

KEEPING THE FOREIGN INTERFERENCE INQUIRY AFLOAT



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He'll know when to go: **ANDREW CADDELL** predicts Trudeau will follow in his father's footsteps out the PMO door

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THE HILL TIMES

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NEWS

Federal Liberals face 'wipeout' in B.C. blue wave, say pollsters

Angus Reid's Shachi Kurl says B.C. United sunk under a rising Conservative tide, and warns previously safe Vancouver federal Liberal ridings could face similar flooding.

BY STUART BENSON

The federal Liberals are hunkering down in Nanaimo, but the party faces a near-total "wipeout" in British Columbia as the rising Conservative tide threatens to breach even the Liberals' Vancouver bulwark, say pollsters.

The Sept. 9-11 caucus retreat aimed to hash out the Liberals' strategy ahead of Parliament's return on Sept. 16, and the two byelections in Quebec and Manitoba that same day.

Shachi Kurl, president of the Angus Reid Institute, said the retreat might be an attempt to "recapture the magic" of the 2015

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberal caucus held their summer retreat in Nanaimo, B.C., where provincial pollsters say the landscape is shaky for the party in the next federal election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

NEWS

Bloc to push feds to back MP's seniors supports bill this fall

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

Proposed legislation to increase minimum prison sentences for motor vehicle theft, increase senior supports, and require the finance minister to develop a national

framework for a guaranteed livable basic income are at the front of the line for consideration this fall, among the 52 private members' bills currently before Parliament.

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NEWS

Canada faces \$100-million forfeiture 'test case' as Russian airline sues over grounded plane

BY NEIL MOSS

The federal government is being sued over the grounding of a Russian cargo

aircraft, providing Canada with its first major test on the operation of its newsanction forfeiture regime.

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Christina Leadlay

Heard On The Hill

Liberal MP Ehsassi named one of Canada's most influential lawyers



Liberal MP **Ali Ehsassi** has been named one of the country's top 25 most influential lawyers.

The accolade was announced on Sept. 5.

"Grateful to members of the legal profession, humbled beyond words, and energized to have been recognized as one of this year's 25 most influential lawyers. My abiding faith in legal tools to conceive better prospects for our world is limitless," the three-term MP for Willowdale, Ont., posted on Twitter on Sept. 5.

This is the 15th edition of the Top 25 Most Influential Lawyers in Canada list published by *Canadian Lawyer* magazine, which "celebrates the most deserving legal professionals making immense contributions nationwide through their leadership in 2024."

The winners were drawn from a pool of 114 candidates in various categories including changemakers; human rights, advocacy, and criminal law; business; in-house; and government, non-profits, associations, and judiciary—the category in which Ehsassi was nominated.

While readers' votes determined the short list of candidates, it's the magazine's editorial board that voted "for a maximum of five winners [in each category] who demonstrated extraordinary impact within the past 18 months," according to the publication's website.

Canadian Lawyer described the 54-year-old MP as "a committed parliamentarian and lawyer. Always on the right and ethical side of issues."

Ehsassi currently chairs the House Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committee.

Senator Petten takes on a new role



Senator **Iris Petten** has joined the Government Representative's Office. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Newfoundland and Labrador Senator **Iris Petten** is the new government liaison in the Senate, one of three roles in the Government Representative's Office.

The other two roles are government representative in the Senate—currently held by Senator **Marc Gold**—and the other is the government representative's legislative deputy, held by Senator **Patti LaBoucane-Benson**.

Formerly known as the government whip, the liaison will see Petten—who's only been in the Red Chamber for one year—working with her fellow Senators to ensure they have all the details they need on government legislation before they vote.

The liaison role was most recently held by ISG Senator **Frances Lankin** who ended her six-month stint at the end of May, and returned to the Independent Senators Group. Likewise, Petten's membership with the ISG has been put on hold while she's on liaison duty. As

of last week her party status is "non-affiliated."

Big party planned for Don Boudria



Maryann Boudria, left, and her husband Don Boudria will launch a scholarship fund on Sept. 16. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

Former longtime Liberal MP **Don Boudria** has a lot of milestones to celebrate this year. So his office is holding a party to celebrate them all at once.

On Sept. 16, the Sandstone Group is hosting a "40-50-75" reception for Boudria: 40 years since first being elected to Parliament, 50 years since he began his career in politics, and his 75th birthday—which officially was on Aug. 30.

The epic bash will take place at the Metropolitan Brasserie, 700 Sussex Dr., starting at 6 p.m.

Many former parliamentarians and figures from Boudria's time in Parliament are expected to attend.

At the party, Boudria and his wife **Maryann** will also launch the newly established Hon. Don Boudria Scholarship Fund "dedicated to supporting students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs at the University of Ottawa, an institution with deep personal significance to the Boudria family," according to the party invitation.

The former Ontario politician was first elected as the Liberal MP for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, Ont., in 1984. In his 22 years in Parliament, he held many roles, including government House leader, chief government whip, minister of international co-operation, and minister of public works in **Jean Chrétien**'s cabinet.

Since stepping back as MP in 2006, Boudria has kept busy writing his memoirs and working in government relations. He joined the Sandstone Group as a senior associate in August 2023.

New heads of mission to Iraq, Ghana



Myriam Montrat is Canada's new high commissioner to Ghana. *Photograph courtesy of X/Twitter.*

Canada's chanceries in Iraq and Ghana are each getting a new head of mission.

Foreign Affairs Minister **Mélanie Joly** announced on Sept. 5 that **Christopher Boehm** is the new ambassador to Iraq, taking over from **Kathy Bunka**. Also, **Myriam Montrat** becomes the new high commissioner to Ghana, replacing **Martine Moreau**.

This year marks Boehm's 30th anniversary in the public service, having joined what's now called Global Affairs Canada in 1994. From 1995 to 2022, he worked at Public Safety Canada in various roles, including as director in the operations division, and director of international policy and programs. He returned to GAC in 2022, where until his new appointment he led the team that oversees the security of Canada's diplomatic missions.

Montrat's most recent role at headquarters was as director general of sustainable economic growth partnerships. She's also held other senior-level positions outside GAC, including as secretary-general at the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, director general of discrimination prevention at the Canadian Human Rights Commission, director of inter-governmental affairs at the Privy Council Office, and director of Canada business and partnerships at Industry Canada.

Stephanie Levitz joins the *Globe and Mail*



Reporter Stephanie Levitz. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The *Globe and Mail*'s Parliamentary bureau itself made the news late last week when bureau chief **Bob Fife** announced that **Stephanie Levitz** would be joining his team as a senior reporter.

"Stephanie brings a wealth of experience, insight and talent to the Bureau. She is an excellent writer

with a well-earned reputation for looking into dark corners," he posted on Twitter around lunchtime on Sept. 5.

Levitz confirmed the news about half an hour later with her own post: "Thrilled to be joining the *Globe and Mail*'s stellar Ottawa team, after a wonderful three years at the *Toronto Star*."

Best wishes poured in from former Conservative cabinet minister **Peter McKay**, the *National Post*'s **John Ivison**, CTV's **Annie Bergeron-Oliver**, the Business Council of Canada's (and former *Star* colleague) **Heather Scofield**, BlueSky's **Alyson Fair**, and journalist **Sabrina Maddeux**.

A graduate of McGill University and from Columbia University's school of journalism, Levitz covered Parliament Hill for The Canadian Press for a decade before moving to *The Star* in 2021. She was named *The Star*'s deputy Ottawa bureau chief in late 2023.

Meredith Boessenkool renames to welcome ex-Alberta minister



Then-Alberta NDP minister Shannon Phillips in Ottawa in 2018. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Former Alberta NDP cabinet minister **Shannon Phillips** has joined **Tyler Meredith** and **Ken Boessenkool**'s eponymous strategy team, resulting in the firm's name change last week.

"I am thrilled to announce I am joining @tylermeredith and @KenBoessenkool to launch Meredith Boessenkool & Phillips Policy Advisors," Phillips posted on X on Sept. 5. "Ken & Tyler are two of the smartest people working in Canadian politics today. I am honoured work with them."

The trio is already having a bit of fun with their new initials: "Meredith Boessenkool & Phillips. Make Policy Better (MBP)," Boessenkool posted.

Meredith is a former senior economic adviser to Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**, while Boessenkool is a conservative strategist who's worked for **Stockwell Day** and **Stephen Harper**.

"Policy and politics are at their best when good people work together. And ideas benefit from different perspectives," Meredith posted on X last week, referencing the team's backgrounds from across the political spectrum.

Phillips stepped down as an Alberta MLA on July 1 after nine years in the legislature. She is currently teaching political science at the University of Lethbridge.

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Learning from Gaudreau

The deaths of hockey players Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau give us all the chance to reflect on how they brought people together during their lives, and how important that is to emulate.



As we grieve the Gaudreaus, let us remember the simple lessons their lives taught us, and that they are transferable beyond the ice, writes Tim Powers. Screenshot courtesy of CityNews

rule, and give that a break. Right now—to the chagrin of many Liberal loyalists—that is a rich vein which can be constantly mined.

Frankly, over the last number of days, my mind has been on the tragedy of young hockey players Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau. Sadly, we all know the terrible story of how both Gaudreaus were killed by an apparent drunk driver while riding bikes back home on Aug. 29. It was the eve of a big family wedding, and—as we have now learned—the wives of both Gaudreaus are expectant mothers.

Hockey players or not, the horror of the story would be

difficult to take in under any circumstance. When the story of the Gaudreaus broke, the outpouring of emotions and sympathy was huge and authentic. Global stars like LeBron James offered thoughts, as did our own Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and Pierre Poilievre, the leader of the official opposition.

You might ask: what do these tragic deaths have to do with Canadian politics? Or reflection in this publication about the same? Maybe they don't, but while hockey may have given the Gaudreaus a stage, what they did in life and through death connects us in many arenas.

Everything that I have seen written or broadcast about both Johnny and Matthew speaks about a kindness they possessed not just towards each other, but also directed at all they encountered. They recognized that being decent wasn't a chore, and, particularly in the case of Johnny—who was a true National Hockey League star—it was genuinely who he was. It cost nothing other than time, and was incalculable in terms of value for those who experienced it.

Determination is also another hallmark word tagged to the Gaudreaus. Neither let physical size—or the lack thereof—take away from their ability to give it their all, compete, and succeed. They didn't accept conventional wisdom about how someone in their profession was supposed to be built. They believed in themselves, the people that supported them, and demonstrated you can beat the odds with hard work and the right attitude, determination, and a positive disposition.

Both in life and death, the Gaudreaus brought people together. Listening to teammates talk about Johnny, or their spouses speak about both men it was apparent they had a unique way of bringing all sorts of people together. They enjoyed it, and

relished creating good moments for whomever was in their midst. This, among other things, was why there was such a sense of communal loss upon their deaths.

Former Calgary Flames president and Johnny's one-time boss Brian Burke wrote that Johnny was always the first to put his hand up for community activities. That speaks to the sense of duty and responsibility he had as a fortunate public figure. To paraphrase that wonderful biblical expression, "to whom much is given much is expected."

As we grieve the Gaudreaus, let us remember the simple lessons their lives taught us, and that they are transferable whether on the ice, in an office, or whatever space we occupy. In the case of politics, this goes beyond yet another call of civility—it is a pattern of behaviour to emulate.

I'd rather be watching Johnny Gaudreau play hockey than writing about his death and that of his brother. Whatever we do, we could all borrow from the lessons of the lives lived by Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau.

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

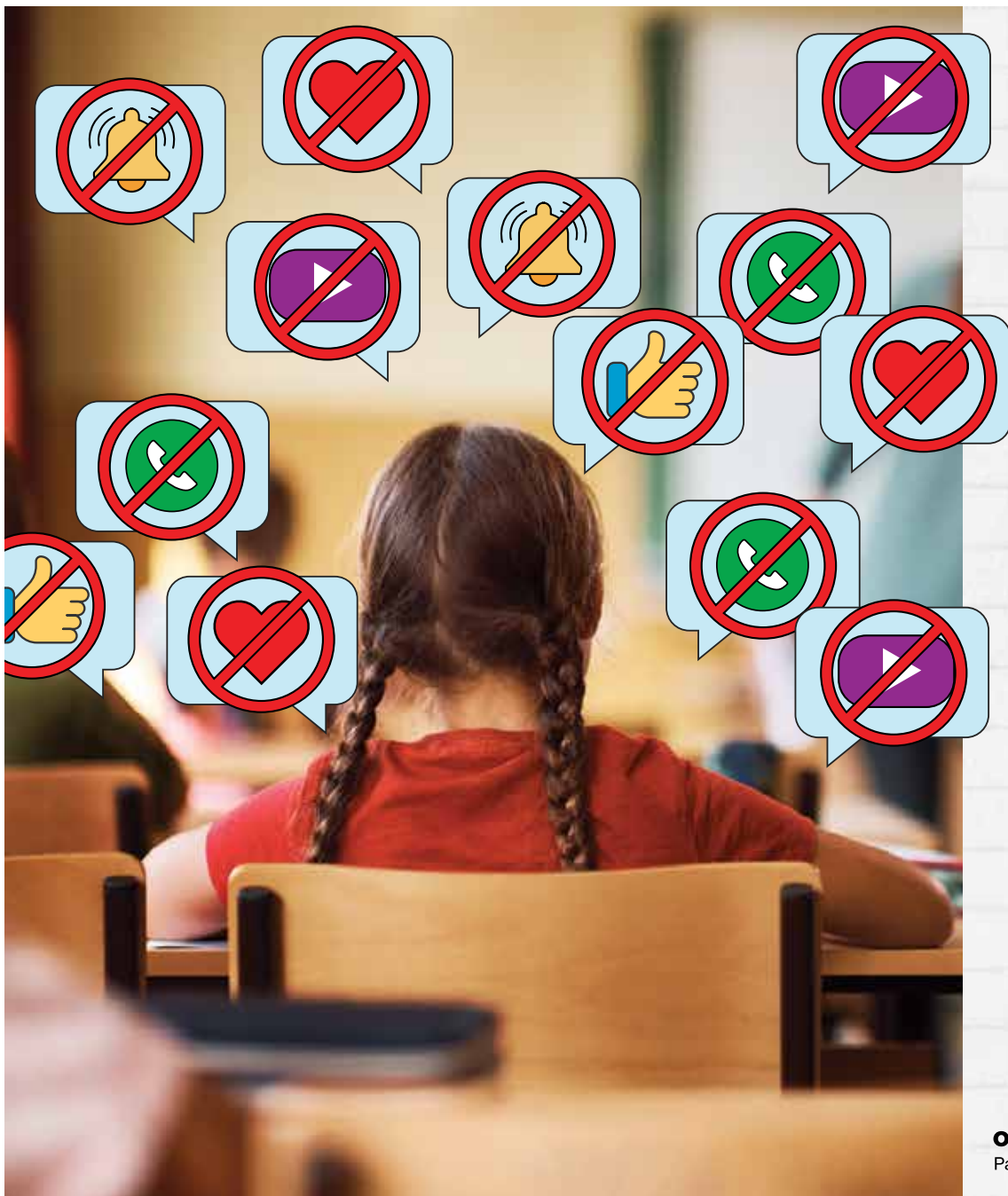
The Hill Times

Tim Powers

Plain Speak



OTTAWA—The low-hanging fruit for this column would be yet another missive about the troubles with the Liberal government, the party, and the prime minister. For this week, I am going to impose my own mercy



We've banned cellphones in classrooms

As a new school year starts, we've made some changes, like banning cellphones in class and vapes in schools. These new rules will reduce distractions, so it's easier for students to focus on learning.

News

Hogue inquiry to return after summer's 'disturbing' lack of focus on foreign interference, says Stephanie Carvin

The Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions begins its second round of public hearings on Sept. 16.

BY STUART BENSON

Amid an already busy time for political watchers, the Foreign Interference Commission resumes next week alongside the fall sitting of Parliament and two closely watched byelections. But despite the already loaded calendar, former CSIS intelligence analyst Stephanie Carvin says parliamentarians can't afford to keep kicking the can down the road while the threats facing the next general election evolve by the week.

The Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions will begin its "Stage 2 Factual" public hearings on Sept. 16. This second round of public hearings will broaden the commission's focus beyond the last two federal elections to study the strength of Canada's democratic institutions, and the experiences of diaspora communities impacted by foreign interference.

Last April, Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue heard from nearly 70 witnesses, including diaspora groups, federal political party officials, politicians, intelligence officials, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.), members of his cabinet, and the top staffers in the Prime Minister's Office, over several weeks of public hearings focused on allegations of foreign interference during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

Following the conclusion of the first round of hearings in April and months of prior investigation and research, Hogue released the commission's preliminary findings on May 3, calling acts of foreign interference a "stain" on the last two elections, but noting that the electoral "system remains sound."

Since then, Canadians' understanding of and concern over



Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue and the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference will return on Sept. 16 with more public hearings. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

foreign interference "seem to be evolving weekly," Carvin, now a Carleton University professor, told *The Hill Times*.

While Russia played a minor role compared to China and India in the foreign interference discussion during the first round of hearings, Carvin said the recently unsealed FBI indictment exposing Russian state-funded media outlets in Canada and the United States will bring it to the foreground.

Carvin said while Russia-backed foreign interference doesn't take the specific form of election meddling, that the country is more focused on sowing division and "encouraging people to lose faith in institutions."

However, while the news of Russia funnelling money through a Canadian company to sponsor right-wing content in the U.S. momentarily drew the lens back onto foreign interference, Carvin said she has found the lack of focus over the summer "disturbing."

Carvin said it had been particularly troubling how quickly the "stunning" allegations in the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians' (NSICOP) report from last June had fallen out of the spotlight.

The heavily redacted report published on June 3 concluded that some elected officials—including a former MP connected with a foreign intelligence officer—are "semi-witting or witting" actors in foreign interference.

Following the report's release, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.) and Green Party Leader Elizabeth May (Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.) elected to read

the unredacted report, but offered very different reactions.

While May downplayed concerns that some sitting MPs had betrayed their oaths, Singh told reporters on June 13 that he was "more concerned than I was yesterday."

Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil-Chambly, Que.) committed to undergoing a security clearance process to read the unredacted report, but has not made public whether he has done so.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) is the sole party leader who has not committed to reading the unredacted report, but has said he would accept a briefing from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service if it has any concerns about his caucus or party, according to *The Globe and Mail*.

Neither Blanchet nor Poilievre's office responded to *The Hill Times*' questions by publishing deadline regarding whether they had or intended to read the unredacted report.

Despite a flurry of media coverage and demands from parliamentarians to release the names of those among them implicated in the report, once the attention had died down, Carvin said it became clear "no one actually wanted to deal with it."

"Everyone's solution was just kicking the can down the curb," Carvin said, adding that at least the commission had accepted the request from parliamentarians to include the NSICOP report in its study.

On June 10, the Bloc Québécois introduced a successful motion requesting that the terms of reference for the Hogue inquiry be further expanded to include the allegations raised in the NSICOP report. The Conservatives unsuccessfully sought to amend it to demand the release of all the names of the current and former parliamentarians involved.

On June 17, the commission published a notice announcing it would work to "shed light on the facts" discussed in the NSICOP report, noting that it will have access to all the documents on which the report is based.

While she said she is glad the commission will be examining the report, Carvin said Parliament shouldn't be let off the hook for ignoring the issue while it is preoccupied with when the next confidence vote will be.

While the passage of Bill C-70 was a "positive step" toward

protecting Canada's elections and democratic institutions, Carvin said the speed at which it received royal assent indicated that most parliamentarians were still avoiding the debate. Among amendments to other legislation, the Countering Foreign Interference Act created a foreign agents registry to be administered by an independent transparency commissioner.

"We're talking about the most serious changes to the CSIS Act since the 1980s, and it passed in two weeks," Carvin said.

Since most Canadians are "understandably more concerned about housing prices and food costs than the nuances of national security," most politicians don't see much of a "political payoff" in maintaining the discussion, she added.

"But these issues go to the heart of our democracy, and it's the responsibility of parliamentarians to look after Parliament," Carvin said. "It's disappointing that there still seems to be no huge interest in investigating these matters or even allowing it to be completed before calling another election."

In response to questions regarding how an early 2024 election would affect the commission's work, commission spokesperson Michael Tansey declined to comment, but said the commission "intends to continue its work throughout the fall."

The Privy Council Office did not respond to a similar request by publishing deadline.

Inquiry has 'only scratched the surface,' says URAP's Mehmet Tohti

While the commission has yet to release the list of witnesses that will be called before the second round of hearings, many of the same individuals and organizations with "intervener" and "party" standing will be returning to examine the evidence and submit contributions to be considered in the final report. Those with "party" standing will also be granted the ability to cross-examine witnesses, and access non-public documents.

Over the summer, Hogue made several new decisions to grant or dismiss requests for increased participation from various groups. This includes denying additional "party" standing to Democracy Watch, and Dwarapalakas, a not-for-profit representing Hindu community members.

On Aug. 30, Hogue also granted the Uyghur Rights Advocacy

Project (URAP) permission to rejoin the Human Rights Coalition, the latter of which was given "party" standing in the first round of public hearings.

URAP withdrew from the coalition back in December 2023 over the commission's decision to grant full "party" standing to Independent MP Han Dong (Don Valley North, Ont.), Independent Senator Yuen Pau Woo (British Columbia), and Markham, Ont. deputy mayor Michael Chan because of their alleged "links and support for the Chinese Communist Party."

In January, URAP's Mehmet Tohti told *The Hill Times* that his organization would boycott the inquiry rather than allow itself to be cross-examined by any of the three.

Following their withdrawal and subsequent negotiations between his legal counsel and the commission, Tohti agreed to participate in a panel representing members of the central diaspora communities targeted by foreign interference.

Joining Tohti on the panel were Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion, representing the Association of Families of Flight PS752, which Iran shot down in January 2020; Yuriy Novodvorskiy, representing the Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance; Jaskaran Sandhu, with the Sikh Coalition; Grace Dai Wollensak, speaking on behalf of the Falun Dafa Association of Canada; and Winnie Ng, from the Chinese Canadian Concern Group.

Unlike other witnesses, the panellists were not cross-examined by parties with standing in the inquiry, but instead answered previously agreed-upon questions posed by the commission's counsel.

Speaking with *The Hill Times* on Sept. 5, Tohti said that while he and URAP remained opposed to Hogue's decision to grant those individuals "party" standing, and his concerns remained about their participation, his mission is not to boycott if they believed those concerns could be seriously assuaged.

After experiencing how the commission handled the first stage of hearings, and the discussions between his and the commission's counsel, Tohti said "some" of those concerns have been addressed or accommodated.

Tohti also said he is even more optimistic about the second round of hearings particularly as it will examine the NSICOP report. He said its release had highlighted the "loopholes" in the parliamentary system that abet foreign interference, and the "infiltration" that has already occurred.

"The inquiry is just the beginning," Tohti said. "We're just scratching the surface."

Following the second round of "factual" public hearings, which will continue until Oct. 16, the commission will hold a week of policy consultations from Oct. 21-25. The commission is mandated to present a final report by no later than Dec. 31.

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The NDP-backed pharmacare plan is a corporate handout as written

The real problem with this signature legislation of the NDP-Liberal agreement is that it will not bring medicines within Canada's publicly funded health system.

Steve Morgan, Matthew Herder & Nav Persaud

Opinion



It's hard to square NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh's concern over bowing to corporate interests with his party's support for such a pharmacare plan, write Steve Morgan, Matthew Herder, and Nav Persaud. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Pharmacare—provided the federal government with a detailed and feasible plan for implementing such a program right away.

Despite calling for that advisory council, Trudeau's government has rejected its recommendations. It drafted a pharmacare act that will, instead, create a "fill-the-gaps" pharmacare program. That means that nearly half of the program will be run by private insurance companies, and paid for by inflated premiums that come out of workers' paycheques. The minister of health has confirmed that the central involvement of private insurers will be "permanent," not just a transitional phase in the program.

It is therefore hard to square the NDP's concern over bowing to corporate interests with its support for such a pharmacare plan. If the NDP-backed pharmacare legislation is implemented as it's written, it will result in unnecessary administrative complexity, fragmented purchasing power (and thus higher drug prices), inequitable financial burdens on households, and conflicts of interest in drug coverage decision-making. That is about as corporate-friendly as a so-called

"national pharmacare" program could be.

Canadians need to look no further than Quebec to find evidence of this. In 1997, the Quebec government created a "fill-the-gaps"-style system centred on private drug coverage. Research has shown that their system has been a failure in terms of access to medicines, financial equity, and system cost. Before 1997, prescription drug costs in Quebec were about the same as in the rest of Canada. Today, prescription drug costs in Quebec exceed the rest of Canada by \$200 per capita. Insurers and pharmaceutical manufacturers pocket that money at the expense of the workers and taxpayers of Quebec.

But the national pharmacare plan drafted by the NDP and Liberals is even worse. The legislation includes the development of a "national bulk purchasing strategy." With private drug plans financing nearly half of the so-called national pharmacare program, that pricing strategy includes federal government efforts to provide private insurers the same drug price discounts negotiated by managers of provincial drug plans. That kind of pricing policy—known as a "most-favoured-nation" policy—will actually increase drug prices under public drug plans while giving the private insurers rebates they did not work to secure. That is the definition of a corporate handout.

Continued on page 11

and taxpayers. It is not too late to change that.

As written, the pharmacare bill drafted by the NDP and Liberals only covers selected diabetes and contraception medications. There are clinical, economic, and moral reasons for starting there if a government does not believe it can launch national pharmacare with a comprehensive list of essential medicines. But the real problem

with this signature legislation of the NDP-Liberal agreement is that it will not bring medicines within Canada's publicly funded health system. Far from it.

Universal, public coverage of prescription drugs has been recommended by four national inquiries since the mid-1990s. The latest of these studies—the June 2019 report of the Advisory Council on the Implementation of National

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News



Acting pay is on the wish list of issues that Treasury Board—which is overseen by Anita Anand—and the unions hope to hash out when they meet for an unprecedented round of bargaining to simplify the myriad of rules in collective agreements. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

consultant at the height of the Phoenix pay crisis. “This has to get fixed, and to do that means going back to how they run the business,” said the person, who was not authorized to speak publicly.

Unions are open to simplification as long as it doesn’t reduce pay. They have argued the government should just apply the most generous entitlement.

Michele Larose, a PSPC spokesperson, said the complexity of acting pay will require more than simplifying the allowances and entitlements that create so much of the manual work for compensation advisors.

To handle federal pay, Day-force, which is building the new system, will need to install cloud extensions. They are considered cheaper and less risky than customization. The company has so far identified 11 such extensions.

“The work undertaken by the Treasury Board ... to simplify complex pay rules is crucial,” Larose said in an email. “If these rules are simpler and more standardized, it will be easier to program and automate them in the current system or in a new modern HR-and-pay solution.”

The auditor-general’s first report into Phoenix found acting pay requests accounted for about one in four cases in the backlog, making it one of the biggest sources of problems.

Phoenix was built for real time. Transactions had to be sent in on time or in advance. This was a big cultural change for public servants who historically had been paid retroactively, and were accustomed to sending in premiums for acting pay, overtime, and shifts after-the-fact.

Every payday, Phoenix choked on late or inaccurate acting-pay requests until PSPC found a fix in

Acting pay is a complication that runs deep in the public service

A technically simplified pay system is in the works to replace Phoenix. But what about the way acting pay is used? Can that be changed, too?

BY KATHRYN MAY

The pay bump that comes from temporarily filling in for senior colleagues is deeply rooted in the culture of Canada’s public service, a staple for thousands of bureaucrats in a way not seen in other sectors.

But acting pay has created a longstanding backlog of troubles that the government paymaster doesn’t want to move over to the new system it is building to replace the beleaguered Phoenix pay system.

The backlog is gradually being cleared by a cadre of pay advisors who have to manually process the

acting-pay transactions. Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), the paymaster, is testing a new AI system to help with the task. Insiders have codenamed it Buffy the Backlog Slayer.

As of July, about 77,000 late or unfinished acting pay cases were sitting in backlog.

It’s unclear how much of payroll is spent topping up pay-cheques with acting pay. The federal pay regime is one of the most complicated in the country.

But acting pay is on the wish list of issues that Treasury Board and unions hope to hash out when they meet later this fall for an unprecedented round of bargaining to simplify the myriad of rules in collective agreements.

The government wants an industry-standard pay system without all the customization Phoenix needed to handle thousands of quirky government rules and practices.

Different rules, different collective agreements

At Treasury Board, Francis Trudel’s job is to simplify pay in

collective agreements. As the associate chief human resources officer, he is also examining ways to standardize practices and change behaviour so they don’t have a “downstream impact” on pay.

“It is not only an IT problem. It’s also an HR problem because we need to change some of our behaviour if we want to get out of that complexity and change a little bit of the culture,” said Trudel.

Last year, employees sent in 531,000 requests for acting pay. That is more than the number of public servants. But people can fill in for someone more than once over the course of year. About 93,000 people filed those requests, it turns out, whether in acting positions for a few days, weeks, or months, according to PSPC.

Someone filling in for a job at a higher classification, whether it’s one level above or stepping into the boss’s shoes, gets the higher pay. But the rules vary by job classifications, which are enshrined in various collective agreements. As a result, acting pay can kick in after one day for some people, or after three days for others.

Executives are not unionized, and don’t qualify for acting pay until they have filled a position for three months.

Unionized workers—most of the workforce—fill the largest number of acting positions. The administrative services group uses acting pay most often. Last year, it filed 136,000 transactions. At the very top are AS-2 jobs, with 30,000 instances.

An acting position can range from stepping in for someone who is sick, or filling in for someone on long-term sick leave or parental leave. It can be filling a vacancy until someone is hired, which in the public service can take more than eight months.

Acting positions are also used to groom employees, or test-drive them for promotions. They are a way to develop talent. But filing a vacancy takes someone from their job, which in turn has to be filled, and on it goes.

Managers taking holidays can rotate two or three employees into their jobs rather than appoint one. Critics argue acting pay often ends up being used as a “way to spread money around,” or get extra pay for “warming a seat.” They’ve argued the volume of acting transactions could be reduced by imposing standard minimum periods.

Trudel said acting pay has become so rooted in the culture that people are put in acting positions without even doing the range of duties and responsibilities that go with the job.

“If they’re not, why are we paying-acting here?” said Trudel.



Auditor General Karen Hogan’s first report on Phoenix found acting pay requests accounted for about one in four cases in the backlog. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

He has no issue with short-term acting positions—even for just two days—if people are taking on responsibilities beyond their usual authority. But should acting pay go to someone assigned to simply cover for an absent colleague?

The road to simplification

Technology experts say acting pay should have been simplified before Phoenix was built.

Until this kind of rule and practice is fixed, “it might be cheaper to bring a bag of money into the office every two weeks and say help yourself,” said a technology

2020 – known as Retro-Redesign.

Since the fix, employees in acting positions are getting their extra pay. Compensation advisors, however, still have to manually adjust everything else, such as such as union dues, allowances, and other entitlements.

This article was republished with permission from Policy Options. Kathryn May is a reporter and the Accenture fellow on the *Future of the Public Service*, providing coverage and analysis of the complex issues facing Canada’s federal public service for Policy Options.

The Hill Times

The Big Photo

Presence with purpose: Larry Rousseau, executive vice-president of the Canadian Labour Congress, rallies the crowd of public servants who gathered for a lunchtime protest against the federal government's increased back-to-office mandate at the corner of Laurier and Bank streets on Sept. 5. The three-days-per-week order began on Sept. 9.



The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia

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Editorial

End of Liberal-NDP deal bodes ill for any chance of House civility

A key pillar of the supply-and-confidence agreement signed between the Liberals and NDP in March 2022 was for there to be “no surprises.”

Well, the NDP definitely blew that up in a major way last week when it pulled the plug on the agreement—and pulled the rug out from under the Liberals at the same time.

While the New Democrats went into their caucus retreat buoyed by the change in plans, the mood was decidedly more mixed for the Grits, who had to be feeling a bit more rudderless when they gathered in Nanaimo, B.C., for the first half of the week. The NDP deal is done, the Liberals’ campaign director is gone, and we could be on the cusp of an election—so what’s the plan?

Aside from Mark Carney being added to the party roster as an adviser for economic growth, things seem a little thin on the ground.

And that’s before the dual byelection contests in Quebec and Manitoba on Sept. 16. The start to the fall parliamentary sitting could be grim for the Liberals who now must gird themselves for what’s bound to be a painful few months—if the current Parliament lasts that long.

The supply-and-confidence agreement was borne out of an understanding that the Conservatives weren’t just going to oppose, they were going to obstruct. Everyone saw how that went during the 43rd Parliament—and the 42nd

Parliament when the Liberals had a majority.

Despite having been in a minority Parliament situation for the last two-and-a-half years, there’s bound to have been some complacency that’s set in, since the Liberal-NDP deal also helped smooth the way to accomplish House business, and for committees to do their work with—somewhat—fewer disruptions.

Without the deal in place, things will be a little more chaotic, and the day-to-day will be messier. It certainly doesn’t bode well for the plea for civility that’s been made by the Canadian Association of Feminist Parliamentarians.

As co-chairs Senator Marilou McPhe-dran and NDP MP Lindsay Mathyssen wrote in *The Hill Times* this week, fewer than 10 per cent of parliamentarians have signed on to the June civility pledge against harassment and abuse on the Hill. The pledge asks signees to, among other things, “uphold the highest standards of conduct, focusing on respectful debate of the issues and not personal attacks.”

As confidence motions are no doubt set to fly, and new name-calling monikers are being readied in the wake of the supply-and-confidence deal’s dissolution, it’s unlikely the association will get the support it needs—at a time when it’s never been more necessary.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor



Ontario Premier Doug Ford. Screenshot courtesy of CPAC

Ontario could go further in relaxing prohibition-era rules, says letter writer

Kudos to our premier for allowing beer and wine to be sold in convenience and corner stores across Ontario, and for his expansion of e-gaming terminals, as well. One beef I have is that these plans don’t go far enough. Doug Ford could take the extra steps of selling the LCBO monopoly to private interests as well as opening the spirits market to competition. And whereas he allowed beer drinking in 28 provincial parks, it is still a far cry from letting patrons drink on the street in Toronto as is already the case in major North American cities such as Las Vegas and New Orleans.

Canada, as a whole, is a socially liberal-leaning country, therefore there’s no reason to hang on to prohibition-era, outdated, century-old rules and laws that—above everything else—originated south of the border.

Bringing in video lottery terminals can go a long way towards increasing provincial coffers, as indicated by the increased revenue streams generated since 2022 when the province let in e-gambling and sports bets.

Jesse Mars
 Las Vegas, Nev.

Improve access to prostate cancer diagnosis tools: Cancer Society volunteer

I am an emergency medicine physician, but more importantly, I am a husband, a father, a brother, a son, and a friend.

At age 51, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and continue to face the challenges head on.

One in eight men in Canada will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime. On average, 91 per cent of individuals diagnosed with prostate cancer are expected to survive at least five years after their diagnosis.

Survival is nearly 100 per cent if the cancer is detected before it has spread. However, when prostate cancer is found late, the five-year survival drops to 41 per cent. Prostate cancer is one of the least preventable cancers, which is why greater accessibility in testing and investing in research is so important to ensure people can live longer, fuller lives.

The Canadian Cancer Society wants to ensure that innovative and effective methods of testing and diagnosing pros-

tate cancer are implemented at no cost to patients. This Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, we are highlighting recent innovations to prostate cancer diagnostics. The PSA blood test continues to be the first step in diagnosing prostate cancer.

PSA tests need to be more accessible to patients who need it most to help to ensure that fewer people die from prostate cancer. That’s why we’re asking for the cost of every PSA test to be covered by the Ontario government when referred by a health-care professional.

Please join us in calling on the Ontario government to make PSA tests more accessible at cancer.ca/psatest.

You can also help fund life-saving prostate cancer research and compassionate support programs by donating to the Canadian Cancer Society at cancer.ca.

Dr. Anthony Dixon
 ER physician, and Canadian Cancer Society volunteer
 Chatham, Ont.



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The breakdown of the Liberal-NDP deal means people will be buzzing about which of the party election platforms will be the least damaging to a future Canadian Armed Forces, writes Scott Taylor. DND photograph by MCpl Cass Moon

Canada's military gutted by politics

The CAF has steadily withered on the vine under successive Liberal and Conservative governments.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



Last week, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh pulled the rug out from under the Trudeau Liberals with the announcement that he was “ripping up” the supply-and-confidence agreement which was signed by both parties back in March 2022.

Under the terms of that agreement, the NDP had vowed to keep the minority Liberal government in power until June 2025. In exchange the Liberals agreed to adopt a number of NDP policies to their platform.

However, with the Liberals plummeting in the polls, Singh is desperate to put some distance between his party and a fast-sinking Liberal ship. The stunning move also means that Canadians could be heading to the ballot box as early as this fall.

As such, social media will be buzzing about which of Canada's political parties will be the best choice for the Canadian military's fortunes. Or more accurately, which of the party platforms will be the least damaging to a future Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)?

One long-running myth is that Conservative governments build a strong military, while Liberal governments slash budgets, and forego vital equipment modernization. This dumbed-down, simplistic equation actually has no grounding in historical facts.

The fact is that the CAF has steadily withered on the vine under successive Liberal and Conservative governments.

In fact, if one goes all the way back to the era of Liberal prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, most commentators cite his legacy as that of having starved our country's military. While conversely, Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper enjoys the false historical perception that he was a hawkish proponent of bolstering Canada's military establishment.

In a head-to-head comparison, the Pierre Trudeau years actually seem like the glory days of the CAF compared to the hollow shell of a defeated military left by the Harper administration.

When Pierre Trudeau was first elected in 1968, the defence budget was 2.5 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product. In 1979, following Trudeau's first two terms in office,

this percentage had admittedly dropped to 1.6 per cent of GDP.

Conversely, when Harper became prime minister in 2006, the war in Afghanistan was expanding and the Conservatives were fully supportive of committing the CAF to that conflict. However, despite the fact that bullets were flying and our casualties were mounting, the Canadian defence budget under Harper never topped 1.4 per cent of GDP.

In fact, in 2012, the Harper government earmarked just 1.14 per cent of GDP to the military.

In terms of personnel, when Pierre Trudeau assumed power in 1968, the military's regular force stood at 101,000 personnel. When Pierre Trudeau exited in 1979 after his second term, there were still 77,000 regular force service members in uniform.

Under Harper, that number never topped 69,000 personnel. By comparison to today's numbers, that figure also seems impressively high. Of a current authorized regular force strength of 71,500 positions, 16 per cent are vacant due to a retention and recruiting crisis.

It needs to be noted that the 16 per cent vacancy does not reflect those members who are still “on strength,” but unable to serve due to disability, sick, parental, stress, or retirement leave.

For those who pine for the “good old days” of the CAF, it is worth noting that when Pierre Trudeau exited the PMO in 1979, he had 6,700 troops deployed in Europe in support of the Cold War, and a further 1,900 deployed under the blue banner of United Nations peacekeeping. Under “hawkish” Harper, the Canadian battle group in Kandahar maxed out at 3,200 in 2011.

Today, the CAF struggles mightily to maintain an 800-strong forward-deployed battle group to Latvia as part of NATO's Operation Reassurance as a deterrent to Russian aggression.

In terms of acquiring equipment, Pierre Trudeau's Liberals purchased 114 Leopard 1 tanks in 1974, and these entered service in 1978. In the early 1980s, Trudeau also purchased 138 CF-18 Hornet fighter jets, which remain in service to the present day.

The Harper government tried and failed to purchase 65 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters.

The current Justin Trudeau government eventually signed a contract to purchase 88 of the F-35s after running on an election platform in 2015 that, if elected, the F-35 was the one plane they would never buy.

The message in all of this is that if Canada does face a snap election this fall, there is no Good Samaritan party poised to invest the necessary capital to rebuild the CAF. They simply don't exist.

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

The Hill Times

Like his father, Trudeau will know when to quit

Justin Trudeau will see the writing on the wall, and give the Liberal Party a chance to choose a new leader.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



But why not immediately? The answer lies in Trudeau's competitive nature, and his sense of history. At the time of his resignation announcement, he trailed Sir Wilfrid Laurier as the longest-serving French-Canadian prime minister by 43 days. On April 12, 1984, he surpassed Laurier and earned a spot in the history books.

His son cannot come close to that record, but Justin Trudeau has already passed Mulroney, Louis Saint Laurent, Robert Borden, and Lester Pearson at eight years, 313 days. On July 31, 2025, he will pass his predecessor, Stephen Harper.

Although many people think Justin Trudeau will run again because he has so little respect for Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre and his brand of *ad hominem* politics, I don't believe he's that egotistical. Like his father, he will see the writing on the wall, and give the Liberal Party a chance to choose a new leader.

There are many signs: a restless caucus; the announced departures of many ministers and MPs like Seamus O'Regan; the “any-day-now” decision of Pablo Rodriguez to run for the leadership of the Quebec Liberals; and the decision of campaign chair Jeremy Broadhurst to step down. But I would be willing to bet the leadership vote won't occur before July 31, 2025, and that the general election gets pushed beyond the fixed date of Oct. 20 by some manoeuvre to give a new leader a chance to establish their brand.

While many will say my scenario has been put off track by NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh's decision to “rip up” the supply-and-confidence agreement, Singh really had no choice as his own partisans were tired of making excuses for propping up Trudeau.

With some clever parliamentary machinations, the Liberals can still hang onto power. This would involve limiting confidence votes, and strategic appeals to the Bloc Québécois and NDP to stay in office. And even though politics is a blood sport, I don't see confidence votes during a leadership race.

As one who has run for office, I can tell you politics is not a sport for shrinking violets. All politicians have a competitive streak, as being elected means beating your opponents. As legendary American football coach Vince Lombardi said, “If winning isn't everything, why do they keep score?” In this case, I think Trudeau will choose to go out on top.

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

KAMOURASKA, QUE.—In the fall of 1983, I was working as a ministerial assistant in the government of then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau as the bottom was falling out of it. He had just shuffled his cabinet, dropping five ministers. Still, his popularity was abysmal at 27 per cent, behind Progressive Conservative leader Brian Mulroney with 55 per cent.

A senior aide to Mulroney said, “My gut feeling is that [Trudeau] is not going to leave and he's going into the next election,” which was expected in 1984. There was one problem with this thesis: Trudeau had vowed the February 1980 campaign against Joe Clark would be his last.

“Elect me and I will quit” was an attractive mantra for many Canadians, given the looming Quebec referendum. Once he helped vanquish the threat of René Lévesque's Parti Québécois in the May 1980 referendum and repatriated the Constitution, Trudeau seemed to have outlived his usefulness.

In spring 1983, the Trudeau government brought in a budget with a \$33-billion deficit, trying to spend its way into the hearts of Canadians. And then the PM became an ambassador for peace, calling on the United States and Soviets to scrap their nuclear weapons. This made him *persona non grata* with then-American president Ronald Reagan and the United Kingdom's prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

So it was that fall that a group of assistants was herded into the Railway Committee Room in the Centre Block to watch a slick presentation by the Prime Minister's Office on a scenario none of us might have imagined: Trudeau might run again. The presentation outlined that Trudeau's popularity among women, francophones, and youth offered a chance of winning the next election. While opposing the PMO was seen as a career-limiting position, many of us expressed our serious doubts.

Of course, the rest is history: Trudeau knew his time was up, and on Feb. 29, 1984, took his fateful “walk in the snow,” and announced he would resign as Liberal leader in late June.

Opinion



The Taliban law comes on the heels of the adoption by the Iranian parliament of the Chastity and Hijab bill in September 2023. Photograph courtesy of Flickr/Ninara

New law silencing women goes beyond Afghanistan's borders

The international community must work to codify gender apartheid to make it possible to take legal action against the Taliban regime's systematic oppression of women in Afghanistan.

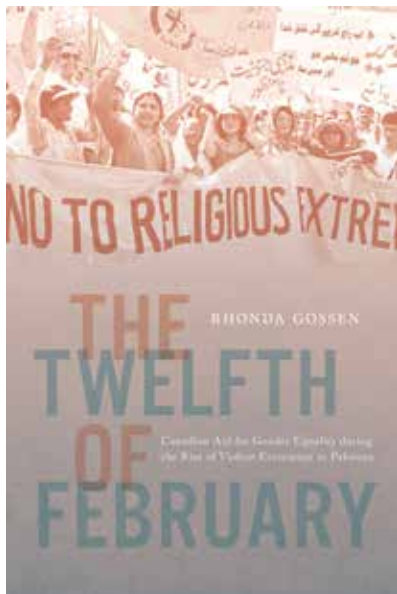
Rhonda Gossen

Opinion



The horrific news coming out of Afghanistan about the new law to silence women from speaking in public is another sign of the worst regression in women's rights the world has witnessed in centuries.

Global Affairs Canada tweeted a condemnation of the law: "Canada condemns the Taliban's so-called vice and virtue law, another attempt to silence the people of Afghanistan—especially women and girls. We call on the Taliban to reverse all restrictions on women and girls and end all



How women's organizations can and do work to resist violent extremism is discussed in the forthcoming book with McGill-Queen's University Press, *The Twelfth of February: Canadian Aid for Gender Equality during the rise of Violent Extremism*. Cover image courtesy of McGill-Queen's University Press

human rights violations taking place in Afghanistan."

For those countries that share immediate borders with Afghanistan—Pakistan and Iran—what might be the impact of this drastic step to silence women? Both Pakistani and Turkish women's rights activists, along with those from other countries like Tunisia, have for years raised concerns over the implications of regressive gender equality policies in Afghanistan for women everywhere.

The Taliban law comes on the heels of the adoption by the Iranian parliament of the Chastity and Hijab bill in September 2023, a year after the women, life, freedom protests following the

death of Mahsa Amini. Iran's recent crackdown on the new hijab law has seen an increase in women targeted in Iran, especially young women and ethnic minorities. The broader institutional discrimination against women and girls in Iran enforced through state laws and policies that fuel gender inequality alongside the targeting of religious minorities in Iran presents an intersectional

challenge.

In contrast, Pakistan has taken the opposite approach by strengthening the institutional and legal frameworks for women's rights and protection in recent years, and stands out as a leader in the region for its work on gender justice. Pakistan also elected a female prime minister in the 1990s.

From the first days of the Pakistan Women's Action Forum raising the alarm bells on the Islamic laws that were inherently discriminating against women in the early 1980s, to now, their voices have been indicators of a dangerous path to follow. Despite the influence of Islamic extrem-

ism in Pakistan, the gender equality movement, in collaboration with civil society, did make tangible headway. How women's organizations can and do work to resist violent extremism is discussed in my forthcoming book with McGill Queen's University Press, *The Twelfth of February: Canadian Aid for Gender Equality during the rise of Violent Extremism*. The book makes the connection between gender inequality and security threats in a volatile region.

Canada supported the gender equality movement and civil society in Pakistan for decades in solidarity and partnership. The year the Taliban first took power in Kabul in 1996, CIDA—Canada's former international development agency—launched the Women's Development Fund for women's organizations in Pakistan, beginning 14 years of continuous funding to the women's rights movement during what some have called the "Talibanization of society" that occurred in Pakistan during the same period. The first fund (1996 to 2001-02) coincided with the period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, and the following one—Program for the Advancement of Gender Equality—began just after 9/11 (2001 to 2009-10) with a greater emphasis on women's human rights, political participation, and economic empowerment. Over six years, 73 sub-projects were funded, with the last completed in 2004. As a result, Canada was recognized in Pakistan and the region for

its leadership and progressive approaches on gender equality, human rights, and support to civil society organizations. The long investment in gender equality since 1989 was a major contributor to the discernible progress in advancing women's issues and gender equity in Pakistan, in which CIDA was an acknowledged leader. Canada's decades-long support to women's rights in the region continues through the feminist international assistance policy.

The international community is being called upon by women's rights activists everywhere to take stronger action on codifying gender apartheid through international legal instruments to make it possible to take legal action against the Taliban regime's systematic oppression of women in Afghanistan.

The Twelfth of February addresses a problem that is all too timely: given violent extremism's devastating impact on development gains including women's rights, security, and the elimination of gender-based violence, what is the future role for international development in strengthening the work of those who are facing the immediate risk?

Rhonda Gossen is a former Canadian diplomat and Canadian International Development Agency manager, and a consultant to the United Nations. Gossen worked in Pakistan three times over three decades and was head of development co-operation from 2010-2013. She has worked on development and crisis response in more than 15 countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Her forthcoming book from McGill Queen's University Press, *The Twelfth of February*, is out on Sept. 15.

The Hill Times

Wake up, Canada: there's no health or wealth without proper funding of health research

Canada provides significantly more in annual subsidies for the fossil fuel industry than it does to conduct the research that underpins the health and wealth of Canadians.

Abraham Fuks, John Bergeron
& ISG Senator
Stanley Kutcher

Opinion



Canada's funding of health research—primarily through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research—has been declining rapidly in comparison to key G7 competitors. The stark statistics reveal Canada as the only G7 country that has reduced its spending as a percentage of GDP.

For health research, Canada's spending for Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) is fivefold less per capita than the United States National Institutes of Health (NIH) despite Budget 2024 announcing increases in the future. Most of the proposed increases are targeted for specific programs with less money for investigator-initiated discovery research.

Canada will be unable to retain its already threatened cadre of outstanding health researchers if this trend continues. The results of the last CIHR competition for support of investigator-driven discovery research signal strongly that without substantial new investments in health research funding, Canada will not only drop out of the international race for improving health and creating wealth, but our best and brightest will also leave to do their work in those countries that have demonstrated that they value them and what they create.

In this recent competition, 2,070 of the 2,443 submitted applications were not awarded any research support. For the Maritimes, the results were a disaster. The success rate for applicants from Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador was zero per cent; the success rate for New Brunswick was 0.3 per cent; while Prince Edward Island had no applicants. Elsewhere in Canada, the results were marginally better with 1.3 per cent success for Saskatchewan applicants, and 2.6 per cent for Manitoba.

The overall level of success across Canada was a mere 15 per cent, and that paltry number was only achieved by implementing an across-the-board reduction of 23.5 per cent to the budgets of successfully funded applications to liberate funds for an additional number of highly ranked projects. This means that even for successfully funded

projects, the researchers will need to choose between providing support for the up-and-coming cadre of young researchers, or purchasing equipment desperately needed to do the work necessary.

This is not a choice that our best and brightest health researchers should be forced to make.

This dismal record is not because health researchers did not submit worthy grant proposals—rather, it is because the pool of funds available to support these proposals is so small that the majority of high quality and fundable proposals are not funded.

For comparative purposes, and as noted above, in the U.S., the NIH provides health research funding that is five times greater per capita than CIHR does in Canada. Unbelievably, Canada provides significantly more money annually in subsidies for the fossil fuel industry than it provides to the CIHR to conduct the research that underpins the current and future health and wealth of Canadians.

While we are grateful for and heartened by the long-overdue increase of stipends for trainees in the last budget, these young researchers will not be in a position to carry out their work if the settings in which they work are bereft of grant support. The chronic underfunding of CIHR crushes our international competitiveness, and forces our young researchers to seek their futures outside of Canada. The hope of a modest budgetary increase for CIHR promised for 2024-25 will not help our international competitiveness. What will talented health researchers in the Maritimes, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, or any Canadian investigators unable to access funding for investigator-initiated research to address health and disease do? Countries that are putting up the funds are in heavy recruitment mode, and are reaching out to our expert researchers. Unless Canada steps up to properly fund CIHR, the brain drain that is already underway will only get worse.

We are aware that the federal government is engaged in a consultation process regarding the governance of research in Canada. However, regardless of the governance model chosen, unless adequate funding is made available to properly support investigator-driven discovery health research in the next budget, there will be no turning this ship around. Rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic is not a strategy for success.

We are running out of time.

Funding for investigator-driven health research is the water that is necessary to produce the fruits of health and wealth for Canadians. Successful crops require water, and deserts do not bloom.

Dr. Abraham Fuks is a professor of medicine at McGill University. John Bergeron is the emeritus Robert Redford professor, and a professor of medicine at McGill University. Dr. Stanley Kutcher is an Independent Senator for Nova Scotia.

The Hill Times

The NDP-backed pharmacare plan is a corporate handout as written

The real problem with this signature legislation of the NDP-Liberal agreement is that it will not bring medicines within Canada's publicly funded health system.

Continued from page 5

Canadians do not need to look elsewhere to find evidence of this. In 1993, Quebec passed a most-favoured-nation law requiring that the price charged for any drug in Quebec be no higher than the best available price anywhere else in Canada. This didn't lower prices in Quebec. It increased prices in other provinces that were actively negotiating drug prices at the time, such as Saskatchewan, where prices increased by 10 per cent. The same will

happen to public plans if private insurers get preferred treatment under so-called national pharmacare.

The pharmacare legislation currently before the Senate was a political compromise that—at the end of the day—advances corporate interests at considerable cost to Canadians. The NDP and Liberals must either accept this sellout as their legacy, or push to ensure that the pharmacare legislation is amended so that medicine coverage—starting with contraception and diabetes treatments—is truly universal and public. That would be an achievement worthy of praise for both parties—a legacy voters will remember.

Steve Morgan is an economist and professor of health policy at the University of British Columbia. Matthew Herder is a CIHR-PHAC Chair in Applied Public Health, and the director of the Health Justice Institute at Dalhousie University. Nav Persaud is a family physician, and the Canada Research Chair in Health Justice at the University of Toronto.

The Hill Times

BIOTECH

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THE HILL TIMES

News

Federal Liberals face 'wipeout' in B.C. blue wave, say pollsters



Angus Reid Institute president Shachi Kurl says that if current polling holds, Liberal strongholds in Vancouver Centre and Vancouver Quadra could risk being flooded by a blue wave in the next election. Photograph courtesy of Shachi Kurl



Research Co.'s Mario Canseco says the B.C. Conservatives have benefitted more from a 'coalescing of forces' with the federal party than the collapse of B.C. United. Photograph courtesy of Mario Canseco



Columnist David Moscrop says the provincial election may be instructive of 'just how crazy' a candidate's past can be and what they can get away with in an age when most voters 'have a past' on social media. Photograph courtesy of X

Angus Reid's Shachi Kurl says B.C. United sunk under a rising Conservative tide, and warns previously safe Vancouver federal Liberal ridings could face similar flooding.

Continued from page 1

election when the party won seats in the Okanagan and Kelowna, and to remind those voters they haven't been abandoned.

However, "the challenge is that a lot of those federal Liberal voters in B.C. have already abandoned them," Kurl said.

In Angus Reid's most recent polling, released on Sept. 4, the federal Liberals were in third place in B.C. at 23 per cent, five points behind the NDP at 28 per cent, and 16 points behind the Conservatives' 39 per cent support.

While B.C. was a significant part of the Liberals' electoral "architecture" in 2015 and 2019, Kurl explained that the province is a place of "volatile riding swings," where electors vote against what they perceive to be "the centre, or

the elites"—which usually means whoever is in power.

"It's not necessarily about a constituency or riding suddenly wholesale changing its ideology," Kurl said. "It's: 'I don't want to vote Conservative, but I'll never vote Liberal, so I'm going to vote NDP. Or I don't want to vote Liberal, and I can't vote NDP this time, so I'm going to vote Conservative.'"

Most polls project the federal Conservatives winning 40-50 per cent of the vote in B.C., which Kurl said indicates a potential complete "wipeout" of the federal Liberals in the province if any of those numbers hold.

If they do, Kurl said it would call into question the security of safe Liberal seats like those of incumbent MPs Joyce Murray in Vancouver Quadra and Hedy Fry in Vancouver Centre. Kurl noted that Vancouver Quadra was the only seat the Liberals managed to hold in the province during the last wipeout in the 1984 federal election.

Polling aggregator 338Canada's data shows the Conservatives with a projected 45 per cent in B.C., with the NDP in second with 24 per cent, followed by the Liberals at 20 per cent.

Fellow pollster Mario Canseco, president of Research Co., told *The Hill Times* that he had expected the B.C. Conservatives—buoyed by the federal party as right-of-centre rival B.C. United sank—to rise substantially in

the polls. However, he said it has been "shocking" to see how well the federal Conservatives have fared in the province.

In a poll of decided voters released on Aug. 20, Research Co. indicated that 50 per cent of decided voters in B.C. supported the federal Conservatives, followed by the NDP at 20 per cent, and the Liberals at 17 per cent.

"The public's connection with [Leader Pierre] Poilievre and abandonment of the Trudeau Liberals certainly helps the Conservative brand in B.C.," Canseco said, adding that he doubts B.C. Conservative Leader John Rustad's party would be garnering similar levels of support were it called something else.

Canseco said there has also been a seemingly intentional "coalescing of forces" between the federal and provincial parties, pointing to federal MPs knocking on doors for provincial candidates in similar ridings.

"When I come home, I find flyers from the B.C. and federal Conservatives, which is a bit strange, but I'm sure it helps," Canseco said.

The B.C. Conservatives, led by Nechako Lakes MLA Rustad, have undoubtedly benefited from looting the shipwrecked B.C. United's vote share after leader Kevin Falcon announced the suspension of his party's campaign on Aug. 28. But Kurl said the most significant boost to the B.C. Conservative rise in the polls came

United MLAs and candidates were brought on to the B.C. Conservative ballot, with Rustad also cutting loose one of his more controversial candidates, Rachael Weber. Weber, a former chair of the Prince George, B.C., school board, has taken heavy criticism for past social media posts calling 5G towers "genocidal," and predicting the imminent arrival of "the anti-Christ." Weber is now running as an independent in the riding of Prince George-Mackenzie.

Meanwhile, the provincial NDP have set their sights on Vancouver-Langara Conservative candidate Bryan Breguet who has apologized for past social media posts, which he said were "sarcastic or outright jokes," and never intended as derogatory or offensive.

Moscrop told *The Hill Times* that the B.C. election may be instructive of "just how crazy" a candidate's past statements will need to be in an age when "every voter has a past."

"Everybody has a past that's been recorded on social media; we have candidates and voters who grew up with it," Moscrop said, explaining that the public's view on how disqualifying any past social media behaviour has significantly softened in the past decade.

"I think voters and parties are starting to get a little less sensitive about that, and a little more forgiving," Moscrop said. "If someone dug something up that you'd said when you were 22 that was racist or sexist or otherwise bigoted, you were done, but today, people will fight for you."

Moscrop said that he expects successful candidates to moderate their behaviour if they haven't already done so, but that the lesson this election will be "you can get away with more than you expect."

While the party formerly known as the B.C. Liberals may have only shared a name with the federal governing party on the most superficial of terms, the rebranding was the latest extinction event for a "dying or dead" brand west of Ontario, Moscrop said.

"While the federal Liberals are in decline, provincially, Liberal parties are a dying breed," Moscrop said, noting that only one province and one territory—Newfoundland and Labrador, and Yukon—has a Liberal premier, and only held opposition party status in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec.

Moscrop said that with increasingly worse polling and ever-lower vote totals—adjusted for population growth—in the last two federal elections, the Liberals could face the same fate if the ship isn't righted soon.

"The curse of the Liberal Party is that it's a very fickle organization," Moscrop said. "When it's thriving, everyone's in and pulling together; when it's not, it starts falling apart because it's held together by winning, which is thin stuff."

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Bloc Québécois MP Andréanne Larouche's Bill C-319 requires a royal recommendation to be voted on at third reading. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Bloc to push feds to back MP's seniors supports bill this fall

There are 52 private members' bills currently before Parliament, and Conservative MP Randy Hoback is first in line on the order of precedence.

Continued from page 1

Bloc Québécois MP Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, Que.) told *The Hill Times* that making progress on her bill, C-319, and securing the royal recommendation from the government needed to make it a reality, will be a priority for her caucus this sitting.

C-319, which is currently at report stage in the House of Commons, seeks to change how monthly Old Age Security payments are calculated, including increasing the basic amount of full monthly payments from \$273.80—as it's been since 1985—to \$756.32, and to increase the amount of income, including self-employed earnings, that can be exempted when determining the guaranteed income supplement (GIS) from \$5,000 to \$6,500. Altogether, the changes proposed to how OAS is calculated would increase the full pension amount that Canadians aged 65 and older are eligible to receive by 10 per cent, according to the bill's summary.

But, because the bill proposes authorizing additional federal spending, it requires a royal recommendation from cabinet in order to be voted on at third reading in the House.

"Definitely, for the Bloc, [C-319 is] a priority. This bill needs to move forward and to have the

royal recommendation from the government," said Larouche, who is her party's seniors critic. "We will try to do anything that we can to pass this bill."

Larouche has spent the summer working to build pressure on the government to give C-319 a green light, including launching an e-petition in July calling for the seniors and finance ministers to grant a royal recommendation, as well as organizing a letter-writing campaign alongside seniors organizations. Larouche noted that signatures for the petition are being collected both in person and online, and as of Sept. 6, the petition had garnered 3,550 online signatures.

Larouche said the Bloc is also aiming to bring seniors organizations to the Hill for the first week of the House's return—Sept. 16-20—to stand alongside caucus members as part of a press conference calling on the Liberals to grant a royal recommendation. In addition, she said she's set to have a meeting "soon" this fall with new Labour and Seniors Minister Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Que.), who took over the file this past July.

"This bill is very, very necessary" because seniors are facing financial problems right now, said Larouche in a phone interview. "It's not easy with the increased price for the groceries, for the housing."

The Hill Times reached out to MacKinnon's office to ask whether the government will agree to provide a royal recommendation for C-319, but the office declined to address the question. Instead, an emailed statement from press secretary Matthieu Perrotin highlighted steps the Trudeau government has taken to "address affordability challenges for seniors," including restoring the retirement age to 65 years old "after Conservatives raised it to 67," increasing

the GIS, and increasing the OAS pension "for older vulnerable seniors."

"Looking at the Bloc's voting record it is clear that the Bloc doesn't care about what seniors really need. They voted against dental care for seniors, against lowering the age of retirement, and against strengthening the GIS," wrote Perrotin. "Their voting record makes it clear that seniors are low on their priority list, but we will continue to take pride in improving the financial security of seniors and providing targeted assistance to those who need it most."

Larouche said the changes proposed in C-319 are ones she's had in mind since she was first elected in 2019. As it had in 2015, the Liberal Party's platform that election included a commitment to increase the OAS benefit for seniors 75 years and older by 10 per cent—a commitment made reality in 2022. Larouche said that on the 2019 campaign trail, seniors she spoke with expressed confusion over the pledge, as Canadians aged 65 years and older are eligible to receive OAS.

"That's why, since my first campaign in 2019, I've been talking about [the need] to increase this Old Age Security, but for all seniors from 65 [years old] and more—not only 75 [years old]—because this creates two seniors classes, and people don't understand that," she said.

However, the 43rd Parliament only lasted just under two years, and Larouche didn't get a chance to table a private members' bill (PMB). This Parliament, the lottery to determine the list for consideration for private members' business saw Larouche place 59th in line. C-319 was subsequently introduced in March 2023. The House Human Resources Committee wrapped up its study of the bill last February, recommending

no amendments, and the resulting report was tabled in the House on March 19.

Asked how optimistic she's feeling about her bill's fate, Larouche noted it received unanimous support at committee.

"In the House, Liberals continue to say it's not necessary, but in committee they say it's necessary, so I don't know for the next [sitting], and it's a new minister also since the summer," she said. "So I don't know, but we [will] do anything that we can because it's crucial for seniors."

The committee report still needs to be concurred in by the House. Larouche's bill is currently second in line among the private members' business to be considered this fall.

First in line is Conservative MP Randy Hoback's (Prince Albert, Sask.) C-379, which is currently at second reading in the House. It seeks to amend the Criminal Code to increase minimum prison sentences for "third or subsequent motor vehicle theft" offences from six months to three years. The bill was first introduced in February, and got one round of debate at second reading in May.

Following Larouche is NDP House Leader Peter Julian's (New Westminster-Burnaby, B.C.) C-273, which proposes repealing Section 43 of the Criminal Code authorizing the correction of a child by force, and would fulfill Call to Action No. 6 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Since *The Hill Times* last spoke to Julian about his bill in January, the bill has cleared second reading, and has been studied by the House Justice and Human Rights Committee, which tabled a report—proposing only one amendment to adjust the bill's coming into force date—in the House on May 8.

Also within the top 10 on the order of precedence heading into the fall are NDP MP Leah

Gazan's (Winnipeg Centre, Man.) Bill C-223, which would require the finance minister to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income for Canadians over the age of 17 and is currently at second reading; Liberal MP Ali Ehsassi's (Willowdale, Ont.) M-110, which calls for the House to ask the government to develop and implement a "national strategy to reduce food waste and combat food insecurity"; and Conservative MP Eric Melillo's (Kenora, Ont.) Bill C-376, which has yet to be debated at second reading since being introduced in February, and proposes amending the Criminal Code to require courts to prohibit an individual from possessing a weapon for a specified period if they're convicted of indictable offence involving violence used, threatened, or attempted against a person, regardless of their prison sentence.

Since the start of the year, two more MP bills have received royal assent—Green Party Leader Elizabeth May's (Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.) Bill C-226, and Conservative MP Dan Mazier's (Dauphin-Swan River-Neepawa, Man.) Bill C-288—bringing the total number of PMBs passed so far this Parliament to seven. C-226, also known as the National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act, requires the federal environment minister to "develop a national strategy to promote efforts across Canada to address the harm caused by environmental racism." C-288, meanwhile, amended the Telecommunications Act to require Canadian carriers to make information related to broadband services on offer more easily available.

On the flip side, five more PMBs have been defeated—including Bloc MP René Arseneault's (Madawaska-Restigouche, Que.) attempt to enable MPs and Senators to choose whether to swear an oath of office or an oath of allegiance to the Crown, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's (Carleton, Ont.) proposed Building Homes Not Bureaucracy Act—bringing the total to 24.

It'll be a while yet before the order of precedence is replenished again, having last been topped up in mid-June.

The next 10 MPs in line to get a chance to put forward private members' business are: Liberal MP Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval-Les Îles, Que.), Conservative MP Lianne Rood (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Ont.), Conservative MP Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings-Lennox and Addington, Ont.), Liberal MP Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, N.L.), Conservative MP John Brassard (Barrie-Innisfil, Ont.), Conservative MP Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, Alta.), Conservative MP Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray-Cold Lake, Alta.), Conservative MP Rick Perkins (South Shore-St. Margarets, N.S.), Conservative MP Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent-Leamington, Ont.), and NDP MP Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont-La Petite-Patrie, Que.).

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News

Canada faces \$100-million forfeiture 'test case' as Russian airline sues over grounded plane

Canada gave itself the power to repurpose assets seized from sanctioned individuals and entities as part of the 2022 federal budget.

Continued from page 1

More than two years ago, as part of the 2022 federal budget, the Liberal government changed its sanctions law, giving itself power to not only seize assets, but also repurpose them.

Since the change was enacted in June 2022, the government has only seized two assets from associates tied to the Russian government: \$26-million from a company owned by Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, and a Russian plane that has been grounded at Toronto's Pearson Airport since the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Volga-Dnepr, the firm that owns the Antonov An-124 aircraft, is now seeking \$100-million in damages from Canada in international arbitration, according to a *Wall Street Journal* report.

Carleton University professor Fen Osler Hampson, president of the World Refugee and Migration Council, said the two seizures represent the "first two test cases" of the new regime.

The council was an early voice pushing for Canada to enact a forfeiture change to its sanction regime. Council member and Independent Senator Ratna Omidvar (Ontario) tabled a Senate bill to do just that before it was



Independent Senator Ratna Omidvar is sponsoring a Senate bill to grant cabinet the power to dispose of foreign state assets. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Under Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly, Global Affairs Canada has sanctioned 1,500 Russian individuals and 646 entities as of Sept. 9. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

dropped from the Red Chamber's Order Paper after the Liberals announced they would forward the initiative in the 2022 budget.

Hampson said that based on his conversations, the arbitration over the seized plane is up in the air.

"This could end up either way in the courts," he said. "It's not a slam dunk."

While a speedy resolution is desired, there is an acknowledgement that testing out the new mechanism will take time, Hampson said.

"[As] the legislation was drafted there was also recognition that you can't confiscate assets willy nilly. You have to use due process or you're going to be just as bad as [Russian President Vladimir] Putin," he said. "The wheels of justice in Canada move very slowly, and those who are supportive of this recognize that having legislation in place doesn't mean it will be a slam dunk."

The 2022 change to the Special Economic Measures Act allows Canada to seize and repurpose assets when a "grave breach" of international peace has taken place, or there have been "gross and systemic" human rights violations, or "significant corruption." According to the amended legislation, proceeds from the seized assets can go towards reconstruction of the state that has been victimized by the breach of international security, to the "restoration" of international peace, or to compensate the victims.

In August 2023, Volga-Dnepr filed a motion of intent to initiate the dispute with Canada under a 1989 treaty that Ottawa penned with the then-Soviet Union, which included an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) system. An ISDS system allows for companies to sue foreign governments

when regulatory changes impact their business operations.

Hampson described the seizures of the airliner and Abramovich's holdings as symbolic due to the relatively limited Russian-connected assets that are held in Canada.

"There's actually not a lot that's here in Canada, so this is important symbolism to show that we, too, have skin in the game," he said. "As a test case it's important because if both cases get thrown out or the confiscation is denied by the courts, I think it will make this government or any future government very wary of going after the assets of a foreign national and engaging in confiscatory behaviour."

Former Liberal justice minister Allan Rock, a World Refugee Council special adviser, told *The Hill Times* that it isn't a surprise that the owners of the seized assets are taking legal action.

"It's entirely natural that they want to adjudicate it in front of a court, but we're confident that the Canadian legislation—and the steps taken pursuant to the legislation—will be upheld as valid," he said.

Rock said Canada has a right to seize private assets, noting it is a process overseen through judicial supervision.

"So let them arbitrate, let them litigate, let them delay as long as they want. We think we're going to prevail in the final analysis," he said.

The former Chrétien-era cabinet minister said he is confident that even if an arbitrator doesn't rule in Canada's favour, the courts will.

"I think at the end of the day what Canada has done will be upheld, whether it's by an arbitrator or a court to which we appeal from an adverse finding by the arbitrator," he said. "We think we

should win before the arbitrator. We believe we will win before a court."

Rock said the fact that there have only been the two seizures shows the limited Russian-tied holdings in the country, but it's important for Canada to send a message.

"Whether or not we end up with a lot of Russian assets seized in Canada, the signal we sent, the example we set, the leadership we showed is meaningful, and will have an impact internationally," he said.

He said disappointment has grown as there has been a lack of willingness by some of Canada's G7 allies to seize \$300-billion in Russian state assets held in Western banks.

"We were disappointed that the G7 didn't have the political will to do that," he said.

Instead the G7 agreed to use the interest on the frozen \$300-billion in assets to back loans for Ukraine.

In February 2023, Elisabeth Braw, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, warned the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee that repurposing seized assets was a "dangerous path to take."

"We freeze [assets] to steer the foreign policy and other conduct of that country. If we then take those frozen assets and simply seize them, that means that we are seizing assets of people without proving any crime on their behalf or any crime involving those assets," she said.

"That's an extremely dangerous path to take because it would mean that we're saying the rule of law—of which we are so proud in our liberal democracies—doesn't apply to everybody, doesn't apply to geopolitical adversaries, and we would choose to suspend the

rule of law for certain people when it suits us and when it suits our foreign policy," Braw added. "It would remove the moral high ground that we have worked for so long to establish for ourselves."

She remarked that it would also put western firms operating globally in a potentially difficult position as their assets could subsequently be frozen by a foreign government.

Global Affairs Canada senior official Alexandre Lévesque told the Senate committee in 2022—shortly after the change was made to allow for the forfeiture of assets—that that system will require "care, due diligence, and a whole-of-government approach."

As Canada tests the murky waters over the viability of repurposing assets of individuals connected to the Russian government, global attention has turned to the feasibility of freezing Russian state assets.

In May, the United States gave itself powers to seize Russian state assets, and put them towards Ukraine. The idea has yet to be unanimously adopted by other western allies over concerns of unintended consequences.

In Canada, Omidvar is once again leading a push to drag Canada to the front of the line. Last October, she introduced Bill S-278 for the purpose of disposing foreign state assets.

When she introduced the bill, she said the principals of her current legislative effort and her previous one are the same.

"They are, first, that this is an illegal war that Russia has waged, and, therefore, Russia must be held accountable. Second, Russia must pay for the misery and damage it has wilfully wrought. Third, Russia must pay now and not at some vague point in the future," she said.

Omidvar said that Canada has a "unique opportunity" that is "low risk, yet high impact" as only a small amount of Russian state assets are located within Canadian borders.

Since the State Immunity Act grants foreign governments amnesty from any action in Canadian courts, Omidvar's bill proposes a workaround by having a cabinet order seize a government's assets that are located on Canadian soil.

Independent Senators Stan Kutcher (Nova Scotia) and Donna Dasko (Ontario) both indicated they would support the bill.

"Is it not reasonable to ask that Russia—the aggressor in this conflict—pay? And why should it not start paying now?" questioned Kutcher.

"The bill before us," Dasko said, "aims to make Russia accountable and to pay for its crimes and its destruction."

"It is clear that the destruction brought by Russia in Ukraine has been massive. The humanitarian losses, including deaths, injuries and displacements, will deeply affect the physical and mental health of the Ukrainian people for years to come," she added.

Bill S-278 currently is in second reading in the Upper Chamber.

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Laura Ryckewaert Hill Climbers

Who's who on new Labour and Seniors Minister MacKinnon's team

There are plenty of Quebecers among the staff who have joined the labour and seniors office under Minister MacKinnon since July, while multiple policy staff have departed.

Labour and Seniors Minister **Steven MacKinnon** has made plenty of progress in setting his new ministerial team since being shuffled into the role in July, including hiring **Silvia Barkany** as his director of operations.

Chief of staff **Paul Moen**—who had run the office under Liberal MP **Seamus O'Regan**'s time as minister—confirmed he would be staying on to run the office under MacKinnon in a LinkedIn post last month.

MacKinnon was sworn in as labour and seniors minister on July 19, replacing O'Regan, who has announced he will not reoffer in the next federal election.



Paul Moen is chief of staff to Minister MacKinnon. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Moen is an ex-senior policy adviser to then-Liberal trade minister **Jim Peterson**, and a former principal with Earncliffe Strategy. Moen was first tapped to run O'Regan's office as then-natural resources minister after the 2019 election, and followed O'Regan to the labour portfolio after the 2021 election.

Barkany was previously executive assistant to MacKinnon during his time as chief government whip, and had followed him to the government House leader's office to do the same after MacKinnon stepped in last January while **Karina Gould** was on maternity leave.



Philippe-Alexandre Langlois is director of communications. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Philippe-Alexandre Langlois has likewise left the House leader's office to work for MacKinnon as labour and seniors minister, and has been promoted to director of communications in the process. Langlois had been working in the House leader's office since March 2023; beginning as press secretary to Gould, he continued to field media requests during MacKinnon's acting run in the role. Langlois has also previously worked for then-national revenue minister **Diane Lebouthillier**, starting as a Quebec

and Atlantic regional adviser after the 2021 election, and ending as an issues and parliamentary affairs adviser.

Andreea Campobasso, who had been hired as communications director to O'Regan just this past May, is staying with the office, but is now director of issues management to MacKinnon. She's a former chief strategy officer and founder of The Advisory Studio, and an ex-principal secretary to then-Barrie, Ont., mayor **Jeff Lehman**.

Mark Duggan, who was previously director of issues management in the office under O'Regan, has exited. A former assistant in then-Newfoundland and Labrador premier **Roger Grimes**' office, Duggan had been working for O'Regan since the 2021 election, beginning as both issues management head and senior Atlantic regional adviser. He is also a former senior manager with Bell.



Matthieu Perrotin, right, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Matthieu Perrotin, who until recently was press secretary and Quebec regional affairs adviser to Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister **Gary Anandasangaree**, has been scooped up to serve as MacKinnon's new press secretary and senior communications adviser.

Hill Climbers understands that Anandasangaree has yet to hire a new press secretary, but stay tuned for an update on that end.

Perrotin is a former Hill assistant to Public Services and Procurement Minister **Jean-Yves Duclos** as the MP for Québec, Que. At the end of 2022, he was hired as a communications adviser to Innovation Minister **François-Philippe Champagne**, for whom he worked until late 2023, when Perrotin moved over to Anandasangaree's team.

Hartley Witten, who was previously press secretary and senior communications adviser to O'Regan, remains with the office as a senior communications adviser. A former consultant with Blackbird Strategies, Witten got his start on the Hill as executive assistant to then-PMO director of communications **Cameron Ahmad**, and became press secretary to O'Regan in November 2022.

On the flip side, **Gabriel Mezzari**, who had been an adviser for communications, parliamentary affairs, and the Quebec region, has left. Mezzari originally joined the office as a legislative assistant at the start of 2021, and previously interned in the Treasury Board president's office and the office of then-Liberal MP **Will Amos**.



Felipe Alfaro is headed for Tsinghua University. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Five staffers who'd been part of the policy team under O'Regan have also left since July: policy director **Julia Van Drie**, senior policy adviser **Alexander Craney**, policy advisers **Felipe Alfaro** and **Katya Nova**, and policy and operations adviser **Elizabeth Wong**.

Van Drie had recently been on maternity leave from her post as director of policy, and has already found a new job as a policy analyst with Employment and Social Development Canada. Van Drie was first hired to the labour office as a senior policy adviser under then-minister **Filomena Tassi** at the start of 2020. She was promoted to policy director roughly two years later.

Craney had been with the labour office—which became labour and seniors with the July 2023 cabinet rework—since early 2022. An ex-government relations and public affairs manager with software company D2L, he began working for the Trudeau government in the spring of 2020, starting as a policy adviser to then-fisheries minister **Bernadette Jordan**.

Alfaro is Beijing bound, and is set to be part of the Schwarzman Scholars' class of 2025, through which he'll be part of a one-year master's degree program at Beijing's Tsinghua University. Alfaro had been working for O'Regan since April 2023, and is a former regional adviser for the West, North, and Ontario to Lebourhillier as then-revenue minister, and an ex-aide to British Columbia Liberal MP **Hedy Fry**.

Nova had been working for O'Regan since October 2023, and is an ex-regional adviser for the West and North to Champagne as innovation minister, and a past assistant to then-Toronto Liberal MP **Adam Vaughan**.

Wong, meanwhile, had been with the labour and seniors team since September 2023, and is a past executive assistant to the chief of staff and special assistant for operations and policy to then-fisheries minister **Joyce Murray**.



Lhori Webster is director of policy and labour relations. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Lhori Webster, who'd been acting director of policy while Van Drie was on leave, is staying on as director of policy and labour relations to MacKinnon.

Prior to joining O'Regan's office as acting director in 2023, Webster had been a policy adviser in Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**'s office. She also previously spent roughly two years as a policy adviser to **Patty Hajdu** as then-health minister, and is a former assistant in the LRB, amongst other past experience.

MacKinnon has so far hired a couple of new hands to tackle policy in his office, with **Noémie Fiset-Tremblay** now a senior policy adviser with the team, and **Caroline Belbin** in place as a policy adviser.

Fiset-Tremblay has most recently been working as a lawyer in Quebec, specializing in labour, employment, and occupational health and safety law, through which she has experience negotiating collective agreements. She's also a former advis-



Caroline Belbin is a new policy adviser in the labour and seniors office. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

er to then-Quebec Liberal MNA **Maryse Gaudreault**.

Belbin interned with the labour and seniors office this past summer, and has now been hired full time to the policy team. According to her LinkedIn profile, she graduated from the University of King's College with a bachelor's degree in early modern studies and social anthropology earlier this year.

Crystina Dundas, who was previously part of the office's operations team, is now focused on policy as a senior adviser. She was first hired to the labour office under O'Regan after the 2021 election, originally as a West and North regional adviser, and is also a former field organizer for the federal Liberal Party.

Also now on the policy team is **Nicholas Mackiewicz**, who was previously executive assistant to O'Regan as minister. Mackiewicz was hired in May 2023, and is a former constituency assistant to Ontario Liberal MP **Kirsty Duncan**.

Mark Whelan, who had been a communications and regional adviser for the Atlantic, West, and North, is also among those who have made their exit. Whelan had been working in O'Regan's office as the MP for St. John's South-Mount Pearl, N.L., before being hired to the labour office in 2022, originally as an Atlantic regional affairs adviser. He was promoted to his most recent role after the July 2023 shuffle.

With Whelan's exit, **Andrew Welsh**, who was previously an operations adviser, has been named senior operations and regional adviser for the Atlantic, West, and North. Welsh has been with the office since just after the 2021 election, and was first hired as a special assistant for Atlantic regional affairs. His CV includes past experience working with the Nova Scotia Liberal Party.

Victoria Dempster, who'd recently been acting director of operations to O'Regan, is staying on as a senior operations adviser. Dempster joined the labour and seniors office in October 2023, and is a former senior policy and Atlantic regional affairs adviser to Public Safety, Democratic Institutions, and Intergovernmental Affairs Minister **Dominic LeBlanc**. She's also a past executive assistant to O'Regan during his turns as then-minister for veterans affairs, Indigenous services, and natural resources, and a former senior special assistant for the Atlantic to then-innovation minister **Navdeep Bains**, among other past jobs.

Mohammad Kamal, who previously held the title of strategic communications adviser and assistant to the parliamentary secretary, is now a senior parliamentary affairs and Quebec regional adviser and assistant to the parliamentary secretary. Kamal was hired to the office in April 2023, and was previously a special assistant for digital communications to International Trade Minister **Mary Ng**.

Four other staffers currently remain in the same roles they filled under O'Regan: **Damien O'Brien**, director of parliamentary affairs; **Joseph Pagani**, issues manager; **Eric Nicol**, Ontario regional affairs adviser; and **Naomi Panetta**, executive assistant to Moen as chief of staff.

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Feature

Parliamentary Calendar

Conservative MP Chong to explore Canada-Taiwan partnership at Sept. 11 event



Conservative MP Michael Chong will participate in a seminar hosted by the Toronto Region Board of Trade, and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office on Wednesday, Sept. 11, in Toronto. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

SATURDAY, SEPT. 7—SUNDAY, SEPT. 15

Week of Mexico in Canada—The Embassy of Mexico hosts the Week of Mexico in Canada, and the second edition of the Viva México on Sparks Street. Celebrate Mexico's national day and experience Mexico's vibrant culture featuring including an award-winning artist, a singer recognized by *Rolling Stone* magazine, a *Gourmet Magazine* award-winning chef, and a mixologist presenting a "forbidden drink." Saturday, Sept. 7 to Sunday, Sept. 15.

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: forumfintech-canada.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

Discussion: 'Advocacy Essentials'—The OTUS Association Exchange hosts a networking event and panel discussion titled, "Advocacy Essentials: Influence and Impact," featuring Emily Holtby, senior director at the Canadian Media Producers Association, and Government Relations Institute of Canada board member; Stephen Heckbert, executive director, Canadian Pork Council; and Alana Baker, formerly with the Canadian Medical Association, and the GRIC. Wednesday, Sept. 11, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Ottawa Marriott Hotel, 100 Kent St. Details via Eventbrite.

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 1:30 p.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: 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: ccmm.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-Émard-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.

Don Boudria 40-50-75 Reception—The Sandstone Group hosts a "40-50-75" reception for former Liberal MP Don Boudria. This year marks significant milestones in Boudria's life: 40 years since his election to Parliament, 50 years since he began his career in politics, and his 75th birthday. The event is also celebrating the launch of the newly established Hon. Don Boudria Scholarship Fund. Monday, Sept. 16, at 6 p.m. ET at the Metropolitan Brasserie, 700 Sussex Dr. Details via Eventbrite.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 17

Canada's Housing Affordability Crisis—The Economic Club of Canada hosts "Tackling Canada's Housing Affordability Crisis," a panel discussion featuring leading experts who will examine the ongoing Canadian housing market crisis, and the key factors influencing it. Thursday, Sept. 17, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Hilton Toronto. Details: economicclub.ca.

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.

Fall Sitting Housewarming—Earnscliffe, *iPolitics*, and Metropolitan Brasserie host the 2024 Fall Sitting Housewarming. Celebrate the start of the fall sitting of the 44th Parliament. Catch up with friends and colleagues over bubbly and snacks. Tuesday, Sept. 17, at 5 p.m. at Metropolitan Brasserie, 700 Sussex Dr. Details via Eventbrite.

Beer Canada Reception—Beer Canada invites parliamentarians and staff to a reception in advance of Canadian Beer Day. Tuesday, Sept. 17, 6 p.m. ET, in the Sir John A. Macdonald Building. RSVP by Sept. 6 to cheers@beercanada.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

Conference on Afghanistan—The University of Ottawa and the Embassy of Afghanistan host a day-long "Conference on Afghanistan: Changing the Approach and Reversing the Trajectory," exploring the current multifaceted crisis in Afghanistan with a focus on the ongoing global efforts to adopt and implement a new integrated approach. Wednesday, Sept. 18, at 9 a.m. at FSS 4007, 120 University Priv. Details: cips-cepi.ca.

'How Canada Can Matter More to the U.S.'—The Empire Club of Canada hosts a discussion titled, "Borderline: How Canada Can Matter More to the United States—and the Rest of the World" featuring Public Policy Forum president Edward Greenspon, and Janice Stein, founding director of the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. Wednesday, Sept. 18, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Royal York, 100 Front St. W. Details: empireclubofcanada.com.

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 panelists 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.

Cocktail Reception on the Copyright Act—The Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions hosts a cocktail reception: "100 years of the Copyright Act: Towards a law for our times." Wednesday, Sept. 18, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. ET, in Room 310, Wellington Building, Parliament Hill.

Beverly McLachlin to Discuss Her New Book—Former chief justice Beverly 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.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 19

Webinar: 'Lobby Like a Pro'—The Beacon North Mentorship Academy hosts the first in a two-part online course, "Lobby Like a Pro: Plan and Execute a Successful Lobby Day." This first session will cover effective strategies for securing meetings, preparing stakeholders, managing logistics, and following up to build strong relationships. Thursday, Sept. 19, from 12-1:30 p.m. ET. Details: beaconmentorshipacademy.com.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 20

Press Gallery Mugging—Members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery are invited to a lunch to bid farewell to former PPG members. Friday, Sept. 20, at 12:30 p.m. ET in Room 100, Sir John A. Macdonald Building, Parliament Hill.

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 CRTC 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. Arguing against the motion are former Liberal cabinet minister John Manley, and the University of Calgary's Martha Hall Findlay. Tuesday, Sept. 24, at 5:15 p.m. at the Fairmont Royal York, Toronto. Details: cdhoweregntdebate.org.

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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.