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THE HILL TIMES

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CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER

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NEWS

Canada crafts plan to deploy Sudan-focused diplomats in Ethiopia as Khartoum embassy stays shut

BY NEIL MOSS

Sixteen months after Canada suspended operations in Sudan amid a worsening civil war, it has adopted a formal plan to have

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NEWS

Ready to rumble: 'We are going to fight for Canadians,' says Liberal House Leader Gould

With 25 sitting weeks left in this minority Parliament, any final pre-election progress on this Liberal government's legislative agenda hangs on negotiations with the opposition. See story p. 13

NEWS

Mexico's diplomatic pause likely to be short-lived as North American ties will trump discord, say analysts

BY NEIL MOSS

With mere weeks remaining before incoming Mexican president Claudia Sheinbaum takes power, former diplomats

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'Being House leader is both an art and a science,' says Government House Leader Karina Gould. 'I am going to have to negotiate with my colleagues to move things forward.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

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Christina Leadlay

Heard On The Hill

Avi Lewis acclaimed as NDP candidate in Vancouver Centre



Avi Lewis, left, has recently been acclaimed as the federal NDP candidate in Vancouver Centre, B.C. *The Hill Times* file photograph

Journalist, professor, activist, and self-described nepo-baby **Avi Lewis** has been acclaimed as the federal NDP candidate in Vancouver Centre, B.C.

A party spokesperson confirmed to **Heard on the Hill** last week that Lewis ran unopposed for the NDP nomination at an Aug. 24 meeting.

"Avi is a dedicated advocate for a fair economy, climate justice, and equality, and he'll do a great job representing the people of Vancouver Centre," NDP Leader **Jagmeet Singh** said in an Aug. 25 press release.



Hedy Fry has been the Liberal MP for Vancouver Centre since 1993. *The Hill Times* photograph by Jake Wright

The riding has been held by longtime Liberal MP **Hedy Fry** for more than 30 years.

"I am glad to hear that Avi Lewis is running in Vancouver Centre," she said to HOH by phone on Aug. 29. "I am looking forward to the election and we will have a good fight," she added, confirming that she is planning to run again.

Lewis had recently not-so-subtly hinted that he wanted to try another run for political office.

"I am giving this a shot. I am going to run again in the next federal election," Lewis told former NDP MP **Libby Davies** in the July 12 episode of her podcast *Off The Hill* on rabble.ca.

"Just in these recent years of my life I have come to the conclusion that I think I can play a role in the movement, accountable, electoral figure—if I can get elected," he said.

Lewis ran for the NDP in West Vancouver–Sunshine Coast–Sea to Sky Country, B.C., in the 2021 election, but came in third with 25.6 per cent of the vote behind Liberal winner **Patrick Weiler**.

"I come by my nepo-baby status legit," he laughed with Davies as he listed his family's political heritage: his father **Stephen Lewis** was the leader of the Ontario NDP, and his grandfather **David Lewis** led the federal wing. "It's not an inheritance of wealth and power, but of struggle and resistance," he said.

"I am really excited, though it's a terrible time to be in politics," the University of British Columbia associate professor said, noting that he and his family—including wife **Naomi Klein**—were moving to the city of Vancouver "in the next few months."

Bloc's Garon bows out

Bloc Québécois MP **Jean-Denis Garon** will not be running again in the next federal election.

The news was confirmed in an Aug. 30 press release in French.

He said it was a difficult decision, but that he and his wife want to prioritize their "new fam-



Bloc Québécois MP Jean-Denis Garon will leave politics at the next election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

ily project": they are expecting their first child.

Garon said he will stay on as MP until the next federal election, but then will return to his teaching and research career at l'Université du Québec à Montréal where his focus is on economics.

The 41-year-old Garon was elected in 2021 to represent the riding of Mirabel. He currently serves as his party's critic for industry, national revenue, and the green economy.

Hogue Commission announces fall public hearings



Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

After holding in-camera meetings with witnesses in July, the Foreign Interference Commission is returning to public hearings, having published its fall calendar last week.

Commissioner **Marie-Josée Hogue** and her team will hold "factual hearings" from Sept. 16 through to Oct. 16, which will be

followed by five days of "policy consultations" from Oct. 21 to Oct. 25. The hearings will take place at 395 Wellington St., in the Bamberbrick Room.

Members of the public and the media are welcome to attend, but you'll need to apply for accreditation first at foreigninterference-commission.ca.

This is the commission's second series of public meetings, having held its first batch between Jan. 29 and Feb. 2 in Ottawa. Hogue published her interim report on May 3, and is expected to release her final report by Dec. 31.

The commission will also launch its policy consultations on Oct. 21.

"The mandate of the Foreign Interference Commission has two aspects: a factual aspect and a policy aspect. The Commission's factual hearings will conclude on Oct. 16, 2024," reads the Aug. 29 press release.

Erin O'Toole in B.C. during political bombshell



Ex-Conservative leader Erin O'Toole, right, on the campaign trail with then-BC United candidate James Mitchell, left, on Aug. 28. *Photograph courtesy X/@JMitchellINVS*

Well that was awkward timing.

Former Conservative leader **Erin O'Toole** was in British Columbia last week. Amongst the many activities he got up to—judging by his social media feed—he also found time to lend a hand to provincial election campaign efforts.

"Always great to have a friend from out of town help out on the campaign trail. Thank you @erinotoole for spending some time today in North Vancouver–Seymour," then-BC United candidate **James Mitchell** wrote in a post from his now-deleted X account on Aug. 28.

Unfortunately, O'Toole and Mitchell were door-knocking just as BC United leader **Kevin Falcon** officially suspended his party's campaign to throw support behind the ascending BC Conservative Party led by **John Rustad**.

It's only been a year since the centre-right BC Liberals rebranded as BC United, and two years since Falcon took the helm.

Falcon explained his move in a press release: "I know that the best thing for the future of our province is to defeat the NDP, but we cannot do that when the centre-right vote is split." The

release noted that "nominations of BC United candidates will be withdrawn to enable the Conservative Party of BC to draw from BC United's pool of incredible incumbent MLAs and candidates."

Bob Zimmer, the Conservative MP for Prince George–Peace River–Northern Rockies, B.C., called the move a "great decision for British Columbia" in an Aug. 28 post on X.

The provincial election is scheduled for Oct. 19.

Tory MP Barrett in a breakfast event Sept. 10



Conservative MP Michael Barrett. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Conservative MP **Michael Barrett** is scheduled to take part in a bright-and-early breakfast event hosted by Grenville Futures, the North Grenville Chamber of Commerce, and the South Grenville Chamber of Commerce on Sept. 10.

The event will take place at the Prescott Golf Club in Prescott, Ont.

Barrett will be joined by his provincial counterpart, Progressive Conservative MPP **Steve Clark**.

The event promises to be "a morning of connections and collaboration" featuring remarks by both Barrett and Clark. Tickets are available on Eventbrite.

Glen McInnis parts ways with CPAC

After nearly 24 years, **Glen McInnis** has left CPAC, according to *Broadcast Dialogue's* weekly briefing from Aug. 29.

"McInnis, who had most recently been hosting man-on-the-street political opinion show, *Outburst*, is now freelance producing," reads the brief blurb.

McInnis' LinkedIn page corroborates the news, showing that the Halifax-born reporter and musician is now a "producer freelance (self employed)" as of August 2024.

The most recent video with McInnis hosting CPAC's *Outburst* is from July 27.

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The Hill Times

Ottawa off base with claim public servants are needed in office to boost collaboration



The arguments made by Christiane Fox, deputy clerk of the Privy Council Office, for less remote work ignore the dire impact on employees' productivity and performance, writes Nathan Prier. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

A new generation of Canadians will make remote work a job requirement. At some point, the government will have to backpedal on the in-office mandate if it wants to attract and retain staff.

Nathan Prier

Opinion



In less than two weeks, thousands of federal public-sector employees will be forced to spend three days a week crammed into ill-equipped and makeshift offices—just to be on the same video calls they were doing from home. Why? No one really knows.

Ignoring the chaos ahead, Christiane Fox, deputy clerk of the Privy Council Office, told CBC last week that federal employees are being pressured back into offices “to build a sense of teams that collaborate towards difficult public policy challenges.”

For some reason, the government continues to push the idea that this decision was made to boost collaboration—irrespective of the anticipated dire impact on employees' productivity and performance, or on services to Canadians. In fact, hours of work are expected to be lost as employees struggle to book a desk or find an open workstation, while managers must spend an inordinate amount of time monitoring and reporting on their team's in-office presence.

It is hard to imagine what problem they are trying to address here. Government workers have been functioning effectively since the COVID-19 pandemic forced an immediate shift to online work—an inevitable transformation that was already

underway. With the technology and tools available today, collaboration has never been better. Federal unions have repeatedly asked senior management in the federal public sector to provide a single productivity study that backs up their claims. We are still waiting on Fox and her colleagues to show why Canadian taxpayers should pay for entirely optional office-related costs.

The picture is bleak ahead of the Sept. 9 enforcement of the return-to-office mandate. Most offices do not have enough space for teams to sit together, or enough meeting spaces for them to use for “collaboration.” In fact, some employees don't have desk space at all, and will be forced to work at kitchen counters or cafeteria tables.

Infrastructure Canada and Statistics Canada have been granted exemptions to the three-day mandate because *they simply do not have the space*. Many federal office buildings are already being slated for housing conversion—as they should be. Forcing more workers into less space more often while ignoring the huge opportunity cost of what could be done with these buildings shows that our management elites need sober policy advice that Canadian Association of Professional Employees members would be glad to provide.

Most of our work will remain virtual no matter how hard the government tries to shove employees into bed-bug-ridden offices for a completely empty concept like “collaboration.” Not every job requires the constant input of colleagues within spitting distance of each other. The reality is that many of our members working in different offices and cities have built meaningful and productive relationships in the pivot to the virtual office, while the government gets to pull from a much deeper talent pool. It is called the “Canadian” government, deputy minister, coast to coast to coast.

Fox also stated that federal employees “understand the role of a public service, and [are] in a position to learn by observation, by the things they see happening in their workplace.”

The claim is incredibly naive and outlandish considering the amount of work federal employees handle per hour per day with little time to pay attention to what others are doing. Keeping your eyeballs

on your colleagues “to learn” is a luxury afforded to no one, and not to mention creepy. Plus, let's be honest, employees learn best through coaching, training, and doing. So, just like the nature of work has adapted, so, too, should the training. New employees were onboarded and mentored throughout the pandemic quite successfully. What exactly are they trying to fix here, except the profit margins of a few commercial landlords in the National Capital Region? The Ottawa business community supports the pivot to a remote-work-by-design office culture, while Fox struggles to articulate her point.

Another rich argument put forward by Fox is “public perception.” It is the government's job to change the public's perception of the future of work rather than reinforcing it, and throwing its own employees under the bus. What about boosted productivity? The millions of dollars saved letting go of costly, outdated office buildings? The reduction of car-emitted pollution? Access to new buildings for affordable housing and desperately needed child care centres? Crickets.

The government is shooting itself in the foot while putting its other foot in its mouth. Not a pretty picture. The future of work is here to stay. Remote work is a global phenomenon that is transforming our lives and our societies for the better. That ship has sailed, and a brand-new generation of talented Canadian workers will make remote work a key criterion in their employment search. At some point in the future, the government will have to backpedal on its current position if it wants to attract and retain staff. Canadians don't want this government to waste vast sums of money on frivolous and outdated management theories that the overwhelming majority of federal workers have repeatedly rejected.

Last, let's not forget the irony of how this new return-to-office policy was developed by senior government staff working from the comfort of their homes.

So, Christiane Fox, what are you really talking about?

Nathan Prier is president of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees. *The Hill Times*

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News

School food advocates still waiting on promised funding for \$1B National School Food Program

Coalition for Healthy School Food's Debbie Field now hopes 'one or two' provincial school food agreements will be signed before winter after missing the fall semester rollout goal.

BY STUART BENSON



The office of Families, Children, and Social Development Minister Jenna Sudds says she is in 'active negotiations' after announcing the launch of the long-promised national school food program and accompanying \$1-billion over five years at a Toronto press conference on April 1. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The federal government is already late on its first assignment for the 2024-25 school year. The promised funding for the long-awaited National School Food program has yet to be distributed, and agreements with the provinces, territories, and school boards have yet to be made. Despite the delay, school food advocates remain optimistic, but vow to keep the pressure on until the Liberals finally give them their lunch money.

Last April, as part of the Liberals' string of pre-budget announcements, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) announced that the long-awaited \$1-billion over five years for school food—first promised in the Liberals' 2021 election platform—would be included in the upcoming 2024 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.

During the announcement, Freeland said the program would provide "peace of mind" to parents struggling with the high cost of groceries across the country, and that she wanted the program to be ready to roll out by the beginning of the fall semester.

The program aims to provide an additional \$200-million per year—with an initial \$79-million allotted for the 2024-25 school year, and increasing each year after—to expand existing programs offered by provinces, territories, and individual school boards to feed an additional 400,000 students.

Breakfast Club of Canada (BCC) co-founder Judith Barry, who attended the April press

conference, told *The Hill Times* it was a "privilege" to be a part of the "historic announcement." However, as the summer comes to a close and students prepare to return to class, she said she is becoming concerned that the program won't be ready for the fall semester.

Barry said that she has heard from provincial education ministers who have not yet heard back from the federal government, as well as confused Liberal caucus members who were under the impression that funding had already begun to be distributed.

"Something is wrong," Barry said, adding that BCC's data indicates there are still more than 800,000 students who will not be reached by the current programs with their existing funding.

However, Debbie Field, a co-ordinator with the Coalition for Healthy School Food, told *The Hill Times* she remains as excited as she was when the program was announced. While the program wasn't ready for the first day of school, she said she expects some of the money to begin flowing by the end of September or early October.

"From the conversations we've had, the federal government has approached everyone with letters and proposed amounts ... negotiations are underway," Field explained, adding that from the impression she has, at least one or two agreements could be signed "very soon."

"The money should flow for this year," Field said.

Field said she can understand why the BCC may be getting nervous—noting that she only has minimal information regarding the status of the negotiations other than that they are happening—but said it is wise for the feds to keep the discussions under the radar until they are completed.

"They have to be quiet about this part because it would be the worst thing in the world to make the provinces jittery," Field said.

However, Field said she can't understand why the federal government has been so quiet about releasing its National School Food Policy, which was announced with relatively minimal fanfare on June 20 compared to the national program.

The new policy will set out the "vision, principles, and objectives" for school food programs across the country. According to the Employment and Social Development Canada press release, it will guide the creation of the national program "in collaboration with provinces, territories, and Indigenous partners, with a focus on accessibility, flexibility, inclusivity, sustainability, and better health."

The new policy builds on 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.

"Canada now has one of the best school food policies in the world," Field said, noting that it just fell short of programs in Finland or Japan, whose policies are empowered by legislative authority.

In those countries, school children are provided meals "as a right" under existing legislation, which Field said Canada's program still needs.

"But this policy is aspirational, and it can grow," Field said, adding that despite the room for improvement, she is more than happy with what already has been provided by the national policy and program funding.

"After years of people saying it would never happen in Canada, we got it," Field said, adding that she hopes the program will be one that future governments

of any stripe will continue to support.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) has not directly addressed whether a government led by him would support the program or continue the current level of funding.

In a press conference following the April 1 announcement, Poilievre called the program "ironic" given Trudeau is "promising a federal food bureaucracy in Ottawa, the same day as he raises taxes on food," referring to that day's increase to the federal carbon price.

In a statement to *The Hill Times*, Conservative critic for families, children, and social development Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough-Kawartha, Ont.) also did not directly answer whether her party would keep the program in place, but blamed the Liberal government for the rising cost of living where "one in four kids do not get enough to eat."

"While Trudeau was creating his food bureaucracy in Ottawa, he simultaneously raised the carbon tax by 23 per cent on parents who already can't afford to put food on the table after nine years of his disastrous policies. Instead of listening to the majority of Canadians who said they didn't want his tax hike, he announced a photo op program that leaves out 92 per cent of kids and expects parents to thank him," Ferreri said.

However, Fair said she is optimistic that even Poilievre's Conservatives will support the program, pointing to the increasing buy-in from the provinces, including several led by conservative parties.

Most recently, the Nova Scotia government led by Progressive Conservative Premier Tim Houston announced it would be increasing the funding for its provincial school food program to \$18.8-million, and moving to a "pay-what-you-can" model. Phase 1 of the program will roll out on

Oct. 1 in every elementary school, providing 13 million lunches to more than 750,000 students. Those lunches will be offered for \$6.50 per student, and families can choose to pay the total cost, a portion, or nothing, and all payment information will remain confidential.

Field said that Nova Scotia will now have "one of the most impressive universal programs" in the country, particularly as it comes from a smaller conservative-led province.

"That is huge," Field said.

Nova Scotia joins provinces like Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Newfoundland and Labrador, which have significantly increased funding and expanded to a universal model in the past two years.

Additionally, while Quebec has yet to implement a fully universal program, the government has substantially increased its funding, Field explained.

In total, Field said that the various provincial, territorial, and school board programs will now provide more than \$288-million per year, which is greater than what would be provided in federal funding.

While Barry said that she understands that the rollout will take time and hadn't expected the entire \$78-million to be ready by the first day of school, she said it is essential to keep the pressure on the federal government to accelerate negotiations to leverage as much funding as soon as possible.

Alongside the existing gaps and the increased cost of living, Barry said that demand for BCC programs has continued to grow. BCC currently feeds more than 650,000 students through 3,800 programs across Canada.

"We have more students signing up for Breakfast Club programs, and more programs across the country that our support still can't reach," Barry explained, adding that there has been an unintended negative impact on donations to the BCC since the program was announced.

It isn't just Liberal caucus members who had mistakenly believed programs like the BCC had already received funding, Barry said, explaining that regular donors also had to be informed that their donations were still needed to meet the existing gaps.

Until the federal funding begins to flow, the BCC has launched a Back-to-School fundraising campaign, with the MTY Foundation pledging matching donations up to \$100,000 raised.

In response to *The Hill Times'* request for comment, Sudds' office confirmed she is in "active negotiations ... with the goal of signing our first agreement as soon as possible."

"Each province and territory have a different starting point, and we want to provide the flexibility for our partners to invest according to the highest needs in their jurisdiction," wrote Margaret Jaques, Sudds' director of communication.

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Canada's combat cupboard is empty

Meanwhile, we're aiming to ramp up artillery shell production sometime next fall, and our battle group in Latvia is going to freeze their asses off in dune buggies during a cold, damp Baltic winter.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—It has been two-and-a-half years since Russian President Vladimir Putin did the unthinkable and formally invaded Ukraine.

It has been more than 10 years since the Maidan protests overthrew the pro-Russian regime in Ukraine, resulting in Russia's military annexation of the Crimea.

In that interim, Canada has staunchly expressed support for Ukraine, and soundly denounced Putin's aggression. Since 2015, Canadian military personnel have been training recruits for the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU). To date, Canada has trained an estimated 40,000 Ukrainian soldiers, and following the withdrawal of Canadian personnel from Ukraine just prior to Putin's invasion, that training mission resumed in the United Kingdom and Poland.

Canada initially provided Ukraine with non-lethal military aid, but following the February 2022 invasion by Russia, the Canadian military began providing weapons, ammunition, and combat vehicles to the AFU.

Since 2017, Canada has also forward deployed a battle group into Latvia as part of NATO's Operation Reassurance to deter any future Russian aggression in the Baltic.

To a layperson, it might seem that Canada is doing its bit to keep Ukraine in the fight to protect its own sovereign territory. However, for close observers of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, it is obvious that the modern battlefield has evolved dramatically in the past 30 months.

In the very early days of the invasion, vast columns of Russian tanks were turned into heaps of scrap metal by the AFU. While Canada had provided Ukraine with a large number of Carl Gustaf anti-tank recoilless launchers, there were few reported cases of these knocking out Russian armour.

Instead, it was the FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank missile made by Raytheon and Lockheed Martin that soundly defeated Putin's armoured columns.

For the record, Canada does not have the FGM-148 Javelin system, and the bulk of our Carl Gustaf ammunition was donated to the AFU without yet being replaced.

Since those early clashes devolved into a slogging stalemate of trench warfare, aerial autonomous drones have become the queen of the battlefield in conjunction with heavy artillery. The first-person view (FPV) drones used by both sides have made troop movements a nightmare by day and night. The so-called "suicide drones" can disable armoured vehicles or bunkers with their explosive payload, whereas observation drones can pinpoint targets for artillery.



On the modern battlefield, the M777 howitzer Canada has given to the Ukrainian war effort is the wrong weapon system, writes Scott Taylor. DND photograph by Cpl Genevieve Lapointe

Yes, Canada donated four of our Army's 37 M777 155mm howitzers to the AFU, along with more than 40,000 rounds of 155mm artillery shells. However, on the modern battlefield, the M777 is the wrong weapon system. They are a towed artillery piece, without armour protection, and a crew of eight gunners. In a battle with an opponent armed with artillery, and a sophisticated counter-battery capability like the Russians, the M777 is a death trap. It cannot "shoot and scoot," and the crew have no protection. What is needed is a modern, armoured self-propelled gun system such as the BAE Archer or the KNDS Caesar guns. With their automated loaders, these systems have crews of just two to four, or three to five people, respectively, and most importantly they can fire and move within 20 seconds.

As for the 40,000 artillery rounds which we donated, with the AFU firing 2,000 rounds a day, that amounts to three weeks' worth in a war that has been raging for 130 weeks. However, since Canada has not restocked our inventory, it has left our

Army with—at best—two days' worth of ammunition for these howitzers, according to former chief of defence staff General Wayne Eyre.

Canada's current capacity for the domestic production would be 5,000 rounds a month. There is a plan to add another production line, but that is not expected to come to fruition until September 2025.

For the record, Russia is currently producing 250,000 artillery shells per month. But I digress.

Canada has recognized the importance of employing low-level air defence systems to counter drones. As such it was announced in January 2023 that Canada was spending \$406-million to purchase a National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAM) from Kongsberg. At time of writing, the AFU has yet to receive this NASAM from Canada. Ditto for a second RBS 70 NG air-defence system from Saab worth an estimated \$227-million, which will be earmarked for the battle group in Latvia whenever it gets delivered.

For the record, Canada has not announced any acquisition of a fleet of FPV drones, despite their prominence on the battlefield in Ukraine.

What Canada did announce was a rush purchase of 90 light tactical vehicles from General Motors Canada. These are essentially desert dune buggies with no ballistic protection, and no protection from inclement weather.

In case no one in Ottawa has been watching, let me remind our generals that the Russian army today is not the paper tiger that got destroyed before the gates of Kyiv in 2022. They are now battle-hardened veterans of the modern battlefield, and the Russian defence sector is in full gear.

Canada has depleted the combat cupboard, meanwhile, we're aiming to ramp up artillery shell production sometime next fall, and our battle group in Latvia is going to freeze their asses off in dune buggies during a cold, damp Baltic winter.

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



It was 40 years ago this week that Canadians embarked upon a political journey like never before in modern times when Brian Mulroney's Tories formed a massive majority government, writes Arthur Milnes. Screenshot courtesy of CBC News

band belted out our campaign song and thousands of Baie Comeauites—including hundreds of childhood friends who had encouraged me all my life—chanted ‘Brian! Brian! Brian!’ as my supporters had done across Canada (during the election),” he wrote. “When we ascended the stage, the cheering was almost intoxicating, so joyful was the mood, with people surging forward in waves. I could sense the great pride this hard-working crowd took in watching one of their own achieve the highest office in Canada ... I could hardly believe what I was seeing, and what I knew was really happening.”

While there is always the danger of looking with too positive a lens, I still do so with longing as I witness the style of politics often practiced in Ottawa and provincial capitals today.

For five years, from 2003 to 2008, I was proud to serve as Mulroney's assistant as he prepared his *Memoirs*. In hundreds of hours of private conversations with the 18th prime minister, I never once heard him take a personal shot against his main opponent, Liberal leader John Napier Turner. He discussed the pair's policy differences, of course, but always with a genuine admiration for his Liberal foe. The same was true when it came to the NDP leader, Ed Broadbent, who also stood against him in the House and on the hustings.

Sadly, all three of these outstanding leaders have now passed into history. They were each gentlemen politicians from whom we could learn much today.

All of us will remember the pause in the politics of personal destruction and deliberate division in the aftermath of Mulroney's death earlier this year. Partisans from all sides of the political spectrum, including many who had opposed the fallen PM, put aside their swords for a time as a great man's public service to Canada was honoured and recalled.

Martin Brian Mulroney was remembered as a national leader who did—as they say—“big things.” He confronted the challenges of his time with the sort of big ideas that often seem lacking in politics today.

And when our late prime minister failed, he did so, in the famous words of Theodore Roosevelt, “while daring greatly.”

While you could agree or disagree with Mulroney as he governed, what you could never do was ignore him and the policies he placed before us. His leadership truly mattered, and it will continue to be recognized that way as historians render their verdicts in the decades to come.

For a prime minister, there can be no higher praise than that.

Kingston's Arthur Milnes, who has been contributing columns to *The Hill Times* since 1993, served as the *Memoirs* assistant to Brian Mulroney, and was later a speechwriter to then-prime minister Stephen J. Harper. His daily non-partisan celebration of milestone moments in Canadian politics, *Art's History*, appears on *National Newswatch*.
The Hill Times

Mulroney's 1984 victory marked the start of something big

On Sept. 4, 1984, Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservatives achieved a historic electoral win, bringing 211 MPs to Ottawa, and shaping a new Canada along the way.

Our economy was further transformed with the introduction of the GST, a wave of privatizations, and so much more.

There were also two honourable—but gut-wrenching—attempts to bring Quebec officially into the Constitution through the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords. We also saw a government tackle environmental issues like none before—or since.

The acid rain treaty with the United States, our leadership at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, and the Montreal Protocol on the ozone layer stand as permanent memorials to the Mulroney government's resolve and green success.

It was also a time when Canada punched above its weight on the world stage. The Cold War ended with our country and prime minister having played crucial roles in the downfall of the Soviet Union.

We also helped found La Francophonie, and led a Commonwealth of great resolve and importance. The prime minister we elected 40 years ago also took on Ronald Reagan

and Margaret Thatcher, and, by doing so, saw our country play a proud role in the fight against apartheid that led to Nelson Mandela's glorious walk to freedom in South Africa.

It all started on Sept. 4, 1984, and when the polls closed that historic night, Mulroney—who had been elected leader of the federal Progressive Conservative party only 15 months before—had won the greatest majority victory in modern electoral history.

Just think of it from our vantage point today, which is an era when Canadians have returned

minority mandates in five of the last seven general elections: the soon-to-be prime minister—Mulroney was officially sworn in as prime minister on Sept. 17, 1984—would be governing with 210 fellow Tory MPs by his side.

His was truly a pan-national caucus with representatives from every region, including the North, and—above all else for the rookie PM—from Quebec.

It was a remarkable display of trust by Quebecers for a party that had languished for 100 years under the dark shadow of the hanging of Louis Riel under the

19th century Tory government in 1885. Voters there responded to a native son's call, and Quebec elected 58 MPs to stand by Mulroney's side in the four years that followed. (And in 1988 they would do so again.)

Writing 20 years later in his *Memoirs*, Mulroney recalled his emotions as he took to the stage in his hometown of Baie Comeau, Que., to address the nation in triumph.

“The atmosphere was electric when we arrived, as the



Then-18-year-old Arthur Milnes, right, and Progressive Conservative leader Brian Mulroney in Scarborough, Ont., during the 1984 election campaign. Photograph courtesy of Deb Ransom/Harper PMO

Arthur Milnes

Opinion



KINGSTON, ONT.—It was 40 years ago this week that Canadians embarked upon a political journey like never before in modern times.

The new federal government we elected demonstrated political courage daily over the next nine years, shaping a new Canada along the way.

Most importantly, then-prime minister Brian Mulroney and his government bravely entered into free trade talks with the Americans. By doing so, they went on to craft and shape a new and more confident Canada when the successful negotiations concluded.



A push for independence from France by members of New Caledonia's Kanak population failed after three consecutive referendum votes. *Screenshot courtesy of Al Jazeera*

New Caledonia: pragmatism 3, nationalism 0

The latest independence surge is over for the same reason that other French possessions around the world all choose to remain French: the bribe for doing so is irresistible.

Gwynne Dyer

Global Affairs



LONDON, U.K.—With the sole exception of the 50 people on Pitcairn Island, the United Kingdom—once known as the British Empire—liquidated its holdings in the Pacific Ocean long ago. France, by contrast, has a half million citizens in the Pacific, and another two million people living in other bits of its former empire on islands in all the world's major oceans.

This gives rise to much performative outrage in post-colonial countries that need grievances to bring pressure on the world's richest countries. That's only fair: the post-colonial countries are mostly poor, whereas the old imperial powers are very rich, but not very generous. The ex-colonies need leverage, and colonial guilt is a good lever.

For this tactic to work well, however, the people in these remaining European overseas possessions should be groaning under foreign repression, and fiercely demanding their independence. The problem is that most of them are pragmatists who are quite happy to remain colonies if the money is good.

The latest example is New Caledonia, a Belgium-sized island in the South Pacific about 1,500 km northwest of the top end of New Zealand. The population was mostly Kanak—native-born Melanesians—until

around 50 years ago, when various mining enterprises caused a surge in immigration from other Pacific islands, and even from France.

This is a potential grievance well worth exploiting. As a result of that immigration, the Kanak share of the population has dropped to just over one-third of the total—112,000 of the island's 300,000 people.

No doubt many Kanaks want independence—especially young, rural Kanaks who see it as a possible source of protected jobs for these true sons of the soil. However, the other, now more numerous ethnicities will oppose it for the same reason. Independence would effectively make them second-class citizens.

Do not despair. Justice will be done. Under the 1998 Nouméa Accord, France agreed to hold three referendums on independence, and to restrict the vote only to those who were already resident (still a Kanak majority at that time).

Why three referendums? Because it was already obvious that a lot of the Kanaks—call them pragmatists, if you like—didn't want independence. So, to get the pro-independence Kanaks to buy into the process, they were given three chances to persuade the rest to vote yes. Win a majority in just one of those referendums, and New Caledonia becomes independent.

In the first referendum, in 2018, with all the Kanaks except for only long-established residents of other ethnicities eligible to vote, 56 per cent of the voters supported remaining part of France.

In the second referendum in 2020, with the same electorate—all the Kanaks, but only about half of the total adult population—that dropped to 53 per cent in favour of staying French.

And the pro-independence party boycotted the third referendum, in 2021, ostensibly because COVID-19 made voting difficult, but really because their own soundings revealed that they would lose again. Better to walk out and keep the issue alive than to lose a third consecutive vote even though the dice are loaded in favour of the pro-independence faction.

France now regards the independence issue as closed, and last northern spring, the French National Assembly moved to

restore the vote to most of the people who had been excluded from the referendums. All those who have been in New Caledonia for at least 10 years—i.e. since 2014—will be able vote in future elections.

So, what was the pro-independence Kanak faction to do? Launch a national liberation war, obviously, or at least a plausible facsimile thereof.

Last May, Kanak militants put up roadblocks and made sweeping demands for independence with none of that voting nonsense. Nine people were killed, a state

of emergency was declared, French President Emmanuel Macron paid an emergency visit—and nothing much happened.

It's over, really, for the same reason that other French possessions around the world—French Polynesia in the South Pacific, Mayotte and Réunion in the Indian Ocean, Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, and French Guiana in South America—all choose to remain French. The bribe for doing so is irresistible.

If you live in an overseas department of France, then you get a good, free education, and a French level of public and social services. Per capita income in New Caledonia is 10 times that in other nearby island nations like Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, and the Solomon Islands.

It's the same in the Caribbean, where the French islands have three times the per capita GDP of nearby ex-British islands that chose independence. Likewise in the Indian Ocean, where French Réunion has twice the per capita GDP of nearby ex-British Mauritius, and in French Guiana, which has the highest per capita GDP in South America.

Call it bribery if you like, but the more polite word is pragmatism. And if you don't have to live with the choice, don't criticize those who take the softer option.

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

The Hill Times

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Editorial

There's no time for missed deadlines

In less than two weeks, the halls of Parliament will be back to their usual bustling state as politicians and those who work to support them return from the summer recess.

And with the start of the fall sitting comes the official start of the count-down to the end of the 44th Parliament, with a looming fall 2025 election date that could be pushed up at any moment.

To that end, *The Hill Times*' Laura Ryckewaert spoke to Government House Leader Karina Gould about the Liberals' plans for this last stretch, and Gould—who got to watch House proceedings from the sidelines during her maternity leave in the first half of the year—noted the pressures of the ticking clock.

"We're in a minority Parliament, and we need to make sure that we're delivering, but I have to find dance partners," Gould said.

Finding ways around an official opposition that will do everything in its power to not only oppose, but also obstruct, has never been the Trudeau Liberals' forte, whether they're presiding over a majority or minority Parliament.

Conservatives are "doing everything they can to try to break Parliament, and our job is not to let them do that," Gould said.

But the Liberals have a bit of a habit of making own goals, as well. Gould said

she's not opposed to the use of time allocation to pursue the government's legislative agenda, but properly allocating time to government commitments to ensure they're met has been more elusive.

Take, for example, the National School Food program the Liberals announced to much fanfare in the spring. As Stuart Benson reports, the goal was to start rolling things out in time for the fall semester, but that's not going to happen. Stakeholders are encouraged that the necessary conversations and negotiations to get the ball rolling before the end of the year are underway, but it's having some unintended consequences.

"We have more students signing up for Breakfast Club programs, and more programs across the country that our support still can't reach," Breakfast Club of Canada co-founder Judith Barry said, adding that there's also been some confusion from backers (and Liberals MPs) who thought the funding was already in hand.

Things do take time, especially when negotiating with other orders of government, but that explanation becomes harder to swallow for commitments that were made years ago—and by a government that has been in power for nearly a decade. Sometimes, the only one standing in your way is you.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor



Federal government fiscal restraint is a man-made 'reality' that can be changed with enough political will, writes Larry Kazdan. Photograph courtesy of Pixabay

Global Affairs' fiscal issues are of the government's own making: Vancouver reader

Re: "GAC's ability to perform essential duties, sustain foreign presence threatened by financial crunch: memo," (*The Hill Times*, Aug. 28, p. 10).

According to former United States Federal Reserve chair Alan Greenspan, "monetary authorities—the central bank and the finance ministry—can issue unlimited claims denominated in their own currencies." The Bank of Canada's 1994 financial statements also note that, "As the nation's central bank, the Bank is the ultimate source of liquid funds to the Canadian financial system and has the power and operational ability to create Canadian-dollar liquidity in unlimited amounts at any time."

It follows that federal government fiscal restraint is a man-made "reality" that can be changed with enough political will. Nature provides certain material restraints, such as the amount of metals in the ground. However, since in the case of Global Affairs Canada the problem is that it "can't afford the people," the problem is not the limit of natural resources, but unwillingness to create appropriate financial liquidity.

Our political leaders act like a person whose boot is too tight but who can't imagine getting a bigger one, and who believes the only solution is to cut off expendable toes.

Larry Kazdan
 Vancouver, B.C.

War breeds disease, says letter writer

Access to health care in low- and middle-income countries is concerning as it is. Add war to the mix, and one can easily imagine how the problem exacerbates dramatically.

War means destruction of hospitals and health centres. War means overcrowding, and unsanitary living conditions. War means impacts to the delivery and administration of life-saving vaccines from diseases such as polio for children, and Hepatitis E for pregnant women.

With the unfortunate prevalence of wars and conflicts occurring in the world, the effect on health care in these countries must be addressed by nations that

are in a position to provide assistance. This includes Canada.

This is why I call on Canada to invest for our future by ensuring life-saving vaccines reach every child. Canada must support the scale-up of existing vaccines, and the access to new, exciting innovations by making a pledge of at least \$720-million to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance's 2026-2030 Strategy, and to continue to support the eradication of polio by committing \$50-million per year to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative over the next three years.

Dena Sharafdin
 Newmarket, Ont.



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Comment

Opinion

Feds should stand up for the National Field of Honour

The Montreal-area cemetery is currently supported by volunteer contributions through the Last Post Fund, but needs secure government funding.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



KAMOURASKA, QUE.—“Old soldiers never die—they just fade away.” This observation by American General Douglas MacArthur has never rung truer, especially in Canada today. Fewer and fewer of our veterans are around to remind us of their past sacrifices in the Second World War and in Korea, and their comrades who did not survive stayed in the theatres of war.

When my father, Philip “Pip” Caddell, died in 2004, we buried him next to my mother at her family’s plot in Quebec City. I made sure the inscription on his tomb mentioned his rank—captain—and his

regiment—Royal Canadian Artillery—reflecting five-and-half years of service in Britain, Sicily, and Italy.

If he had not been buried with my mother, the natural spot would have been the Field of Honour in the Montreal suburb of Pointe-Claire, Que. That was the choice made by two of my former Global Affairs Canada colleagues, Robert Peck and Peter MacArthur.

Peck’s father—Robert Sr., who died in 2006—was a veteran of D-Day, as the lieutenant-commander of a landing craft. MacArthur’s father James died in 2008; he was an infantry veteran of the campaigns in Sicily, Italy, and the Netherlands. They are buried along with 22,000 others. In a nod to the egalitarian notion of service, each of the dead are commemorated in stones about two feet square. No matter their rank, all are equal.

The cemetery is unique in many ways: created in 1910, it is a national historic site, it is the only such final resting place in Canada, and it is supported by volunteer contributions through the Last Post Fund charity. There are two other veteran cemeteries—in Esquimalt, B.C., and near Halifax, N.S.—but both precede Confederation. Paradoxically, both are financed by Veterans Affairs Canada, while the National Field of Honour is not. And with \$900,000 in the bank, and an annual up-

keep of \$200,000, the Last Post Fund will soon run out of money.

As a significant contributor to the Commonwealth Graves Commission, Canada finances dozens of cemeteries around the world. These are places which remind us of the tens of thousands who died fighting for Canada.

But those who survived deserve to be remembered with distinction, as well. And that is the objective of Peck and MacArthur: to ensure secure government funding for the cemetery. The solution, as Peck said, “is to put financing on a fully sustainable footing.” There are significant issues of upkeep: the flat stones need to be raised from the ground before they sink down, and the grounds need to be maintained in all seasons.

When they discovered the dire situation of the Field of Honour, they decided to apply their considerable energy and experience into an impressive media and political campaign to encourage Veterans Affairs Canada to take over the National Field of Honour in perpetuity.

So far, the campaign is getting some traction. They have been featured in articles in *La Presse* and the *Montreal*

Gazette, and interviewed on CBC’s *As It Happens*. The ministers who could ensure the funding are Veterans Affairs Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor and Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge. To that end, a petition has been launched with Liberal MP

Francis Scarpaleggia in whose riding of Lac-Saint-Louis, Que., the Field of Honour stands. So far, it has attracted more than 1,000 signatures, but the Sept. 14 deadline is closing in fast.

I spoke to Derek Sullivan, former president of the Last Post Fund, who has been charged with leading the project for government support. As an incentive, the fund would turn over the existing money in their budget to Veterans Affairs, and transfer the ownership of the land to the Government of Canada. Sullivan said he believes the National Field of Honour is just as significant as the graves abroad, adding, “I have a feeling Veterans Affairs wants to do it, but it will be up to [the Trudeau] cabinet to decide on a number of options.”

Peter MacArthur said the time is right: “There are significant anniversaries approaching: next year will be 80 years since the end of the Second War, and commemorations will begin with this Remembrance Day.” Bob Peck added that “it is time for the government to do the right thing.” As the son and father of veterans, I can’t help but agree.

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



Liberal MP Francis Scarpaleggia, left, Robert Peck, and Peter MacArthur are working to secure Veterans Affairs Canada responsibility for the National Field of Honour. Photograph courtesy of Robert Peck

Fix, don’t gut, the temporary foreign worker program

Shrinking the program is unlikely to help any Canadian looking for work, but will certainly add to the immense pressures already facing many of Canada’s small businesses.

Dan Kelly

Opinion



Changes to the temporary foreign worker program announced last week will have serious negative consequences for many sectors and communities, writes Dan Kelly. *Unsplash photograph by Tim Mossholder*

Over my 30-year career at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Temporary Foreign Worker program has been one of the most challenging files.

The program and the employers who use it have become easy targets. The program has been accused of suppressing wages for Canadians, killing summer jobs for students, and even creating modern-day slavery. While there are legitimate criticisms of the program and lots of ways to improve it, the rhetoric has been over the top, and without supporting evidence. In the past few weeks, the federal government has halted the processing of applications from employers in Montreal and many important sectors across the country, among other changes.

The reality is that the program has been a huge net winner for Canadian employers, Canadian workers, and foreign workers, too. One of its important features is that the dial can be turned up or down, depending on the nature of the current labour market. It was entirely reasonable for the government to turn the dial up after the pandemic as the labour market was broken, and employers were desperate for people in so many occupational categories. It is also reasonable for the government to turn the dial down now as the labour supply has improved.

But last week’s changes will have serious negative consequences for many sectors and communities. While care was taken with agri-business/food, construction, and health care, other important sectors will be hit hard—particularly hospitality and travel/tourism. The 10 per cent cap will be a disaster in communities that depend on tourism like Kelowna, B.C., or Niagara Falls, Ont.

While wages are always part of the discussion, temporary foreign workers (TFWs) are far more expensive than Canadian workers. Not only does government itself set the prevailing wage rate, but the employer must pay \$7,000-15,000 in fees and costs like return transportation to the worker’s home country.

Canada needs to have an adult conversation about the labour market and admit that there are many jobs and locations where there aren’t enough Canadians to fill the gaps. TFWs can help supplement

the Canadian labour force and protect Canadian jobs. I’ve spoken to several restaurant owners who have said they can find Canadian young people willing to work as servers in the front of house, but can find no one willing to staff in the kitchen. Hiring a couple of experienced cooks from overseas helps them ensure there is work for their Canadian crew.

As for taking jobs away from students, we need a big reality check. While students may be available for work during July and August, how does the business owner staff a day shift in September or October without people available for work year-round?

There are legitimate criticisms of the program. Temporary workers are often hired by employers who really need permanent staff. But this is where there is large agreement between employers and migrant groups—and even the United Nations report. Creating greater pathways between the TFW program and permanent residency is a way to fix many of the programs’ defects. For years, the CFIB has lobbied government to shift elements of the TFW program to an Introduction to Canada program where TFWs can shift to permanent status after one-to-two years in Canada. This would allow the worker to learn the job, put down some roots in an area of Canada they may not have otherwise, and then have full labour-market mobility at the end. We see this as a way to balance the relationship between workers and employers.

The vast majority of employers use the TFW program as a last resort in their hiring process and treat their workers—both Canadian and foreign—well. I’ve spoken to many employers who have built fantastic relationships with their foreign workers, and provided help to give them a great start in Canada. Shrinking the program is unlikely to help any Canadian looking for work, but will certainly add to the immense pressures already facing many of Canada’s small businesses.

Dan Kelly is the president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. *The Hill Times*

News

Federal contractors raising money to sue government over alleged procurement misconduct

Botler AI's co-founders say they are looking to raise \$25,000 to cover the legal fees and subject matter expert costs needed to prepare a statement of claim.

BY IREM KOCA

The contractors who raised procurement misconduct allegations against the Canada Border Services Agency that sparked the ArriveCan controversy are trying to raise \$25,000 in order to sue the federal government.

Amir Morv and Ritika Dutt, the co-founders of Montreal-based tech company Botler AI, have launched a crowdfunding campaign to raise \$25,000 they say would cover legal fees and subject matter expert costs associated with a lawsuit against the federal government for "improper information technology procurement practices." They have raised \$3,820 through GoFundMe since their campaign launched on Aug. 28.

"We are turning to the Canadian public to crowdfund for a lawsuit that we're bringing against the federal government and against the attorney general for corruption in the government," Dutt said in an Aug. 28 interview with *The Hill Times*.

The co-founders expressed their frustration over the government's lack of concrete action to address the procurement issues they have raised, as well as their concerns about compensation for outstanding payments on contracts unrelated to the ArriveCan application.

Dutt said she and Morv have decided to take the matter to Federal Court after seeing that "nothing has changed" since they came forward with allegations of procurement misconduct. Over the past year, the federal government has implemented various measures to improve procurement practices overall, and suspended the three companies involved in the ArriveCan debacle, but there has not been any specific action—at least not publicly—to recoup federal funds spent on the app, or to pay contractors who claim to be affected by improper contracting practices.

"What we want to do is bring those same claims before an independent judge, so the judge can make a ruling because the gov-



Amir Morv, left, and Ritika Dutt, the co-founders of Botler AI, speak at a House Government Operations and Estimates Committee meeting on Oct. 26, 2023. Screenshot courtesy of ParIVu

ernment is never actually going to take action by itself," she said.

Morv said the duo is confident they will get the financial support they need to pursue a lawsuit.

The government is often in the courts as a defendant, so it's not novel to see Ottawa subject to lawsuits in this area, said Timothy Cullen, co-lead of the procurement, government, and public policy practices at McMillan LLP, a Canadian law firm.

"There are procurement lawsuits for issues with bidding processes and contract award decisions, and lawsuits arising from public contracts for payment issues or disputes about completion of the project," Cullen said in an Aug. 29 interview.

But "it's very rare" for a contractor to sue the government for corruption or fraudulent conduct, Cullen said. It would be difficult to determine whether Botler would be entitled to claim damages, according to Cullen, since their claims are not yet public. But if there is a valid basis for their claim and it is proven in court, a judge could decide to award damages to Botler, he said. The government would have the right to appeal a ruling, or be on the hook for the payment, he added.

Cullen said complainants' claims could touch on a number of areas: unpaid work, unfair termination of a contract, and allegations of intimidation or mental suffering. But each of these claims would require proving intent, which he said can be challenging.

Morv and Dutt have been central figures in the ongoing investigations surrounding the ArriveCan application. According to reports, they had been contacted by GC Strategies co-founder

Kristian Firth via LinkedIn in 2019 for a chatbot project for the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA). Neither of them worked on ArriveCan, but they have been associated with several of the same contractors—GC Strategies, Coradix, and Dalian—and public servants involved in the app's procurement process because Botler worked on a separate project with the CBSA.

Botler's co-founders said they raised allegations of improper contracting practices and cozy relationships between public servants and private contractors to the CBSA three times. They said they sent emails to the agency's leadership in September and December 2021, and then a final time in November 2022. According to Morv, the second attempt led to the CBSA abruptly ending their ongoing project with Botler. However, the company's third report of allegations was received by the then-newly appointed CBSA president Erin O'Gorman. That led to O'Gorman launching an internal investigation into the CBSA's procurement practices, and referring the matter to the RCMP. The RCMP has confirmed it is investigating Botler's allegations.

The developers went public with their allegations in a *Globe and Mail* article last fall. The accusations prompted probes by two parliamentary committees—the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee, and the Public Accounts Committee—which then led MPs to call for numerous independent investigations, including by the auditor general and procurement ombud.

GC Strategies was the primary contractor for the procurement of the app and received an estimated \$19.1-million for its work, which

did not involve the actual development or maintenance of the application. While the company's co-founders deny any wrongdoing, the RCMP is investigating GC Strategies both in relation to Botler's allegations and the ArriveCan app.

Botler's co-founders said they had issues with GC Strategies around invoicing, delays in payments, and the deliverables of the project which did not reflect the actual work they did, Morv previously told *The Hill Times*. The contractors also discovered that Dutt's work experience—which is a factor in determining whether someone is qualified to work on a government project—had been inflated by Firth to secure a contract on their behalf. The allegedly inflated resume stated that Dutt had previously worked for accounting firm Deloitte for 51 months, rather than two months as an intern.

Under pressure from MPs during multiple committee hearings, Firth admitted to providing incorrect versions of Dutt's resume to the government, insisting this was a mistake rather than a forgery. Dutt and Morv have also accused Firth of claiming to have cozy relationships with government officials, which he denied.

Firth was admonished by the House Speaker on April 17 after MPs found his testimonies in parliamentary committees to be evasive.

Morv argued that public servants have been blamed for issues in the procurement system as the debacle has unfolded.

"The fault is not with public servants," he said. "I'm not saying people shouldn't be held accountable for their wrongdoings within the capacity of their role, but

today, the main responsibility is with the minister."

Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), Treasury Board, the Department of Justice, and Attorney General Arif Virani's (Parkdale-High Park, Ont.) office did not respond to *The Hill Times'* requests for a comment.

The minister responsible for PSPC has changed three times in the four years since ArriveCan's implementation. Current minister Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec, Que.) replaced Helena Jaczek (Markham-Stouffville, Ont.) in July 2023. Jaczek's predecessor was Filomena Tassi (Hamilton-West-Ancaster-Dundas, Ont.), who took over the role in 2021 from Anita Anand (Oakville, Ont.).

Both Morv and Dutt criticized the politicization of the issue, and stressed that the deep-rooted issues in procurement should not be taken as a partisan matter.

The pair appealed to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) in a June 17 email, asking for "justice by facilitating the outstanding payment for the CBSA work," so they can focus on the recovery of their business, which they say has been negatively affected due to hours spent on misconduct research instead of their tech work.

"The only reason that we push for this so much is because of a much bigger issue that affects every single Canadian taxpayer," said Dutt.

"At the end of the day, the ministers and prime minister and the attorney general are responsible for all of this. Over the past year, really, nothing happened besides ugly battles between public servants trying to shift the blame," Morv said.

Duclos told *The Hill Times* in June that both reports by Auditor General Karen Hogan and Procurement Ombud Alexander Jeglic have focused on poor documentation across departments. "It's been a matter of, 'We don't know,'" Duclos said about the findings. "No indication of fraud, but we can't be certain because, again, we don't have enough to be able to dig into it," he said.

Trudeau said in March that "significant changes" are needed in procurement and contracting, in response to ongoing controversies on ArriveCan. "This is an unacceptable situation and there needs to be changes on this," he said. "We will be making changes."

Jeglic's Jan. 29 review into the ArriveCan application noted that the criteria for the \$25-million contract were "overly restrictive and favoured" GC Strategies as an existing CBSA supplier.

Hogan's Feb. 12 report concluded that the federal government "repeatedly failed to follow" the right practices and showed a "glaring disregard" in the contracting and implementation of the ArriveCan application.

There are also another dozen independent probes into the matter underway, including those by the CBSA, Information Commissioner, and Public Sector Integrity Commissioner.

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A newcomer's view of Ottawa's 'Parliament: The Immersive Experience'

An Indian immigrant from England reviews Parliament Hill's immersive experience, one year on.

BY RIDDHI KACHHELA

OTTAWA—The iconic Centre Block might have shut its doors in 2019 for a decade-long makeover, but a year ago, the ingenious folks on Parliament Hill launched a virtual spectacle to give visitors a glance into its architecture and heritage. *Parliament: The Immersive Experience* still remains a crowd-puller, and *The Hill Times* sent me to pay it another visit on its first anniversary.

Being a newbie of Indian origin who has only recently moved to Ottawa from the United Kingdom, I signed up for the task, partly due to my embarrassing obsession with all things British. I randomly ask people if they want a cup of tea, always complain about the weather, and watch *Bake Off* on repeat.



The massive immersive display in the second part of the experience. *The Hill Times* photograph by Riddhi Kachhela

But what yells "British" more than a Senate with royal red chairs, and a green House of Commons resembling Westminster's chambers?

Ironically, my Indian ancestors also had a taste of the classic British colonialism, and I low-key considered the Centre Block as a symbol of the same in Canada, as a government building sitting on the land of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

The experience—I believed—would also be a rite of passage for me covering Canadian politics, by immersing myself into the roots of the country's rich history and legislation.

As I lined up outside the venue at 211 Sparks St., I caught the chatter of some confused tourists: "But it's all boring government stuff, what is there to see?" The answer is: a lot!

For anyone who hasn't seen the attraction, which first opened its doors on Aug. 17, 2023, it is divided into two sections. The first is more like a regular museum, but with cool features. For example, in one section you stand on a symbol and the graphics on a screen describe what Members of Parliament, Senators, and the Governor General do inside and outside Parliament.

It doesn't say anything about sharing propaganda videos online, or elbowing an opposition MP, or arguing over the use of the word "fart" in the House, but I digress.

There are also drawers that can open that tell you more about the House of Commons, the Senate, the Peace Tower, and House committees. The stunning Library of Parliament—the oldest part of Centre Block—stood out for me, with its carvings of plants and mythical beasts, and the statue of Queen Victoria.

On the big screens, it looked like something out of the world of Hogwarts, where Harry, Ron, and Hermione would pore over books to find magical ways to beat Voldemort's dark forces.

Even with its reverence for the monarchy, what I found most striking was the distinctive Canadian symbols that gave the building its own character.

Take, for example, the stone carving of the *Inuk Hunter* holding a knife and a narwhal tusk, and the tribute to Canadian soldiers who fought in the First World War around the time of the building's reconstruction.

It was also fascinating to learn that the building's design came from a British-born Canadian, John A. Pearson, and architect Jean-Omer Marchand from Quebec—a nod to two of Canada's founding nations.

However, the highlight of the 45-minute-long show was the second room that features the main immersive exhibit. It combines light, sound, and visuals to tell the story of the Canadian Parliament and the important goings-on within.

It was a tad dramatic, but it played some historic speeches and quotes by Canadian parliamentarians over the years, like one



Hill Times reporter Riddhi Kachhela visited *Parliament: The Immersive Experience* a year after its opening. *The Hill Times* photograph by Riddhi Kachhela

from 2005 about same-sex marriage, a 2006 message about the Chinese head tax, and another from 1997 by former senator Erminie Cohen about poverty.

Sadly, former NDP MP Pat Martin's tongue-in-cheek remark from 2015 about not being able to sit due to tight underwear didn't make the cut.

But the extravagant display aside, the last 10 minutes of the show was thought-provoking, and made me feel grateful and humbled for being a part of a country that has made some important contributions to the world out of these parliamentary halls.

For now, the actual doors of the Centre Block remain shut, but the Lower Chamber will reconvene in the West Block within days. As a political journalist, the immersive experience has doubled my anticipation of seeing the House of Commons in action again.

On that note, can we also bring back the Canadian remake of *Yes Minister* that only lasted one season?

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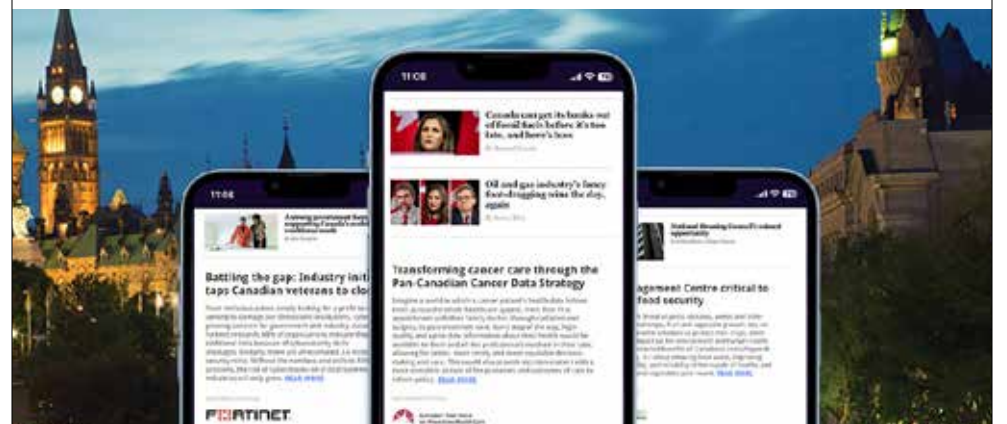
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News

Mexico's diplomatic pause likely to be short-lived as North American ties will trump discord, say analysts

Canadian Ambassador to Mexico Graeme Clark made public comments on Aug. 22 regarding concerns investors had about Mexico's judicial overhaul.

Continued from page 1

expect Canada to face a short-lived interruption in ambassadorial outreach following current President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's announcement of a pause.

López Obrador, commonly referred to as AMLO, said he would be pausing relations with the Canadian Embassy—as well as the American mission—in Mexico City following foreign criticism of Mexican judicial reform efforts.

López Obrador is attempting to make over his country's judiciary by enacting a change to have judges elected by popular vote, arguing the overhaul is needed to address corruption.

The diplomatic discord takes place less than two years from when the three countries will undertake a mandated review of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA). But López Obrador will hand the presidency over to Sheinbaum on Oct. 1.

Trade consultant Eric Miller, a former diplomat at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., said López Obrador's response is akin to a brushback pitch in baseball where the batter must shift to avoid being hit.

"What AMLO is doing is he's not looking to break the relationship, but he's looking to make clear that there's concerns," said



Miller, now president of Rideau Potomac Strategy Group.

Canadian Ambassador to Mexico Graeme Clark said during an Aug. 22 event that investors have issues with the proposed judicial reforms.

"My investors are concerned, they want stability, they want a judicial system that works if there are problems," he said, according to a Reuters report. But he added that Canada and Mexico have "excellent relations."

U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar called the reforms a "major risk to the functioning of Mexico's democracy."

Miller said there is added concern for Canadian investors in Mexico since when CUSMA replaced NAFTA, it removed an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) system.

ISDS regimes allow companies to sue governments in arbitration if there is a regulatory change that threatened their investment holdings. Now, those same companies have to take their case to domestic courts.

"[There could] be concerns about what does this mean [for] domestic courts to the extent they



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, right, has a new foreign irritant to navigate after Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, left, announced he would pause relations with the Canadian and American embassies after critical comments from North American ambassadors about his proposed judicial reforms. *Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons and The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

get involved in commercial transactions," Miller said.

"Analysts of Mexico have growing concerns about some of the rules of law challenges that exist in Mexico, and there's a sense that if you have elected judges then the ability to influence those judges could be greater," he said.

Miller said there have never been periods where there wasn't at least some sort of tension in the relationship between Canada, Mexico, and the U.S.

As Mexico started its diplomatic recess with the Canadian and American embassies, the U.S. launched a long-awaited dispute settlement regarding Canada's digital services tax.

Miller said the fact that Mexico didn't expel ambassadors is notable, and shows a more proportionate response by López Obrador.

"Kicking out the ambassador would bring a true crisis in the relationship," he said. "[Now] that the ambassadors can stay, and relations with the embassy were put on pause, and so what that means is as things evolve over time, those relations can be quietly unpaused."

Former diplomat Louise Blais, who served twice as Canada's consul general in Atlanta, said a pause in relations with an embassy is standard practice to register disapproval.

"This is not unusual, per se," she said, but added that López Obrador has drawn more attention through his public announcement. "It really [was] just a way to tell mostly the Americans—but he lumped us in—to say, 'Just buzz off. This is a purely domestic matter.'"

have enjoyed warm relations, so I expect that this is a blip, and a moment in time that will get softened through skillful diplomacy over the next week or two, so that we can get back to business."

During the NAFTA renegotiations, many observers looked at Canada and Mexico as having an opportunity to present a united front to buttress against being steamrolled by the desires of the U.S. administration. In the end, that hope didn't live up to reality as Mexico and the U.S. carved out a preliminary renegotiated deal, and Canada was given the option to sign on.

Future Borders Coalition executive director Laura Dawson, an expert on North American relations, said the Canada-U.S.-Mexico trading relationship is not a tripartite one, but rather dual bilateral relationships: one between Canada and the U.S., and the other between the U.S. and Mexico.

She said in the 2026 CUSMA review, the three countries will likely strive to work together as long as possible, but sooner or later, it will break down into issues in the dual bilateral relationships.

Dawson said that at that point, it will become a very advantageous position for the U.S., but less so for Canada or Mexico.

"So, if we learned anything from the CUSMA negotiation last time around, as far as possible, [it is better for Canada] to avoid situations where the U.S. can divide and conquer," said Dawson, a Canadian who has previously served as a senior economic adviser in the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa.

"If you are in a divided environment ... don't burn your bridges with the other party. Try to maintain a strong channel of communications, and goodwill relations between Canada and Mexico throughout the process because if you end up with a situation of Canada throwing Mexico under the bus on this, or Mexico throwing Canada under the bus on another thing, it means that there is no opportunity for Canada and Mexico to join together on joint interest," she said.

Dawson said that will require a lot of will and intention on the part of Canada and Mexico because there aren't too many issues where Canada shares the Mexican position as opposed to the U.S. position.

She said that Mexico holds far more influence in the U.S. due to its economic impact in large U.S. states, like California and Texas, as well as being a volatile market, whereas Canada remains a consistent market that will always be present in the U.S. trading relationship.

"With Canada, you treat us well [or] you treat us badly, we're still going to be a pretty reliable trading partner," she said, remarking that Mexico has more leverage, especially around the treatment of its border with the U.S. to extract better outcomes from the Americans.

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Mexico—which is represented by Ambassador Carlos Joaquín González in Ottawa—has proposed changes to its justice system in favour of an elected judiciary. *The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia*

Ready to rumble: 'We are going to fight for Canadians,' says Liberal House Leader Gould

With 25 sitting weeks left in this minority Parliament, any final pre-election progress on this Liberal government's legislative agenda hangs on negotiations with the opposition.

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

The upcoming fall sitting marks the beginning of the final stretch of this Parliament, and with a slate of bills still winding their way through the pipeline and the Conservative official opposition rattling the cages for an early election call, Government House Leader Karina Gould says she'll be looking to the "other reasonable parties" to find "dance partners" to move legislation ahead.

"We are going to—as the Liberal team—demonstrate that, despite the fact the Conservatives want to muck everything up, and don't want Canadians to get the programs that they receive because of the legislation that we've passed, like dental care, like childcare, like pharmacare ... we're going to keep working with the other reasonable parties in the House," Gould (Burlington, Ont.) told *The Hill Times* by phone on Aug. 29.

"As Liberals, what we feel is that we're in Ottawa to fight for Canadians. If that means that we have to go head-to-head with the Conservatives, that's what it means. But we're there to fight for Canadians, unlike Conservatives



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre held a press conference outside the West Block on Aug. 29 urging the NDP and Bloc Québécois to help force an early election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

who think they're there to fight Liberals."

The House of Commons returns on Sept. 16, followed by the Senate on Sept. 17.

There are a little more than 11 sitting weeks on the books this fall, and 25 overall before Parliament rises next June. The next federal election is set to take place no later than Oct. 20, 2025—or Oct. 27, if elections law changes proposed in Bill C-65 (which is awaiting House committee study) are passed in time—but could happen earlier should the government lose a confidence vote in this minority Parliament.

Key to sustaining the House's backing is the supply-and-confidence agreement penned between Liberals and the NDP back in 2022. But, in the lead up to the House's return, Conservatives have been ramping up pressure on the NDP to break the deal. Last week, Conservative Leader

Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) called on New Democrats and the Bloc Québécois to stop supporting the Liberal government and force an early election by calling for a vote of non-confidence, penning a letter directly to NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.) as part of his appeal.

NDP national director Anne McGrath has said her party still hopes to get more out of the agreement with the Liberals, including expansion of the proposed pharmacare program, and improvements to employment insurance. But NDP House Leader Peter Julian (New Westminster-Burnaby, B.C.) has also warned that an early exit from the deal is "always on the table."

At the recent Liberal cabinet retreat in Halifax, Gould told reporters the government is "fairly confident" the pact will hold.

Speaking to *The Hill Times*, Gould noted that the agreement the NDP signed stipulates it will last until Parliament rises in June 2025, and includes a commitment to support four federal budgets.

"The NDP has agreed to support four budgets, there's a fourth one coming up [next spring], so I'm operating under that premise," she said.

While Gould isn't part of the supply-and-confidence agreement oversight group—which instead brings together the respective leaders' chiefs of staff, along with others from the Prime Minister's Office and NDP brain trust—she said she feels she's "had a great working relationship with" Julian, and spoke with equal confidence of relations between the two parties to date.

Gould was on maternity leave through the last parliamentary sitting, with now-Labour and Se-

nior Minister Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Que.) serving in her place from January up until July of this year. But watching from afar—"following it too closely, for someone who was on maternity leave"—Gould said it was a "very productive" sitting "in terms of delivering legislation through the House of Commons."

"I think that's a testament to the strong working relationship that we have [with the NDP]; understanding that there are places where we disagree, and there's space for both parties to air those disagreements, but then when there is a shared objective, we work well together to deliver that for Canadians," she said.

But Gould also spoke to seeing a House divided by political gamesmanship, and didn't mince her words in describing what she saw as "absolutely ridiculous antics" from Conservative MPs in House committees last sitting.

Conservatives "do not take their job as representing Canadians seriously, and instead think that they are there to serve Pierre Poilievre, and that's it, and I think that's really unfortunate," charged Gould. "That's what I saw watching Question Period, that's what I saw the few times that I tuned in to committee, and unfortunately, I think that's what we can expect heading into the fall as well."

While the all-important Pharmacare Act—a key commitment from the supply-and-confidence agreement—has reached committee stage in the Senate, a number of notable government bills remain before the House. Among those bills still at second reading in the Lower Chamber are Bill C-63, which—among other things—would enact the Online Harms Act; Bill C-38, which seeks

to address gender discrimination in the Indian Act, but has languished at second reading since 2023; and Bill C-66, which was introduced last March, and aims to amend the military justice system.

Bill C-27, the much-discussed Digital Charter Implementation Act, has been stuck at the House committee stage since 2023, and Bill C-53, which would recognize Métis self-governance, is still at report stage in the Commons.

Gould declined to comment on what's at the top of the government's agenda for this fall, but said on the heels of the cabinet retreat and heading into the meeting with caucus in Nanaimo, B.C., "we're certainly focused on what we've been hearing from Canadians all summer." She said addressing problems facing Canadians—in particular the housing shortfall, and affordability issues—will be "front and centre of our plans."

Asked whether new bills can be expected, Gould said "there will always be new legislation that's coming forward as we respond to what the needs of Canadians are."

"There's still a year left in this mandate, and we have to govern effectively for Canadians, and make sure that we are responding," she said.

But, in this minority Parliament, any hope of making progress in moving existing or upcoming legislation ahead hangs on the government's ability to secure support from the opposition benches. To that end, Gould noted that, watching last spring's sitting, she picked up on an increasing sense of frustration from Bloc Québécois MPs over Conservatives' committee "antics."

"Being House leader is both an art and a science," said Gould. "I am going to have to negotiate with my colleagues to move things forward, and figure out a way to continue to deliver for Canadians. ... We're in a minority Parliament, and we need to make sure that we're delivering, but I have to find dance partners."

Top of mind among the procedural levers at the government's disposal to push bills through the legislative pipeline is time allocation. Gould said she thinks its use is "justified when we're not hearing new arguments, when the Conservatives are holding things up just for the sake of holding things up, when we know that we've heard from a very broad range of folks to move stuff forward."

Conservatives are "doing everything they can to try to break Parliament, and our job is not to let them do that," she argued.

Gould said one thing that became "very clear" during her time away from the House is her motivation to see "the programs, the policies that we put in place benefit Canadians."

"That's the message that I want people across this country to see is that, when we go to Ottawa—Liberal Members of Parliament—we're not going to fight Conservatives, we are going to fight for Canadians," she said.

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NDP House Leader Peter Julian has warned that an early exit from the supply-and-confidence deal is 'always on the table.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

News

Canada crafts plan to deploy Sudan-focused diplomats in Ethiopia as Khartoum embassy stays shut

‘As the conflict persists and as fighting has engulfed large parts of the country, a return to [Khartoum] looks unlikely in the medium term,’ notes an internal GAC memo.

Continued from page 1

diplomats focus on Sudan from neighbouring Ethiopia, as Ottawa’s doesn’t foresee a return to Khartoum in the “medium term,” according to an internal memo.

Ottawa shuttered its embassy in Sudan in April 2023, days after a civil war began that has been described by a senior United Nations official as a “crisis of epic proportions,” with more than 14,000 people killed and nearly nine million displaced by the conflict.

With no signs the ongoing war is abating, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) has crafted a plan to create a regional hub for the Horn of Africa in its mission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which also includes responsibility for Djibouti, and Canada’s permanent observer to the African Union. Sudan and Eritrea have now been added as countries that Canada’s mission in Ethiopia will oversee.

The plan was proposed by Cheryl Urban, assistant deputy minister for GAC’s sub-Saharan Africa Branch, and approved by Foreign Affairs deputy minister David Morrison in an April 19 briefing note, which was obtained by *The Hill Times* under the Access to Information Act.

The partially redacted memo suggested that changes take place in time for the summer staffing cycle, noting that staffing the posts in Addis Ababa “will support Canada’s operational capacity on Sudan.”

The briefing note states that since the closure of Canada’s Khartoum embassy, the Ethiopia embassy has “informally assumed the bulk of consular and passport

responsibilities” for Sudan, along with “ad hoc” assistance from GAC headquarters in Ottawa.

“Direct engagement with local authorities by accredited Canadians is crucial to managing complex consular cases and a permanent lead on responsibility for consular assistance to Canadians in Sudan and Eritrea is needed, along with resources to support it,” the memo details.

The federal government has been heavily criticized for the rollout of its refugee program for those fleeing the conflict in Sudan as it was restricted to 3,250 people who have close family in Canada. Applications were closed in early May after Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada said it had received enough applicants to fill the available spots.

The memo notes that the lack of a physical presence in the region limits the foreign ministry’s ability to oversee programming investments, and to “engage meaningfully to support diplomatic efforts at mediation and enhancing Sudanese civilian leadership.”

Information submitted to the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee in August 2022 noted that Canada had six diplomats in its Sudanese Embassy at the time, as well as 12 local staff. Its embassy in Ethiopia had 24 diplomats, and 57 local staff, according to the same documents.

“As the conflict persists and as fighting has engulfed large

parts of the country, a return to [Khartoum] looks unlikely in the medium term,” the memo notes, adding that “key” allies—such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union—have also transferred their missions covering Sudan to Ethiopia.

Former Canadian ambassador Nicholas Coghlan, who served as Canada’s first resident diplomat in Khartoum, said having dedicated officers in the field in Ethiopia with a mandate to cover Sudan is a “very positive development.”

“When we evacuated in April of last year [and] pulled everyone out, everyone was reassigned to other duties,” he said. “So, essentially, you had a couple of junior, mid-level desk officers following the file, but that was it.”

But Coghlan said it is essential that there be an official in place with a certain level of seniority to interact with other senior officials in the region.

“We need a quite senior official in the field,” he said. “In that part of the world, people are very protocol conscious. If you want to interact with African ambassadors or African ministers, you need to have a certain standing.”

He said it doesn’t have to be someone with the title of an ambassador, but someone at a similar level.

“It needs to be somebody on that level and someone experienced who can liaise and interact with ambassadors at the African Union, who can travel to Nairobi



Sudan wasn’t mentioned in a readout of Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly’s recent trip to Africa, which included a visit to influential African Union member South Africa. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

bi [and] meet with the foreign minister, who can be up in Cairo meeting officials there ... who can interact one-on-one with the U.S. peace envoy and with the British and European envoys,” he said.

Coghlan said that senior-level official wouldn’t be expected to lead the peace process, but would be tasked to find a useful niche where Canada can play a positive role.

He said he hopes the briefing note signals that a senior official will be tasked with the effort. Information related to the type of positions that will be staffed is redacted.

Coghlan said that the information outlined in the memo regarding Canada’s engagement on the conflict shows it has been “minimal.”

The document notes that since the war’s outbreak, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.) have engaged with “counterparts in the region and beyond.” Joly and senior Canadian officials have raised the situation with “regional and international interlocutors,” according to the memo. In May 2023, Joly travelled to Kenya, as well as met with Kenyan Foreign Minister Alfred Mutua in Canada in the same month.

The document lists a few other initiatives where Canada has raised the issue of the conflict, all of which were in 2023. More recently, Joly travelled to the Ivory Coast and South Africa last month. The topic of the civil war in Sudan wasn’t featured in GAC’s summary of the trip.

“We have been very much absent from the scene,” Coghlan said.

With Canada in the middle of public consultations for the government’s long-delayed “approach” to Africa, Coghlan

said Canada can’t focus on the continent without re-engaging with Sudan.

“This looks like there is some willingness to start on that road,” he remarked.

He said the three areas where Canada should be playing a role are in addressing the problems in its refugee resettlement regime, finding creative solutions to support ground-level humanitarian assistance to bypass aid logjams, and finding a unique role to aid in a diplomatic solution, but not lead it.

Coghlan said when it’s safe enough—which he noted it is not currently—Canada should resume its work in Sudan, and restart the mission.

“The challenges that will lie ahead for Sudan are even greater than when we had a full embassy. Why would we downscale when the challenges and needs are greater than ever?” he questioned.

The department memo notes under a section about “resource implications” that the costs for the new diplomatic approach for the Horn of Africa are “not yet clear,” and will depend on whether GAC keeps the chancery, seemingly referring to its embassy in Khartoum.

“It is expected that platform costs will be managed with existing resources currently allocated to Khartoum,” the briefing note reads. “Further, officials will assess whether to undertake the disposal of the chancery building before the end of the current lease, taking in consideration diplomatic, financial, operational, and security considerations.”

Coghlan said that it is always a large effort to reopen an embassy after it has been closed.

“Once you pull out, the going back in is always much, much harder than it seems at the time when you went out,” he said.

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A senior United Nations official called the situation in Sudan a ‘crisis of epic proportions’ with more than 14,000 people killed, and nearly nine million displaced by the war. *Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*



Laura Ryckewaert
Hill Climbers

Ministers Boissonnault, Vandal add new assistants to their teams

Plus, Kevin McHarg is now officially director of operations to Fisheries and Oceans Minister Diane Lebouthillier.

Employment, Workforce Development, and Official Languages Minister **Randy Boissonnault** has bulked up his parliamentary affairs team with the recent addition of new assistant **Raj Gill**.



Raj Gill has joined the employment minister's team. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Gill, who officially started at work in Boissonnault's office on Aug. 12, fills the role of legislative assistant, and assistant to the minister's parliamentary secretary, Liberal MP **Irek Kusmierczyk**.

Until recently, Gill spent the last two years working on and off for Alberta Liberal MP **George Chahal**. He first joined Chahal's office as a summer intern in 2022, after which he was hired as a part-time assistant. In 2023, Gill left Chahal's office just before the summer, which he spent as an intern in the Liberal research bureau on the Hill. Post-internship, he returned to Chahal's team part time where he worked up until this past May.

Gill is currently in his last year of a bachelor of arts degree at Carleton University, and last year was elected to serve as the Young Liberals of Canada's (YLC) national organization chair. As set out in the youth wing's charter, in that role, Gill is responsible for helping co-ordinate the organization's federal election readiness efforts, overseeing its various section organization chairs, co-ordinating recruitment efforts, as well as "providing organizational support to the provincial and territorial YLC organizations and campus clubs."

Luke Guimond, who previously served as both assistant to the parliamentary secretary and legislative assistant, got a new title back in March, and is now legislative assistant and issues manager to the employment minister.

Guimond has been working for Boissonnault since the fall of 2023, and is a former assistant to Quebec Liberal MP **Anthony Housefather**, and Ontario Liberal MPP **Lucille Collard**.



Employment Minister Randy Boissonnault, left, and Northern Affairs Minister Dan Vandal have both recently added fresh faces to their respective teams. *The Hill Times photographs by Andrew Meade*

Brendon Legault is director of parliamentary affairs to Boissonnault, whose office is run by chief of staff **Elliott Lockington**.

Skipping over to Northern Affairs Minister **Dan Vandal**'s shop, the minister has likewise welcomed a new assistant to his team in recent weeks, with **Samiullah "Sami" Hussaini** having been hired as executive assistant to both the minister and his chief of staff, **Kathy Kettler**.



Sami Hussaini has joined Minister Vandal's office as executive assistant. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Hussaini joined Vandal's office in July. A former volunteer with Khalsa Aid International—an NGO focused on providing "humanitarian aid in disaster areas and civil conflict zones," as described on its website—Hussaini is currently also involved with YATA-NATO Canada, the youth wing of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as both a member of its defence and strategy committee, and as vice-chair of its international relations committee.

Hussaini spent 2023 working in the constituency office of Ottawa Centre, Ont., Liberal MP **Yasir Naqvi**. Starting as an



intern in January, after graduating from Carleton University with a master's degree in political management, he spent the last quarter of the year working as a full-time assistant to Naqvi. Hussaini's CV also includes past administrative work for The Ottawa Hospital, among other things.

Fisheries Minister Lebouthillier makes it official

Fisheries, Oceans, and Canadian Coast Guard Minister **Diane Lebouthillier** has officially named **Kevin McHarg** as her new permanent director of operations.



Kevin McHarg is officially director of operations to Minister Lebouthillier. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Formerly a senior operations adviser, McHarg first took a seat in the director's chair on an acting basis this past May after predecessor **Benjamin Sparkes** left to do the same for Foreign Affairs Minister **Mélanie Joly**. McHarg was officially promoted to take over the job on July 25.

McHarg has been working for the fisheries minister since September 2023, and

is a former Ontario regional affairs adviser to the public services and procurement minister—starting under then-minister **Filomena Tassi**, he continued through **Helena Jaczek**'s turn in the portfolio, and briefly stayed on under current minister **Jean-Yves Duclos** after he was shuffled into the role in July 2023.

McHarg has a culinary background, and once worked in food services on Parliament Hill. He's been working for politicians since late 2015, starting as a constituency assistant to now-House Speaker **Greg Fergus** as the Liberal MP for Hull-Aylmer, Que. McHarg worked for Fergus for more than six years in all, having transitioned over to Fergus' Hill team in 2018 before exiting to join Tassi's ministerial office in early 2022.

There's an opening—or two, or three—on Lebouthillier's operations team following regional adviser **Evan Sambasivam**'s departure in mid-July.

Sambasivam had been responsible for Ontario, Prairies, and North regional affairs, as well as Indigenous outreach. A former assistant to Ontario Liberal MP **Gary Anandasangaree**, Sambasivam had been working for Lebouthillier since May 2023, beginning as an Ontario, West, and North regional adviser in her office as then-national revenue minister. He took on his most recent title after following Lebouthillier to the fisheries portfolio in the wake of last summer's cabinet shuffle.



Evan Sambasivam is now running as a candidate in an upcoming Toronto municipal byelection. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Sambasivam is now one of 12 candidates—as of Aug. 28—in the byelection race to represent Ward 15, also known as Don Valley West, on Toronto City Council, a slate that also includes former *Sun* columnist and past mayoral candidate **Anthony Furey**. The vote is set for Nov. 4.

It's not Sambasivam's first time throwing his hat in the electoral ring: back in 2022, he ran as a city council candidate in Toronto's Ward 8 (Eglinton-Lawrence), ultimately coming second behind former Ontario cabinet minister **Mike Colle**. As Sambasivam noted in a recent LinkedIn post about his decision to run, Ward 15 is where he was "born and raised."

Left covering regional desks in Lebouthillier's office are: **Joshua Lindner**, senior regional adviser for British Columbia; **Alex Gagné**, Quebec regional adviser; and **Ty Bradley**, Atlantic regional adviser.

Faizel Gulamhussein remains chief of staff to the fisheries minister.

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Feature

Parliamentary Calendar

Minister Wilkinson headlining 'Pints and Politics' event in North Vancouver on Sept. 5



Energy and Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkinson will participate in a Liberal community event called 'Pints and Politics' on Thursday, Sept. 5 in North Vancouver, B.C. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 4

Bank of Canada to Announce Overnight Rate—The Bank of Canada will announce its decision on the target for the overnight rate. Wednesday, Sept. 4, at 10 a.m. Details online: bankofcanada.ca.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 5

Info Sessions on FNCFS Draft Settlement Deal—The last in a four-part series of online info sessions on the Draft Settlement Agreement on Long-Term Reform of First Nations Child and Family Services hosted by the Assembly of First Nations. Today's session is on "Chapter #4: Governance and Accountability." Thursday, Sept. 5 at 11 a.m. ET happening online: afn.ca.

Pints and Politics with Minister Wilkinson—Energy and Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkinson will take part in a Liberal community event, "Pints and Politics." Thursday, Sept. 5 at 7-9 p.m. PT at 3154 Highland Blvd., North Vancouver, B.C. Details: event.liberal.ca.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 10

Breakfast with Conservative MP Barrett—Grenville Futures, the North Grenville Chamber of Commerce and the South Grenville Chamber of Commerce host a breakfast with Conservative MP Michael Barrett and Ontario Progressive Conservative MPP Steve Clark. Tuesday, Sept. 10, at 7:30 a.m. ET at the Prescott Golf Club, 900 Boundary St., Prescott, Ont. Details via Eventbrite.

Bank of Canada Governor to Deliver Remarks—Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem will deliver remarks to the Canada-United Kingdom Chamber of Commerce. Tuesday, Sept. 10, at 8:25 a.m. ET, in London, U.K. Details online: bankofcanada.ca.

RBC President McKay to Deliver Remarks—Dave McKay, president and CEO of the Royal Bank of Canada, will deliver remarks at a lunch event hosted by the Canadian Club of Toronto. Tuesday, Sept. 10, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, 100 Front St. W., Toronto.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 10—WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 11

Canada Fintech Forum—Finance Montréal hosts the 11th edition of the Canada Fintech Forum, the largest fintech event in Canada. Quebec's Finance Minister Eric Girard is among the speakers. The latest edition of the *Quebec Fintech Report* will also be unveiled. Tuesday, Sept. 10, to Wednesday, Sept. 11 at the Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth, Montreal. Details online: forumfintechcanada.com.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 10—TUESDAY, SEPT. 24

UN General Assembly—The 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly opens today in New York City with a high-level General Debate. Tuesday, Sept. 10, to Tuesday, Sept. 24.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 11

Seminar on the Canada-Taiwan Partnership—Conservative MP Michael Chong will take part in a seminar, "Pathways to Prosperity: Redefining the Canada-Taiwan Economic Partnership," hosted by the Toronto Region Board of Trade, and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office. Wednesday, Sept. 11, at 1:30p.m. at The Quay, 100 Queens Quay East, 3rd Floor, Toronto. Details: bot.com.

Bob Rae to Discuss the UN—Bob Rae, Canada's ambassador to the United Nations in New York City, will take part in a debate and public talk on "The United Nations and its Future" hosted by the Canadian International Council. Wednesday, Sept. 11, 6:30 p.m. AT at the Halifax Central Library, 5440 Spring Garden Rd., Halifax. Details: thecic.org.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 12

Privy Council Clerk Hannaford to Deliver Remarks—John Hannaford, clerk of the Privy Council and secretary to the cabinet, will deliver remarks at a roundtable lunch hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Thursday, Sept. 12, at 12 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Suite 300, Toronto. Details online: cdhowe.org.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 13

Senator Gignac to Deliver Remarks—PSG Senator Clément Gignac will take part in a breakfast "Discussion on the Economic Outlook for 2024-2025" in French hosted by the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal. Friday, Sept. 13, at 8 a.m. ET at Le Centre Sheraton, 1201 René-Lévesque Blvd. W., Montreal. Details: cccmm.ca.

MONDAY, SEPT. 16

House Resumes Sitting—The House will resume sitting on Monday, Sept. 16, and will sit for four weeks from Sept. 16-Oct. 11, but will 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 to Dec. 17.

Two Federal Byelections—Federal byelections will be held on Monday, Sept. 16, in the electoral districts of Elmwood-Transcona, Man., and LaSalle-Énard-Verdun, Que., to fill vacancies in the House of Commons.

Ambassador May to Deliver Remarks—Canada's ambassador to China, Jennifer May, will deliver bilingual remarks at a lunch event hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Monday, Sept. 16, at 11:30 a.m. at the DoubleTree by Hilton Montréal, 1255 Jeanne-Mance St., Montreal. Details: corim.qc.ca.

Webinar: 'Geopolitics of Trade in an Era of Security'—The Institute for Research in Public Policy hosts a webinar on "The Geopolitics of Trade in an Era of Security," expanding on the ideas raised in the corresponding *Policy Options* editorial series about how major international players including Canada are navigating this rapidly evolving geopolitical environment. Monday, Sept. 16, at 12 p.m. ET happening online. Details: irpp.org.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 17

Mining Association President to Deliver Remarks—Pierre Gratton, president and CEO of the Mining Association

of Canada, will deliver his annual address to the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. Tuesday, Sept. 17, at 11:30 a.m. PT at the Fairmont Pacific Rim, 1038 Canada Pl., Vancouver. Details online: boardoftrade.com.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 17—THURSDAY, SEPT. 19

Special Chiefs Assembly on FNCFS Program Reform—The Assembly of First Nations hosts a Special Chiefs Assembly on Long-Term Reform of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program. Chiefs and proxies will deliberate and vote on the proposed reforms. Tuesday, Sept. 17, to Thursday, Sept. 19, at the RBC Convention Centre, Winnipeg, Man. Details: afn.ca.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 18

Panel: 'Three Years Since the Taliban Takeover'—The NATO Association of Canada and the Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary International History host "Three Years Since the Taliban Takeover: Security Threats, Humanitarian Crisis, and the Fight for Freedom" featuring panellists who will take part in two sessions. Wednesday, Sept. 18, at 2 p.m. ET at the Munk School, University of Toronto. Details: billgrahamcentre.utoronto.ca.

Beverly McLachlin to Discuss Her New Book—Former chief justice Beverley McLachlin will discuss her latest work of fiction, *Proof*, a thriller featuring defence attorney Jilly Truitt as she defends a high-profile mother accused of kidnapping her own child, hosted by the Ottawa International Writers' Festival. Wednesday, Sept. 18 at 8 p.m. ET at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St. Details: writersfestival.org.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 21

Canada Strong and Free Regional Networking Conference—Conservative MP John Barlow is among the speakers at the Canada Strong and Free Regional Networking Conference. This year's theme is "Alberta Leading the Way." Saturday, Sept. 21, at the Red Deer Resort and Casino, 3310 50 Ave., Red Deer, Alta. Details: canadastrongandfree.network.

MONDAY, SEPT. 23

Space Canada's Annual Parliamentary Reception—Brian Gallant hosts Space Canada's third Annual Parliamentary Reception featuring networking with leaders of Canada's emerging space ecosystem, food and drinks, several space-related interactive displays, and a special guest speaker. Monday, Sept. 23, 5-7 p.m. ET at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building. Details and RSVP to: RSVP@space-canada.ca.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 24

Panel: 'Canada as Natural Resource Powerhouse'—The Ottawa Board of Trade hosts a panel discussion on "Charting the Path: Canada's Potential as a Natural Resource Powerhouse and the Impact to Canadians" featuring speakers from the Indigenous Resource Network, Cenovus Energy, and Fertilizer Canada. Tuesday, Sept. 24, at 11 a.m. at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St. Details: business.ottawabot.ca.

Next Frontier in Canada's Digital Divide—The Institute for Research on Public Policy hosts a hybrid event, "The Next Frontier in Canada's Digital Divide." Participants include Ian Scott, former CRTX chair; Bill Murdoch, executive director of Clear Sky Connections; and Elisha Ram, senior assistant deputy minister at Employment and Social Development Canada's Income Security and Social Development Branch. Tuesday, Sept. 24, at 12 p.m. ET. Impact Hub Ottawa, 123 Slater St., 7th floor, and online. Details: irpp.org.

The Regent Debate—The C.D. Howe Institute hosts the sixth Regent Debate on the topic "Be It Resolved: Canada can turn a Trump Presidency from a threat into an opportunity." Arguing in favour are author and businessman Conrad Black, and former New

Jersey governor Chris Christie. Tuesday, Sept. 24, at 5:15 p.m. at the Fairmont Royal York, Toronto. Details: cdhoweregentdebate.org.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 25

CUTA 2024 Policy Forum—The Canadian Urban Transit Association hosts its 2024 Policy Forum in Ottawa. Some of North America's leading transit and urban mobility experts will discuss the industry's future and the role of federal public transit policy. This year's event will focus on affordability, regional co-ordination and integration, and transit's role in addressing Canada's productivity gap. Wednesday, Sept. 25, at the Hilton Garden Inn Ottawa Downtown, 361 Queen St. Details via Eventbrite.

Via Rail President to Deliver Remarks—Mario Pélouquin, president and CEO of Via Rail, will deliver remarks titled "At the Heart of Canada's Passenger Journey: Via Rail's 2030 Vision" hosted by the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. Wednesday, Sept. 25, at 7:30 a.m. PT at the Vancouver Club, 915 W. Hastings St., Vancouver. Details online: boardoftrade.com.

Minister Champagne to Deliver Remarks—Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne will take part in a bilingual discussion with Margrethe Vestager, executive vice-president of the European Commission for a Europe fit for the Digital Age and Commissioner for Competition, hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Wednesday, Sept. 25, at 11:30 a.m. ET. Location to be announced. Details: corim.qc.ca.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 26

Murray Sinclair to Discuss His New Book—Former senator and Truth and Reconciliation Commission chair Murray Sinclair will discuss his new memoir, *Who We Are: Four Questions For a Life and a Nation*, on stage with CBC host Matt Galloway. Thursday, Sept. 26, at the RBC Convention Centre, 375 York Ave., Winnipeg. Details: mcnallyrobinson.com.

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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.

