to work remotely and able to kind of continue and carry out its function, it's set a bit of a precedent for everyone else,' says former staffer John O'Leary.

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

For better or worse, the COVID-19 pandemic helped normalize the ability for federal political staff to work remotely—not just from outside the office, but also from outside the National Capital Region—and it's an option that remains available for many cabinet staff, including those in the Prime Minister's Office.

COVID transformed Hill life in many ways, as outlined in a recent *Hill Times* series marking the fourth anniversary of the start of the pandemic, including ushering in the House of Commons' decision to permanently function as a hybrid body.

The pandemic forced workplaces across Canada to allow staff to work remotely for the first time, and Parliament Hill was no exception, turning a previously relatively rare occurrence into standard practice—at least for a time—among both MP and cabinet offices.

While many staff worked from homes in Ottawa during the

pandemic, some took the opportunity to move back to their home regions or otherwise relocate outside the National Capital Region (NCR), and since the slow shift back to largely in-person work following the winding down of pandemic measures in 2022, some staff continue to work remotely, including from outside the NCR.

Each MP is the employer of their staff, and the one caucus whip's office that responded to questions from *The Hill Times* indicated that its members have been left to decide work arrangements for themselves. Among cabinet offices—the focus of this piece—*The Hill Times* understands the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has similarly left it up to each office, namely the minister and chief of staff, to decide.

"Although individual requests for remote work are dealt [with] on a case-by-case basis, the overwhelming majority of ministerial staff are based in the National Capital Region," said PMO lead press secretary Mohammad Husain in a Feb. 21 email.

The Hill Times reached out to all 38 ministers' offices asking about their policy regarding remote work, and how many staff currently work from outside the NCR. In all, 18 offices did not respond, while 19 provided largely identical responses declining to comment on "HR arrangements." The now-former chief of staff for one office, Claire Seaborn, who left the helm of Energy and Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkinson's (North Vancouver, B.C.) office as of March 22, spoke openly about her office's approach by phone from Toronto on Feb. 1.

With no cabinet-wide policy, who is able to be employed from outside Ottawa and how they're allowed to work—for example,

whether they're required to work from a nearby regional office, or able to simply work from home—varies office to office, staffer to staffer. In many cases, examples involve staff focused on regional affairs work, but the list goes beyond that to include policy staff, communications staff, chiefs of staff, and others.

Pre-pandemic, there were some instances of cabinet staff working remotely from outside the NCR—for example, *The Hill Times* has previously noted that then-PMO senior adviser Sarah Goodman largely worked from Vancouver during her tenure between 2020 and 2022—but such cases were "an exception, not default," said Zita Astravas, a vice-president at Wellington Advocacy who held senior roles in the Trudeau government from 2015 to 2023.

"It was truly not the norm pre-pandemic," she said in a March 11 interview, noting that when she was a chief of staff pre-pandemic, one of her western regional affairs advisers worked from British Columbia (her then-minister's home province), "which for me just made sense. But the rest of my staff worked from Ottawa [and] were in the office every day."

"At that time, it was a real exercise for me and the team on making sure that that staff member—or any staff member who worked remotely—that they felt part of the team, that they were included, that they were part of the discussion," she said. "We had to be very deliberate ... Fast forward a couple of years, in the pandemic ... everyone was in that scenario."

Astravas said the first time she "really cut letters of offer for

staff who were outside" the NCR was after the 2021 election.

"The challenges that I had faced earlier pre-pandemic with that staff member living outside of Ottawa, [navigating] that was now normal," and staying connected virtually "was a normal reflex that staff had developed," she said.

"Every minister's office is different," said Astravas of the remote-work option post-pandemic. In her case, as chief of staff, she ensured employees working on parliamentary affairs and communications were in Ottawa, as those roles require "a high frequency of in-person" work, "staffing the minister in Question Period or scrums," for example.

"We certainly had the discussion among chiefs of staff and colleagues in the Prime Minister's Office ... on how

you strike the balance, right, how do you support the minister best? And that is how all staffing decisions should be made," she said.

Seaborn is one example



Claire Seaborn exited as chief of staff to Minister Wilkinson on March 22, and is set to join Torys LLP in Toronto this month. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

of a chief of staff who continued to work from outside Ottawa post-pandemic.

Seaborn moved from Toronto to Ottawa when she first began

working for the Trudeau government for then-environment minister Catherine McKenna in 2018, but she moved back after the pandemic hit. When she was asked to serve as chief of staff to Wilkinson following the 2021 election, she said she made it clear to PMO chief of staff Katie Telford that she'd only take the job if she was allowed to do it from Toronto, as she had a young child and a spouse who didn't want to leave his job. "And they just said, sure, that's fine."

Seaborn said, generally speaking, she travelled to Ottawa one week out of every four, and other weeks would be with her minister in his home province of British Columbia, or on the road. "I personally don't find that it changes my face time with my minister at all," she said, adding she also spoke to her boss "multiple times a day, every day."

Asked about associated costs, Seaborn made clear she only expensed travel that was strictly for work, and often travelled to Ottawa on her own dime, including for garden parties or partisan events. Being based in Toronto also had the benefit of making work travel easier, and a bit cheaper, she noted, as most flights from Ottawa require layovers in cities like Toronto, and for events in the city—a place ministers frequently visit—no travel was required on her part.

At the time of the interview, Seaborn was one of six staff in Wilkinson's then-21-member office based outside the NCR, with others located in Vancouver, Calgary, Halifax, Montreal, as well as Toronto. She said the "general rule" was remote staff either had to work from a ministers' regional office (there are 16 such offices across Canada, which support ministers across cabinet), or a "local office of their department, whichever one's closer." In the Toronto MRO where she worked, there were also staffers from other cabinet offices.

"There's lots of ways to do this job. There are some chiefs who post-pandemic have taken an 'everybody must be in the office every day' ... approach. That's not my style, and that's OK," she said. "I really respect that PMO has said, 'listen, however a chief wants to run their office, that's their choice, whatever works for them and their minister.'"

Seaborn noted her then-deputy chief of staff and parliamentary affairs director, Kyle Harrietha—who has since replaced her as chief to Wilkinson—is based in Ottawa, and tackled "everything to do with Parliament," while she focused on cabinet and provincial/territorial relations, policy, and HR—"all things that are easier to do from Toronto."

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The Top 50 Influencing Foreign Policy

The Top 50 Influencing Foreign Policy

U.S. election preoccupies Canada's top 50 foreign influencers as feds' focus gets pulled from Asia strategy

Current and former senior government officials, past diplomats, and insiders weigh in on who has influence over Canadian foreign policy for *The Hill Times'* annual list.

BY NEIL MOSS, STEPHEN JEFFERY, STUART BENSON, JONAH GRIGNON

With wars in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, a worsening crisis in Haiti, and stunted relations in Asia, those influencing Canada's foreign policy trajectory already have a full docket. But for most involved with international files, their eyes are still locked due south as Canada braces for a consequential American election this fall.

While Canada prepares for the possible return of a Donald Trump presidency in Washington, D.C., it faces an increasingly disruptive and unpredictable world order in which those with influence must respond to the pull of seemingly unending international crises, and do so with a shrinking budget.

In a major foreign policy address last October, Foreign Affairs **Mélanie Joly** painted a bleak picture of the world that Canada has found itself needing to navigate: "Our world is marked by geopolitical turbulence, unpredictability, and uncertainty. The tectonic plates of the world order are shifting beneath our feet. And the structures that are built upon them are fracturing."

As the Liberal government closes in on almost nine years in power, the number of people influencing Canada's place in the world is shrinking, with those holding sway largely working in—or are trusted voices to those in—the Prime Minister's Office, and to a lesser degree in the Pearson Building, where Global Affairs Canada (GAC) is headquartered. That leaves a reduced number of Canadian diplomats on the list compared to years past, with ambassadors like **Kirsten Hillman** in Washington, D.C., and **Bob Rae** at the United Nations in New York City a cut above the rest.

With the "Team Canada" effort for engagement with the United States in its early days, those who are part of the effort are playing an outsized role, including International Trade Minister **Mary Ng**, Innovation Minister **François-Philippe Champagne**, Hillman, and senior GAC official **Larisa Galadza**.

"It's all going to be about the relationship with the U.S. this year," said one foreign policy

watcher. "Anyone who is playing a role there, commenting, influencing foreign policy will be more important, frankly, over the next year or two."

While a renewed engagement in the Indo-Pacific was in the spotlight following the release of the government's strategy in late 2022, attention on the continent has started to dwindle amid stunted relationships with China and India as concern mounts over allegations of foreign government interference in Canadian elections.

Over the last 365 days, the focus has shifted from the Indo-Pacific to dealing with the U.S., according to a senior government official. "There is a slight shift in focus from [Asia] to Canada-U.S., with the additional pressure from a continued war in Ukraine and conflict in the Middle East," the source said.

To compile this year's list of the top 50 people with international sway, *The Hill Times* spoke with more than 15 senior government sources, sitting Parliamentarians, former top officials, past diplomats, insiders, and stakeholders. The great majority of sources spoke to this newspaper on a not-for-attribution basis for added frankness.

Those who just missed the cut on year's version of the list include Environment Minister **Steven Guilbeault**, who was praised for his performance at COP28; Canada's envoy in London **Ralph Goodale**, and the United Kingdom's high commissioner in Ottawa **Susannah Goshko**, whose influence took a hit with the pause on Canada-U.K. trade talks; Ukrainian Ambassador to Canada **Yulia Kovaliv** is seen as an effective operator, but her influence was slightly lessened as the conflict has fallen out of the spotlight thanks to the war in Gaza; l'Université de Montréal professor **Laurence Deschamps-Laporte** and the University of Ottawa's **Thomas Juneau** were widely praised; as were staffers **Taras Zalusky**, who is chief of staff to Defence Minister **Bill Blair**, and **Elise Wagner**, policy director to Ng. Long-serving parliamentary secretary to the foreign minister, Liberal MP **Robert Oliphant**, continues to have a wide array of backers, but his influence has taken a hit following the report on a private conversation he had with a constituent criticizing the government's policies on the Israel-Hamas war, as well as his long-delayed work towards an African engagement plan.

The list is presented by category in no specific order.

Politicians

Justin Trudeau, prime minister
As the final decision-maker,

Justin Trudeau's influence will dominate the country's foreign policy as long as he is prime minister.

While the early enthusiasm for the Canadian leader internationally has faded—albeit not to the same extent as his domestic popularity—he remains prominent on the world stage, especially at international summits, and is the longest-serving leader in the G7.

The top 50 influencing Canadian foreign policy

POLITICIANS

- Justin Trudeau, prime minister
- Chrystia Freeland, deputy prime minister and finance minister
- Mélanie Joly, foreign affairs minister
- Mary Ng, international trade minister
- François-Philippe Champagne, innovation, science, and industry minister
- Bill Blair, defence minister
- Dominic LeBlanc, public safety minister
- Ahmed Hussen, international development minister
- Jonathan Wilkinson, energy and natural resources minister
- Michael Chong, Conservative foreign affairs critic
- Heather McPherson, NDP foreign affairs critic
- Peter Boehm, Independent Senator
- John McKay/Randy Hoback/Brian Masse, MPs on the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group

STAFFERS

- Katie Telford, PMO chief of staff
- Brian Clow, PMO deputy chief of staff
- Patrick Travers, PMO senior global affairs adviser
- Oz Jungic, PMO senior policy adviser
- Jason Easton, PMO strategic adviser for special projects
- Ben Chin, PMO senior adviser
- Emily Desrochers, issues and parliamentary affairs adviser
- Peter Wilkinson, chief of staff to the foreign affairs minister
- Ian Foucher, chief of staff to the innovation minister
- Alexandre Boulé, deputy chief of staff to the foreign affairs minister

CIVIL SERVANTS

- David Morrison, deputy minister for foreign affairs
- Stephen de Boer, foreign and defence policy adviser to the prime minister
- Nathalie Drouin, national security and intelligence adviser to the prime minister
- John Hannaford, clerk of the Privy Council and secretary to the cabinet
- Rob Stewart, deputy minister for international trade
- Wayne Eyre, chief of the defence staff
- Bill Matthews, deputy minister for national defence
- David Vigneault, CSIS director
- Cindy Termorshuizen, associate deputy minister for foreign affairs
- Heidi Hulan, assistant deputy minister for international security and political director
- Alexandre Lévesque, assistant deputy minister for Europe, Arctic, Middle East, and Maghreb
- Larisa Galadza, head of the Canada-U.S. Engagement Task Force

DIPLOMATS

- Kirsten Hillman, Canada's ambassador to the United States
- Bob Rae, Canada's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations
- Ian McKay, Canada's ambassador to Japan
- Jacqueline O'Neill, Canada's ambassador for women, peace, and security
- David Cohen, U.S. ambassador to Canada
- Sabine Sparwasser, German ambassador to Canada
- Kanji Yamanouchi, Japanese ambassador to Canada

CIVIL SOCIETY AND OTHERS

- Janice Stein, academic
- Roland Paris, academic
- Maryscott Greenwood, Manulife
- Flavio Volpe, Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association president
- Goldy Hyder, Business Council of Canada president
- Laura Dawson, Future Borders Coalition executive director
- Alexandra Chyczij/Ihor Michalchyshyn, president and CEO of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress
- Robert Fife/Steven Chase, *Globe and Mail* reporters

The ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza remain front and centre for the prime minister as he nears the end of his third mandate.

Chrystia Freeland, deputy prime minister and finance minister

Chrystia Freeland may not be in charge of the foreign affairs portfolio anymore, but as Trudeau's second-in-command and custodian of the nation's finances, she remains heavily influential on Canada's standing



in the world. Thanks to her connections and close circle of friends in high places from Kyiv to Washington, Freeland remains a major player in Canada's relationships with the U.S. and the European Union, including efforts to seize Russian Central Bank assets and transfer them to Ukraine.



Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne, left, and International Trade Minister Mary Ng, right, have been tapped to lead the 'Team Canada' U.S. engagement effort, with Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, centre, bringing her key D.C. links, having formerly been Ottawa's point person for the bilateral relationship. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Mélanie Joly, foreign affairs minister

As Canada's top diplomat, **Mélanie Joly** has established herself as the second-most seasoned foreign affairs minister under Trudeau (aside from Freeland), but she faces increasing challenges while being pulled in all directions, and navigating the domestic implications of the wars in Gaza and Ukraine. With her department in the middle of a foreign service transformation, Joly faces looming budget cuts as both she and external voices have called for more investment.

With the government's focus on Asia dwindling since the Indo-Pacific strategy was unveiled, Joly has the challenge of navigating rocky relationships with China and India. One former senior government official said that responding to the war in Gaza has made it "challenging" to move forward on strategic initiatives.

Mary Ng, international trade minister

Tasked as one of the leaders of Canada's engagement efforts with the U.S. ahead of the November presidential election, **Mary Ng** has been put front and centre to help chart the course on Canada's most important relationship. She has a close relationship with U.S. Trade Representative **Katherine Tai** as

both countries make preparations for the 2026 review of the North American trade pact. On Capitol Hill, Ng has developed re-



lations with those on both sides of the Congressional aisle, according to a senior government source.

Some of the shine came off of the trade file with Canada's negotiations with India and the U.K. grinding to a halt. Finalizing completed pacts won't be easy to come by in 2024 for Ng.

François-Philippe Champagne, innovation, science, and industry minister

Joining Ng in leading Canada's engagement with the U.S. is the diminutive innovation minister, who has been described as an "energizer bunny." **François-Philippe Champagne** will have his elbows up this year as he defends Canada's economic interests while facing a potential return of Trump to the White House. The effort is still in the early stages, according to a senior official, but it ensures that 2024 will be a big year for both Champagne and Ng. The Wilson Center's Canada Institute director **Christopher Sands** said the pair has a "tough job ahead," and 2024 will be a "make-or-break year for them."

The globetrotting Champagne brings deep experience to the global file as a former minister for both foreign affairs and international trade. He has received praise for bringing foreign direct investment into Canada with the announcement of new auto plants.

Bill Blair, defence minister

Under near-constant fire defending the state of Canada's military—which faces an ever-increasing personnel and equipment readiness crisis—**Bill Blair** has

been upfront on the need for the government to do more. At the same time, he has yet to convince the government to increase defence spending as it has earmarked \$2.5-billion in cuts over three years for his department. Canada has faced global pressure from NATO allies to boost its defence spending to meet commitments to the military alliance, which will only be intensified if Trump retakes the White House. Many are still waiting on a defence policy update that is more than two years in the making, and is still yet to be released.

However, a senior government source described Toronto's former top cop as having a large presence on the world stage, especially with the ongoing role Canada plays responding to the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East.



Dominic LeBlanc, public safety minister

Picking up the dual portfolios of public safety and democratic institutions last July, **Dominic LeBlanc** has been the government's point man on its response to allegations of foreign interference in Canadian elections. While the public inquiry into foreign interference—which will present its findings later this year—is primarily a response to domestic political concerns, LeBlanc's proximity to the prime minister means the minister cannot be ignored for his resulting influence on foreign

policy. With much of Canada-U.S. chatter focused on national security, LeBlanc is a central figure in the bilateral relationship, especially with his oversight of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the Canada Border Services Agency, according to a senior government official.

Ahmed Hussen, international development minister

After being shuffled from housing to international development last summer, **Ahmed Hussen** regularly finds himself in the middle of much of the foreign policy discussions in cabinet, according to a senior government source. However, his handling of the temporary suspension of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and rushed announcement that Canada would be participating in missions to air-drop aid into Gaza have caused frustration and questions regarding his decision-making on the file.

Jonathan Wilkinson, energy and natural resources minister

Natural resources, the environment, and Canada's foreign policy are increasingly intertwined, leading numerous sources to name **Jonathan Wilkinson** as holding outsized influence on the country's foreign policy and international trade discussions. Wilkinson's global influence stems from leading the critical minerals file, according to a senior government official. Sources also pointed to

Wilkinson's counterpart on the environment portfolio, **Steven Guilbeault**, as being a "rockstar" for Canadian interests at the COP28 climate conference in the United Arab Emirates last year. The environment-natural resources combination are only becoming more important for Canada on the international stage.

Michael Chong, Conservative foreign affairs critic

Michael Chong remains "the man" on Conservative foreign policy, sources agreed, with leader Pierre Poilievre giving the critic room to be the party's face on issues such as the Middle East and foreign interference. But multiple sources also noted that new Tory MP **Shuvaloy Majumdar**, elected in a

July 2023 byelection, will become increasingly influential on foreign policy thinking within the caucus as the next election approaches. Conservative deputy leader **Melissa Lantsman** has also been an influential voice on the Israel-Hamas war, according to one strategist.

Heather McPherson, NDP foreign affairs critic

Despite her relatively minor role as the foreign affairs critic of Parliament's fourth party, **Heather McPherson** has become a major voice in discussions on foreign policy inside the House of Commons and committee rooms as vice-chair of the Special House Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China relationship, and member of the Foreign Affairs and International Development Committee.



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With the closer relationship between the Liberals and NDP since the 2022 introduction of the supply-and-confidence agreement, McPherson has also become a critical ally and effective critic of the government's foreign policy from Ukraine to the Middle East, including playing a major role in negotiating amendments to her party's successful opposition day motion on March 18 calling for a ceasefire in Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.



Peter Boehm, Independent Senator

Bringing vast global experience to the Red Chamber, Independent Senator **Peter Boehm** chairs the Senate Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committee, which recently finished an overarching report on the state of the foreign service. The former deputy minister for international development and past ambassador to Germany brings learned experience to the foreign file, and has called for political will and renewed investment to modernize the risk-averse department in the Pearson Building. He holds connections with Trudeau and the PMO as a former G7 sherpa, during which time he helped manage the chaos of the Trump presidency during the turbulent 2018 summit in Charlevoix, Que.

Boehm is given a helping hand on his committee with vice-chair and Progressive Senator **Peter Harder**, who also has senior experience at GAC as a former deputy minister of foreign affairs.

John McKay/Randy Hoback/Brian Masse, MPs on the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group

Building deep connections on Capitol Hill, Liberal MP **John McKay**, Conservative MP **Randy Hoback**, and NDP MP **Brian Masse** each have a long history holding leadership positions on the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group, which gives them central access to key lawmakers in Congress. The trio of cross-party MPs have built lasting relationships with the likes of Democratic Senator **Amy Klobuchar** and Republican Congressman and Trump ally **Bill Huizenga**. While some of those relationships may not be properly appreciated by the Canadian



cabinet or those in the centre, they are long established as the Liberal government rekindles its charm offensive with the U.S.

"They've been doing this for a really long time," Sands said, remarking that this trio of MPs readily get meetings in Washington with members of Congress who may be future cabinet secretaries or governors.

McKay serves as co-chair of the group, and Masse is a vice-chair. Hoback has been a previous vice-chair and currently is the adviser on Canada-U.S. relations to the Conservative leader. A senior government source said Hoback is someone who is sought after for "constructive engagement," and has been described as someone with a "very good perspective" on the U.S. and beyond.

Staffers

Katie Telford, PMO chief of staff

Officially the longest-serving PMO chief of staff in Canadian history, **Katie Telford** is the prime minister's ever-present right hand and shadow in every meeting with foreign officials, and has ridden shotgun on every international delegation since the Liberals took power in 2015. With contacts in the Biden administration, like National Security Adviser **Jake Sullivan** and White House Deputy Chief of Staff **Jan O'Malley Dillon**, Telford remains a significant asset in Canada-U.S. relations.

Brian Clow, PMO deputy chief of staff

A commanding foreign policy figure in the centre of power working as one of Telford's No. 2s, **Brian Clow** has developed key links in Canada's most important relationship with the U.S., which includes a close link with Ambassador Kirsten Hillman. He has been a top player in the PMO since 2017, previously serving as chief of staff to Freeland as trade minister. "His expertise and contacts are great," said a former senior government official, noting that he has "great political acumen."

During the Trump administration, Clow ran the Canada-U.S. war room inside the PMO. This time around the American engagement efforts are largely being run on a day-to-day basis by Ng and Champagne's ministerial office, but Clow is involved in the process with a broad oversight.

Patrick Travers, PMO senior global affairs adviser

A veteran presence in the PMO, **Patrick Travers** is the most senior staffer who exclusively handles the foreign file. Having spent eight years at the centre—all working on



Canada's global engagement—he is a trusted aide for all. He's "the guy that the PM turns to on all matters of international or global affairs. He's the guy that Katie [Telford] turns to. He's the guy that Brian [Clow] turns to. He's at the centre of everything that we do internationally," said a senior government source.

"He's been there since Day 1, so what he brings to the table is huge," said a former senior official, remarking that Travers has immense policy knowledge and is not afraid to challenge plans that are wrongheaded.

Oz Jungic, PMO senior policy adviser

Joining Travers as the second-most senior staffer focused on day-to-day foreign policy matters, **Oz Jungic** is widely praised by those in government for his management of the global crisis of the day. While below Travers in the pecking order, he has been in the PMO since 2021, previously serving in senior policy roles in the foreign affairs and defence ministers' offices. A former senior government source said, along with Travers, Jungic plays a "key role" in staffing Trudeau on big international trips.

"He's looked to for trusted advice," a senior government official said. A second senior government source also credited Jungic for building deep links with Ottawa's diplomatic community, as well as with stakeholders.

Jason Easton, PMO strategic adviser for special projects

A former chief of staff to Ng, **Jason Easton** brought with him a wealth of trade and international experience when he took on the new PMO role last October. At the top office, he is involved in all discussions on trade, as well as giving his voice to national security files. Easton has been praised for his work on stakeholder relations and lending an ear to business concerns. Along with Clow, he is the PMO point-person on U.S. engagement, working with Ng and Champagne's offices, as well as with Global Affairs. He also brings auto industry experience to his role, which is a frontline issue in Canada's relationship with its southern neighbour.

Ben Chin, PMO senior adviser

A trusted aide to Trudeau, **Ben Chin** may only spend a portion of his day on global matters, but his voice echoes, according to senior government sources. He was acutely involved in the development of the government's Indo-Pacific strategy. He has travelled to Asia alongside Joly, and has links in South Ko-



rea, including with their embassy in Ottawa. "He is someone that the PM turns to for important international engagements to step in and give good advice," a senior source said. Chin has also served as then-finance minister **Bill Morneau's** chief of staff, and spent time in then-B.C. premier **Christy Clark's** office.

Emily Desrochers, issues and parliamentary affairs adviser

Rounding out the PMO staffers who handle the foreign policy file is **Emily Desrochers**, who joined the centre in 2022. She has past experience in issues management in the defence minister's office, and spent three years on the foreign affairs minister's team. Like Travers and Jungic, Desrochers is exclusively focused on the foreign file on a daily basis. Her position in the PMO gives her added influence where the decisions are made, working closely with the two PMO foreign policy senior staffers.

Peter Wilkinson, chief of staff to the foreign affairs minister

Described as a "trusted hand" by a senior government official, **Peter Wilkinson** is the point person for everything foreign policy after a little more than a year in the job. Often on the road with the minister, Wilkinson also brings Indo-Pacific experience to the office from his former role at Manulife, including with China. "He was brought in there to kind of clean things up and bring some real stability," said an academic expert on international affairs.

"His Asian competence is quite high," said a former diplomat, adding that Wilkinson knows how to operate in difficult countries, and has been described as "seasoned." One Canada-U.S. observer remarked that he has "a great Rolodex" and "very good political smarts."

Ian Foucher, chief of staff to the innovation minister

With his boss co-leading Canada's U.S. engagement drive, **Ian Foucher** is playing a leading role in the effort. A senior government source called Foucher the "key driver" for Champagne on the initiative, and someone who is known as an excellent networker. "He's great on relationships, and he's a strategic thinker who is putting his boss in the right places," the official said. **Kevin Coon**, chief of staff to Ng, also is playing a leading role in the American engagement effort, but his recent arrival to government life has some questioning if he is as influential. **Elise Wagner**, Ng's policy director, is also playing an active role on the file, bringing Canada-U.S. experience to the initiative from her time in the PMO.



Alexandre Boulé, deputy chief of staff to the foreign affairs minister

Peter Wilkinson's No. 2, **Alexandre Boulé** may be new to Joly's office, but he has already received high praise for his handling of the workplace, especially with Wilkinson often on the road staffing the foreign minister. He is thought of as someone who gives good advice, and is a trusted voice in the office. He was recruited by Joly from Quebec Lieutenant **Pablo Rodriguez's** office. "He really carries the minister's voice," said a former senior official, praising Boulé's political awareness. While not seeking the spotlight, he is praised for "connecting the dots" and being able to read the political temperature among stakeholders. Boulé is also leaned on for advice on all things American, as it was a role he performed as a policy adviser in then-foreign minister **Marc Garneau's** office.



Civil servants

David Morrison, deputy minister for foreign affairs

A trusted voice inside the PMO as Trudeau's former foreign and defence policy adviser, **David Morrison** brings diplomatic bonafides to an executive role that has been criticized in the past for being given to non-diplomats. Not only does he manage the department, but he is also someone who is in the "inner circle" of consultations, which includes Joly and senior decision-makers in the PMO. A known quantity in Washington, D.C., early in his tenure he travelled down to Foggy Bottom to meet with then-counterpart and State Department No. 2 **Wendy Sherman** where he not only focused on the Canada-U.S. relationship, but also on how Canada could make an effective contribution to the crises in Ukraine and Haiti.

A past G7 sherpa and former deputy minister for international trade, Morrison faces an increasingly tough task running a department that has signalled the need for more cash amid government cuts. While widely praised, he can clash with Ottawa's intelligence community as he is viewed as having a "healthy skepticism" of intelligence assessments.

John Hannaford, Privy Council clerk and secretary to the cabinet

The public service's top bureaucrat, **John Hannaford** brings a background in foreign affairs to the role, having served previously as a foreign policy and defence adviser to Trudeau, and as deputy minister of international trade



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and past ambassador to Norway. “He is the most trusted voice the prime minister has within the public service and that is certainly shown in his involvement and counsel on matters of foreign policy,” a senior official said. Even when Hannaford was shuffled into a more domestic-facing role as deputy minister for natural resources, he was still called on by the government to offer his global expertise. When Trudeau travelled to Ukraine in February, it was Hannaford who was by his side.

Stephen de Boer, foreign and defence policy adviser to the prime minister

The person by Trudeau’s side for all major discussions on foreign policy, **Stephen de Boer** touches everything on the global file. Travelling with the prime minister on all international trips, de Boer is also never far from Trudeau’s earshot, and attends cabinet meetings when foreign policy is discussed. “There’s a whispering dimension [to the role], there’s a constant presence dimension that brings with it influence,” noted an academic. While de Boer reports directly to **Nathalie Drouin**, the former World Trade Organization ambassador is considered a top adviser by senior government officials, described by one senior source as a “trusted voice” and part of the foreign affairs “inner circle.”



Nathalie Drouin, national security and intelligence adviser to the prime minister

Nathalie Drouin’s appointment earlier this year brought criticism from some quarters for an apparent lack of foreign policy credentials. But that was “unfair,” said one senior government source, as she dealt with numerous international matters as deputy clerk of the Privy Council and deputy minister of justice.

Another senior official gave her credit for the role she played in the resolution of the Two Michaels’ affair. She was also heavily involved in the response to the so-called “Freedom Convoy” protest and the imposition of the Emergencies Act in 2022, which had a global dimension. Drouin also proved herself managing a community of deputy ministers who all have personal “fiefdoms,” and briefing officials right up to the prime minister.

Rob Stewart, deputy minister for international trade

The second-most influential deputy minister in the Pearson Building, **Rob Stewart** has been the top bureaucrat for international trade



since 2022. A former public safety official, he also has experience in Finance Canada working at the G7 level. Sources described Stewart as “very smart” with a “very strong personality.” He has the task of not only getting in the weeds of trade policy, but also trade development, which brings in the cadre of trade commissioners that roam GAC.

The third deputy minister at GAC, **Christopher MacLennan**, the top bureaucrat for international development, also received wide praise, playing an important role as G20 sherpa.

Wayne Eyre, chief of the defence staff

Canada’s top soldier, General **Wayne Eyre** won’t be in the role for much longer, having announced in January that he plans to retire this summer. However, considering how publicly vocal his warnings have been over the readiness of Canada’s military capabilities, he isn’t expected to go quietly into retirement. While not receiving much of an orientation after taking on the role in an acting capacity in January 2021 and officially being appointed the following November, Eyre has tried to be a point of stability for a military leadership grappling with a sexual misconduct crisis. Since then, Eyre hasn’t shied away from putting the government on red alert over the capability, recruiting, and readiness deficits plaguing Canada’s Armed Forces as it faces an increasingly fractured and dangerous world.



Bill Matthews, deputy minister for national defence

The top bureaucrat at DND, **Bill Matthews** has the difficult task of managing a department that is being subject to \$2.5-billion in cuts as the world calls for increased funding. With past experience as a deputy minister of public services and procurement, he brings value to the department as it makes crucial purchases, which includes naval warships that will serve as the backbone of Canada’s Navy for decades to come, as well as the controversial procurement of F-35s after their acquisition was initially scrapped when the Liberals came to power in 2015.



David Vigneault, CSIS director

Called a “skilled operator” by one source, **David Vigneault** has vast experience, having been in his current job since 2017, and previously filling a senior role in the Privy Council Office.

In an ordinary year, it’s probable that Vigneault—by sheer virtue of his position at the head of the organization responsible for foreign-intelligence gathering—



David Morrison, left, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in 2020. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

would be included in this list. But this is not an ordinary year, and the importance of both Vigneault and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service have only been heightened amid allegations of foreign interference, and of potential leaks exposing those allegations.

The public inquiry into foreign interference could well shed more light onto what is, by its very nature, a secretive organization.

Cindy Termorshuizen, associate deputy minister for foreign affairs

As Trudeau’s G7 sherpa, **Cindy Termorshuizen** has been handpicked to be in the post when Canada takes over the group’s presidency next year—a role she will be filling on a full-time basis in the coming months. One former diplomat said she is “well respected” within the department, where she serves as an integrator of the three pillars operating at GAC: diplomacy, trade, and development. Termorshuizen brings a wealth of experience on China to her role, as she previously served as deputy head of mission in Beijing, which is especially important for a department that been known to lack experts on the Canada-Sino relationship.



Heidi Hulan, assistant deputy minister for international security and political director

A frequent travel companion for Joly, **Heidi Hulan** is often by Joly’s side on international trips as her role places her in the middle of a multitude of crises that the government is seeking to address. Hulan helps co-ordinate meetings



between Joly and her counterparts around the world, and is involved in discussions about regions that threaten global stability. A former ambassador to Austria, Hulan also brings political instinct to her role as a staffer turned civil servant. A former senior official described her as a “quiet, effective operator” who has strong relations with all G7 counterparts. A past diplomat added that Hulan is “high value” and a “star.”

Alexandre Lévêque, assistant deputy minister for Europe, Arctic, Middle East, and Maghreb

In a role that oversees Canada’s engagement in Europe and the Middle East, **Alexandre Lévêque** is in the middle of everything that is happening as Canada addresses wars in Ukraine and Israel. Often seen by Joly’s side, Lévêque is viewed as an ascending star within the department. “He’s proven himself to be really strong,” said a former diplomat. He represents a strong voice within the francophone base of the foreign ministry, bringing a different worldview to the anglophone-dominated department.



Larisa Galadza, head of the Canada-U.S. Engagement Task Force

Canada’s former envoy to Ukraine, **Larisa Galadza** is co-ordinating American engagement throughout the public service as part of the “Team Canada” initiative, where all information flows through her. The role was previously in place during the NAFTA renegotiations, and has been recently restarted.

While the job could potentially only be temporary, having an



experienced hand dealing with all things U.S. brings influence. Galadza serves a key role with various ministries and offices involved in the recently commenced effort.

Diplomats

Kirsten Hillman, ambassador to the United States

Canada’s most important ambassador always holds office in the Pennsylvania Avenue mission steps away from Capitol Hill, but longtime D.C. envoy **Kirsten Hillman** brings added influence to the post. A rare career diplomat to lead the mission in Washington, the technocrat heads Canada’s biggest mission of some 340 personnel—with nearly 60 Canadian diplomats—as well as a network of 13 consulates general around the U.S. Hillman rounds out the triumvirate co-leading the American engagement effort with Ng and Champagne.

“Hillman remains the most influential diplomat in our diplomatic corps,” a senior government source said. She is “very well trusted by all senior decision-makers.”

Hillman is closely connected with Trudeau and Telford, having a similar prestige to a political appointee. The former trade negotiator was initially named deputy ambassador during the NAFTA renegotiations, and played a pivotal role at the table as the tumultuous talks played out, making her well-placed as the review of the renegotiated deal is fast approaching. She has served as the ambassador since 2019, first in an acting role and later as the full-fledged envoy.



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The Top 50 Influencing Foreign Policy

Continued from page 15

Bob Rae, ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations



One of Canada's most prolific envoys, **Bob Rae** has attracted attention with his thoughtful—and sometimes bombastic—rhetoric in the General Assembly and online. Taking over the role after an embarrassing loss for a temporary seat on the Security Council, Rae has been rebuilding Canada's influence at the UN, including currently sitting as vice-president of the Economic and Social Council, thought to be one of the most important organs of the multilateral institution. A senior official said Rae is an equal to Hillman in terms of influence, given the “growing importance” of the work that is being done at the UN to address a multitude of conflicts throughout the UN, remarking that he is “very well positioned” and “very well trusted.”

Ian McKay, ambassador to Japan



A former national director of the Liberal Party, the Japanese-speaking **Ian McKay** has close links to the PMO, and played an active role in the development of the Indo-Pacific strategy. Tapped as Canada's special envoy to the Indo-Pacific last April, his influence has shrunk slightly as the government's focus on the region has shifted elsewhere. But with the shift, a senior official said that it is just as important as ever that he continues to be active and high profile.

Jacqueline O'Neill, ambassador for women, peace, and security



The first person to hold the title when the role was created in 2019, **Jacqueline O'Neill's** tenure was extended for another three-year term in 2022 until 2025. From her early days in the role, O'Neill quickly entrenched herself as a credible and influential advocate for women and girls at a time of rising international conflict. One Parliamentarian described her as “smart, thoughtful, caring ... everything an ambassador should be,” and noted that she played a key role in fulfilling the Liberals' promise of a “feminist foreign policy.” Another said, “her fingerprints are everywhere,” as she has built up an extensive network of knowledgeable contacts with whom she constantly communicates.

David Cohen, U.S. ambassador to Canada



America's top diplomat in Ottawa will always be the most influential foreign presence in the diplomatic corps, but **David Cohen** adds additional heft with his effectiveness working behind the scenes, according to a

senior government official. A top fundraiser for U.S. President Joe Biden, the Philadelphia-native telecoms executive was rewarded with the ambassadorship in 2021 for his support. As he has developed in the role, Cohen has found areas where he can be a productive voice in the Canada-U.S. relationship, said another senior official. “He's been hugely helpful in moving forward some of the bilateral conversations,” the source said, remarking that Cohen is “exceedingly effective” in ensuring Canada stays on the agenda for the Biden administration as it often can be ignored inside the Beltway. The government also gave him high grades for his work pulling together Biden's visit to Ottawa in March 2023.

Sabine Sparwasser, German ambassador to Canada

Considered one of the most influential ambassadors in Ottawa, **Sabine Sparwasser** has been a constant in the Ottawa-Berlin relationship over the years. Serving as Germany's top diplomat in Ottawa since 2017, she has been a past consul general in Toronto, and has had previous postings in Ottawa and on exchange at the Pearson Building, bringing her time in Canada in total to nearly 15 years. She is credited for her work in deepening links between the two G7 powers since taking over the Golden Triangle embassy, bringing extensive institutional knowledge for all involved in the bilateral relationship.

Kanji Yamanouchi, Japanese ambassador to Canada

While only in his sophomore year as ambassador, **Kanji Yamanouchi** has made quite a splash since starting the post in the summer of 2022 after moving from New York, where he previously served as Japan's consul general. Whether performing *O Canada* on electric guitar at the “Do It For Democracy” reception last year, or his star-studded party at the Château Laurier Hotel to mark Japan's National Day and the Japanese Emperor's birthday last February, Yamanouchi has become a “larger-than-life presence in Ottawa,” whose warm and friendly demeanour has proven an asset in strengthening the strong relations and friendship between Japan and Canada.

Civil society and others

Janice Stein, academic

The founding director of the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs, **Janice Stein** is one academic that the government has sought advice from amid the escalating Israel-Hamas war. Trudeau has called Stein personally a number



of times to pick her brain on the unfolding situation, according to a senior government official. One former diplomat said she exhibits “a masterclass” on how to be an excellent academic who can communicate, pointing to her appearance on **Peter Mansbridge's** podcast *The Bridge*. She also co-chaired an external advisory group that aided in the foreign ministry's development of the Indo-Pacific strategy.

Roland Paris, academic

Eight years after he left his role as a senior adviser on global affairs and defence to the prime minister, the government still listens to **Roland Paris**. The director of the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa was named by multiple sources as among the key academics the government turns to most for thoughts on foreign affairs.



Maryscott Greenwood, Manulife

A former U.S. diplomat, **Maryscott Greenwood** has long been the Washington whisperer for those at the centre of power in Ottawa. While she departed last year as the head of the Canadian American Business Council, her influence persists, according to senior government officials. The former chief of staff to Clinton-era ambassador to Canada **Gordon Giffin** is a go-to for the government when there is a need for a trusted voice on Canada-U.S. matters, especially around business. Greenwood has close links past and present, and has given advice to Ottawa on how to better lobby the powerbrokers inside the Beltway.



Flavio Volpe, president of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association

One of the latest inductees into the Order of Canada, **Flavio Volpe**,

the head of the association representing Canada's largest auto parts makers, is much more than just an industry lobbyist. With close relationships to PMO deputy chief of staff Clow and cabinet ministers Champagne and Freeland, Volpe's input on the Canada-U.S. trade relationship is of significant value to the governing Liberals, as evidenced by his invitation to brief the caucus on the file at its winter retreat in January.



Goldy Hyder, president of the Business Council of Canada

Most sources interviewed for this list agreed that **Goldy Hyder** and the Business Council of Canada should be included. Although business interests and the Liberal government may find themselves at odds, Hyder remains someone who federal officials repeatedly seek out for advice.



More than five years into his role, Hyder is continually sought out for his opinions, whether or not the government likes the answers. He can frequently be seen lobbying in Washington, D.C., and accompanying the international trade minister on overseas delegations.

Laura Dawson, Future Borders Coalition executive director

Like Volpe, **Laura Dawson** was called on by the government to give her two cents at the recent winter cabinet retreat. Her expertise is on the world's longest undefended border that traverses the 49th parallel—a border that has been put under an increased spotlight by bombastic American lawmakers as their election approaches. One



senior official called her perspective a “thoughtful voice” that is listened to. Dawson previously led the Canada Institute at the D.C.-based Wilson Center and was a senior adviser in the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa.

Alexandra Chyczij/Ihor Michalchyshyn, president and CEO of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress



Though cracks have begun to appear in the consensus on military and trade support for Ukraine in Canada, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) remains among the fiercest and most-listened to advocacy organizations on the Hill as the country enters its third year of Russian invasion. UCC president **Alexandra Chyczij** and CEO **Ihor Michalchyshyn** lead a team of advocates for greater contributions to Ukraine and support in its fight, and retain the ear of some of the most important decision makers.

Robert Fife/Steven Chase, *Globe and Mail* reporters



The Globe and Mail Ottawa bureau chief **Bob Fife** and senior parliamentary reporter **Steven Chase** “can be permanent members on this list,” according to one source interviewed by *The Hill Times*. Fresh off breaking story after story about allegations of Chinese government interference in Canadian elections, Fife and Chase followed Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau's** allegation of Indian government involvement in the killing of a Sikh activist in British Columbia.

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The Hill Times



German Ambassador Sabine Sparwasser, left, speaks with Liberal MP Rachel Bendayan before the House Foreign Affairs Committee meeting on Aug. 4, 2022, to answer questions about the export of Russian turbines and the continued export of Russian natural gas to Europe. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

A national pharmacare plan should cover what's best for patients, not what's new

Using insulin is always challenging, so access to a broad range of appropriate options is vital.

Colleen Fuller
& Sharon
Batt

Opinion



Coverage should be based on the best and most independent evidence available or we risk throwing money away on drugs and devices that are neither cost-effective nor providing patients with better health outcomes, write Colleen Fuller and Sharon Batt. *Unsplash photograph by Towfiq Barbhuiya*

In her March 17 *Hill Times* column, Susan Riley captured the moral imperative of a full-scale national universal pharmacare program while raising valid concerns about whether the Liberals will ever take the necessary steps to implement one. This has been promised since the 1940s, so fears the party will maintain its track record are well-founded. But, as she points out, the first phase is in the works—largely due to the persistence of the NDP—giving the glass-half-full crowd reason to hope.

During this first phase, a national formulary will be developed to include contraceptives and drugs to treat diabetes, along with devices that are needed for insulin therapy. Riley zooms in on insulin pumps. They should be included in national pharmacare, she writes, because they relieve diabetics “of the need to constantly check their blood sugar levels and inject insulin with a needle, which,” she

adds, “was the old system.” But this is not the bar that should be met to guide decisions about public funding.

Riley is not alone in believing that insulin pumps “provide better control of sugar levels and better long-term outcomes for patients.” Unfortunately, the evidence isn’t so clear.

Germany’s public drug plan, for example, reviewed all the available evidence in 2007 to determine whether it would cover insulin pumps, and if so, to what extent. One review found that there were no fully published studies lasting at least 24 weeks—hardly enough time to determine whether they provide better long-term outcomes. A 2017 British assessment of insulin pump therapy found that they “did not significantly enhance glycemic control or psychosocial outcomes in adults with [Type 1 diabetes]” compared with needle injections, and were not cost-effective.

Using insulin is always challenging—physically, psychologically, emotionally, and financially—so access to a broad range of appropriate options is vital. Insulin pumps may be the best choice for some people if they are safer and more effective than alternatives, offer quality-of-life improvements, and decrease the risk of long-term complications associated with Type 1 diabetes. But information about these important issues is limited. One recent study, for example, found that 20 per cent of adults discontinued using the pump after 18 months, mainly because of severe hypoglycemia. Another reported on six deaths when plastic tubing failed to penetrate the skin and deliver insulin.

The decision to fund pumps—and for whom—must be based on something more meaningful than the fact that they are the newest thing on the market. One reasonable policy is to restrict funding for insulin pumps to those who

can’t achieve appropriate blood sugar control using syringes. Many jurisdictions have adopted this approach, including the United Kingdom, Germany, British Columbia, and Ontario.

Insulin pumps are just one example of a larger imperative: the need to base coverage on the best and most independent evidence available. Otherwise, we risk throwing money away on drugs and devices that are neither cost-effective nor providing patients with better health outcomes.

Manufacturers and the patient advocates they fund constantly lobby regulators in high-income countries to approve and fund products that fall far short of the safety-and-effectiveness standard. A recent example is the drug Albrioz for ALS. Health Canada approved the drug for sale in June 2022, the first country in the world to do so. Last June, Ontario put Albrioz on its formulary, garnering cheers

from manufacturer Amylyx Pharmaceuticals, the ALS Society of Canada, and the chair of the ALS Research Network. Even the United States Food and Drug Administration paused before approving the expensive drug—branded in that country as Relyvrio—finding “notable limitations to the interpretability of the data,” but approved it in September 2022. Early this month, Amylyx announced the drug had failed to show efficacy in a Phase 3 clinical trial. The burning question now is whether Amylyx’s two CEOs will pull the drug from the market. About 4,000 American patients have been prescribed Relyvrio, with an annual list price of US\$158,000 per patient. So far, Canadian sources have been silent on the shocking news of the drug’s flop.

Health Minister Mark Holland has framed the funding of just two drug categories as a “proof-of-concept opportunity” to test the effectiveness of the universal single-payer model. In fact, the model’s effectiveness is well established, as the government’s own advisory council concluded. What’s missing is proof of the government’s commitment to a national single-payer plan, based solidly on the evidence.

Colleen Fuller is a health policy researcher and writer who has had Type 1 diabetes since 1969. Sharon Batt, an adjunct professor at Dalhousie University, writes on pharmaceutical policy. They are both members of Independent Voices for Safe and Effective Drugs. *The Hill Times*

Canada is becoming an afterthought in Africa



Albert Muchanga, African Union commissioner for economic development, trade, tourism, industry and minerals, left, and International Trade Minister Mary Ng sign the Global Affairs Canada-African Union Commission Co-operation Framework in Ottawa on May 17, 2023. Ottawa must take Africa seriously, and soon, write Tapfuma Musewe and Kyle Hiebert. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Global power is moving away from western hegemony, and African nations are busy courting the opportunities that come with competition.

Tapfuma Musewe
& Kyle
Hiebert

Opinion



Canada’s prosperity depends on international trade. Yet Ottawa remains conspicuously slow to engage with Africa, a burgeoning hub of economic dynamism and an increasingly important geopolitical player. Instead, Canada’s presence on the continent is dissipating.

The Liberal government deserves credit for its proposed Canada-Africa Economic Co-operation Strategy (CA-ECS). The plan is premised around support for the African Continental Free Trade Area—the world’s largest free-trade zone—as well as facilitating investments in infrastructure, and expanding partnerships in research and innovation.

But its progress has slowed since the public feedback process launched last May. Canada’s African diaspora, Africa-facing organizations, and allied groups have participated in consultations, and submitted input via designated channels. Yet they’ve been given no clear indication of what to expect and when. And if the glacial pace of development of Canada’s Indo-Pacific Strategy

Opinion



Immigration Minister Marc Miller, left, and Housing Minister Sean Fraser. Walking the extra mile to provide a warm welcome is in the DNA of communities across the country, but we need more leadership from the federal government, write Emilio Rodriguez and Allan Reesor-McDowell. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

Canada needs a comprehensive, national plan for refugee claimant housing

With emergency shelters overwhelmed, and alarming headlines telling of refugee claimants sleeping on the streets in Toronto and other major Canadian cities, this is a problem that can no longer be ignored.

Emilio Rodriguez & Allan Reesor-McDowell

Opinion



In 2023, 143,785 people filed refugee claims in Canada, a significant increase compared to the record high of 91,730 people in 2022. Despite these numbers, the government lacks a comprehensive and co-ordinated plan to address the short- and long-term housing needs of refugee claimants. The result is that a significant number of newly arrived refugee claimants are ending up homeless.

Housing Minister Sean Fraser recently committed millions of dollars towards municipalities and provinces for the provision of essential services, such as housing and health care. But without

the input of community-based organizations, these plans have so far resulted in lower-quality support for refugee claimants at a higher cost to taxpayers.

Refugee claimants are individuals who seek protection in Canada because they fear persecution, or are at risk of torture, cruel treatment, or punishment in their home country. People have the right to claim asylum in Canada based on the government's commitment to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. But rather than developing a plan for what happens when refugee claimants arrive, the federal government has sought instead to reduce the flow of refugee claimants, and abdicated its human rights responsibilities by restricting access to asylum, including through the expansion of the United States-Canada Safe Third Country Agreement.

It hasn't worked, and the number of claims has continued to increase. With emergency shelters overwhelmed, and alarming headlines telling of refugee claimants sleeping on the streets in Toronto and other major Canadian cities, this is a problem that can no longer be ignored.

A comprehensive national plan—as opposed to the current reactive and piecemeal approach—would result in higher-quality support at a lower cost to taxpayers. Such a plan must involve the experts: community and non-profit organizations who have been addressing the needs of refugee claimants for decades, including Matthew House in Ottawa, Romero House in Toronto, and Kinbrace in Vancouver. In addition to providing temporary

housing, these organizations offer wraparound support and referrals that allow people seeking asylum to submit their claim, secure a work permit and employment, and find long-term housing. Refugee claimants coming through these programs are diverted from homelessness, and are able to sustain themselves often within months.

“Providing due process and adequate conditions through the in-Canada asylum system is part of our international human rights obligations.”

The alternative is extensive and expensive stays in emergency shelters or federally funded hotel rooms. The federal government currently has contracts with 23 hotels across the country

to temporarily house refugee claimants and government-assisted refugees. Without access to the contracts, it is impossible to fully gauge the cost. But as an example, a 160-room hotel in Montreal leased between April and December of 2022 reportedly cost the government \$9.7-million. That is \$6,736 per room a month, or \$80,000 per room a year. Emergency shelter beds are expensive as well, often costing up to \$100 per night, or more than \$3,000 per month.

The City of Toronto last year declared that it was severely overcrowded and underfunded as it sought to respond to an increased influx of refugee claimants. But the problem is not just about money: staff at emergency shelters and hotels often lack the capacity and expertise to provide adequate support tailored to the needs of refugee claimants. The result has been high costs and poor outcomes.

The good news is that there are models that yield much better results at a fraction of the cost. For example, Matthew House Ottawa is able to provide a bed, food, and wraparound support for less than \$1,000 a month. While the costs from one organization to the next can vary, initial research suggests that they are consistently less than the emergency shelters and hotels, with the added benefit that there are experts on site to ensure claimants get the support they need. With additional funding, these models could be expanded and replicated across the country to divert newly arrived refugee claimants from homelessness.

This is not to say that other facilities—like larger reception centres—are not needed, or that municipalities should not be involved. Initiatives like the future reception centre for refugee claimants in the Peel Region—as recently announced by Immigration Minister Marc Miller—are long overdue. But all these initiatives must be part of a larger, comprehensive plan that helps co-ordinate the multiple actors involved, and that prioritizes sustainable and cost-efficient models that result in better quality support and better outcomes.

Given the complex realities of global displacement, with millions of people fleeing war and persecution, Canada will continue to receive people who seek asylum, in addition to those who arrive through refugee resettlement programs. Providing due process and adequate conditions through the in-Canada asylum system is part of our international human rights obligations. It is also in the DNA of communities across the country to walk the extra mile to provide a warm welcome. But we need more leadership from the federal government. Beyond much-needed financial transfers, a forward-looking and co-ordinated national plan that builds on the models that have already proven effective would serve everyone better—and very likely save a lot of money in the process.

Emilio Rodriguez is the policy analyst for refugee and migrant rights at Citizens for Public Justice. Allan Reesor-McDowell is the executive director of Matthew House Ottawa.

The Hill Times

Canada is becoming an afterthought in Africa



African Union Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, left, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau meet outside of the West Block on Oct. 26, 2022. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Continued from page 17

is a benchmark—taking more than three years to materialize—Canada could lack a coherent approach to Africa for a while. A possible change in government next year might delay matters even further.

This is a major problem. By far the world's youngest region, Africa's trajectory will profoundly impact the energy transition, international migration, global security, and more. Mutually beneficial market opportunities around clean power, agriculture, financial tech, education, digital connectivity, and logistics are already abundant.

Post-pandemic concerns over African governments falling into debt distress are easing as well. The African Development Bank's latest annual economic outlook report suggests the continent will possess 11 of the world's 20 fastest-growing economies in 2024. The bank's analysis also indicates fiscal deficits have stabilized; the average of debt-to-GDP ratios across Africa will decline to 60 per cent this year, down from 63.5 per cent between 2021 and 2023. Local currencies are gaining strength, too. And investors are mobilizing: the prospect of interest rate cuts by the U.S. Federal Reserve has reduced the average risk premium for African debt over United States treasuries down to the lowest levels since early 2022.

Geopolitical shifts are providing added effect. The rebalancing of global power away from western hegemony has countries across the Global South embracing greater agency in a multipolar world. This includes African nations which are busy courting the opportunities that come with competition.

India, Japan, and the U.S. have each launched charm offensives in Africa to counter China's vast footprint there. Beijing, meanwhile, is evolving away from mega infrastructure project partnerships toward more nuanced political and economic engagement. Kremlin-linked entities have struck a flurry of deals with African governments dating back to 2014. Turkey, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates are pouring money and diplomatic attention into Africa in a bid to cement their status as regional powers. European countries seek to tap the continent's vast energy supplies as they pivot away from Russia.

Canada is virtually irrelevant by comparison. In 2021, our country did roughly \$13-billion in combined trade with Africa's 54 countries and collective market of 1.5-billion people. That's slightly more than we traded with Mexico and the Netherlands alone last year.

True, Canada has invested in successful development projects around improving female reproductive health. But these get overshadowed by instances of Canadian corporate malfeasance and Ottawa's cuts to foreign aid. Then there is our near complete withdrawal from United Nations peacekeeping and stabilization missions—aside from a brief, virtue-signalling flop in Mali beginning in 2018.

Ottawa must take Africa seriously, and soon. Lecturing sovereign, diverse African nations on social issues and platitudes about democracy will also not get very far. Rather, African experts point to how western engagement should focus on enabling democracy-agnostic improvements to service delivery that can unlock economic growth. This will require much greater effort to better understand and appreciate the unique needs, perspectives, and interests of individual African countries themselves.

Canada's African diaspora over the last year has dedicated significant time and resources to clearly and repeatedly communicate this to the Liberal government. The upcoming federal budget will therefore reveal whether expediting the CA-ECS is a priority for Ottawa.

If not, this will signal to African leaders and their citizens more of the same: you're good enough for us to extract your resources and send you some meagre aid for your problems, but we don't consider you peers and equitable stakeholders.

Tapfuma Musewe is the associate director of sustainable finance at EYELiance, and founder of Afrifursa, an organization that connects members of the African diaspora and others with opportunities for collaboration across Africa. Kyle Hiebert is an independent analyst and contributing writer to the Centre for International Governance Innovation. He was formerly based in Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa, as the deputy editor of the Africa Conflict Monitor.

The Hill Times

Virtual reality: COVID leaves legacy of remote work for cabinet staff

Continued from page 11

In addition to formal and informal chats via different Slack channels, to try to foster interoffice connections, Seaborn said she had a rule whereby anyone new to the office had to have a "one-on-one in person or virtual coffee with every other member of the team" within two weeks of joining.

The Liberal Party's 2015 platform included a pledge to "make it easier for federally regulated workers to request more flexible working conditions," as described in the document, but John O'Leary, a senior consultant



John O'Leary was last on the Hill as director of strategic communications in the Liberal research bureau. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

with Crestview Strategy who worked for the Liberals on the Hill from 2016 to July 2020, said he doesn't think political staff "ever assumed that would include them."

"The expectation was Parliament meets in person, the House of Commons meets in person, your minister or Member is there ... and if you're going to adequately support them, you need to be there, too," he said.

But then came COVID, and remote work "became just a fact of life," said O'Leary.

"I think, in a lot of ways, staff have taken the lead of Parliamentarians themselves," said O'Leary, noting changes that have been "embraced" post-COVID, like remote voting and virtual meetings, have made it easier to work remotely. "If Parliament is able to work remotely and able to kind of continue and carry out its function, it's set a bit of a precedent for everyone else."

For better, or worse?

Astravas and Seaborn noted a number of positives when it comes to allowing staff to work from outside the NCR.

For staff working from their minister's region, there's a "greater connectivity with the constituency office," Astravas said, and it helps "keep a greater pulse ... on what's happening at the riding level" and "how policies were being rolled out" and received, adding she sees "great benefit" to having "staff where Canadians are, and not just in Ottawa." The option has also helped in hiring, bringing "forward different candidates who may, for a number of reasons—personal or family—may not be able to work in Ottawa," she said.

Seaborn similarly noted the benefit of having staff on the ground in different regions who can help with advance planning for ministerial trips and better connect with local stakeholders. "It's easy for them to check [locations] out, and know the local stakeholders, and have relationships with the local governments," she said.

Seaborn said she personally found benefit in not feeling "stuck in the [Ottawa] bubble."

"I like that the people that I interact with on the weekends ... don't really care what I do, and they're not trying to lobby me, and they don't really care about Ottawa. And I actually find that puts things into perspective for me," she said.

Seaborn also said she sees an upside in the prevalence of virtual meetings and online conversations post-pandemic, not only because she thinks it helps information flow faster, but also because it's made it "easier for more junior staff to be able to be in the room virtually ... and get to see how decisions are made" as part of conversations they might not traditionally have been included in.

Overall, Seaborn said she sees the normalization of remote work post-COVID as a "wildly positive" change for the Hill.

Asked about the drawbacks, Astravas reiterated the new onus remote work puts on staff "to continue to make sure that they're including individuals who are working from home," be it in work discussions or social connections. "You had to be deliberate about those informal checkpoints early on in the pandemic ... but I think it's incumbent on staff to continue to do that."

Not everyone is a fan of the shift.

Andrew Balfour, a managing partner at Rubicon Strategy with roughly a decade of experience as a federal lobbyist, said in recent months he's noticed an uptick in in-person meetings with cabinet staff in Ottawa, but "there's still several, even like chiefs of staff, who don't live in Ottawa, [including] senior people in the Prime Minister's Office."

Balfour said, in his view, connecting in person is "much more productive."

"My job is about talking to people and getting information and intelligence, and figuring out where decisions are going and how people are making decisions. I'm much more productive at that if I am in person [rather] than sitting at home," he said.

Amid the pandemic, cabinet offices had to "adapt and change," but "outside of the public service, the majority of people are now back at work and that's just a normal thing," he said.

"When you're on a Zoom call or a Teams call, or whatever you're on, it's very structured and not as

friendly, I would say.

It's difficult to build relationships when you're just talking into a screen. ... There's not as much candour and interaction as there would be otherwise."

Overall, Balfour said he thinks



Andrew Balfour says he thinks it would be "much better" for cabinet staff to all be working in person in Ottawa. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

working in person is "more effective," and that it would "be much better for everyone to be at a desk in Ottawa interacting with stakeholders and their other colleagues from ministerial offices."

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News

School food advocates celebrate as Liberals serve up long-awaited \$1B for national program

Continued from page 6

ments, we will look to them and the many stakeholders who've been doing this work for many years and determine how best to move forward."

Sudds also said that while she didn't have details to share on how much of the \$1-billion will be included in the upcoming budget, she said the aim was \$200-million per year, which would nearly match the combined yearly contributions of the provinces and territories to their programs, which—including the upcoming 2024-25 school year—now total more than \$264-million.

While that is the stated goal, Sudds also suggested that it may take time "to get ramped up and ensure that the schools are equipped and ready to provide this program," and there is still work to be done to ensure that the funding streams "adequately reflect the realities on the ground."

Field said she won't be completely happy until those finer details are worked out amongst the provinces and territories, and the agreements



Breakfast Club of Canada co-founder Judith Barry says she and other advocates will be keeping close watch to ensure the announcement achieves 'concrete results,' and pressure the provinces and territories to allow the funding to flow quickly. *Photograph courtesy of Breakfast Club of Canada*

are signed. She attributed the government's decision to move forward to the increasing wealth of data supporting the program's health and economic benefits, pointing to a recent study funded by the Arrell Family Foundation.



Debbie Field, a co-ordinator with the Coalition for Healthy School Food, says she hopes the major new social program will be a non-partisan issue 'everybody can get behind.' *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

The study, released in October 2023 and updated this past February, indicates such a program could have a 250-700 per cent return on investment in health-care costs and economic benefits in high-income countries like

the United States and Sweden. It also indicates that universal free school meals (breakfast and lunch) could save families between \$129 and \$189 per child per month on grocery bills, and families with two children could save between \$2,580 to \$3,780 per school year. Additionally, alongside the economic benefits of sourcing food locally, which could contribute \$4.8-billion in domestic food purchases over 10 years, the most recent data out of Sweden indicates that access to universal free lunch increased mothers' labour market participation by five per cent, and permanent household incomes by 2.6 per cent.

According to Statistics Canada, nearly 1.8 million children under the age of 18—roughly one quarter of the total population of children in Canada—lived in a food-insecure household in 2022, compared to the 1.4 million children experiencing food insecurity in 2021. Additionally, despite representing less than one-fifth of the total population, roughly 33.1 per cent of food bank customers in Canada are under the age of

18, according to data from Food Banks Canada.

In a What We Heard Report released on Oct. 31, 2023, summarizing feedback from the more than 5,000 responses the government received to its online questionnaire in the last two months of 2022, an overwhelming 96 per cent of respondents indicated support for the school food program and the belief that it will benefit students by teaching healthy habits and helping them stay focused during the day.

While one of the biggest concerns around implementing the program is whether providing federal funding could incentivize provinces and territories to reduce their contributions, Field said much of that has been assuaged by the increased commitment they have demonstrated over the past year. Most significantly, British Columbia, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and several other provinces and territories have made increased investments in their programs for the 2023-24 and 2023-25 school years.

"There has been an incredible influx of money from the provinces and territories, so the discussion is much easier with their lead, and we've gotten through some of the jurisdictional concerns," Field explained. "I think Canadians want to see their federal, provincial, and territorial governments work together, so this is a good news story for all three."

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Confronting Beijing's meddling outweighs concerns over politician participation, says Uyghur advocate

Continued from page 4

national security at the University of Ottawa's Professional Development Institute, Stanton said the panellists' experiences brought into focus what "happens when you don't deal with foreign interference."

"It sophisticates, broadens, and then you end up having these manifestations that we've seen from disinformation campaigns in election campaigns to harassment and murder," Stanton said during a break in proceedings on March 28, where he has a front-row seat as counsel for the Pillars Society, which represents former CSIS employees.

However, Stanton cautioned against expectations that any evidence or testimony presented at the inquiry in either stage of the hearings would present any kind of "smoking-gun" revelation relating to either of the scrutinized federal elections.

"I think people are looking for some kind of incident or a particular event that would have had a

significant impact, and it's probably not going to be there," Stanton said, explaining that due to the nature of the nuanced threat, un-



Dan Stanton, director of national security at the University of Ottawa's Professional Development Institute, says that when foreign interference isn't immediately addressed, 'it sophisticates and broadens' from disinformation campaigns to violent threats and murder. *Photograph courtesy of Dan Stanton*

like espionage or terrorism, there are far less distinct lines of cause and effect.

Stanton's comments echoed the testimony of Canada's chief electoral officer, Stéphane Perrault, who told the commission on March 28 that assessing an election's integrity is "fundamentally a qualitative exercise" rather than a quantitative one, and should separate the impact on the result from the impact on integrity. He explained that the former is extremely difficult to assess, if not impossible, in most cases.

"When you look at things like disinformation campaigns, or even illegal financing of parties ... there are so many factors at play in an election that you cannot basically draw a straight line between any activity in those areas and the results, unlike, for example, destruction of ballots or election fraud," Perrault told the commission.

Stanton said that rather than focusing on whether a foreign state is successful in any particular attempt at interference or

meddling, what matters is intent and the clandestine nature with which those states are pursuing their goals.

"Each state—whether its Russia, China, India, or Iran—conducts foreign interference with very different methods," Stanton explained, comparing China's more technologically sophisticated and far-reaching "whole-of-society" approach to interference to the more limited, brute-force tactics employed by agents of the Iranian or Russian governments.

"Ultimately, you have to follow the breadcrumbs back to the foreign state, but Canadians can't get caught up looking for a smoking gun," Stanton said, adding that his judgment of the commission's success or failure depends on whether the diaspora communities in the crosshairs of those foreign states believe it has been a worthwhile exercise.

"They have opened up very personally and viscerally about what has been going on, and many Canadians expect change

here," Stanton said. "The commission has made a considerable effort to make them feel safe to come forward, and that speaks well of them, but if this is going to be worth it, the federal government will have to show that they're actually trying to mitigate the threat."

In the second round of witnesses, the commission will hear from an additional 33 people over the remaining five days of hearings from April 4-10, including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.), Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, N.B.), Liberal House Leader Karina Gould (Burlington, Ont.), and National Defence Minister Bill Blair (Scarborough Southwest, Ont.), as well as Katie Telford and Brian Clow, Trudeau's chief of staff and deputy chief of staff, respectively; David Morrison, Trudeau's former foreign and defence policy adviser; Vincent Rigby, Trudeau's former national security and intelligence adviser; and CSIS director David Vigneault.

Once those hearings are complete, the commission will have until May 3 to submit its first report, after the governor-in-council extended the commission's deadline for filing from Feb. 29. The inquiry's policy phase is planned to begin sometime in the fall, with its final report to be submitted by Dec. 31, 2024.

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Cuba opens embassy doors

The Hill Times photographs by Sam Garcia



Then-Cuban Ambassador Héctor Igarza Cabrera, left, greets French Ambassador Michel Miraillet at the Cuban Embassy to mark the country's national day on Jan. 31.



International Development Minister Ahmed Hussen, left, Igarza Cabrera, and Brazilian Ambassador Carlos Alberto Franco França.



Onedys Álvarez, wife of the Cuban ambassador, left, Igarza Cabrera, and Moroccan Ambassador Souriya Otmani.



Igarza Cabrera, left, Pakistan High Commissioner Zaheer Aslam Janjua, Indonesian Ambassador Daniel Tumpal Sumurung Simanjuntak, and South African High Commissioner Rieaz Shaik.

Saint Kitts and Nevis welcome new envoy



Costa Rican Ambassador Adriana Solano Lacle, left, Saint Kitts and Nevis High Commissioner Samuel Berridge, and Farryn Tamica Prosper-Berridge, the high commissioner's wife, attend a welcome reception at the National Arts Centre on Feb. 23.



Berridge, left, and Eustace Wallace, minister-counsellor at the Saint Kitts and Nevis high commission.

Serbia throws national day party



Belgian Ambassador Patrick Guido M. Van Gheel, left, and Serbian Ambassador Dejan Ralevic at Serbia's national day reception on Feb. 15 at the Château Laurier.



Kazakh Ambassador Dauletbek Kussainov, left, Armenian Ambassador Anahit Harutyunyan, Carine Kjelsen and her husband, and Swiss Ambassador Olaf Andreas Kjelsen.



Greek Ambassador Ekaterini Dimakis, left, and Argentinian Ambassador Josefina Martinez Gramuglia.



Maria Luisa Leão Rocha, wife of the Portuguese ambassador, left; Maria Rosa Paneda Usunariz, wife of the Spanish ambassador; and Alma Muça, wife of the Albanian ambassador.



Laura Rycckewaert Hill Climbers

Sport Minister Carla Qualtrough in need of a new press secretary

Plus, Housing and Infrastructure Minister Sean Fraser has hired a new lead creative media adviser, among other recent office changes.

Sport and Physical Activity Minister **Carla Qualtrough** is on the hunt for a new press secretary, following the recent exit of **John Fragos** from the role.

Frags left the minister's office in mid-March after roughly six months on the job. He was previously a communications specialist for corporate social responsibility with ABB, an automation company, in Montreal, and is also a former assistant to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Minister **Marc Miller** as the MP for Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs, Que., among other past roles.

While a replacement has yet to be named, **Renée LeBlanc Proctor** continues as a senior communications adviser to Qualtrough. Deputy chief of staff **Dilys Fernandes** also continues to oversee communications work in the minister's office.

Kelly Bryant is chief of staff to Qualtrough, whose office also currently includes **Lucio Durante**, director of parliamentary affairs; **Eric Gustavson**, senior policy adviser; **Miles Wu**, senior policy and Ontario regional affairs adviser; **Eamonn Schwartz**, policy and Atlantic regional affairs adviser; and **Diane Chieng**, special assistant for operations and West and North regional affairs adviser.

Minister Fraser adds to team

Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities Minister **Sean Fraser** has a new pair of hands working on communications in his office, with **Justin Manoni-Millar** hired as lead creative media adviser to the minister in February.



Justin Manoni-Millar is lead creative media adviser to Minister Fraser. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Manoni-Millar's LinkedIn profile notes he has worked as a freelance photographer and drone pilot since the fall of 2020. He also brings experience as a freelance audio engineer, and as an audio-visual technician from working for event management company PSAV, now known as Encore. More recently, in 2023, while freelancing, he also worked as editor at Carpe Diem Photography, a school photography company in Ottawa.

But, not long after Fraser's communications team—which is led by director **Matthew Dillon-Leitch**—added one staffer, it bade farewell to another, with senior communications adviser **Tanveer Sandhu** having exited the minister's office in March.

Sandhu first began working in federal politics in January 2018 as an assistant to Richmond Hill, Ont., Liberal MP **Majid Jowhari**, and joined now-Diversity, Inclusion, and Persons with Disabilities Minister **Kamal Khara**'s office as the MP for Brampton West, Ont., later that year. He landed his first ministerial job in early 2020 when he was hired as an Ontario regional affairs adviser to then-immigration minister **Marco Mendicino**, and was kept on after Fraser took over the immigration portfolio following the 2021 federal election.

In 2022, Sandhu was promoted to stakeholder relations and outreach adviser in Fraser's immigration office. When the minister was shuffled into the housing



Housing Minister Sean Fraser speaks with reporters at the National Press Theatre space in the Wellington Building in downtown Ottawa on Jan. 29. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade



Then-employment minister Carla Qualtrough, who is now responsible for the sports file, announces funding for skilled trades apprenticeship programs at the LiUNA Local 527 training centre in November 2022. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

portfolio last July, Sandhu followed, taking on his most recent title. Aside from a sizeable list of campaign experience, including on Khara's successful 2019 re-election campaign, Sandhu is also a former public affairs intern with Crestview Strategy, and a former programming intern with the Al Jazeera Media Network, amongst other past experience.



Tanveer Sandhu left Minister Fraser's office in March. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

He noted his decision to leave the Hill after more than six "incredible years" in a recent LinkedIn post, writing that he owes "an immeasurable debt of gratitude to my friends, colleagues and mentors who have supported me tirelessly," including Liberal MPs **George Chahal** and **Ruby Sahota**, Fraser's chief of staff **Savannah DeWolfe** and director of operations **Sebastian Clarke**, and others. Along with giving a shout out to each of his past bosses, Sandhu also gave special thanks to Fraser "for his trust and leadership," and to **Angad Dhillon**, chief of staff to Small Business Minister **Rechie Valdez**, "without whom I would not have been able to dream of this dream."



Mohamad Awada is once again working for the Centre for Newcomers in Calgary. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

In more belated news, **Mohamad Awada**, regional affairs adviser for the Prairies and North, left Fraser's office in December, and is now busy as chief operating officer of the Centre for Newcomers, a not-for-profit aimed at helping immigrants and refugees in Calgary. Awada previously worked for the centre in 2018, and again between 2019 and 2022 focused on cultural

community outreach. A former assistant to Calgary Liberal MP **Chahal**, Awada began working as a regional affairs adviser for the West and North to Fraser as then-immigration minister in the fall of 2022, taking on his most recent title after following Fraser to the housing portfolio after the July 2023 shuffle.

Following Awada's departure, British Columbia regional affairs adviser **Aman Parmar** was promoted, and now also covers regional affairs for the Prairies and the territories.

Current communications chair for the B.C. Women's Liberal Commission, Parmar has been working for Fraser since 2022, starting as a senior special assistant, under which title she was effectively executive assistant to Fraser's chief of staff as then-immigration minister. She became a regional affairs adviser after following Fraser to the housing file last summer. Parmar is also a former constituency assistant to Emergency Preparedness Minister **Harjit Sajjan** as the MP for Vancouver South, B.C., who she worked for between 2020 and 2022.



Aman Parmar is now responsible for regional affairs for B.C., the Prairies, and the territories. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Also currently tackling regional affairs work in Fraser's office are: **Lindsay Basinger**, Ontario regional affairs adviser; **Joshua Mbandi**, who's focused on the Greater Toronto Area; **Liam MacKinnon**, Quebec regional affairs adviser; and **Natasha Kochhar**, who covers the Atlantic.

Along with those already mentioned, the minister's office also currently includes: **Kyle Fox**, director of policy; **Micah Richardson**, deputy director of housing policy; **Matthew Paisley**, senior policy adviser; **Michael Kuliak**, policy adviser; **Dalton Wakely**, senior adviser for projects and planning; **Alexann Kropman**, director of parliamentary affairs and issues management; **Kevin Collins**, issues manager and senior parliamentary affairs adviser; **Zoe Romeo**, legislative assistant; **Micaal Ahmed**, communications manager; **Camellia Celestino**, communications planner; and **Linda Hooper Fraser**, executive assistant.

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Parliamentary Calendar

Parliamentarians dive into the future of the news media at April 8 roundtable



PSG Senator Andrew Cardozo, left, Liberal MP Mona Fortier, and ISG Senator Hassan Yussuff will host a roundtable examining the future of news media in Canada on Monday, April 8, in the Senate of Canada Building. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3

House Sitting Schedule—The House is scheduled to sit for a total of 125 days in 2024. It is currently on a two-week break, and returns again on Monday, April 8, when it will sit until April 19. It takes a one-week break (April 22-26), returns on April 29, and will sit for two weeks (April 29-May 10). The House returns on Tuesday, May 21, after the Victoria Day holiday, and will sit for five straight weeks until June 21. The House resumes sitting on Sept. 16, and will sit for four weeks from Sept. 16-Oct. 11, but take Monday, Sept. 30, off. It breaks Oct. 14-18, and resumes sitting on Oct. 21. It sits Oct. 21-Nov. 9, and breaks on Nov. 11 for Remembrance Day week until Nov. 15. It resumes again on Nov. 18, and is scheduled to sit from Nov. 18-Dec. 17.

Panel: 'Learning from Canada's COVID-19 Pandemic'—Former justice minister David Lametti will take part in "Resilient Institutions: Learning from Canada's COVID-19 Pandemic," a panel discussion on how to make Canada's institutions more resilient so that they're better able to respond to future crises, hosted by the Institute for Research on Public Policy. Other participants include Fahad Razak, Canada Research Chair in Health-care Data and Analytics, and Lori Turnbull, director of the School of Public Administration at Dalhousie University. Wednesday, April 3, at 5 p.m. ET at the Toronto Reference Library, 789 Yonge St., Toronto. Details online: centre.irpp.org.

THURSDAY, APRIL 4

Former Bloc MP St-Hilaire to Deliver Remarks—Former Bloc Québécois MP Caroline St-Hilaire, now administrator for the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, will deliver remarks in French at the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Thursday, April 4 at 11:30 a.m. at the DoubleTree by Hilton Montréal, 1255 Jeanne-Mance St., Montreal. Details online: corim.qc.ca.

Aga Khan Foundation Canada Book Club—The Aga Khan Foundation Canada's Book Club will meet to discuss Syracuse University associate professor Erin Hern's book, *Explaining Successes in Africa: Things Don't Always Fall Apart*, a journey into the unsung victories,

resilience, and triumphs that often go unnoticed. Hern will take part in a discussion with Cheryl Urban, Global Affairs Canada's assistant deputy minister for Sub-Saharan Africa. Thursday, April 4, 5:30 p.m. ET at the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat, 199 Sussex Dr. Details online via Eventbrite.

FRIDAY, APRIL 5

Rand Debate 2024—Augustine College and the First Freedoms Foundation hosts the 2024 Rand Debate, inspired by former Canadian Supreme Court justice Ivan Rand, who said, "Logic must yield to common sense as well as to justice." Wilfrid Laurier University's David Haskell will argue in favour of the resolution "Be it resolved that, as Wokeism destroys the West, the first responsibility of government is to foster a virtuous society, rather than protect individual liberty," while Queen's University's Bruce Parry will argue against. Friday, April 5, at 7 p.m. ET at Augustine College, 152 Metcalfe St., Ottawa. Details online via Eventbrite.

An Evening with India's Envoy to Canada—India's High Commissioner to Canada Sanjay Kumar Verma will deliver remarks on "India's Indo-Pacific Vision," hosted by the Saskatoon branch of the Canadian International Council. Friday, April 5, at 6 p.m. CT at the Saskatoon Club, 417 21st St. E. Details online: thecic.org.

MONDAY, APRIL 8

What is the Future of News Media in Canada?—This in-person roundtable, hosted by Senator Andrew Cardozo, Liberal MP Mona Fortier, and Senator Hassan Yussuff, will look at the news media in Canada and the rapidly changing world and layoffs from traditional news media. Monday, April 8, at 11:30 a.m. A meet and greet precedes the roundtable discussion at the Senate of Canada Building, 2 Rideau St., Ottawa, Room B-45. Simultaneous French/English interpretation and a light lunch will be provided. Contact Sharon.Fernandez@sen.parl.gc.ca.

Panel: 'The Fight for Liberal Democracy'—McGill University hosts a panel discussion on "The threat to civility and the fight for liberal democracy," the inaugural event of the series "Conversations: sponsored by Charles

Bronfman." The CBC's Nahlah Ayed will moderate the discussion featuring Rosalie Silberman Abella, retired Supreme Court of Canada justice and human rights law expert; Vikas Swarup, former Indian high commissioner to Canada; and Luís Roberto Barroso, president of the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court. Monday, April 8, at 7 p.m. ET at Théâtre Symposia, Centre Mont Royal, 2200 Mansfield St., Montreal. Details online: mcgill.ca/misc.

TUESDAY, APRIL 9

AFN Dialogue on Transport and Storage of Used Nuclear Fuel—The Assembly of First Nations hosts the first in a four-part series, "Regional Dialogues on the Transportation and Storage of Used Nuclear Fuel," from April 9-May 22, to advocate for First Nations' active involvement in decisions about used nuclear fuel, management, and transportation across Turtle Island. Tuesday, April 9, at 8 a.m. PT at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 655 Burrard St., Vancouver. Details online: afn.ca/events.

Pathways to Indigenous Economic Reconciliation—The National Capital and Manitoba regional groups of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada host an online panel discussion on advancing Indigenous self-determination by strengthening economic opportunity. Panelists include former chair of the Indigenous Chamber of Commerce Jamie Dumont, Canadian Council of Aboriginal Business vice-president of policy Matthew Foss, and Indigenous Services Canada senior director Matt Garow. Online on Tuesday, April 9, from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. ET. Details at IEC-REA.eventbrite.ca.

Panel: 'A Better Digital Future for Canadian Transportation'—The Institute for Research on Public Policy hosts a panel discussion on "Imagining a Better Digital Future for Canadian Transportation." Shauna Brail, Institute for Management and Innovation, University of Toronto Mississauga; Jean-Sébastien Langelier, Infrastructure Canada; and Catherine McKenney, CitySHAPES, will discuss the policies needed to realize the benefits of "the new mobility era" in a way that is equitable, efficient, and effective. Tuesday, April 9, at 12 p.m. ET at the Delta Ottawa City Centre, 101 Lyon St. N. Details online: irpp.org.

Virtual Pink Tea with Justice O'Bonsawin—The Famous 5 Foundation hosts a virtual Pink Tea with Justice Michelle O'Bonsawin, the first and only Indigenous Justice on the Supreme Court. Tuesday, April 9, at 2 p.m. ET taking place online, register via Eventbrite.

Paramedic Chiefs Parliamentary Reception—Join the Paramedic Chiefs of Canada and co-host Conservative MP Todd Doherty on Parliament Hill for an evening reception. Paramedic chiefs from across the country are looking forward to sharing their priorities and experiences with Parliamentarians at this event. Tuesday, April 9, 5:30-7:30 p.m. ET in Room 228, Valour Building.

National Public Safety Awards—The Union of Safety and Justice Employees hosts its annual National Public Safety Awards. Members of Parliament, Senators, and staff are invited to this catered reception featuring local cuisine and a prestigious awards ceremony celebrating the outstanding work undertaken by Canada's federal public safety and justice employees. Tuesday, April 9, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. in Room 310, Wellington Building, 180 Wellington St. RSVP: miya@kitpublicaffairs.ca.

Jane Philpott to Discuss Her New Book—Former Liberal health minister Jane Philpott will discuss her new book, *Health For All: A doctor's prescription for a healthier Canada*, with journalist Paul Wells at an event hosted by the Ottawa International Writers' Festival. Philpott is currently dean of health sciences at Queen's University. Tuesday, April 9 at 7 p.m. at the Church of St. John the Evangelist, 154 Somerset St. W. Details online: writersfestival.org.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10

Minister Fraser to Deliver Remarks—Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Sean Fraser will deliver remarks on "Affordable Housing in Canada: What's Next?" part of a lunch event hosted by the Canadian Club of Ottawa. Wednesday, April 10, at 12 p.m. at the Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St. Details online: canadianclubottawa.ca.

Japan's Ambassador to Deliver Remarks—Japan's Ambassador to Canada Yamanouchi Kanji will speak about Canada-Japan relations and on Japan's perspective on security in the Indo-Pacific at an event hosted by the Canadian International Council. Wednesday, April 10, at 11:30 a.m. at the Union Club, 805 Gordon St., Victoria, B.C. Details online: thecic.org.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10—FRIDAY, APRIL 12

The Progress Summit—NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh will deliver remarks at the Broadbent Institute's annual Progress Summit from April 10-12. Other speakers include Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow; Manitoba's Deputy Premier Uzoma Asagwara; and Fae Johnstone, executive director of Wisdom2Action. Wednesday, April 10 to Friday, April 12 at the Delta Hotel City Centre, 101 Lyon St. N. Details online: broadbentinstitute.ca.

Canada Strong and Free Conference—Canada Strong and Free hosts its two-day networking conference on the theme: "Leading with Conviction." Confirmed speakers include Conservative MPs Michael Chong, Melissa Lantsman, and Shannon Stubbs; former United Kingdom prime minister Boris Johnston; and former Saskatchewan cabinet minister Tim McMillan, among others. Wednesday, April 10, to Friday, April 12, at the Westin Hotel Ottawa, 11 Colonel By Dr. Details: canadastrongandfree.network.

THURSDAY, APRIL 11

The Governor General's Symposium—Governor General Mary Simon will host "The Governor General's Symposium: Building a Safe and Respectful Digital World." This one-day symposium aims to promote respectful digital dialogue by raising awareness of toxic online discourse, bringing together people and organizations working to promote digital respect, creating partnership

opportunities and amplifying co-operation. Thursday, April 11, at Rideau Hall, 1 Sussex Dr. Details online at gg.ca.

Canada Growth Summit and Annual Testimonial Dinner—The Public Policy Forum hosts the Canada Growth Summit 2024. The Annual Testimonial Dinner will take place this evening, honouring five distinguished Canadians who have made outstanding contributions to public policy and good governance, including former cabinet minister Marc Garneau, and former Privy Council clerk Janice Charette. Columnist Paul Wells will also receive the Hyman Solomon Award for Excellence in Public Policy Journalism. Thursday, April 11, at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Details: ppforum.ca.

CGAI's International Trade Conference—The Canadian Global Affairs Institute hosts its annual conference on international trade. Speakers include Canada's former chief trade negotiator Steve Verheul; Karina Häulsmeier, deputy head of mission, Embassy of Germany; André von Walter, head of trade, EU Delegation to Canada; Marie-France Paquet, chief economist, Global Affairs Canada; and Vincent Rigby, former national security and intelligence adviser to the prime minister. Thursday, April 11, at 9 a.m. ET event at KPMG, Suite 1800, 150 Elgin St. Details online: cgai.ca/events.

OEA/CABE 2024 Spring Policy Conference—The Ottawa chapter of the Canadian Association for Business Economics hosts its 2024 Spring Policy Conference on the theme "Navigating Economic Crossroads in Canada." Former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge will deliver the lunch keynote address. Thursday, April 11 at 8:15 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St. Details online: cabe.ca.

FRIDAY, APRIL 12

Justice O'Bonsawin to Talk Mental Health—Supreme Court Justice Michelle O'Bonsawin will take part in a conversation about mental health in the workplace, "Mental Health: We Have Come a Long Way, But Are We There Yet?" hosted by the Empire Club of Canada. Friday, April 12, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Royal York, 100 Front St. W., Toronto. Details online: empireclubofcanada.com.

SATURDAY, APRIL 13

Parliamentary Press Gallery Dinner—The Parliamentary Press Gallery hosts its annual gala dinner. Journalists, together with political leaders, diplomats, and other distinguished guests will gather for an evening of high spirits and satire that puts the spotlight on media's crucial role in our democratic ecosystem. Saturday, April 13, at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building.

MONDAY, APRIL 15 - THURSDAY, APRIL 18

AFN's Water Symposium and Trade Show—The Assembly of First Nations hosts its annual Water Symposium and Trade Show on the theme "Bridging the Gap: First Nations Water and Wastewater Equity" featuring panel discussions, plenaries and exhibits on addressing important water-related issues facing First Nations. Monday, April 15, to Thursday, April 18 at the Hilton Lac-Leamy in Gatineau, Que. Details online: afn.ca

TUESDAY, APRIL 16

Minister Freeland to Table Budget—Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland will table the 2024 federal budget on Tuesday, April 16 at 4 p.m. ET in the House of Commons. The Department of Finance will host an embargoed reading and press conference for media prior to the tabling.

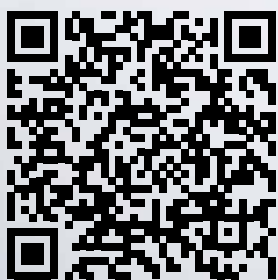
Post-Budget Reception—Earncliffe Strategies and iPolitics host a post-budget reception. Tuesday, April 16 at 5:30 p.m. ET at the Metropolitan Brasserie, 700 Sussex Dr. Details online via Eventbrite.

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

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