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INSIDE

THE HILL TIMES

Heard
On The
Hill
p. 2

THIRTY-FIFTH YEAR, NO. 2159

CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER

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Christina Leadlay

Heard On The Hill Back to Parliament

The Other Hill to launch with introspective chat on Ottawa's future



The Other Hill's board of directors includes recent Liberal ministerial staffer **Frédérique Tsai-Klassen**, left, and Sandstone Group co-founder **Kevin Bosch**, also an ex-Grit staffer. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn and The Hill Times photograph by Cynthia Münster

You've heard of "the other place," what parliamentarians say when referring to their counterparts in either the House or the Senate.

Here's a new one for the Ottawa lexicon: "The Other Hill."

Sandy Hill, to be precise.

What began 10 years ago as a project called Prime Ministers' Row—leaning into the Ottawa neighbourhood's history as home to some of Canada's political elite—has transformed into a broader initiative called "The Other Hill—L'autre colline," according to **Leanne Moussa**, the board's chair.

"The Other Hill aims to bring Canada's leading authors, artists, historians, and activists to inspire the conversations we need to have as a country," Moussa told **Heard on the Hill** via email last week.

"Together, we will gradually bring to life the outdoor spaces, stately homes and important historic buildings along Laurier Avenue East," she said. Strathcona Park, Laurier House, and the Allsaints Event Space are listed on the group's website as key venues.

The Allsaints Event Space on Laurier Avenue East is where the soft launch will take place tonight, but the proper kick-off is Sept. 17 at the same location with a chat featuring **Joanne Chianello**, the award-winning reporter formerly with CBC Ottawa, and **Jesse Wente**, author and chair of the Canada Council for the Arts. They will attempt to answer the following questions: 1. Ottawa would be a better capital if ...; 2. My responsibility to future generations has me wishing...; and 3. A difficult conversation we need to have is...

The Other Hill's board of directors reads as a who's who of former Hillites and those with GR credentials, such as **Frédérique Tsai-Klassen**, who until last month was chief of staff in National Revenue Minister **Marie-Claude Bibeau's** office; former Liberal staffer **Kevin Bosch**, now managing partner and co-founder

of Sandstone Group; **Lisa Haley**, who managed events and issues on Parliament Hill for 30 years; **Alayne Crawford**, an ex-staffer to then-prime minister **Stephen Harper**, and Moussa herself who worked for then-Liberal cabinet minister **Pierre Pettigrew** "many moons ago," she said.

Moussa confirms that living in Sandy Hill—which was recently listed by Re/Max as among the top 10 most liveable neighbourhoods in Canada—is not a prerequisite for being involved in The Other Hill, though conveniently "many, but not all of the board of directors live in Sandy Hill."

"This project is led by people who care about building a vibrant capital city," said Moussa. "We want to offer all people, visitors and tourists alike, the opportunity to come together and reflect on where we have been, where we are now and where we want to go."

Conservative MP Rachael Thomas has a baby girl



Conservative MP Rachael Thomas. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Alberta Conservative MP **Rachael Thomas** and her husband **Victor** welcomed their first child on Aug. 3.

"Victor and I are excited to share with you that we welcomed our sweet baby girl, **Brielle Mary**



Brielle Mary Thomas was born on Aug. 3. Photograph courtesy Rachael Thomas' Facebook account.

Thomas, on August 3rd. She weighed 7 lb 2 oz and measured 19" long. We are totally in love!" the 36-year-old MP posted on Facebook on Sept. 4, just over a month after giving birth.

Best wishes for the growing family poured in from Thomas' caucus family, including Conservative MPs **Michelle Ferreri**, **John Barlow**, **Blaine Calkins**, **Bob Zimmer**, and **Kelly Block**.

Thomas has represented the riding of Lethbridge, Alta., since 2015. She and her husband married in June 2021.

Ex-Quebec minister Pierre Moreau appointed to Senate

Senate vacancies getting hard to come by these days, as Prime



New Senator **Pierre Moreau**. Photograph courtesy of Twitter/X.

Minister **Justin Trudeau** tapped a new Senator for Quebec on Sept. 11, less than a month after appointing two new Senators for the Prairies.

Pierre Moreau's ticket to the Red Chamber fills one of two vacant seats for Quebec.

A lawyer by training who's taught at the École du Barreau du Québec, Moreau was first elected to the Quebec National Assembly in 2003, and was re-elected four times. He held a variety

of cabinet minister roles in the Quebec Liberal governments of both **Philippe Couillard** and **Jean Charest**. More recently, he's been a panellist on ICI RDI's television program *Mordus de politique*, and has contributed to the radio show *Puisqu'il faut se lever*, according to his biographical note.

With these appointments, the list of Senate vacancies drops to five, with two openings in British Columbia, and one each in Nunavut, Ontario, and Quebec.

Women on the Hill mixer on Sept. 19

Party season picks up this week as Parliament resumes, and among the receptions on the calendar, Earnscliffe is hosting a "Women on the Hill" reception on Sept. 19 on the Château Laurier's La Terrasse.

The mixer is billed as a gathering with women from politics, government, media, business, academia, labour, diplomacy, and civil society. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres will be served, but space is limited, so head to Eventbrite for RSVP.

Two Sinclairs, Maher, Valliant and Wilson at Toronto International Festival of Authors



Authors **Marie Wilson**, top left, retired Senator **Murray Sinclair**, author **John Vaillant**, bottom left, and journalist **Stephen Maher**. *The Hill Times* file photographs, by Stuart Benson and Jake Wright.

Retired Senator **Murray Sinclair** and his son **Niigaan**, journalist **Stephen Maher**, award-winning author **John Vaillant**, and former Truth and Reconciliation commissioner **Marie Wilson** are some of the big names scheduled to take part in the Toronto International Festival of Authors.

The TIFA opens on Sept. 19, and runs until Sept. 29 in and around Toronto's Harbourfront Centre Theatre.

Vaillant will sit down with climate policy thinker **Catherine Abreu** on Sept. 21 for a conversation moderated by the CBC's **Nahlah Ayed** titled "Burning Questions: Confronting the Challenges of our Global Climate Crisis." As this event is officially the 2024 PEN Canada **Graeme Gibson** Talk, author **Margaret Atwood** will be

making the introduction in memory of her late husband.

On Sept. 28, Wilson will discuss her book *North of Nowhere: Song of a Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner* with award-winning podcast host **Connie Walker**, followed later in the day by Maher in conversation with **Vass Bednar** on Maher's book *The Prince: The Turbulent Reign of Justin Trudeau*. The next day, the two Sinclairs will discuss their respective books—the elder's *Who We Are: Four Questions For a Life and a Nation*, and the son's *W̱inip̱êk: Visions of Canada from an Indigenous Centre*—part of a two-day celebration of Indigenous writers within the larger TIFA.

Back to Parliament **Heard on the Hill**

Continued from page 2

Ex-Liberal MP Robert Ouellette to talk Indo-Pacific Strategy



Former Liberal MP Robert-Falcon Ouellette. *The Hill Times* photograph by Aidan Chamandy

Former Liberal MP **Robert-Falcon Ouellette** is scheduled to take part in a panel discussion at the University of Ottawa on Oct. 1.

Titled “The Other ‘T’ in Canada’s Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Taiwan-Canada Dialogue on Indigenous Engagement,” the event is hosted by uOttawa, the Canadian International Council’s National Capital Branch, and the Taipei Economic & Cultural Office in Canada.

Other participants include **Harry Ho-jen Tseng**, representa-

tive with the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Canada; and uOttawa professor **Scott Simon**.

Ouellette represented the Liberals in the Manitoba riding of Winnipeg Centre from 2015 to 2019 when he lost his seat to the NDP’s **Leah Gazan**. Since leaving the Hill, Ouellette ran unsuccessfully for the mayor of Winnipeg in 2022, and is now an associate professor at uOttawa’s faculty of education.

News from *The Logic* and *Toronto Star’s* Ottawa bureaus

There are two media moves to catch up on.

The Logic’s **Murad Hemmadi** is changing roles within the organization. This means he will be leaving Ottawa in due course for Toronto where he will be covering artificial intelligence.

“My beat stretches across AI, semiconductors, quantum and more. I’m going to write about the companies building businesses in these spaces, the investors funding them, the policies promoting and regulating them, and the impacts they have on people and economies,” Hemmadi posted on X on Sept. 10.

“I’m going to miss a lot about Ottawa,” he wrote. “Covering federal politics is a consistently fascinating and fun, if occasionally frustrating, experience.”



Meanwhile, **Mark Ramzy** announced that he’s not going anywhere in that he’s now permanently in *The Toronto Star’s* Ottawa bureau.

“The last year has been a wonderful experience and I’m excited to continue reporting from Parliament Hill for Canada’s premier newspaper,” Ramzy posted on X on Sept. 10.”

David Bowen joins Delphic Research

Dr. **David Bowen** has joined Toronto-based GR firm Delphic Research as a senior adviser to help the company expand in the American healthcare and life sciences sectors. Bowen has over 20 years of “senior U.S. government, non-profit, and industry experi-



Murad Hemmadi, left, and Mark Ramzy. *Photograph courtesy of Maclean’s and The Hill Times photograph by Stuart Benson*

ence in health and life sciences policy-making,” according to the press release.

Delphic Research was founded in 2020 by **Jason Grier**, whose CV includes several senior roles to former federal Liberal cabinet ministers **David Collenette** and **Diane Marleau**, former Ontario Premier **Dalton McGuinty**, and stints with Hill+Knowlton and Santis Health.

Ex-Library of Parliament staffer Sylvie Lauzon dies: ‘she was everyone’s heart and soul’

A belated condolences to Liberal MP **Stéphane Lauzon** whose

sister **Sylvie Lauzon** died this past May at the age of 67. Sylvie Lauzon was a 37-year veteran Library of Parliament staff member, whom *Hill Times* editor-in-chief **Kate Malloy** recalls as “a really lovely person.”

“I got to know her over the years when I first started as a reporter on the Hill and in the days before the internet, and had to use the Library of Parliament almost every day for research purposes. Sylvie worked in the clippings room in the basement of the library with two other clerks,” Malloy told HOH. “She was always really helpful and funny.”

The MP for Argenteuil-La Petite-Nation, Que., paid tribute to his late sister in the House back on June 19: “Sylvie was my No. 1 supporter. She was always there through good times and tougher times, also,” he said.

“She was inseparable from her cousin **Michel** and so proud of her two brothers, one of whom was in business and the other in politics, as she used to say. To the family, she was much more than a sister. She was a loving mother and a devoted grandmother. She was everyone’s heart and soul. Sylvie was a champion during election campaigns and a great leader to the volunteers.”

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News Back to Parliament

'Tense' fall sitting begins, with Liberals under pressure from Conservatives, NDP, and Bloc Québécois, say pollsters, lobbyists



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, Bloc Leader Yves-François Blanchet, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, and Green Party Leader Elizabeth May. It's going to be a tense few months in the House. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

The House is back. Get ready for a lot more parliamentary tactics, a lot more focus on the House, and a lot more of day-to-day instability in the government, says pollster Darrell Bricker. NDP House Leader Peter Julian, meanwhile, says his party will approach the fall sitting on a 'vote-by-vote basis, much as we did during COVID.'

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

Affordability and the economy will likely be top priorities in a tense fall sitting of Parliament, with the recently scrapped supply-and-confidence deal putting the Liberals under heightened pressure from the NDP and the Bloc Québécois, say pollsters and lobbyists.

"Anything that has to do with people's monthly incomes and expenses is definitely on the table. That's the top priority for Canadians right now, and that hasn't changed," said Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs. "Now that the NDP has pulled out of [the supply-and-confidence agreement], that puts them back into a position where they have some leverage. So, the question is, how are they going to use that leverage? The Bloc has leverage as well. How are they going to use that leverage? Because the government has to have at least one other party supporting them in order to pass their legislation."

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.) announced on Sept. 4 that he had "ripped up" the supply-and-confidence agreement between his party and the Liberals, which had helped prop up the current government since March 2022 in exchange for NDP legislative priorities. The end of the agreement means it is no longer a guarantee that the NDP will support the minority Liberal government on budgetary and confidence votes in the House.

Although the next election is scheduled for Oct. 20, 2025, at the latest, an election could be triggered sooner if the prime minister were to lose the vote on a confidence motion. In order to survive on confidence votes in the House, the Liberals will have to cut deals with opposition parties to get their legislation through in the Commons on a regular basis.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) has said his party will put forward a non-confidence motion "at the earliest possible opportunity" when Parliament resumes on Sept. 16, as reported by CBC News on Sept. 11. Anne McGrath, Singh's principal secretary, said that an early election could happen, but also said she doesn't think the NDP leader is anxious to launch one, as reported by CTV News on Sept. 11.

NDP House Leader Peter Julian (New Westminster-Burnaby, B.C.) told *The Hill Times* that his party will approach the fall sitting

on a "vote-by-vote basis, much as we did during COVID."

"Under COVID, we forced the government and the other parties to accept supports for small businesses, for people with disabilities, for seniors, for students [and] for families," said Julian. "Those were all things that the NDP negotiated a on a one-vote basis, and all of the COVID supports were enhanced or prolonged to ensure that people got the supports that they needed. That's what we will be doing this fall—working for people and making sure people have the support they need."

Bricker said the certainty around the NDP vote is less than it was, but "we haven't seen it tested by legislation" yet.

"The problem that the NDP has is that their numbers are not great either. Normally, the other progressive party benefits when the governing progressive party declines. We're not seeing that this time. What we're seeing is both of them decline," he said. "Jagmeet Singh can say ... that he's ready for an election, but the truth is in the numbers, and their numbers are no better than they were in the last election campaign."

Bricker said the situation for the Bloc Québécois is different, because that party serves the interests of Quebec.

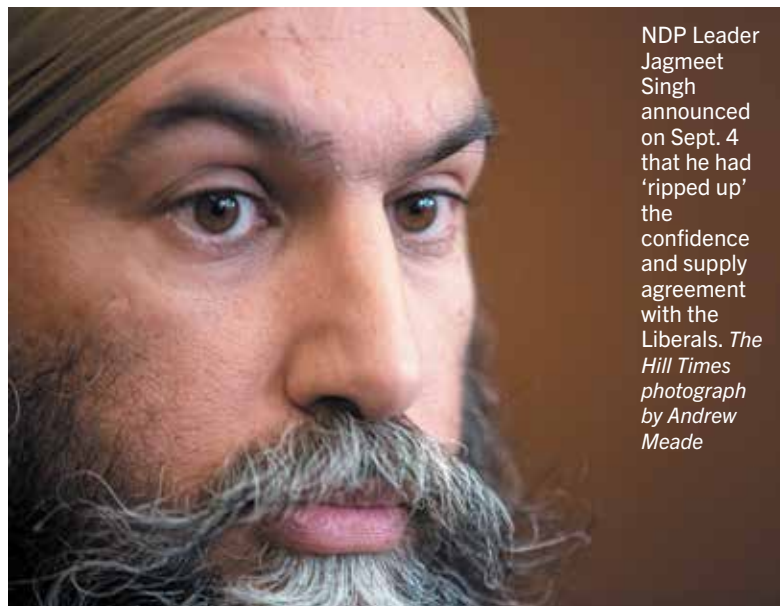
"The Bloc is leading in the province of Quebec. They're in a very strong position and they do not fear an election. They're in a position where they can press the government an awful lot harder than the NDP could," he said. "What we're going to see is a lot more parliamentary tactics, a lot more focus on the House of Commons, a lot more of day-to-day instability in the government going forward than we've seen since the last election campaign."

More than half, or 56 per cent, of Canadians said they feel the opposition parties should try to work with the government to avoid an early election, while the remaining 44 per cent think the opposition parties should defeat the government to trigger an election, according to the results of an online Ipsos poll of 1,000 Canadians of ages 18 and over conducted between Sept. 6-10 and released on Sept. 11. If a federal election were held tomorrow, the Conservatives would see a decisive victory with 45 per cent of the decided vote, assuring them a majority government, according to the Ipsos poll.

Before the deal was scrapped, the supply-and-confidence agreement was slated to last until June 2025. Accomplishments during the life of the agreement include the royal assent of Bill C-58 on June 20, 2024, which bans the use of replacement workers at federally regulated workplaces during a strike. On the same day, Bill C-50, the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act, also received royal assent, which is intended to support the creation of sustainable jobs and economic growth as Canada transitions to a net-zero economy. The agreement also stipulated an intention to move forward with a Housing Accelerator Fund to boost housing supply. The \$4.4-billion fund was launched in March 2023.

Unfinished priorities outlined in the agreement include implementation of a national pharmacare program, to help manage the cost of prescription drugs. Bill C-64, which outlines principles to guide implementation of the long-awaited national universal pharmacare program, completed second reading in the Senate on June 18 and is currently under consideration by the Senate's Social Affairs, Science and Technology Committee.

Nik Nanos, CEO of Nanos Research, told *The Hill Times* that



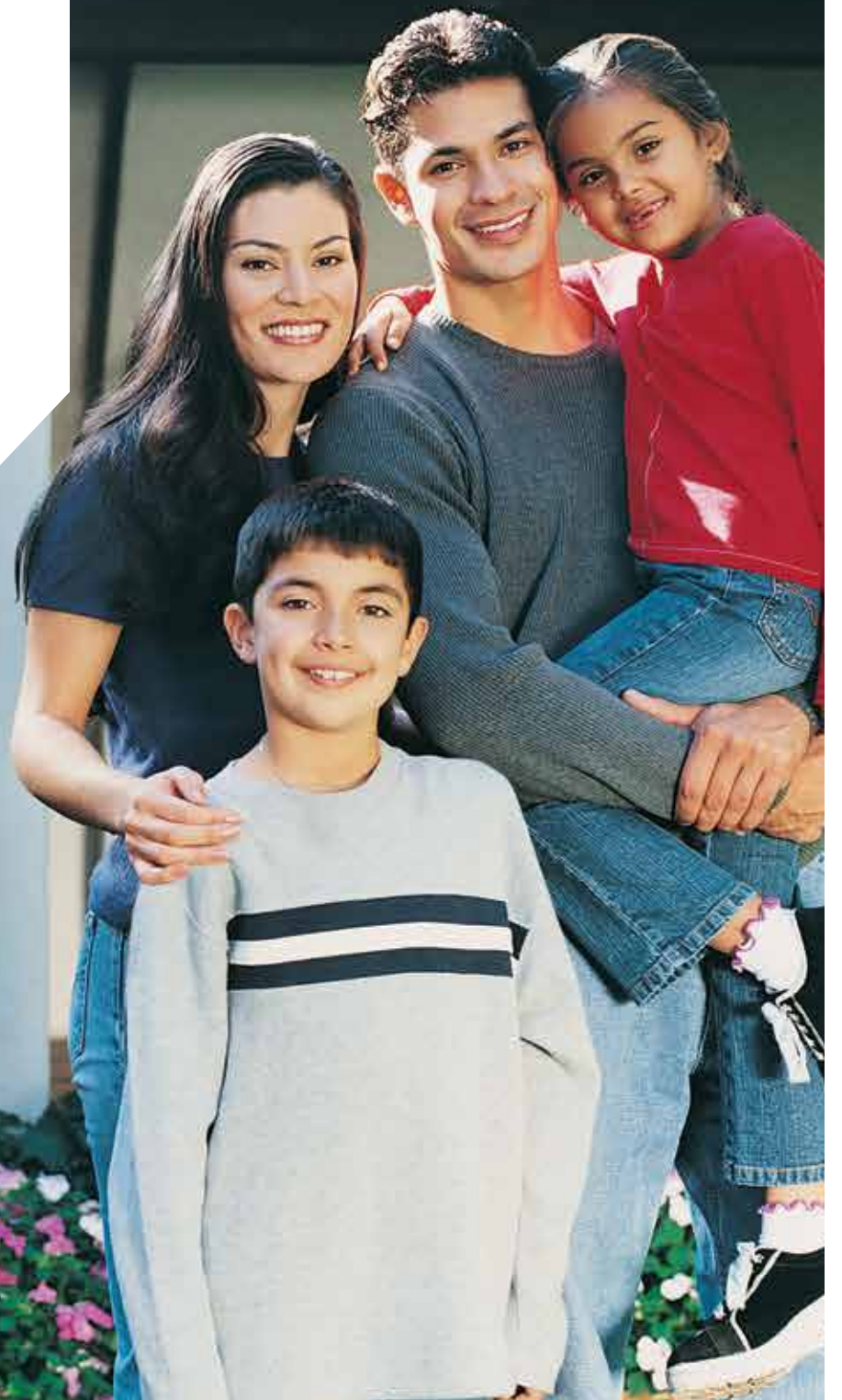
NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh announced on Sept. 4 that he had 'ripped up' the confidence and supply agreement with the Liberals. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



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News

Liberal MPs unclear about party's strategy for 2025 at final summer retreat before next federal election

If the Liberals lose the Montreal byelection on Sept. 16, more MPs will speak up criticizing their leadership, say some Liberal MPs.

BY ABBAS RANA

Even after the final national summer retreat ahead of the next federal election, Liberal MPs say the party leadership has yet to share their strategy for winning in 2025.

The 154-member national caucus convened in Nanaimo, B.C., from Sept. 9-11 to strategize for the fall parliamentary session, and to receive updates on election readiness. This retreat occurred against a backdrop of several summer setbacks for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.).

On the retreat's opening day, four-term Liberal MP Alexandra Mendès (Brossard-Saint-Lambert, Que.) told CBC News that "dozens and dozens" of her constituents want Trudeau to step down, and that they believe the party should enter the next election with a new leader.

The Liberals have been trailing the Conservatives by 15-20 points since the summer of 2023. In June of this year, the Liberals lost the safe seat of Toronto-St. Paul's, Ont., to the Conservatives in a byelection. Following this loss, eight Liberal MPs called for a special national in-person caucus meeting to discuss the defeat of a long-held riding. At that time, Liberal MP Wayne Long (Saint John-Rothesay, N.B.) also called for Trudeau's resignation.

The leadership denied the request for an in-person caucus



Liberal MPs at a caucus meeting on the Hill earlier this year. The 154-member Liberal caucus held its final summer retreat before the next election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

meeting, citing logistical reasons. However, Trudeau reached out to MPs individually to gather their feedback on what to do next. During the summer months, in addition to speaking with MPs one on one, Trudeau attended regional caucus meetings to understand their concerns.

According to interviews with *The Hill Times*, MPs made two demands: change the top tier of advisers, and shuffle the cabinet to remove underperforming ministers and those who not seeking re-election. As of now, the prime minister has not acted on these demands, and it remains to be seen if any changes will occur in the coming weeks.

In July, Liberal MP Seamus O'Regan (St. John's South-Mount Pearl, Nfld.), a close friend of the prime minister and a senior

cabinet minister, stepped down as labour minister to spend more time with his family. In early August, media reports suggested that Transport Minister and Quebec lieutenant Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Que.) wants to seek the provincial Quebec Liberal leadership. If he does decide to proceed, he will step down as cabinet minister and potentially as an MP, as well.

Two weeks ago, Jeremy Broadhurst, the national Liberal campaign director and a member of the prime minister's inner circle, announced he would step down for family reasons. According to *The Toronto Star*, Broadhurst told the prime minister that, in his opinion, Trudeau cannot win the next election, and that the Liberals needs to bring someone in who thinks Trudeau can win.

Before that, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.) "ripped up" the supply-and-confidence agreement with the Liberals that has kept the governing party in power since March 2022.

Last week, *The Globe and Mail* reported that five chiefs of staff to senior cabinet ministers are stepping down. Given this context, MPs and political insiders anticipated discussions at

a capable guy, and he's capable of winning this."

Several MPs interviewed for this article expressed that many of their colleagues desire a change in leadership, but also said they feel resigned to the fact that there is no mechanism to force such a change unless the prime minister chooses to step down.

During the three-day retreat in Nanaimo, MPs participated in regional caucus meetings, issue-based caucus meetings, and three national caucus meetings. They heard from senior cabinet ministers, PMO and party officials, including Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.), Government House Leader Karina Gould (Burlington, Ont.), Prime Minister Trudeau's chief of staff Katie Telford, senior adviser Ben Chin, and executive director of communications Max Valiquette. However, MPs said that they did not receive any briefing on the party's strategy to win the next election, despite trailing the Conservatives by a double-digit margin for the past year.

"No specific strategy, but for the fact that we have to work harder, we have to be at our best, we have to do a much better job in terms of communicating," said one Liberal MP.

"It was a bit like having a self motivation, kind of like a Anthony Robbins presentation. It was just about like each of you [MPs] have to do more. You got to pick it up, you got to be at your best. This is a process that they've been doing for quite some time, as those numbers don't pick up. It's all about saying, 'Well, maybe you guys aren't doing enough,' it's putting the onus on MPs."

According to MPs, PMO advisers reminded caucus members that during the 2022 summer retreat, they had predicted 2023 would be challenging for the Liberals due to an anticipated economic downturn. However, they now pointed out improvements, with inflation decreasing and interest rates falling.

A second MP said that Telford told MPs that there are multiple pathways for the Liberals to win the next election, but wouldn't share it with them at this time as it would become public.

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Voters in the riding of LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, Que., will elect a successor to former Liberal MP David Lametti this week. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Liberal MP Marcus Powlowski said if Trudeau decides to run, "then I'm absolutely with him, and I'm happy to fight for him," and if he doesn't, it's his call. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Google signs deal to launch journalism fund in California, while cash from its Canadian media fund has yet to flow

Google awaits the CRTC go-ahead for \$100-million-a-year Canadian media fund as news outlets call for urgent access to cash.

BY SOPHALL DUCH

Google has reached a multi-million-dollar deal with California to fund newsrooms in that American state, echoing a similar deal the tech giant made in Canada late last year.

But while Google's California deal is still fresh, its Canadian agreement has yet to see any funds flow to newsrooms north of the border.

"I don't think anyone should be surprised that it's taking quite a while to get all that operational," said Michael Geist, a professor at the University of Ottawa who specializes in internet and intellectual property law.

The California deal is worth about US \$242.5-million (about C\$328.5-million), and is expected to get going in 2025. The timeline for the Canadian deal? Still in question.

C-18 Status Update

Canada's Online News Act—formerly Bill C-18—came into effect last December. The legislation forces tech giants to negotiate compensation deals with Canadian media organizations for hosting their content on their platforms.

To secure an exemption from Bill C-18, Google announced last November that it would contribute \$100-million annually—indexed to inflation—to a media fund over five years.

However, Meta—which runs Facebook and Instagram—took a different approach by blocking access to news content on its platforms in Canada.

As for Google, it wasn't until this June that the company officially applied for its Online News Act exemption to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). Google made its exemption application to the CRTC once it announced its deal with the



Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge, flanked by other Liberal MPs, speaks with reporters after the government reached a deal with Google for an exemption to the Online News Act on Nov. 29, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Canadian Journalism Collective (CJC) to help run and distribute the fund.

The CRTC was meant to wrap consultations on Google's application for a Bill C-18 exemption by Aug. 9, but that deadline was extended twice over the summer—ultimately closing the period to submit replies on Aug. 26.

In its application to the CRTC, Google said the money for the fund "will come into effect on the date the exemption is granted."

The government is also waiting for the CRTC to give the go-ahead.

"As soon as the CRTC reaches an agreement with Google, eligible news organizations will receive fair compensation from Google's contribution to Canada, so journalists can continue to do the important work Canadian deserve and expect," said a spokesperson from the office of Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge (Brome-Missisquoi, Que.) in a statement to *The Hill Times*.

But when the CRTC gives that green light is still unclear.

The waiting game

The CRTC declined an interview with *The Hill Times* for an update on Google's exemption request.

"The CRTC is working quickly, but as this matter is the subject of an open proceeding, we unfortu-

nately cannot grant an interview or comment further on it," a CRTC spokesperson wrote to *The Hill Times*.

While they await the CRTC decision, Canadian media outlets are calling for urgent action, given the crisis in the industry.

"News businesses require the money as soon as possible," Corus Entertainment Inc. (Global News' parent company) wrote in its submission to the CRTC.

Since the Canada-Google deal was announced, there have been layoffs at CTV News, Global News, and Saltwire—Atlantic Canada's largest private newspaper chain. Following Bell Canada's cuts of about 4,800 jobs last February, the company placed some of that blame on "unsupportive federal government policies and CRTC decisions."

"[We] continue to face a difficult economy and government and regulatory decisions that undermine investment in our networks, fail to support our media business in a time of crisis and fail to level the playing field with global tech giants," said Mirko Bibic, president of BCE Inc. and Bell Canada (CTV News' parent company), in an open letter following the February layoffs.

Geist said that once reality set in, media outlets realized the fund was not "going to be the kind of saviour that perhaps some had envisioned."

"Many in the industry were so fixated by the perception that there was this pot of gold at the end of the C-18 rainbow that they didn't really heed the warning that there were real risks, and that there was a significant overestimation about what this could generate," said Geist.

While the CRTC would not provide *The Hill Times* with a timeline, the CJC said the commission has until Oct. 7 to issue Google's exemption order for funds to be distributed "within the 2024 calendar year." If the CRTC misses that deadline then Canadian media will have to wait until next year—more than a year since Bill C-18 came into effect—to start seeing fund money.

Google's Golden State deal

California Assembly member Buffy Wicks announced the state's deal with Google in late August, touting it as the "first-in-the-nation partnership."

According to numbers provided to *The Hill Times* by Wicks' office, Google will contribute US\$110-million (C\$149.6-million), and the state will contribute another US\$70-million (C\$95.2-million) to a fund to be administered by UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism over five years.

The deal's framework aims to "front load" US\$100-million

in the first year to kick-start the initiative.

Despite Google's being headquartered in California, the tech firm will ultimately dole out more cash to Canadian media than to those in its home state.

"It's peanuts compared to what Canada is able to get," said Jon Schleuss, president of the U.S. national union NewsGuild-CWA, in an interview with *The Hill Times*.

As part of the deal, Wicks shelved the bill she was championing that was similar to Canada's Online News Act and Australia's News Media Bargaining Code, legislation that would force tech giants like Google and Meta to remunerate news outlets.

Schleuss labelled the agreement as a "backroom deal" that is "essentially avoiding the legislative process."

While Google was able to outmanoeuvre the impending California legislation, Schleuss said there is federal legislation making its way through the U.S. Congress that could force tech giants to pay up to news outlets.

Schleuss added that the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act of 2023—a bill sponsored by U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar—is "still in play," but "is not probably going to move with the election pending."

Also on the horizon for Google is a second antitrust trial—this time for the tech giant's alleged monopoly on digital advertising.

All eyes on AI

What also sets the California deal apart from the Canadian one is the artificial intelligence (AI) provisions.

There's an additional US\$62.5-million (C\$85-million) from Google earmarked towards a National AI Innovation Accelerator Fund.

The California deal is also a partnership with OpenAI, the artificial intelligence firm behind ChatGPT.

"This initiative builds on our longstanding work to help newsrooms and journalists around the world leverage AI to improve workflows, better connect users to quality content, and help news organizations shape the future of this emerging technology," said Jason Kwon, chief strategy officer for OpenAI, in a statement.

But as some media organizations grapple with the pros and cons of AI in their newsrooms, the inclusion of AI provisions in the deal has raised some red flags.

"It's really concerning to us that tied into this backroom deal is an artificial intelligence accelerator. We've already seen how AI can spread misinformation and disinformation. And when you don't have actual human beings going out and telling stories, you open yourself up to a lot of false narratives," said Schleuss.

Schleuss admitted that some aspects of AI can be helpful as a technology. But he warned that the AI accelerator fund could "backslide" the industry, and it could ironically result with a loss of more journalists since the deal's funding isn't tied to creating journalism jobs.

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Editorial

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Editorial

Expect more antics than ever this fall

Welcome back to the circus. Parliament is back for the fall, albeit with a twist. For the first time since early 2022, there's the potential that every single confidence vote in the House could lead to Canadians heading to the polls early.

The Liberal-NDP supply-and-confidence agreement that has allowed the minority government to operate more or less like a majority for two years has been "ripped up," per the language of New Democrat Leader Jagmeet Singh.

So if you thought the 44th Parliament was lacking in stunts, grandstanding, and stonewalling thus far, you're in luck. We can expect more of all three in the months ahead as we limp towards October 2025.

The Liberals don't want an early election. The Conservatives do. Singh says the NDP is ready for an election, but its fundraising numbers suggest otherwise. The Bloc Québécois likely wouldn't say no to one given their standing in the Quebec polls.

The likelihood of otherwise of an early election will also be determined in part by the results of two byelections on Sept. 16. The Liberals hope to cling on in LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, Que., while the NDP are campaigning to retain Elmwood-Transcona, Man.

If the status quo holds, so may the Parliament. If the NDP retains its Manitoba seat and picks up the Quebec rid-

ing, they may feel emboldened to back the Conservatives in a non-confidence motion the official opposition will inevitably bring. If the Conservatives win Manitoba and the Bloc takes LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, the Liberal caucus could start looking for a new leader.

Lost in all of these hypotheticals are policy discussions. There are still plenty of bills on the Order Paper, and a lot of government initiatives that have not yet received royal assent.

One thing we can expect to see by way of policy is a long wish list from the Bloc Québécois. If the Parliament is to cross the fall 2025 finish line, the Liberals will need to rely on ad hoc arrangements with either the NDP or the Bloc to survive confidence support, and the sovereigntist party has already drawn up a list of priorities with its newfound balance of power.

While it is, admittedly, a long shot, it would be nice to see at least some legislative work being prioritized amid the noise. Cost-of-living and security concerns have not gone away, and it's as important as ever for MPs and Senators to focus on serving Canadians, not just their party coffers.

We can expect a lot of song and dance over the next few months. But who knows; maybe parliamentarians will surprise us.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

France-Canada relationship: protecting the diversity of cultural expressions in the AI era

This year at ALL IN, a Canadian conference on artificial intelligence, France has been designated as the country of honour. The relationship between our two nations in the realm of innovation is understandable, but it is vital that the enthusiasm for technological progress does not overshadow our shared commitment to protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions.

This commitment lies at the heart of a long-standing connection between our countries, which notably led to the creation of UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Canada was the first to ratify this international convention, with France following shortly after. Today, it has been ratified by more than 155 parties, recognizing the dual nature—both economic and cultural—of cultural goods and services.

In both Canada and France, this convention has recently been leveraged to enact laws regulating the activities of major streaming multinationals ensuring their contribution to the financing and promotion of local cultural productions.

In the era of generative artificial intelligence, this convention proved more relevant than ever. For the Canadian and French Coalitions for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, collectively representing hundreds of thousands of artists and cultural enterprises, this renewed France-Canada alliance centered on innovation serves as a reminder to remain vigilant.

Over the past year, both countries have seen their cultural sectors mobilize vigorously to ensure that national ambitions for innovation do not come at the expense of protecting creators and rights holders. The coalitions firmly believe that innovation and creativity must work together to thrive for the benefit of all.

In France, the adoption of the European AI Law last April marked significant progress particularly in terms of trans-

parency, while in Canada, legislative efforts remain ongoing. During last fall's federal consultations on the impact of generative AI on Canada's Copyright Act, AI developers sought an exception to use the works and productions of Canadian artists and cultural enterprises for system training without consent or compensation. The Canadian Coalition firmly opposed this demand.

Last winter, after two years of consultations on Bill C-27 concerning Artificial Intelligence and Data, during which the cultural sector's concerns were largely ignored, the Canadian Coalition and some of its members were finally able to submit amendment requests. The organization is now calling on Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne to resume the review of this crucial bill,

and to introduce amendments, including a requirement for AI developers to publish detailed records of the works and productions used to train their systems.

On Sept. 12, the Canadian cultural sector participated in ALL IN for the second time, driven by the commitment of the Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and the support of Quebec's Ministry of Culture and Communications. This major event, organized by Scale AI in collaboration with MILA and CEIMIA, presented an opportunity to highlight the potential of AI for cultural ecosystems, both locally and globally, while also acknowledging its significant risks, and presenting concrete solutions for their mitigation. It should also be a moment to remind everyone that France and Canada have long been recognized for their ability to innovate while celebrating human artistry and valuing the contributions of creators.

Hélène Messier and Bill Skolnik,
 co-chairs of the Canadian Coalition
 for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions
 and
Pascal Rogard,
 chair of the French Coalition for
 Cultural Diversity



Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne, pictured on the Hill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



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Trump's political effigy should read 'Let them eat dog'

The debate moderator rebutted the pet-eating immigrants claim, but that didn't faze Trump, who said he'd seen the carnivorous behaviour talked about on TV.

Sheila Copps

Copps' Corner



OTTAWA—I ate dawg to celebrate the debate-thrashing administered to former president Donald Trump by future president Kamala Harris.

My dawg wasn't real. It was a hot dog confection created by the team at Tavern on the Falls on Sussex Drive in the nation's capital.

Called da dawg, it includes corned beef and sauerkraut atop the large steamy that the restaurant is known for.

This dawg choice was perfectly timed because everyone was talking about Trump's bizarre debate claim that dogs and cats were being eaten by immigrants who should not have been let into the United States. Trump literally screamed that illegal immigrants were eating people's pets in Ohio.

ABC's debate co-moderator David Muir immediately rebutted the claim saying that Springfield city manager Bryan Heck had already laid waste to that false accusation. That didn't faze Trump. He said he had even seen the carnivorous behaviour being discussed on television.

Trump was referring to a discredited internet claim that Haitian immigrants were kidnapping people's pets to cook them for dinner.

That internet nugget had been peddled by his running mate J.D. Vance who was reported to have clarified the pet-eating rumours might have been false.

Trump's shouts about eating dogs prompted Harris to laugh

out loud, which spiked Trump's temperature even further.

Even when the debate's subject matter was supposed to be delving into other issues like economic policy, Trump focused his pitch almost exclusively on Democratic immigration policies that he claims have let millions of criminals into the country.

He went on to say that the crime rate around the world is going down because Harris and U.S. President Joe Biden have created border policies that are letting all foreign lawbreakers to move to the United States. He said that was causing a spike in American crime.

When Muir pointed out that the American crime rate had gone down, Trump ignored that fact and simply pointed to his own experience, declaring he had taken a bullet in the head because of Harris' policies.

Trump was referring to the assassination attempt on July 13 where his ear was allegedly grazed by a bullet that killed a rally supporter but he was saved because he moved his head at the last minute.

His ear appeared fully intact on debate night. Sporting a new haircut, the side of his head was

visible. No tear or scarring is visible on the lobe.

Trump trumpeted his near-death experience, but didn't seem too out of sorts until Harris mentioned how many people were leaving his rallies from boredom.

The former president kept his lips pursed throughout that line of attack, and went on to waste valuable airtime explaining how his crowds were bigger than hers, and how much he was loved by the people while she was hated, even by President Biden.

Harris was deftly able to bait her opponent on a number of issues, but also managed to engage in economic issues in support of small business and housing.

She repeated her positive claim that she would be running an "opportunity economy" while in government, expanding the child tax credit, and lowering prices for food and prescription drugs.

She also peppered Trump with questions about his inconsistent position on abortion. He recently said he would oppose a Florida referendum banning abortions after six weeks into a pregnancy, and then reversed his position the following day.

For her part, Harris agreed to reinstate a national policy to take the abortion decision out of the hands of government and give it back to the women whose bodies are affected.

She went on to accuse Trump of currying favour with dictators who could easily seduce him with flattery and favours.

Trump helped make her point by telling his audience that he has the support of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban who is known as an autocratic strongman cosying up to the Russians.

Trump also dodged questions about whether he supported Ukrainians in their fight for survival following a Russian invasion of their sovereign territory.

When asked repeatedly whether he supported Ukraine, the former president simply ignored the question, and repeated that he would have the issue solved before the presidential swearing-in if he were elected president.

All the post-debate punditry seemed to say that Trump was badly beaten by a better-prepared, calmer Harris who was more presidential in demeanour.

The former president was more into personal attacks than in convincing Americans he was fit to govern.

If he is defeated, Trump's political effigy should read "Let them eat dog."

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

The Hill Times

Poilievre didn't bully Singh into breaking Liberal deal

I'd suggest Pierre Poilievre likely knew Jagmeet Singh would inevitably cancel the deal with the Liberals this fall, which is why he ran his attack ads in the summer. He wanted to take credit for what was going to happen anyway.

Gerry Nicholls

Post Partisan Pundit



OKAVILLE, ONT.—Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre is benefiting from a common logical fallacy, specifically



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, left, and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh. Poilievre is benefiting from a common logical fallacy, specifically the one referred to as 'causation implying correlation,' writes Gerry Nicholls. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

the one referred to as "causation implying correlation."

You know about it, right?

It happens when people assume two factors are causally related to one another even though there's no proof of such a connection, i.e., "every time I wear my lucky hat, the Toronto Blue Jays win; therefore, my hat must be the key to their success!"

And, yes, this particular fallacy began to surface in media commentary soon after NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh announced last week he was "ripping up" his supply-and-confidence agreement with the Liberal minority government, which had helped keep

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in power.

Indeed, almost immediately after this happened, pundits—without any evidence—began to suggest Singh's decision to pull the plug on the deal was him reacting to the Conservative Party's recent media blitz, which had blasted the NDP for propping up the Liberals.

For instance, journalist Max Fawcett observed, "If anything, Singh's decision is a show of weakness rather than strength, given that it comes on the heels of Poilievre's (successful, it seems) attempts to bully him into breaking faith with the government."

Likewise, former CBC journalist Don Newman, citing a letter Poilievre wrote to Singh urging him to terminate his agreement with the Liberals, wrote, "For his sake, I hope federal New Democratic Leader Jagmeet Singh doesn't receive a letter from Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre telling him he should jump off the Peace Tower to see if he can fly."

So, yes, it seems both Fawcett and Newman are assuming Singh's decision to break up his alliance with the Liberals was a direct result of Conservative Party pressure.

But was it?

To my mind, the answer to that question is a definite no.

Mind you, before I explain why that's the case, we first need to acknowledge that the Conservative attacks on the NDP were, in fact, pretty tough.

Those are the ads, keep in mind, which labeled the NDP leader as "sell-out Singh."

Ouch!

What's more, Poilievre repeated the Conservative attacks in his highly-publicized letter to Singh.

But I'd argue it's still a stretch to argue the Conservative campaign—harsh as it was—had any impact on Singh's decision to change course.

For one thing, I strongly suspect Poilievre launched his attack against Singh mainly because his polling numbers were telling him the NDP's deal with the Liberals was highly unpopular.

If Poilievre's polls were saying that, doesn't it make sense that Singh's own polls were telling him the exact same thing, that his deal with the Liberals was political poison?

And if that's the case, doesn't it also make sense that Singh would have cancelled his agreement with the Liberals even if the Conservatives had never raised the issue?

My point is, Singh's decision was based on a rational, pragmatic political calculation.

He wasn't bullied into it.

Yet, if I'm in the Conservative camp, I'm more than happy if the Fawcetts and Newmans of the world spin the idea that Singh is frightened of Poilievre, and that somehow the Conservative leader is adeptly moving the playing pieces on the board.

After all, that helps create the impression that Poilievre is some sort of genius.

Heck, I'd even suggest Poilievre likely knew Singh would inevitably cancel the deal with the Liberals this fall, which is why he ran his attack ads on the NDP in the summer.

Essentially, he wanted to position himself to take credit for what was going to happen anyway.

Not a bad plan, even if it depends on a logical fallacy.

Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.

The Hill Times

Comment Back to Parliament

Harris' flip-flops small potatoes compared to Trump's tawdry rap sheet



Kamala Harris, left, and Donald Trump took part in a televised debate last week, watched by 67.1 million people. Kamala came out the champ, and Trump, the chump, writes Michael Harris, although that was not the just the decision of most news agencies, including *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. Photographs courtesy of Wikimedia Commons/Flickr and Gage Skidmore/Flickr

For those holding back from supporting Kamala Harris because they don't know what she stands for, here is the question: what more do American voters have to know about the former president before deciding it would be hard to find a worse candidate to run the world's greatest democracy than Donald Trump?

Michael Harris

Harris



HALIFAX—Thanks to Donald Trump, the U.S. presidential election is turning into comedy in hot pursuit of farce.

To some extent, that is to be expected in an age where politics, like journalism, is morphing from information into entertainment.

But the recent presidential debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, watched by 67.1 million people, showcased how risible the whole process has become.

The debate was hyped like a heavyweight title fight. It had everything but the weigh-in. Weeks of pre-bout coverage, endless speculation about the outcome, and keen anticipation. Finally, it was time for the combatants to climb into the ring.

Harris came out the champ, and Trump the chump. That was not just the decision of most news agencies, including *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*—Trump himself confirmed the result by his own actions.

After losing, he headed over to Fox News for a post-debate foot rub, complaining that it had been three against one in front of the cameras. Those “enemies of the people,” the press, had tipped the scales against him again.

The false and pathetic whine that ABC hosts David Muir and Linsey Davis were “far-left moderators,” who picked on Trump, was quickly echoed by flunkies at Fox. For the Foxies, picking on someone apparently means fact-checking.

Trump toadies, U.S. Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio,

quickly called the ABC debate a “disgrace” to journalism. Both men know more about Egyptian architecture than they do about journalism.

It was yet another re-run of the old Trump movie. When he loses, whether at the polls or in court, Trump and his cronies cry foul, fraud or hoax. Why? As he said last week, referring to himself in the third-person, “Trump is never wrong.”

Normally when you win, whether in a boxing match or a debate, it's a more or less settled moment. On that day, and until the next rumble, you bested your opponent and get to wear the belt. But much of the coverage of Kamala Harris' win was oddly grudging. Some of it was facetiously conditional.

Though most commentators awarded the match to Harris, the judgment came with a caveat; it was not at all certain that her debate performance would affect the election. She still had a long way to go and a lot to prove.

As evidence, many of the news agencies conducted post-debate straw polls of voters in swing states. A number of those interviewed complained that they still didn't know enough about Harris to vote for her. She had yet to show them who she was and what she believed.

That reaction seems more than a little disingenuous when you consider that Kamala Harris

has been in the public eye for a long time. She has served as a district attorney, attorney general of California, a senator, and, for the last three-and-a-half years, vice-president of the United States. No scandals and just a steady assumption of greater and greater public responsibility.

But assuming some voters honestly need to know more about Harris before voting for her, they are ignoring another obvious issue. What do they already know about Donald Trump?

They know that he was twice impeached in his one-term presidency.

They know that he was the most prolific liar in presidential history.

They know that he promised to balance the books, and instead added \$US8-trillion to the national debt.

They know that while a million Americans were dying during the COVID-19 pandemic, he recommended injecting bleach to counter the virus.

They know that the inner circle in his own administration, including his vice-president and defence secretary, can't today “in conscience” vote for him, and don't think he's fit for office.

They know that he is a convicted felon, awaiting sentencing on 34 counts of falsifying business records to pay hush money to a porn-star.

They know he was found liable for sexual abuse on journalist

E. Jean Carroll that one judge called “rape.”

They know he boasted about grabbing women by their private parts, and getting away with it because he was famous.

They know he has been indicted for unleashing a violent mob on the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to overturn the result of a free and fair election.

They know that Special Prosecutor Jack Smith is appealing to the 11th Circuit Court the decision of a Trump-friendly judge in Florida to throw out the classified documents case against the former president.

They know he stacked the U.S. Supreme Court with arch-conservatives of dubious integrity.

The Trump court struck down *Roe v. Wade*, ending the constitutional right of women in the U.S. to access an abortion. That same court granted the former president a substantial degree of immunity from prosecution.

They know he called Russia's invasion of Ukraine a “brilliant” move by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

They know that he exchanged what he characterized as “love letters” with North Korean tyrant Kim Jong-Un.

They know that one of his favourite world leaders is Hungary's Viktor Orban, the champion of illiberal democracy and authoritarianism.

They know that during his presidency, he rolled back more than 125 measures to protect the environment, and that he plans to “drill, baby, drill” if re-elected.

They know he has vowed to round up and deport millions of people now living in the United States.

They know that he plans to impose a 100 per cent tariff on any country that moves away from using the U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency. Investment banks and bond rating agencies like Goldman Sachs and Moody's say such a policy would trigger massive inflation for U.S. consumers.

And, thanks to the recent ABC debate, they now know two more things. He believes that Harris isn't really Black, and he thinks that immigrants are abducting and eating the pets of the good people of Springfield, Ohio. No, really.

It is the right and duty of citizens to learn as much as they can about any candidate who wants to govern their country. It is fair to ask Harris about policy reversals on issues like building the wall on the southern border, and fracking.

But for those holding back from supporting Harris because they don't know what she stands for, here is the question: what more do American voters have to know about the former president before deciding it would be hard to find a worse candidate to run the world's greatest democracy than Trump?

Harris' flip-flops are small potatoes compared to Trump's tawdry rap sheet.

Michael Harris is an award-winning author and journalist.

The Hill Times

How to know when media are ‘sanewashing’ politics



If Donald Trump was your uncle at the family dinner talking smack, you'd be incredulous, writes Rose LeMay. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons/DonkeyHotey

It's time we stopped the embarrassed and awkward bystanding when politicians blather nonsense and conspiracies.

Rose
LeMay

Stories, Myths,
and Truths



OTTAWA—The newest term of the day is “sanewashing”—when media does backflips to try to logically re-interpret into policy what former U.S. president Donald Trump says when all he really did was bafflegab.

Picture *The Muppets* and the “Mahna Mahna” song—now you’ll never get that song out of your head today! The character with the orange hair is about 20 seconds into his song and goes completely off-script singing nonsense, and his backup singers the Snowths look at him with incredulity.

It’s pretty difficult to not look incredulously on as Trump sounds mad as a hatter. How *did* we get here, after all? How has the Republican Party fallen so far? If he was your uncle at the family dinner talking smack, you’d be incredulous. Offended. You probably would ask him to stop that in front of the kids, and likely ask him to leave.

But then the U.S. media and some on this side of the border try to fit his square

debate meanderings into the round shape of policy, and try as they might, it doesn’t fit. Sanewashing does nobody any good, least of all the public. It’s a bit like rationalizing away bad behaviour—it doesn’t resolve anything, all it does is tell others that bad behaviour has no consequence.

For all the Republican/conservative screams about an alleged liberal bias in the media, let’s be clear that it doesn’t

exist. Otherwise we would have seen 10 media outlets question Trump’s fitness for duty.

Do we have a similar problem of sanewashing politicians in Canada? Well, a few examples come to mind. Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre continues to spin conspiracy theories for applause. No, the World Economic Forum is not controlling people’s minds. Even former prime min-

ister Stephen Harper saw the benefit of networking and learning on an international level, and continues to do so.

No, the government is not invading people’s privacy and financial decisions with a proposed digital ID. Good lord, the government can barely control its own finances, and totally messed up the First Nations status card system with years-long backlogs, so good luck with a digital ID!

Trump has inflamed the conspiracy theorists, as well as Americans who feel left out. Let’s be clear, lots of Americans are left out of economic growth and a sense of belonging. But we have that problem here in Canada.

The whole impetus of reconciliation is to build belonging for Indigenous Peoples. So we are also at risk in Canada of a political leader banking on the fears of those who feel left out, using conspiracy to stoke those fears into votes, but never actually dealing with the policy issue of lack of inclusion. Inclusion is for all, not just for the convoy donations, or the Bay Street donations, just to balance the parties.

Just once, I’d love to see a national political leader chasing Indigenous votes and inclusion with the same enthusiasm as Bay Street or Convoy people.

It is not a future and far-away danger if white supremacists infiltrate a national political party, it’s a here-and-now danger for anybody they target—Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ2S+, racial minorities, and strong women who lead. It’s a here-and-now problem for all of us.

This is not the time to uncomfortably ignore the embarrassing uncle at dinner. This is the time to spell out what professional and ethical behaviour is expected from politics.

It’s time we stopped the embarrassed and awkward bystanding when politicians blather nonsense and conspiracies. We can’t be part of the problem here.

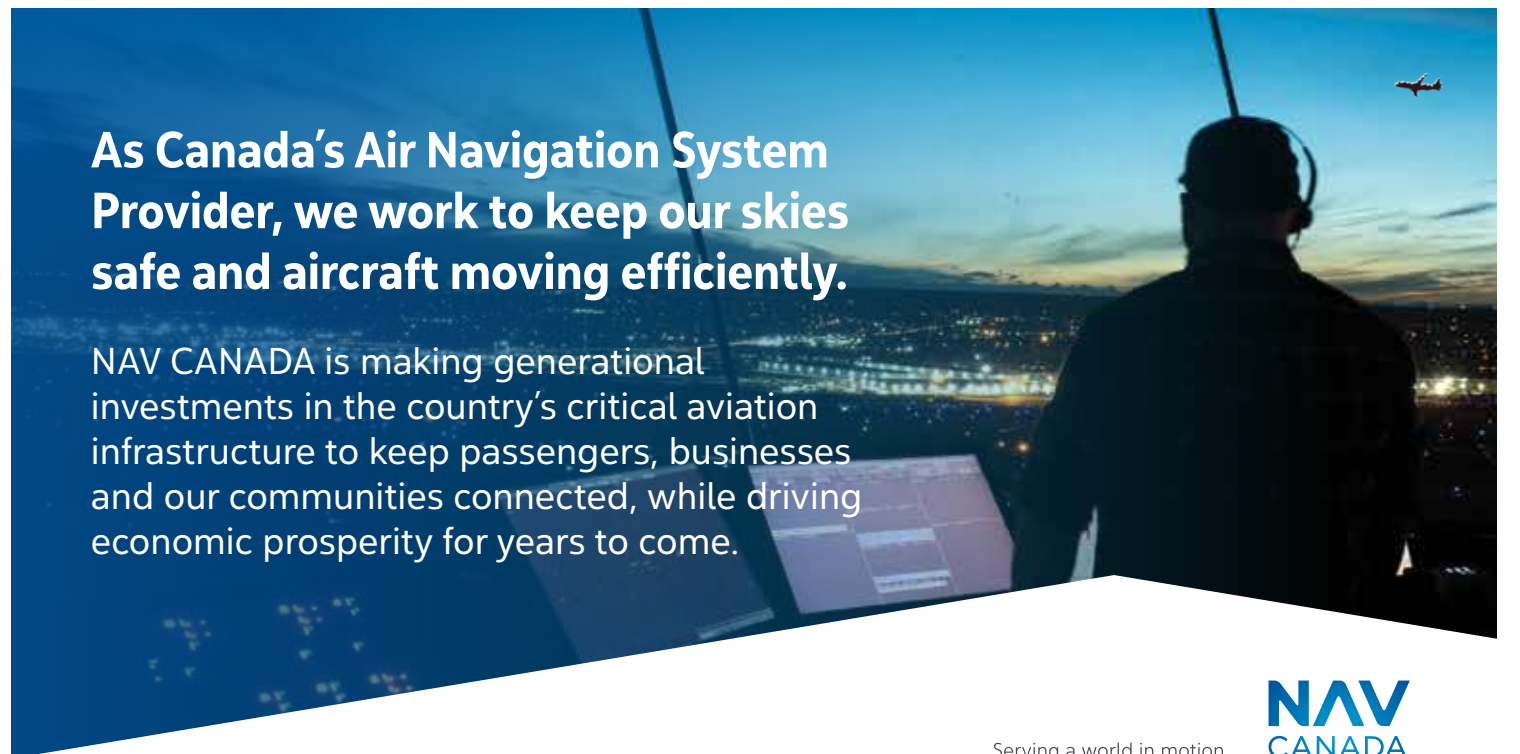
How can we be part of a solution? How can we hold political leaders to the standard of facts and evidence?

Rose LeMay is Tlingit from the West Coast and the CEO of the Indigenous Reconciliation Group. She writes twice a month about Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation. In Tlingit worldview, the stories are the knowledge system, sometimes told through myth and sometimes contradicting the myths told by others. But always with at least some truth.

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Opinion Back to Parliament



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently dodged a direct question about Canada's arms exports to Israel, pivoting instead to his standard rhetoric that 'Israel has a right to defend itself.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade and photo illustration by Neena Singhal

Canada has failed to implement a meaningful arms embargo on Israel

Taha Ghayyur &

Rachel Small

Opinion



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently dodged a direct question about Canada's arms exports to Israel, pivoting instead to his standard rhetoric that "Israel has a right to defend itself." This deflection speaks volumes as Ottawa continues to allow weapons shipments to Israel through American loopholes, despite public claims to the contrary. After meeting with South African Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola, Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly stated that the government is urging Israel to comply with the International Court of Justice's orders to prevent genocide in Gaza, and insisted arms sales had been halted. However, her assurances ring hollow against the backdrop of Ottawa's continued export of arms to Israel through existing permits and loopholes, revealing a troubling hypocrisy.

A recently uncovered escape clause exposes millions of dollars' worth of Canadian explosives produced at a General Dynamics factory in Quebec are being routed to Israel via the United States.

In March 2024, Parliament passed a non-binding motion to cease arms exports to Israel, a response to the violence in Gaza that has claimed over 40,000 Palestinian lives, most of them women and children. Yet, despite this clear pledge, Ottawa's failure to halt these deals not only undermines Parliament and our nation's global standing, but also erodes confidence within Trudeau's own ranks.

For months, Canadians have been calling for a comprehensive arms embargo on Israel. On Aug. 20, during the "Arms Embargo Now" Day of Action, thousands participated in protests, letters, and calls demanding decisive action to end the flow of all military goods to and from Israel. In response to Trudeau's handling of Gaza, 52 Liberal staffers have boycotted the LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, Que., byelection, demanding that the prime minister revoke existing arms export permits

to Israel, and close the loopholes that allow these exports to continue.

As Israeli forces bomb schools, hospitals, and refugee camps in Gaza, Canadian-made parts are used in these attacks. The ongoing bloodshed, with its ever-rising death toll, underscores our country's complicity in this violence.

The call for an arms embargo is more urgent than ever. UN experts have named Canada as a military exporter potentially liable for aiding war crimes, and the UN Human Rights Council has urged all nations to impose an embargo on Israel. Yet, our government's refusal to cancel existing arms export permits and its continued purchase of Israeli weapons show a blatant disregard for these demands. Under the Arms Trade Treaty, Canada is required to halt military exports when there's a substantial risk of serious violations of humanitarian or human rights law. Given Israel's systematic assaults on Gaza, this risk is undeniable.

Under the Genocide Convention, Canada is legally obliged to "prevent and punish" the crime of genocide. In January 2024, the International Court of Justice ruled

that there is a "plausible" case that Israel is committing acts of genocide in Gaza, and that Palestinians face a "real and imminent risk" of genocide. This ruling puts Canada on notice that, as a party to the Genocide Convention, our government must take all necessary actions to prevent genocide in Gaza.

Yet, our country's actions—or lack thereof—are stark. Between October and December 2023, Canada approved \$28.5-million in military exports to Israel, a figure surpassing annual totals for the past three decades. Since Trudeau assumed office in 2015, Canadian firms have exported an estimated \$150-million in military goods to Israel, effectively weaponizing the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) operations against civilians in Gaza. Those figures exclude the majority of Canada's military exports to Israel, which exploit a loophole that allows them to be exported, untracked, and unreported, to the U.S. before being sent to Israel. Such exports include Canadian-made components for Lockheed Martin's F-35s, Boeing's F-15s, and Apache helicopters—among the primary

weapons systems used by Israel to bomb Gaza.

Canada imported over \$130-million in arms from Israel between 2018 and 2022, making it Israel's sixth-largest arms customer. In December, even after Israel had massacred nearly 20,000 Palestinians, Defence Minister Bill Blair announced a \$43-million deal to purchase Spike LR2 missiles from Israeli state-owned Rafael—the same missiles the IDF is using in Gaza. By funding an industry complicit in these attacks on Gaza and violations of international law, Canada deepens its involvement in these atrocities.

Canada's failure to implement a comprehensive arms embargo on Israel is not just a policy failure—it is a betrayal of its legal obligations, its commitments to Canadians, and its moral responsibility to protect innocent lives. Canada must halt all shipments from previously approved exports, cancel existing permits, and close loopholes allowing arms to reach Israel via the U.S.

The time for half-measures and excuses is over. Canada must take immediate and decisive action to stop the flow of arms to and from Israel and uphold the principles of justice and human rights it claims to stand for. Anything less is an endorsement of the ongoing atrocities.

Taha Ghayyur is the executive director of Justice for All Canada, a human rights and advocacy organization dedicated to preventing genocide. Rachel Small is the Canada organizer for World BEYOND War, a global movement advocating for the abolition of war and the replacement of violent conflict with just and sustainable peace.

The Hill Times

Conservatives' sympathy for public servants wanting to work from home will likely be low

If the polls are to be believed, the Conservatives are poised to form government following the next election. They have already indicated their dismay about the size of the public service, and questioned its competence as an institution to deliver services to Canadians.

Lori
Turnbull

Opinion



OTTAWA—Federal public service employees have been mandated by the Treasury Board to return to the office for at least three days a week. This decision is being met with resistance from unions, one of which has won a judicial review of the decision in Federal Court. The tone of discussions on Reddit on this topic is charged with anger and frustration. Some public servants decry being forced back to the office for an extra day as a regressive act by an employer that has not come to terms with the realities of a digital age.

The Treasury Board must shoulder blame for the mixed and



Jennifer Carr, president of PIPSC, pictured Sept. 9, 2024, at a rally for public servants' remote work rights outside 365 Laurier Avenue West in Ottawa, Immigration and Citizenship Canada. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

muddled messages sent to staff as workplaces reopened after the COVID pandemic period, during which most of the public service worked from home. The employer can be excused for not having a standard playbook on how to manage this transition. The federal public service is a huge organization that is not monolithic; a one-size-fits-all approach would not have worked.

But even with that being said, the response seemed particularly bungled. After too much silence from the centre of government, the first initial messages were to let individual departmental deputies decide on how best to manage their workplaces. This created an asymmetrical application which sowed confusion and a degree of jealousy as some had to go work and others didn't (not to

mention frustration among many frontline workers who never had the option to stay at home in the first place). Senior officials and local politicians further muddled the waters by suggesting that return to work wasn't simply about productivity and service delivery, but rather that public servants had a broader societal responsibility to support the rebuilding of local economies by shopping and eating at downtown restaurants.

The federal public service is complex entity and, within it, there are many different realities, jobs, and workplace cultures. There are jobs that lend themselves to remote work which is why, prior to COVID, the public service had experience with tele-work agreements. It used to be clear, however, that the onus was on the employee to make the

case for remote work. Intuitively, this makes sense. The employer needs to have the authority to set the terms and conditions of employment in ways that serve the purposes of the organization. If you don't like the workplace requirements, then perhaps that job is not for you.

But the COVID experience seems to have obscured this fact—or reversed it entirely. There appears to be a growing belief among significant pockets of the public service that it is the employer that needs to justify their desire to enforce in-person work arrangements—even if those were the terms and conditions of employment to which everyone had previously agreed.

One of the key problems with this issue is that both sides are pointing to largely unproven

“evidence” to support their positions. The unions suggest that everything is fine, that workers are getting the job done, and that the COVID experience has proven that video conferencing works. The employer counters with arguments about productivity and collaboration. Those in favour of more in-person office work argue that skills are best learned through osmosis by working in close proximity to colleagues, and that this helps to build a positive work culture.

While there may be merit to both sides of the argument, many Canadians—in both the private sector, and the provincial and municipal public sectors—are simply mystified that this conversation is taking place at all.

For the vast majority of working Canadians, getting up, getting dressed and going to work is an indispensable part of having a job. In Don Draper's famous line from AMC's *Mad Men*: “That's what the money is for.” Public servants do themselves no favours when complaining that going back to the office will mean paying for parking or daycare—things which Canadian workers across the employment spectrum must accept. In some respects, one cannot help but get the impression that many public servants exist in a professional reality far removed from those that they are serving.

The clerk of the Privy Council recently launched a public service-wide conversation on what it means to be a public servant, and the values and ethics that underpin the institution and its work. This is a timely and important exercise. This discussion is also taking place in a period of potential political change.

If the polls are to be believed, the Conservatives are poised to form government following the next election. They have already indicated their dismay about the size of the public service, and questioned its competence as an institution to deliver services to Canadians. One can imagine the levels of sympathy for public servants wanting to work from home will be low.

Lori Turnbull is a senior adviser at the Institute on Governance. *The Hill Times*



Andrea Joya, president of CAPE Local 522, pictured Sept. 9, 2024, with other public servants protesting outside 365 Laurier Avenue West, at Immigration and Citizenship Canada. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia



Nathan Prier, president of CAPE, pictured Sept. 9, 2024, at a rally at 365 Laurier Avenue West in Ottawa. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

Opinion Back to Parliament



Participants in the Capital Pride parade in Ottawa on Aug. 25. Our rallying cry is: 'No human is illegal, Black lives matter, science is real, queer and trans youth homelessness is a policy failure, and there is no Pride in antisemitism,' write Jess Burke, Rabbi Daniel Mikelberg, and Jesse Samuels. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson

Our Pride embraces, cares for, and protects all at-risk communities, and denounces hate

Swayed by a vocal minority who oppose the existence of Jews and the Jewish State, Pride groups have been drawn into bandwagon activism and virtue signalling.

Jess Burke, Daniel Mikelberg & Jesse Samuels

Opinion



“Pride was a protest,” we’re reminded, referring to its origins as a reaction to the New York City Police Department’s brutality when it raided a gay bar in Manhattan on June 28, 1969, which sparked a global liberation movement for gender and sexual diversity. Since then, Pride has evolved into a celebration with slogans like “You belong” and “Love wins,” promoting radical

inclusion, and denouncing hate. We are a queer parent, activist, and trades worker; a community spiritual leader, rabbi and gay dad; and an advocate, antisemitism expert, and Israeli Canadian. We’ve been part of the movement our entire lives.

Active in queer life and advocacy, the intersectional queer Jewish community has contributed to key victories like ending the gbMSM blood ban, enhancing protections for transgender Canadians, and banning conversion therapy. Now, however, spaces where we devoutly lived, worked, and volunteered have rejected us based on our ethnicity, culture, religion, and national origin.

How did Pride shift from protesting police brutality to protesting Jews and Israel’s right to exist, chanting “Globalize the Intifada” or “No Zionists allowed”? How, under the guise of human rights, did most Prides import one conflict while ignoring all others? No Jews, no news?

Swayed by a vocal minority who oppose the existence of Jews and the Jewish State, Pride organizations have been drawn into bandwagon activism and virtue signalling. Despite knowing little about the conflict, they’ve issued

one-sided, divisive statements recycling Hamas propaganda and committing to firm—but blind—stances that foster infighting and incite hate.

For nearly a year, we’ve mourned the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, prayed for those held hostage, and witnessed in anguish the civilian tragedy in Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Gaza. As we grieved, we yearned for Jewish and Palestinian states to coexist peacefully, for mutual recognition and healing. At a time when we sought hope and unity, Pride’s reckless statements on the Middle East crisis only deepened our pain.

This Pride season was rife with antisemitism and destructive actions—though there was a bright note—that left queer Jews and Israelis feeling rejected from the community where we once felt safe and found refuge.

2SLGBTQIA+ Jewish charity, Keshet, was forced out of London Pride following domestic terror threats.

Toronto’s Jewish delegation marched with a two-to-one private security contingent (costing thousands of dollars), whereas Pride Montreal allocated security

for the Jewish delegation and denounced hate.

Pride Toronto allowed extremists to hijack and shut down the largest parade in Canada.

Fierté Capital Pride committed to the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions movement, violating Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy, and released a statement so antisemitic it caused public uproar and mass withdrawal of support.

Reminiscent of the U.S.S.R.’s use of “anti-Zionism” to persecute Jews, queer clubs in Vancouver required attendees to sign anti-Zionist declarations.

In 2024, queer Jews wondered if they’d be safe wearing kippot or raising rainbow flags bearing Stars of David. As a queer community acquainted with the pain of hiding our identities, how can we now operate within a framework that makes Jews feel so unsafe, so marginalized, and so unprotected?

While we managed to mitigate concerns of physical safety marching as visibly Jewish delegations, we are left to contend with psychological harm, and the normalization of systemic, ideological hate. We will not hide our identities, or return to the closet. We stand with our community,

including the founding members of Temple Israel in Ottawa, Jewish lesbians who organized anti-racism workshops in Vancouver, and yes, queer Israeli Jews, like Omer Ohana, whose almost husband, Maj. Sagi Golan, was murdered fighting terrorists at Kibbutz Be’eri just 13 days before their wedding. We fight for justice, not despite our identities, but because of it.

We call on Pride organizations and the wider 2SLGBTQIA+ community to recognize, address, combat, and unlearn antisemitism just as they’ve endeavoured to unlearn other oppressions. We ask them to stop recycling propaganda, and to refute insidious claims of “pinkwashing” that suggest Israel only pretends to support 2SLGBTQIA+ human rights to further atrocities. We ask them to stop dehumanizing Jews and Israelis, to condemn incitements to violence, and—just as they do for other minorities—allow Jews to define antisemitism, Zionism, and anti-Zionism. We urge them to acknowledge our pain, to learn about us, and to care for us. We ask that they uphold Pride’s vision, mission, and mandates, as well as Canadian values and the principles of pluralism.

Our Pride embraces, cares for, and protects all at-risk communities, and denounces hate. Our rallying cry is: “No human is illegal, Black lives matter, science is real, queer and trans youth homelessness is a policy failure, and there is no Pride in antisemitism.”

We believe Pride can—and should—champion this. We hope you’ll join us.

Jess Burke is the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs’s director of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and liaison to 2SLGBTQIA+ Partnerships. Rabbi Daniel Mikelberg is the senior rabbi of Temple Israel (Ottawa). Jesse Samuels works with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

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Comment Back to Parliament

Economic challenges need more than pages for next Liberal platform

Appointing Mark Carney to a Leader's Task Force on Economic Growth smacks of desperation, with a government urgently in search of something that will keep it in power, writes David Crane. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia



Mark Carney's task force may improve things at the margins, but we will need much more than a short-term project.

David Crane

Canada & the 21st Century



TORONTO—We don't know what Mark Carney and his Leader's Task Force on Economic Growth will deliver, or what impact if any it may have on Budget 2025—if there is one.

What we do know is that the exercise smacks of desperation with a government urgently in search of something that will keep it in power.

But the challenge is much bigger than the next Liberal platform. Without a 21st-century

economy there will be little room for pay increases, and not enough money for a decent health-care system. We could become an economic has-been.

So the country desperately needs to up its game to become a truly innovative nation with a much higher level of productivity growth. Our record in recent years has been appalling, and threatens the ability of the country to successfully maintain the Canadian way of life, and to meet public expectations on future well-being.

Yet there has been little time—and no serious leadership—in making the crucial investments and designing the effective policies for long-term success in a low-carbon, knowledge-based world, one where investment in intangibles—such as research, marketing, software and intellectual property—and in services matter more than ever. By investing more in intangibles, we are more likely to invest in advanced manufacturing.

In her 2022 budget speech, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland described Canada's miserable performance in productivity and

innovation as “the Achilles heel of the Canadian economy.” But she has never presented a coherent innovation-led growth strategy for the nation. Disconnected programs are not a strategy. Building a growth plan for a new kind of world has at best been a scatter-shot exercise. Lots of consulting money for McKinsey, but not much in the way of improved performance.

Last March, the Bank of Canada's Senior Deputy Governor, Carolyn Rogers, described our poor economic performance as “an emergency,” adding “it's time to break the glass.” Rogers was widely praised, and generated headlines for her speech. But, like the government, our central bank had largely ignored the productivity and innovation crisis for more than a decade. Rather than praise, the Bank of Canada deserves criticism for neglecting its responsibility to provide research and leadership on the economy.

The real question on the Rogers speech should have been: “What took you so long?”

Nor is the need for a better economy at the centre of serious political debate in Canada. In the

past year, our MPs on the House Industry Committee couldn't be bothered to spend even one hour examining the multi-billion-dollar budget of the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, instead giving it a rubber-stamp of approval without any scrutiny. And while innovation and productivity are central to the kind of economy needed for a future decent life, neither opposition party—Conservative or New Democrat—has offered Canadians a serious growth strategy.

Business does sound off on the issue, but too often this is largely to promote the oil and gas industry, urge less regulation, call for lower taxes and—above all—don't do anything the Americans might not like. But there is a lack of serious, strategic business leadership in Canada. You are unlikely to find many new ideas that are more than self-serving on Bay Street. Do we need better people running our businesses?

There are active business lobbies—the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Business Council of Canada, for example. But given the large voice that foreign firms have in these groups,

they are compromised in their ability to voice policies opposed by foreign multinationals. The only business group that voices a strong pro-Canada position is the Council of Canadian Innovators, which represents the locally owned tech sector.

The Business Council recently issued a report, *Engines of growth*, that, typically, is eager on aspiration. But it falls short on how to turn aspirations into accomplishments.

Canada has too few large-scale businesses—we are overweight in small and midsize companies—the report says, warning, “not competing at scale in advanced industries means Canada will remain a low-innovation economy, and, as a result, continue to slip on the global competitiveness scale. To succeed, the country must focus on innovation in industries where it has a comparative advantage, such as energy, agriculture, infrastructure and biotechnology.”

But how?

While some of its thinking is on the right track, the report falls short on what Canada really needs: how to create strong domestically-controlled firms that are globally competitive and provide good jobs, rather than making Canada even more of a branch-plant economy where the profits and knowledge flow to and enrich foreign parent companies.

It fails to recognize the need for an intensive review of the Canadian financial system, for example, which in its current structure fails to finance, with long-term patient capital, the scaling up of the best small and midsize home-grown businesses so they can become future Canadian champions controlled and owned here.

Nor is there adequate discussion of the importance for small growth companies to grow by working with government or large firms as lead customers, or new arrangements such as manufacturing extension services that provide the facilities for small companies to test new technologies.

We need big and more innovative ideas in how to be more innovative. The goal should be to create the wealth-creating capacity in Canada, based on ownership of data and intellectual property that enables our businesses to flourish in the global economy if we are to have quality health care and education, and affordable housing and infrastructure.

But this also means the benefits must be widely shared, and that what we do must be environmentally sustainable.

We are not on that path today. Carney's task force may improve things at the margins. But we will need much more than a short-term project to fill pages in the next Liberal platform. Mario Draghi's new report, *The future of European competitiveness*, is not a bad model for what Canada needs. It's the life chances of future generations we are talking about.

David Crane can be reached at crane@interlog.com.

The Hill Times



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Comment Back to Parliament

Trudeau needs a post-byelection game plan

On the heels of the byelection collapse of a Liberal stronghold in June, a loss of another Liberal-held riding would be a big blow to the prime minister's caché.

Bhagwant Sandhu

Opinion



OTTAWA—Should Prime Minister Justin Trudeau worry about the upcoming byelection in LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, Que.? The answer is yes, and no. It all depends on his game plan before the next general election.

A loss in this riding—made vacant by former Liberal cabinet minister David Lametti's exit from politics earlier this year—would be particularly harmful if the win were to go to Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's team on Sept. 16.

Coming on the heels of the Liberals' byelection collapse in Toronto-St. Paul's, Ont., to the Conservatives back in June, it would be another blow to the prime minister's caché. The chorus of calls for Trudeau's head after that defeat would find new wind. Conjecture about him stepping down would regain speculative power, as would the political scheming by various wannabes desiring to remove him from the helm of the Liberal ship. With the Liberal-NDP supply-and-confidence



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau should be worried about the Bloc and the NDP, his chief rivals in the riding of LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, Que., writes Bhagwant Sandhu. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

agreement broken, Trudeau's minority government already faces the uncertainty of an early election.

Poilievre, needless to say, would have a field day riding the wave of critical coverage—especially if Trudeau loses to the Conservatives. That outcome may not be likely. The Conservatives were a distant fourth-place in the 2021 election that gave Lametti a decisive win with 43 per cent of the vote. Lametti's closest rivals were the Bloc Québécois at 22 per cent, and NDP at 19 per cent, with the Conservatives trailing at seven per cent. Interestingly, the People's Party of Canada garnered three per cent in that

riding, increasing its 2019 total by nearly 2.5 per cent.

This data reveals three interesting points to consider. First, Trudeau clearly needs to be worried about the Bloc and the NDP, his chief rivals in the riding. Their vote banks are motivated. Losing to either one of them would reflect badly, but it wouldn't be fatal. It would signal a need for Trudeau to make policy and rhetorical changes to attract left-leaning voters, have a good ground game, and develop a better plan.

Second, the Conservatives are not competitive. But if they improve their vote-share considerably, they could seal the fate

of Trudeau's declining electoral prospects. Moreover, if Poilievre can exploit this improvement strategically, the national political outcomes would resemble those of an actual win by the Conservatives.

Third, the performance by the People's Party. If it is able to expand support again—especially at the expense of the Conservatives—it could force Poilievre to move more to right-wing populism. Although unlikely, this could help open up more political space for Trudeau.

Still, it is not evident that the prime minister has much of a plan. He has certainly not shared it. What is evident is that it does

not involve a cabinet shuffle—at least not yet. Neither does it involve Trudeau abdicating leadership of the Liberal Party. It does appear to involve policy statements and small-scale public communications events as demonstrated by his low level of engagements this past summer.

Perhaps Trudeau's potential path to victory will become self-evident after the Sept. 16 byelection. A win, for example, might indicate that the calibre of the local candidate is so critical that it cannot be chanced on nomination battles. In LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, the Liberals appointed the well-respected Montreal city councillor Laura Palestini. The bet is her name recognition should pull in the votes, but, privately, the party is reportedly tempering expectations for the anticipated three-way race. If successful, perhaps this formula could be replicated across the country.

A win could also indicate the level of exposure the Trudeau name and image should be given in campaign events. In this byelection, unlike in Toronto-St. Paul's, the Trudeau moniker is being significantly downplayed. Perhaps that's the key to the general election: to play up merits of the local candidate over the Trudeau brand, given the current negative associations.

A July poll of voter intentions in the Montreal riding by Mainstreet Research put the Liberals at 29 per cent, Bloc at 22 per cent, and the NDP at 19. For the Bloc and the NDP, these numbers match the results of the 2021 election. But the Liberal numbers have shrunk by 14 per cent, and 338Canada pegs the riding as a toss-up between his party and the Bloc.

Canadians, meanwhile, peg the personal likeability of Trudeau and all the other party leaders at near or below zero. As Nanos Research notes, we don't find any of the current crop of leaders to be credible. In the final analysis, that—and only that—should be the real cause for worry, for all of us.

Bhagwant Sandhu is a retired director general from the federal public service. He has also held executive positions with the governments of Ontario and British Columbia.

The Hill Times



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Voters want a financial system aligned with climate action



Independent Senator Rosa Galvez introduced Bill S-243, The Climate Aligned Finance Act, in the Senate in March 2022. The bill completed second reading in June 2023, and is currently under consideration by the Senate's Banking, Commerce and the Economy committee. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Some provinces are proactively moving to align their financial systems with climate action. Quebec launched a roadmap for sustainable finance over the summer, and plans to advance a number of core sustainable finance policies. Delivering policies to align finance with climate action is both important and doable.

Yet Canada trails behind international peers in modernizing rules for a more sustainable financial system. The European Union, the United Kingdom, and Australia have made concrete progress with climate finance policy solutions. The U.K. and the EU have clarified that the mandates of their central banks and financial regulators should consider climate change, which is an important lever to ensure the whole economy advances climate action.

All three regions are requiring climate transition plans. The U.K. government committed to require financial institutions and large firms “to develop and implement credible transition plans that align with the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement.” Similar policies in Europe require implementation of a climate transition plan that aligns with the EU’s climate commitments, and Australia plans to advance climate transition plan requirements in the next year.

To keep up with global progress, Canada must act quickly. These underpinnings are important for this nation to seize green job opportunities in the climate transition, and to succeed on climate commitments.

A safer planet and more stable economy are foundational to a better quality of life for people across the country, and Canadians want to see policy that ensures their financial system moves in a sustainable direction. The solutions are being implemented in other jurisdictions, and Canada has its own versions of policies drafted with popular support. Our government needs to prioritize and implement them.

Canada can only meet its climate commitments if the financial sector moves in the same direction. Time is running out. Canadians want policymakers to implement climate aligned financial policy in order to fix this missing piece of our climate plan.

Julie Segal is senior program manager of climate finance at Environmental Defence Canada. She was a member of the advisory committee for Bill S-243, the Climate-Aligned Finance Act, and for the Quebec government’s sustainable finance roadmap.

The Hill Times

Requiring climate transition plans is one key policy, as is clarifying that group leaders should aim to help mitigate climate change and its resulting risks.

country’s climate commitments. Modernizing the mandates of regulators is an important part of this solution so that organizations are held accountable for progress.

Public opinion supports climate-related financial policies, which means these solutions should have wind in their sails.

According to recent polling, 65 per cent of people surveyed want mandatory rules to ensure the financial system invests sustainably. This support increases to 78 per cent—nearly four-fifths—for policies that directly counter greenwashing. Most Canadian financial

institutions have climate commitments, but few yet have the plans to deliver on these commitments. Perhaps as a result, less than 10 per cent of people trust their financial institution to take meaningful climate action without mandatory regulations in place.

Over 120 groups have specifically endorsed CAFA, including climate expert organizations and members of the financial sector. This broad swath of support shows an opportunity for policy that advances climate and economic goals, and that is sensible and winning in the eyes of Canadians.

Julie Segal

Opinion



Last year, elected officials from four political parties committed to align Canada’s financial system with the Paris Agreement, and called for the government to use all regulatory and legislative tools at its disposal to make it happen. Now people are waiting for outcomes. This fall, delivering policy to align finance with climate action should be a priority.

Existing solutions are ready and waiting to be propelled forward.

The Climate Aligned Finance Act (CAFA), introduced by Independent Senator Rosa Galvez in the Senate in 2022, outlines a comprehensive set of solutions. CAFA would align the financial system with Canada’s climate commitment to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, including by prioritizing equity, biodiversity, and the best available scientific evidence.

Requiring climate transition plans is one key policy, as is clarifying that leaders of organizations should aim to help mitigate climate change and its resulting risks. This would ensure that banks, pension funds, insurers, and large companies align their financing and investment activities with this



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News Back to Parliament

Elections Canada braces for mammoth byelection ballot count as protesters sign up dozens of candidates

John Dale, one of 77 candidates running in LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, Que., as part of a protest for electoral reform, said disruption is expected in social movements, and ‘politely asking, in a lot of cases, does not work.’

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

As voters in a Quebec riding byelection prepare to choose from the largest number of candidates in federal history, Elections Canada is working on strategies to ensure the count on election night is not significantly delayed by the protest movement that’s behind the majority of the names on the ballot. “It is never possible to predict exactly when all results will be reported, but estimates based on the simulations we’ve conducted suggest it will take longer to count and report each poll,” an Elections Canada spokesperson told *The Hill Times*. “With this in mind, we cannot provide specific estimates for when results will be completed, but can confirm that results will be available on election night.”

There are 91 candidates on the ballot for the Sept. 16 byelection in LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, Que., the highest number in federal election history. While only four of those candidates are projected to have a chance at winning the seat—Liberal Laura Palestini, NDP Craig Sauv , Bloc Qu b cois Louis-Philippe Sauv , and Conservative Louis Lalenti—the number of others in contention has forced Elections Canada to divide the ballot paper into two columns.

Of the 91 candidates on the LaSalle- mard-Verdun ballot, Tomas Szuchewycz is listed as the official agent for 77 of them.

Among those candidates is Independent John Dale. This is the third byelection he has contested, following Toronto-St. Paul’s in June, and Winnipeg South Centre, Man., in June 2023.

Dale is running as a volunteer for the Longest Ballot Committee,

a movement that floods ballots with independent candidates as part of a protest against Canada’s first-past-the-post voting system, and in favour of a citizens’ assembly on electoral reform.

Dale told *The Hill Times* that he was inspired to join the movement as a result of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s (Papineau, Que.) broken promise to replace first-past-the-post at federal elections.

“I think that caused a lot of disillusionment for a lot of Canadians, myself included, and so I was very happy to put my name in for these federal byelections,” he said.

The movement was responsible for a similarly long list of candidates in the Toronto-St. Paul’s, Ont., byelection on June 24, with 48 of the names that appeared on that ballot matching those running in LaSalle- mard-Verdun, Que.

The high number of candidates in the Toronto-area byelection led to a delay in counting: 84 candidates contested the election, of whom 77 were volunteers for the Longest Ballot Committee.

The result—that Conservative Don Stewart had defeated the Liberals’ Leslie Church—was not known until the morning of June 25. “The unusual dimensions of the ballot itself meant that some steps took more time than normal,” an Elections Canada spokesperson told *The Globe and Mail* after the vote.

Dale said disruption is important when holding a protest.

“That’s the nature of social movements, they’re very inconvenient to a lot of people,” said Dale. “Politely asking, in a lot of cases, does not work, especially for structural change, especially for something as significant as the federal level.”

The committee has pushed for a citizens’ assembly to discuss electoral reform with the eventual goal of a form of proportional representation replacing the existing system.

Under first-past-the-post, the candidate with the most votes in each riding wins, whether or not they receive a majority. Under proportional representation, parties win seats based roughly on the percentage of overall votes received.

Proportional representation can take multiple forms, and Dale said the committee is not advocating for one system over another.

“The second you start hunkering down for a very specific brand

of proportional representation, I could see that breaking down pretty easily in terms preferences, what would benefit certain parties over others,” he said. “I think it’s just contributing to that national conversation to breed the just general energy for that citizens’ assembly or something similar.”

Despite the delay in Toronto-St. Paul’s back in June, the eventual result did not appear to have been affected by the large number of candidates. The Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Green, and People’s Party candidates received a collective 96.4 per cent of the validated votes in that byelection. The remaining candidates—which included some not affiliated with the committee campaign—received 3.6 per cent, a little over double the 1.7 per cent margin between Stewart and Church.

With an even greater number of candidates in LaSalle- mard-Verdun, the Elections Canada spokesperson said the body was working within its power to adapt its counting procedures. Canada’s chief electoral officer is focusing efforts on the counting of advance poll ballots.

In the emailed statement to *The Hill Times*, an Elections Canada spokesperson said it is expected that the results of the byelection may take longer to report and publish, and that the organization has been running simulations to “determine the best way to adapt our procedures to avoid unnecessary delays.”

“For our simulations, a team of EC employees goes through the whole counting process to see how long it takes to open a ballot box, unfold all the ballots, count the votes, deal with any objections, and report results,” the spokesperson said.

After those simulations, and based on the number of advance poll votes, the Chief Electoral Officer “has used his authority under the Canada Elections Act to allow the counting of advance poll votes to begin earlier on election day” at 5:30 p.m. The results from the advance poll count, however, will not be reported before polls close at 9:30 p.m.

The group is not targeting the Sept. 16 byelection in Elmwood-Transcona, Man. Six people are contesting the riding, four of them for parties already represented in the House: Leila Dance for the NDP; Colin Reynolds for the Conservatives; Ian MacIntyre for the Liberals; and Nicolas Geddert for

the Green Party. Also contesting the byelection are Sarah Couture for the People’s Party, and Zbig Strycharz for Canadian Future.

At least two more byelections could be held during this term of Parliament: for Cloverdale-Langley City, B.C., and for Halifax, N.S.

Dale said he was not sure whether the committee would run similar campaigns in a general election, or whether it would continue to focus on byelections. During the 2021 federal election, 21 candidates contested Saint Boniface-Saint Vidal, Man., many of them as part of the protest movement. The riding was won by Liberal MP and Northern Affairs Minister Dan Vandal.

“I think [a byelection] has the highest amount of visibility, I think this is the easiest to organize, so all in all, it makes sense,” he said. “But I think if—and this is just my guess—we do see future longest ballots, it will likely be in a similar federal byelection format.”

Cloverdale-Langley City became vacant on June 4 after the resignation of Liberal MP John Aldag, who departed federal politics to run in next month’s British Columbia provincial election for the B.C. NDP.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) must announce the date of a byelection by Nov. 30. That date must be at least 36 days but no more than 50 after the announcement.

A byelection date for Halifax must be announced between Sept. 14, 2024, and March 3, 2025. The latest the byelection could be held under that time frame is Oct. 21, 2025, one day after the next general election is due to take place. The riding was vacated in late August upon the resignation of Liberal MP Andy Fillmore, who is campaigning to become mayor of Halifax in the Oct. 19 municipal election.

Green Leader Elizabeth May (Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.) told *The Hill Times* that she was torn in her opinions on the protest.

“To have this many names on the ballot is a very strong indication of a deep vein of discontent—bordering on rage—that Justin Trudeau broke the promise of 2015 that 2015 would be the last election held under first past the post,” she said. “But at the end of the day, these longer ballots make it harder for voters. They certainly make it harder for Elections

Canada and Elections Canada workers, they delay the time it takes to find out who’s actually won an election.”

May noted that those were “minor complaints,” but also said the protest would only be effective if voters were paying attention to the issue and were not blindsided by the large numbers at the polling booth.

“I certainly don’t condemn them for what they’re trying to do. I just don’t think that we’ll get the results they hope for,” she said.

“I definitely support non-violent civil disobedience in a democracy. This is different in that it’s not civil disobedience, it’s all legal. The inconvenience is an intended effort to draw attention to how horrible first-past-the-post is.”

The Hill Times also reached out to the Liberals, Conservatives, NDP, and Bloc Qu b cois to ask about the Longest Ballot Committee’s efforts, whether they were concerned about the effect on voter turnout and votes for their candidate, and their thoughts on the effects of a campaign taking place during a general election.

Parker Lund, the Liberal Party’s director of communications, told *The Hill Times* in an email that “every Canadian has the right to put their name on a ballot and run for public office.”

“Laura Palestini and our Liberal team have been working very hard over this campaign to connect with voters in LaSalle- mard-Verdun, and share our plan to build more homes, invest in dental care and stronger public health care, strengthen gun control, and deliver bold climate action.”

In an emailed statement, NDP MP Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo-Ladysmith, B.C.), her party’s democratic reform critic, noted that she brought forward a motion to “create an independent nonpartisan Citizens Assembly to reevaluate how our democracy works—but the Liberals and Conservatives voted against it.”

She promoted Sauv , the party’s candidate in LaSalle- mard-Verdun, as a way to “fight for people and not corporations.”

“People are angry because Justin Trudeau has broke his promise to make 2015 the last under the first-past-the-post system,” Barron said in the statement. “Canadians want more representation, and they want every vote to count. The Conservatives are also not willing to do what’s needed to fix our outdated systems.”

The Bloc Qu b cois referred *The Hill Times* to an Aug. 19 tweet from leader Yves-Fran ois Blanchet (Beloeil-Chambly, Que.) in which he said in French that democracy was imperfect, but that “if we win, we’ll change things.”

“We can’t ridicule democracy or act as if we’d do better without it, on the pretext of improving it,” the tweet reads. “Activists slap each other on the thighs laughing in a basement because they’re causing trouble. Bravo.”

The other parties did not respond by deadline.

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The Hill Times

Google signs deal to launch journalism fund in California, while cash from its Canadian media fund has yet to flow



Michael Geist, a professor at the University of Ottawa who specializes in internet and intellectual property, told *The Hill Times*: 'I don't think anyone should be surprised that it's taking quite a while to get all that [Google money] operational.'
The Hill Times
photograph by Andrew Meade

Continued from page 7

Lighting rod

While the future of AI in journalism has become a divisive subject, government attempts at supporting the news industry have also proven to be just as divisive.

The Canadian government's suite of measures aimed at supporting journalism—including the Online News Act, the Local Journalism Initiative, and the Journalism Labour Tax Credit—have led to accusations of the governing Liberals buying the media, and torpedoing journalistic independence. According to government data, there have been more than 12,000 entities that have been awarded money from the 'Local Journalism Initiative' or the 'Canada Periodical Fund' between 2015 and 2024.

"Frankly, at this moment, our bigger problem is that government has become so enmeshed in financing of news that it is undermining the trust," said Geist.

Geist pointed to an X post (formerly Twitter) from Sept. 7 that has added fuel to the fire where a Liberal MP appeared to use his government's efforts to support journalism as a way to deflect from criticism from the media.

"Your paper wouldn't be in business were it not for the subsidies that the government that you hate put in place—the same subsidies your Trump-adjacent foreign hedge fund owners gladly take to pay your salary," wrote Liberal MP Taleeb

Funding breakdown of Google's annual Canadian media fund

CBC/Radio-Canada	\$7-million
Eligible broadcasters	\$30-million
Eligible print media	\$63-million

Source: *Canadian Heritage*



Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage Taleeb Noormohamed responds to criticisms from *National Post* columnist Terry Newman on X (formerly Twitter) on Sept. 7. Screenshot from X.

Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, B.C.), the parliamentary secretary to St-Onge, on X in response to *National Post* columnist Terry Newman's criticisms of the Liberal Party and Immigration Minister Marc Miller (Ville-Marie-Le Sud-Ouest-Ile-des-Soeurs, Que.).

Despite concerns over a possible chilling effect in the media, the feds insist their financial supports won't impede journalistic independence.

In a statement to *The Hill Times*, St-Onge said the Online News Act is "transparent, durable, and operates independently from government."

Geist said that in looking to become the saviour of Canadian journalism, the feds have "overplayed their hands."

"The effect of this legislation has for many been pretty harmful. And then even with the attempt to salvage it with some Google money, there's far less than meets the eye and potentially even actual losses," said Geist. "Notwithstanding the fact this money is on the way, you're still seeing layoffs."

[Disclosure: *The Hill Times* has previously claimed the Canadian Journalism Tax Credit.]

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Opinion Back to Parliament



Over the past 18 months, data collected by Abacus Data has highlighted a growing 'scarcity mindset' among Canadians, writes David Coletto, founder, chair and CEO of Abacus Data. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Canadians need to see a clear strategy for the nation: Parliament must deliver

Parliament and the federal government need to find ways to instill confidence in Canadians that there is a clear economic strategy in place to create wealth, grow the economy, and secure their future.

David Coletto

Opinion



As Parliament returns, the mood among Canadians is strikingly pessimistic. Only one in four Canadians believes the country is headed in the right direction—a historic low.

For context, more Canadians felt positive about the country's direction during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic than they do today. This stark reality paints a challenging picture for our elected officials as they begin a new parliamentary session.

At Abacus Data, we've been tracking public sentiment closely, and the top issues remain consistent: affordability and health care. The cost of living, housing affordability, and access to health care dominate Canadians' concerns. Unfortunately for the Liberal government, they trail the opposition parties on all three issues regarding who Canadians think is best able to handle them.

Over the past 18 months, our data has highlighted a growing "scarcity mindset" among Canadians. This mindset is characterized by a feeling that the essentials of life—from housing and food, to energy and health care—are becoming harder to obtain and, if lost, nearly impossible to recover. It's not just about the rising costs; it's about the sense that everything Canadians need and aspire for is slipping out of reach.

Imagine what keeps Canadians awake at night: micro-economic worries like paying rent or a mortgage, affording groceries, or filling up the car. The reality is grim for millions of people. In research we did last year, almost two million Canadians feared that they could become homeless at some point. Moreover, more than six million Canadians do not have access to a family doctor. Those who do worry about what happens if their physician retires or leaves their practice. This scarcity mindset isn't just about material goods; it's a deep-seated anxiety about the future.

This anxiety has also caused a rapid rise in concerns about immigration. Currently, three in 10 Canadians rate immigration as one of their top three concerns—a dramatic increase from just a year ago. This shift reflects how deeply the scarcity mindset is reshaping public opinion. Canadians, feeling the pinch in their own lives, are more wary of newcomers and the pressure they might place on resources like housing and healthcare.

However, as inflation slows and interest rates continue to drop, we should anticipate a shift in priorities. The next major concern likely to take centre stage is economic and job security. Over the summer, we saw a flurry of labour disputes—a rail stoppage, the threat of another strike at British Columbia ports, and the possibility of a pilot strike at Air Canada. These disputes are symptoms of a deeper issue: growing insecurity about work driven by rising costs and the increasing impact of automation and artificial intelligence on job stability.

Recent data from Statistics Canada reveals rising unemployment, including the highest youth unemployment rate since the Great Recession in 2009. It's no surprise that younger Canadians are shifting their focus toward addressing immediate, tangible needs, sometimes at the expense of longer-term concerns like climate change and social justice.

This emerging landscape requires a new focus from Parliament. Addressing Canadians' concerns and rebuilding their confidence is paramount. Canadi-

ans want to know that there is a strategy to tackle both perceived and real problems. Right now, most don't believe there is one.

As this new legislative session begins, Parliament and the federal government need to find ways to instill confidence in Canadians that there is a clear economic strategy in place to create wealth, grow the economy, and secure their future. The upcoming fall economic statement and work on the next federal budget must go beyond rhetoric. They need to demonstrate that the government not only understands people's worries, but also has a practical and effective plan to address them.

Ultimately, this session begins with one very clear Abacus Data poll result: 86 per cent of Canadians want to see a change in government. For many, this means new leadership. For others, it's about achieving better outcomes—a desire to feel that their quality of life and standard of living are improving, not declining.

Parliament has a crucial opportunity—perhaps the last, before the next election—to prove it can rise to the challenge. Canadians are looking for hope, direction, and a plan that addresses their daily struggles. The question is, will our leaders listen and act accordingly, or will they risk further alienation in a country that feels its grip on prosperity slipping away?

David Coletto is the founder, chair, and CEO of Abacus Data, a public opinion and market research firm based in Ottawa and Toronto.

The Hill Times

A parliamentary year like no other: shifting alliances, a cautious ‘legacy’ agenda, and a potential deal with the devil



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh. The NDP will be cautious in the fall sitting, despite its new expressions of independence, writes Yaroslav Baran, a former Conservative Hill staffer. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

most likely dance partner for the Liberals. The party tends to be election-indifferent knowing they can never form government. *Conservatives in power? Liberals in power? Whatever. What’s in it for Quebec?* They could potentially be won over—or bought off, to be cynical—with richer transfers to the provinces accompanied by pledges that the federal government will retreat from recent incursions into provincial jurisdiction. That, for the Bloc, would be a win.

Here, then, is new reality for Parliament: the Liberals can no longer count on the NDP. The “legacy-building year” will in fact be a limited parliamentary agenda where the government works hard for support, case by case, bill by bill. They will turtle from avoidable confidence tests. And their traditional partner will embark on a cautious new quest of political differentiation, more inclined to challenge than facilitate, and almost certain to vote against the 2025 federal budget.

The wild card will be the Bloc. Parliament will likely make it past Christmas, but a spring-versus-fall election will largely depend on a party whose *raison d’être* is to split the country apart. And imagine the narratives in Election 2025 if that was the Liberals’ last alliance before taking the county to the polls.

Either way, this year won’t be boring. Yaroslav Baran is co-founder of *Pendulum*, a political analysis and public affairs consultancy. He is former communications director to Stephen Harper, and former chief of staff to both the government House leader and the chief government whip.

The Hill Times

almost guaranteed minimum of 12 confidence moments before we even get to the federal budget.

How, then, to survive in an era where the NDP is embarking on a new path of pre-election brand differentiation?

In reality, the NDP will be cautious. Despite its new expressions of independence, it has just dug itself out of debt, meaning an election would be waged on borrowed money. Moreover, most recent pollster seat projections have suggested status quo as the best scenario for the NDP, with a plausible prospect of losing seats. Last week saw a first glimmer of hope, with a new algorithmic projection suggesting a potential seat increase. But we shouldn’t expect the NDP to bet the farm until they know if this is an outlier, or a sustained new trend. The later this year wears on, though, the more caution will make way to posturing.

Intriguingly then, the sovereigntist Bloc Québécois is emerging as potentially the

The Liberals can no longer count on the NDP, and the ‘legacy-building year’ will be a limited parliamentary agenda where the government works hard for support bill by bill.

ble and focus on legacy building. Concede the next election and focus on the history books, hoping eventually to be remembered for significant achievements. Option two is to pivot, scrap it out, and try aggressively to win the public back.

The mood the PMO appears to be with is the latter. Normally, then, the smart move would be to open the final year with a new speech from the throne: a near-monopoly on communication, articulating a focused—and political pre-positioning—agenda for the pre-election year. But the NDP’s departure makes this play a much harder gamble, as throne speeches are followed by a confidence vote to concur in the agenda—something the Liberals should now try to avoid.

These new dynamics will have a similar influence on the fall economic statement. What has tended to be a *de facto* fall mini-budget will now possibly be just a straight-up statistical update on economic indicators and fiscal trends. If there are no new fiscal or taxation measures, then no ways and means confidence votes will follow.

To be clear, even the most careful planning and self-preservation instincts cannot dodge all confidence tests. The opposition parties will have seven “supply days” this fall in which they can move any motion they want, including non-confidence. Five go to the Conservatives, which will almost certainly try to bring the government down, and attempt to wedge the other parties to follow suit. There is also an unavoidable series of votes on government spending and appropriations by mid-December. This whole cycle repeats itself in the January-to-March term, meaning an

Yaroslav Baran



Opinion

The government opens the new parliamentary season amidst grave challenges. Nine years in, it has inevitably accumulated nicks and bruises. Senior talent is starting to leave. And, most significantly, the Liberals have seen a sustained lag in the polls, trailing their Conservative challengers by 14-20 per cent for well over a year. Adding to these problems is the game-changing departure of the New Democrats from their supply-and-confidence agreement with the government, a formal deal by which they had guaranteed the minority Liberals’ survival in exchange for policy concessions, Euro-style.

Normally, a late-stage government with a polling deficit would see itself at a crossroads. Option one is to accept the inevita-

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Opinion Back to Parliament

NDP will feel free without supply-and-confidence agreement

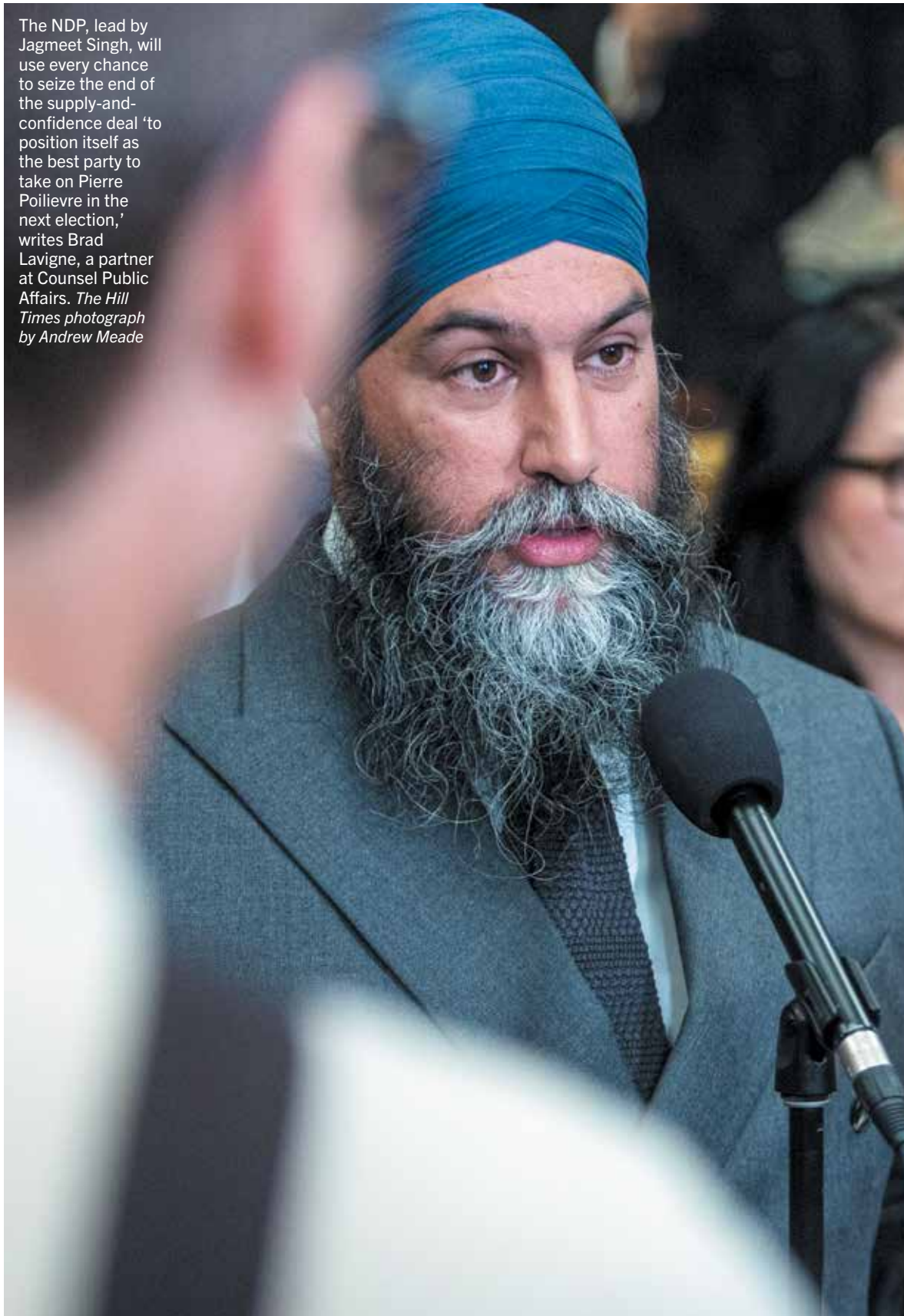
The Conservatives will be relentlessly haranguing the NDP to help them bring down the government at the earliest chance.

Brad Lavigne

Opinion



The NDP, led by Jagmeet Singh, will use every chance to seize the end of the supply-and-confidence deal 'to position itself as the best party to take on Pierre Poilievre in the next election,' writes Brad Lavigne, a partner at Counsel Public Affairs. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



As with every pre-election sitting of a minority Parliament where an opposition party is currently dominating the polls and showing momentum—money, crowds, etc.—this fall's sitting will be full of fireworks; a parliamentary sitting which will offer Canadians a preliminary look at the tone and positioning of the next election campaign taking place at some point within the next 13 months.

The NDP, now outside of the constraints of the supply and confidence agreement (SACA) will feel unencumbered to pull its punches on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The Conservatives in turn will be relentlessly haranguing the NDP to help them bring down the government at the earliest opportunity. In response, the New Democrats will use every opportunity to seize the SACA pivot to position itself as the best party to take on Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre in the next election. The Liberals, meanwhile, will continue to battle against ambivalence of many checked-out MPs and staffers as they keep one eye on the door ready to bolt at any chance to make an elegant exit before likely defeat.

Functionally, the SACA gave both Liberals and NDP members on House committees an incentive to collaborate, and ensured they functioned and stayed focused on moving forward on policy priorities. What impact will no longer having the SACA on the functionality of committees? How will the Liberals seek to move forward on their existing meagre legislative agenda? The next few weeks will illustrate whether this Parliament has any capacity to get work done. If no such appetite exists, the life of Parliament is in severe jeopardy as the Liberals face increasing challenges to

stave off losing confidence. Smart money is on this being the most toxic and least productive parliamentary sitting ever.

Adding to the SACA fallout will be the rush to define how the outcomes of today's two byelections in Montreal and Winnipeg

will play in the tone and productivity of the fall session. If the Liberals lose Lasalle-Émard-Verdun to either the Bloc or the NDP, it

will deepen the crisis in Trudeau's leadership. In the House, Liberal MPs will be sheepish while opposition MPs on all sides will be merciless in their attacks. On the surface, losing an incumbent seat in a byelection this late in the government's tenure is not a cause for panic. But there is far more at stake for the Liberals in this byelection than usual. A loss in Lasalle-Émard-Verdun would come less than three months after a devastating loss in another safe incumbent seat: Toronto-St. Paul's, Ont. Liberals would be foolish to chalk-up the loss to mere local conditions as these two reliably safe Liberal seats represent the core of their traditional voting coalition: moderate, urban voters.

Two options for the Liberals to prolong the life of this Parliament include turning to the Bloc Québécois for support on confidence motions, or seek to prorogue Parliament to buy enough time to shake things up.

Turning to the Bloc for support is optically sub-optimal. Bloc Leader Yves-François Blanchet has already begun to draw up his list of demands in exchange for his party's support. And while then-Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper governed with the support of the Bloc when he needed votes to survive confidence motions in his minorities, Trudeau pursuing the same path may risk alienating one of the last remaining elements of his base: Quebec federalists. (How bad has it gotten when a prime minister has to rely on separatists to hold onto power?)

If Trudeau loses the Sept. 16 Montreal byelection, there will be renewed calls for him to either completely re-boot the government's agenda, or step down. But with the cover of stability that SACA gave Trudeau now gone, how could he do either with the threat of being toppled at any time being now a greater possibility? Prorogation would offer the government a safe time-out to develop a more coherent legislative game plan and pre-election message. It also affords the Liberals a safe space to hold a short leadership contest. Prorogation worked for Harper in late 2008 when it became clear that he had lost confidence of the House, and needed to buy time for conditions to change. Change they did. And this was despite howls of protest from the opposition about how "undemocratic" the tactic was. In the aftermath the Liberals cratered, changed leaders, supported Harper's budget, and the Conservatives governed until spring 2011. The gambit paid off, and the Conservatives survived a confidence crisis. Between the Bloc and the hard place Trudeau's currently in, he may find a route to safer electoral shores with a bold new legislative agenda.

Brad Lavigne is a partner at Counsel Public Affairs. He served as the New Democratic Party's 2011 national campaign director, and was principal secretary to then-leader Jack Layton. He is the author of the best-selling book *Building the Orange Wave, The Historic Rise of Jack Layton and the NDP*.

The Hill Times

How the public service should prepare for a Conservative government

For the public service to effectively transition to a future Conservative government, it needs to act now to re-orient its focus on service delivery, and to shrink and flatten its executive ranks.

Gregory Jack

Opinion



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, left, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Even though an election is not expected until next fall, the NDP's recent decision to withdraw blanket support for the Liberals means an election could come sooner, writes Gregory Jack. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

As the House of Commons reconvenes for what is almost certainly to be this Parliament's final fall sitting, the public service is likely already thinking about what a government transition might look like.

Even though an election is not expected until fall of 2025, the NDP's recent decision to withdraw blanket support for the Liberals means an election could come sooner. Polls have been heavily favouring the Conservatives to win a sweeping majority for some time. If a chance of a new government indeed comes to pass, the federal public service will be managing its first transition of power since 2015, and the first transition to a Conservative government since

2006. A year is not as long as it sounds, and the time to prepare is now.

In 2006, Stephen Harper's Conservatives captured a minority of seats in the House, and arrived with five clear, distinct priorities: cut the GST, a new federal accountability act, a childcare rebate sent directly to parents, getting tough on crime, and a health-care wait-time guarantee. Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre has already hinted at what his five priorities are, and they will likely include eliminating the carbon tax, tackling the housing and affordability crisis, getting tough on crime (again), increasing Canada's competitiveness, and protecting freedom of speech. The public service

should begin to think about how it will enable a new Conservative government to achieve quick wins on those files, and start directing resources to those areas.

Since the last transition in 2015—then to a Liberal government—the federal public service has grown by close to 40 per cent, and total compensation adjusted for inflation increased by nearly 37 per cent from 2015-16 to 2021-22. A Conservative government would be under enormous public and fiscal pressure to arrest and reverse some of this growth. One way the bureaucracy can tackle this is by looking at the executive category. From 2016 to 2024, the total number of executives (EX-01 to EX-05) increased by 43 per cent.

This growth is in part due to a widening middle-management class, something the public service should narrow. A more effective public service should have fewer layers of management, and more responsibility under fewer assistant deputy ministers—the top level a public servant can reach as an executive prior to the deputy minister designation. Eliminate positions like “associate assistant deputy minister” and “associate assistant secretary,” and get rid of chiefs of staff in directors-general and assistant deputy minister offices. Since Paul Martin re-introduced the chief of staff role in 2004, the position has proliferated not only throughout political offices, but also the bureaucracy.

The title suggests a stature and importance many of these offices should not have. Wholesale classification reform—a massive undertaking—may be needed, and a good place start is the EX category.

There are also far too many senior public servants in duplicate roles. Do we really need a deputy minister of Environment and Climate Change, a deputy secretary to the cabinet for clean growth, and an assistant secretary to the cabinet for clean growth, to pick one example. Central agencies like the Privy Council Office and Treasury Board Secretariat should return to being smaller, nimble challenge and co-ordinating agencies that attract the best talent available, not duplicate delivery departments. Make central agencies central again by taking away their responsibility for implementation.

One theme on which the Conservatives have focused over the past year is the idea that “Canada is broken.” Canadians have noticed anecdotal evidence of this, from long passport waits to long border waits. Yet, the traditional pathway to being a senior public servant has been through demonstrated policy expertise. Right now, the public service needs experts in execution, and should identify—and reward—leaders in service delivery over those who can write a mean briefing note. Success for a new Conservative government will partly be measured in restoring faith in the public services for which Ottawa is responsible.

For the public service to effectively navigate a transition to a Conservative government, it needs to act now to re-orient its focus toward service delivery, shrink and flatten its executive ranks, focus on effective implementation rather than brilliant policy and return central agencies like PCO to their traditional role. That would constitute a good start.

Gregory Jack is vice-president, strategic communication and research with Loyalist Public Affairs. He worked previously in the federal and Alberta public services, including seven years in the Privy Council Office. *The Hill Times*

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Opinion Back to Parliament



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre and his party 'have done an excellent job focusing their priorities on why so many Canadians are unhappy,' and want the next election to be framed as a 'change-election,' writes Christian von Donat, a vice-president at Impact Public Affairs. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

Priorities for a troubled electorate

This fall, the government has to focus on delivering on past promises and ensuring programs are reaching Canadians.

Christian von Donat

Opinion



Most Canadians I talk to don't seem particularly happy about the state of affairs at play in our country. They feel worse off today than they did before the pandemic. They dislike some of the tawdry antics from our political class. They worry about their children's or grandchildren's future. They have an unsettled

sense of safety in their communities. And, yes, some are worried about what political change come the next election could mean for them and for the nation.

I suppose it is of some comfort, then, to see that, at the very least, party leaders all agree that Canadians are struggling. Our next election will be decided on whether voters feel it's time for a change, or if the Liberals can still right the ship after all these years. So, let's look at what the parties could consider as we approach the election.

For years now, the Liberals have told Canadians that they are working hard to make life better. Dental and pharmacare, the Canada Child Benefit, pandemic relief supports, and new health accords are multi-billion-dollar investments that promise to do just that. Ten years of deficit spending were justified as a means to make life better. Of concern for Liberals, though, should be that Canadians are not heeding the message.

New graduates struggle with debt and difficult job prospects coupled with a feeling that find-

ing stable housing and planning their financial future is more like a dream. Every politician talks about housing, but the reality is most Canadians won't see positive change in the near future. Affordability is at a crisis level for so many people, and three interest rate cuts and inflation finally falling will not impact their bottom line for some time. Seniors wonder how their fixed incomes will cover costs, and others consider if they can ever retire.

Our sense of public safety and community has been upended. As someone who fell victim to a home invasion this summer while my wife and I were putting our newborn to bed, it seems every Canadian has their own anecdote about why they are frustrated.

It begs the question: if the government says it's making life better, and remains ruthlessly focused on the topic but Canadians don't feel that way, has it really made a difference, and do they deserve another term in government?

This fall, the government has to focus on delivering on past

promises, and ensuring programs are reaching Canadians; the business of governing well. Coupled with this, it needs a concise economic and social agenda that can restore optimism and hope. Voters must see the change in their lives.

Pierre Poilievre and the Conservatives have done an excellent job focusing their priorities on why so many Canadians are unhappy. They want the next election to be framed as a change election, and for voters to dwell on the questions above. Polling, fundraising, and the length of time the Liberals have spent in power is on their side. With the recent collapse of the Liberal-NDP supply-and-confidence agreement, the Conservatives are well positioned to capitalize on an early election, and will seek to force one at every opportunity. They argue Canadians can't wait, and many voters agree.

By continuing to focus on affordability, public safety, and our country's economic future, Conservatives will use Parliament in session as one component of

an overall campaign to communicate to Canadians that they are ready to govern. They will also continue to hold the government to account using every legislative procedure which they can avail themselves: votes, opposition motions and legislation, committees, Question Period, and speeches in the House.

For the New Democrats, the end of the supply-and-confidence agreement will chart a new path forward. Many of their voters have felt that while they have earned concessions from the Liberals during the time the agreement stood, it has often been too little, or too late. The NDP should lean into voters' frustrations, and outline how their party—if elected—would take bolder action to tackle housing, affordability, and economic prospects for Canadians. It can do this while still voting alongside the government on confidence items to prevent a fall election.

The top issues on Canadians' minds are no secret. Voters want to feel like they are heard, and to see real change in their lives at a time when many don't see a future for themselves. The party that can best capture this mindset will win on election day.

Christian von Donat is a vice-president at Impact Public Affairs. He has worked in federal and provincial politics across Canada, advising party leaders and senior officials, running campaigns, and developing policy.

The Hill Times

Heritage Minister St-Onge makes history as first openly lesbian cabinet minister to take parental leave

Pascale St-Onge will start her parental leave in mid-November and return in the new year, she tells *The Hill Times*.

BY ABBAS RANA

In a historic step forward for LGBTQ+ representation and work-life balance in federal politics, Canada's federal Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge is about to become the first openly lesbian cabinet minister to take parental leave.

"I'm thrilled to be expecting my first child," said St-Onge (Brome-Missisquoi, Que.) in a statement to *The Hill Times*. "In the meantime, I'm fully committed to my responsibilities and delivering on Canadians' priorities. While I'll be taking a few



Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge will be taking parental leave starting in mid-November until the new year. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

weeks off, this won't impact our ongoing work. I look forward to returning after the holiday break and continuing the important work."

St-Onge is expected to be away from Ottawa from mid-November to the end of the year, returning in the new year. During this time, she will be working remotely on key ministerial and riding files using virtual tools.

First elected to the House in the 2021 election, St-Onge is having her first child with her partner, Maeva Proteau, who is an exempt ministerial staffer. Immediately after the election, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) appointed St-Onge as minister of sport and minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the regions of Quebec. At the time, she made

history by being the country's first openly lesbian cabinet minister. In the July 2023 cabinet shuffle, she was promoted to the Heritage portfolio. She won her seat by a razor-thin margin of 0.3 per cent, or 197 votes, against Bloc Québécois candidate Marilou Alarie.

Alongside Conservative Deputy Leader Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, Ont.), she's one of two openly queer women in the current Parliament. Other LGBTQ2S+ MPs who were elected in the last election include NDP MP Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, Alta.); NDP MP Randall Garrison (Esquimalt-Saanich-Sooke, B.C.); Liberal MP Rob Oliphant (Don Valley West, Ont.); Liberal MP Seamus O'Regan (St. John's South-Mount Pearl, Nfld.); Employment Minister Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Alta.); and Conservative MP Eric Duncan (Stormont-Dundas-South Gleggarry, Ont.).

Until recently, Trudeau's cabinet included three ministers from

the LGBTQ community. However, O'Regan stepped down from cabinet in July to spend more time with family. He also said that he would complete his current term as an MP, but will not reoffer in the next election.

Before being elected to the House, St-Onge was a prominent union leader and served as the president of Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture, a union that promotes Canadian culture and support of the arts sector.

Recently, St-Onge hosted the summer cabinet retreat for her Quebec Liberal colleagues in her riding. Trudeau also attended the retreat.

Sheila Copps, a former deputy prime minister and senior cabinet minister in the Jean Chrétien cabinet, was the first person to give birth while in office about 37 years ago. In 2018, then-Democratic Institutions Minister Karina Gould (Burlington, Ont.) also gave birth to her first child. At the time, she took 10 weeks of maternity leave. Gould welcomed her second child in January this year and took six months off.

In her absence, Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Que.) was promoted to the cabinet as government House leader. Upon her return in late July, MacKinnon was shuffled to the labour portfolio, succeeding O'Regan.

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Conservative to the core: Top left: Pierre Poilievre, Andrew Scheer, Jenni Byrne, Leo Housakos, Anaisa Poilievre, and Tim Uppal. Lower left: Denise Batters, Pierre Paul-Hus, Melissa Lantsman, John Baird, and Stephen Harper. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade, Sam Garcia, and Jake Wright

Top 25 most influential Conservatives in federal politics

Pierre Poilievre and Jenni Byrne are at the current power structure's core, but there are other groups of people influencing them, insiders tell *The Hill Times*.

BY ABBAS RANA & IAN CAMPBELL

With the Conservatives having dominated public opinion polls for more than a year, the party has a serious shot at power in the next election.

That means some of its top players are poised to hold major influence following the next campaign. *The Hill Times* spoke

on a not-for-attribution basis with multiple Conservative insiders, including former staffers and party officials, so they could candidly offer their views on who the real power players are in the party, and who would likely hold influence if the Conservatives were to form government.

Multiple insiders told *The Hill Times* there are two names that hold a degree of influence above all others on the list: Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.), and his key adviser Jenni Byrne. No surprise there.

However, insiders also made the point that while Poilievre and Byrne are at the core of the current Conservative power structure, there is an orbit of several surrounding groups of people influencing them.

This is *The Hill Times*' list of the Top 25 Most Influential Federal Conservatives in Canada today, and those who will hold sway if the party comes to power.

The core

Pierre Poilievre, Conservative leader



Having handily won a first-ballot victory in his party's 2022 leadership race, and now holding a commanding 15-to-20-point lead in most public opinion polls, **Pierre Poilievre** is the first Conservative leader since former prime minister **Stephen Harper** to have a solid grip on his party's leadership. With current public opinion trends indicating he has a strong chance of forming a government after the next election, that makes him solidly the most influential federal Conservative in Canada. During the 2022 leadership race, the Conservative Party gained more than 578,000 new members, the majority of

whom were signed up by Poilievre's team. Poilievre also commands a sizeable following across multiple social media channels, and has shown a high degree of comfort in using this medium. The issues he has centred—such as housing and cost of living—regularly poll as top issues for Canadians in public opinion research.

Jenni Byrne, top adviser

Some sources consulted for this list told *The Hill Times* there are really only two names that belong



on it: Poilievre, and his key adviser **Jenni Byrne**. While Byrne officially operates without a title, she is widely known to be the key architect of Poilievre's political strategy. It's a partnership that goes back to the days of the Harper government when Poilievre was an upcoming MP and Byrne was a political operative. The two also dated for several years during that time. While that relationship ended, their political alliance remains. Byrne is said to be involved in every key decision Poilievre makes, and she has extraordinary say in who else does—or does not—have influence in current Conservative circles.

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Caucus clout

Melissa Lantsman, deputy leader

A former staffer who worked in the office of **Peter Kent**—whom she succeeded as the MP for Thornhill, Ont.—**Melissa**

Lantsman has made her own mark since entering the House in 2021. She was a strong supporter of Poilievre's leadership bid. Now, as deputy leader, Lantsman is involved in the morning meetings that set the message of the day. She has been a trusted media spokesperson for Poilievre, most recently traveling to Halifax during the Liberal cabinet retreat to provide her party's reaction to reporters during the event. As a member of the Jewish community, she has been an outspoken voice on the Israel-Hamas conflict. The Jewish community represents an important bloc of voters for the Conservatives in several ridings, including Lantsman's. A bilingual daughter of immigrants, she is also able to draw on connections as a member of the LGBT community.

Tim Uppal, deputy leader

A four-term MP and former cabinet minister, **Tim Uppal** (Edmonton Mill Woods, Alta.) plays a pivotal role in the Conservative Party's outreach to Indo-Canadian and broader South Asian communities. An MP since 2008, Uppal has served as deputy leader since 2022 alongside Lantsman. Under Harper, Uppal held key positions, including minister of state for democratic reform, and later minister of state for multiculturalism. He also



Conservative deputy leaders Melissa Lantsman, left, and Tim Uppal, centre, with Conservative Senator Yonah Martin in January 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

acted as the party's liaison with visible minority communities under then-leaders **Andrew Scheer** (Regina—Qu'Appelle, Sask.) and **Erin O'Toole**. In 2017, Uppal was instrumental in supporting **Jason Kenney's** successful bid for leader of Alberta's United Conservative Party.

Andrew Scheer, House leader

Andrew Scheer has resuscitated his political career following his rocky stint as Conservative leader from 2017-2020 by returning to one of the areas he knows best: House procedure. The former speaker

of the House of Commons is a long-time friend of Poilievre. They both became MPs in the class of 2004, and have a relationship that goes back to their days in the Reform Party's youth wing. Scheer worked closely alongside Poilievre in the 2022 leadership race, and now plays a key role in setting strategy for the opposition's attacks on the government in the House. Scheer is closely aided in this role by Deputy Whip and Question Period Coordinator **Chris Warkentin** (Grande Prairie-Mackenzie, Alta.), who often implements the strategy set by Scheer within caucus.

Arpan Khanna, MP

A lawyer and former ministerial staffer, **Arpan Khanna** (Oxford, Ont.) is emerging as an up-and-coming figure within the Conservative Party. First elected in a June 2023 byelection, he works closely with Uppal on outreach to visible minority communities. Khanna served as Poilievre's Ontario campaign chair during the 2022 leadership contest, and was later appointed as the party's national outreach chair. To win a majority government, Conservatives need major support in multicultural communities. For this, Khanna and Uppal travel across the country to recruit candidates from these communities, and to build connections.

Pierre Paul-Hus, MP and Quebec lieutenant

Quebec is the only region of the country where the Conservatives are not presently leading in

national opinion polls, and they have a path to victory without winning a majority of its 78 seats. However, to be seen as a national government, it is still key for the Tories to win at least a handful of seats in Quebec, as Harper did in the elections when he formed government. That's where **Pierre Paul-Hus** (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Que.) comes into the picture as Poilievre's Quebec lieutenant. Insiders say Paul-Hus' role involves advising Poilievre on Quebec issues, and being a trusted media spokesperson in the province, while **Leo Housakos**, a Conservative Senator from Quebec, has the lead role on organizing the party's ground game in the province.

Adam Chambers, MP and caucus policy lead

When it comes to the policy agenda that a Poilievre government might pursue if elected, Conservative MP **Adam Chambers** (Simcoe North, Ont.) is playing a key role that goes beyond his assignment as national revenue critic. He's the caucus lead on policy development, working closely with Poilievre, Byrne, and OLO policy director **Aaron Wudrick**. Chambers is a first-term MP, but no stranger to the Hill having served as a senior advisor to the late **Jim Flaherty** when he was finance minister. He also brings business experience, having served as an assistant vice-president for a large insurance firm, and as an entrepreneur starting his own businesses.

Upcoming candidates

Aaron Gunn, candidate
Poilievre's team has been actively recruiting candidates

across the country that it wants at the caucus table after the next election. One of those candidates who's said to have the trust of the inner circle is **Aaron Gunn**, the nominated Conservative candidate for North Island—Powell River, B.C., where three-term NDP MP **Rachel Blaney** is not seeking re-election. Gunn is trusted by the OLO when it comes to decisions about tour planning and local issues in that province where the Conservatives presently look poised to make big gains. Other candidates to watch include former B.C. MLA **Ellis Ross**, and former chief of the Enoch Cree Nation **Billy Morin** who have their party's nomination in the ridings of Skeena—Bulkley Valley, B.C., and Edmonton Northwest, Alta., respectively.

Senate strength

Leo Housakos, Senator

The Senate is expected to be a key issue that a future Conservative government as Poilievre would inherit an Upper Chamber where a large majority of the Senators have been appointed by Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**. While they are nominally independent, many of them have progressive policy leanings, and there has been talk of whether they would try to tie up Tory legislation. That's where Senators like **Leo Housakos** (Wellington) from Quebec will come in to work on political strategy in the Senate, as well as to potentially mount public pressure against

Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre pictured on Aug. 29, 2024, on the Hill. *The Hill Times* photograph Andrew Meade

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Top 25 Tories

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any serious delays of legislation. Housakos is also playing a key role in preparing his party's ground game in Quebec for the next election.

Denise Batters, Senator



Another Senator who is likely to play a key role if the Upper Chamber balks at Tory bills is **Denise Batters** (Saskatchewan). Insiders say that while Housakos could mount public pressure in Quebec, Batters—who represents Saskatchewan—would be well positioned to be that voice in English-language media, particularly in Western Canada. Batters is also seen as close to the leader's inner circle, having played a key role in the ouster of Poilievre's predecessor, O'Toole.

Stalwart staffers

Ian Todd, OLO chief of staff

A seasoned insider with roots going back to the Reform Party days, **Ian Todd** manages access to the leader.



He determines who meets with the leader and for how long, and when specific issues are brought to the leader's attention. Additionally, Todd oversees hiring, firing, and overall staff management in the OLO, as well as the office's budget.

Aaron Wudrick, OLO director of policy



A recent recruit to the OLO, newly minted policy director **Aaron Wudrick** is exactly who the core wanted to have in this job, replacing former policy director **David Murray**, say insiders. Wudrick brings serious policy chops having served as director of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute's domestic policy program up until his recent recruitment. He also previously worked with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. Wudrick is said to be working closely with Poilievre, Byrne, and caucus policy lead Chambers on setting the platform—which the Tories have said they will not roll out until the election is underway. Wudrick's work could form the blueprint for what a Poilievre government would do with power, if elected.

Craig Hilimoniuk, OLO Director of Parliamentary Affairs



Director of Parliamentary Affairs **Craig Hilimoniuk** is trusted with a significant role due to his background having worked in Poilievre's MP office. This history has built a strong trust, and has given Hilimoniuk direct access to Poilievre. In a minority government, a federal election can be triggered by a defeat on a single confidence vote in the House. With the NDP ripping up its supply-and-confidence agreement with the Liberals, Hilimoniuk's role becomes even more crucial. As the House returns for the fall sitting, Poilievre will put forward a non-confidence vote against the prime minister at the earliest chance. Although this vote is unlikely to succeed, it will put pressure on the Liberals' parliamentary agenda, and on the other opposition parties. With Poilievre aiming to challenge Trudeau in the House at every opportunity, Hilimoniuk's role is vital.

Party Officials

Mike Crase, CPC executive director

Mike Crase is the highest-ranking official at Conservative Party headquarters, overseeing all major aspects



of party operations, including organization, fundraising, data management, polling, and election readiness. Before assuming this role, he was the executive director of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party. There, he overhauled the provincial party's voter data system—a key skillset to bring to the federal Tories at a time when their old voter data management system had atrophied, which gave the Liberals a leg up in this area in the most recent federal campaigns. The Ontario PCs won two back-to-back majority governments under **Doug Ford**'s leadership while Crase was in his employ.

Jeremy Liedtke, CPC director of political operations

In the roughly 25-year history of the federal Conservative Party, only three individuals have held the prestigious position of director of political operations: the late former Senator **Doug Finley**, frequent media commentator **Fred DeLorey**, and now **Jeremy Liedtke**. In this role, Liedtke collaborates closely with Crase and other members of the party's top brass to secure victory in the next election. During the forthcoming campaign, he will also oversee the party's get-out-the-vote efforts, a critical operation to winning. A long-time staffer for Poilievre in his MP office, Liedtke managed Poilievre's re-election campaign in 2019, and served as campaign



Anaida Poilievre, left, with her husband Pierre on stage at Ottawa's Shaw Centre on Sept. 10, 2022, after he becomes the new Conservative leader. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



director during his successful 2022 leadership bid.

Robert Staley, Conservative Fund Canada chair



As the chair of the Conservative Fund Canada—one of the most prestigious and influential positions within the Conservative Party—lawyer **Robert Staley** oversees the party's finances. Under Poilievre's leadership, the fund has been raising record-breaking amounts of money. At every convention,

the chair's speech is an anticipated event, where members get updates about the party's financial health. Presently, the Conservatives are out-fundraising the Liberals by a ratio of three to one. Since Poilievre became leader in 2022, the Conservative Fund has invested millions of dollars in building his public image. Each year, the fund decides how to allocate tens of millions of dollars under Staley's direction.

Rob Batherson, Conservative Fund Canada member

A former party president, three-term national councillor, and former Hill staffer, **Rob Batherson** is now a director on



Andrew Scheer, left, actively supported Pierre Poilievre during his 2022 leadership campaign. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

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only Pierre Poilievre's wife, she's also a key part of his inner circle. As a former staffer, she understands political strategy. She has input on strategy across the country, particularly in Quebec where her family settled after immigrating from Venezuela in 1995. Political insiders who've worked with her describe her as very "assertive," and not a pushover. Growing up in Quebec, Anaida has established herself as an impressive bilingual speaker, earning standing ovations at Conservative Party events. She is instrumental in portraying Poilievre as a family man and a pan-Canadian figure: hailing from Alberta, representing an Ontario riding, fluent in French, and married to an immigrant from Montreal.



ievre, having first taken Poilievre under his wing when he was a newly elected MP. Baird also chaired Poilievre's 2022 successful leadership campaign. If the Conservatives win the next federal election, Baird may take on a meaningful role for the new government, even if it means taking a pay cut from his current position in the private sector.



Stephen Harper, former prime minister



Stephen Harper, the founding leader of the modern Conservative Party, formed government less than

three years after the merger of the Progressive Conservatives and Canadian Alliance, and went on to win three consecutive elections. Poilievre was first elected as an MP under Harper's leadership, and served under him until 2015—including a stint as parliamentary secretary to the prime minister. Byrne also served under Harper in the party office and in his PMO. The former prime minister is known as a "true-blue" Conservative, and took the rare step of endorsing Poilievre for leadership during the 2022 campaign—something he didn't do in the other two leadership races since he stepped down from the party's top job. Even though he left office a almost decade ago, his advice remains influential among senior Conservatives, including Poilievre, Byrne, and others.

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Ian Brodie, former Harper staffer



Ian Brodie, who previously served as chief of staff to Harper and as executive director of the Conservative Party, is seen as an elder

statesman. Byrne worked under Brodie in both the party office and the PMO. Brodie chaired the Leadership Election Organizing Committee in the 2022 Conservative Party leadership race that saw Poilievre become leader. Known for guiding the party's "intellectual side," he frequently gives interviews to traditional and new media outlets, such as podcasts, to articulate the Conservative viewpoint.

John Baird, former minister

A former Harper-era senior cabinet minister, **John Baird** is known as an elder statesman of the party and mentor to Poil-



the board of the influential Conservative Fund Canada. The party also relies on him for guidance on fundraising, candidate nominations, and his expertise on Atlantic Canada—a region where Conservatives are looking to make big gains in the next election. Senior Conservatives describe Batherson as someone who is "in the deal flow," meaning he's consulted and involved in core decisions.

Stephen Barber, CPC president

A former senior federal and provincial public servant, **Stephen Barber** is the Conservative Party's current president.



He's also the national councillor from Manitoba. The 20-member National Council is the party's highest elected governing body. To be a successful leader, Poilievre needs to maintain the support of the national council, caucus, and the Conservative Fund. As party president, Barber is an ex-officio member of all national council committees.

Key vendors

Brooke Pigott, pollster



Longtime Tory operative **Brooke Pigott** is the party's primary vendor for public opinion research. She has a long resume, having worked on conservative campaigns both federally

and provincially, including having served as director of public opinion research in the Harper PMO. As the party's pollster, she plays a key role in providing vital public opinion research that informs the party's political strategy and policy positions. She also has a longstanding, close relationship with Byrne, and is trusted by the inner circle.

Chad Bowie, direct mail vendor

Founder and principal of The Bowie Group, **Chad Bowie** is the primary vendor working on the Conservatives' direct mail campaigns—a vital role in the party's fundraising efforts. The Tories' success in this area has been key



in establishing the strength they presently hold over their political rivals. Bowie has also worked with federal and provincial conservatives campaigns across the country, and is well-known and trusted by many party operatives.

Outside influencers

Anaida Poilievre, spouse and adviser

Anaida Poilievre, a former Senate and House staffer, is not



Then-prime minister Stephen Harper, left, and top Conservative adviser Jenni Byrne. Photograph courtesy of Jenni Byrne + Associates

News Back to Parliament

Canada expects to spend \$1-billion over 10 years running new supply ships

Experts say ‘modern combat is a freakishly expensive endeavour,’ so the high operational costs projections are no surprise.

BY IREM KOCA

The government says it plans to spend \$1-billion over 10 years to cover the operating and maintenance costs for Canada’s new supply ships: the HMCS *Protecteur* and HMCS *Preserver*.

When one of the new vessels is in operation, the annual operating and maintenance costs would start at \$9.9-million, and generally increase every year up to \$141-million, with age and more extensive maintenance driving up the cost over time. That puts the yearly average over the 10-year period at approximately \$109-million, according to new numbers from the Department of National Defence (DND). The \$1.01-billion tally over 10 years does not include taxes, and is separate from the taxes-included \$3.4-billion contract with Seaspan’s Vancouver Shipyards Co. Ltd. to acquire the supply ships. Canada has said the first ship is earmarked to arrive in November 2025.

There are several components that make up the billion-dollar price tag, according to Captain Gabriel Ferris, a DND spokesperson. Ferris explained that crew salaries to operate the Joint Support Ships (JSS) are expected to cost \$365-million, while fuel cost is around \$132-million. Maintenance costs for the first decade—which includes in-service support, second-line maintenance, and docking work periods—is estimated to cost \$381-million. Future modifications or engineering changes are projected to cost \$44-million.

DND spokesperson Kened Sadiku told *The Hill Times* the billions of dollars set aside for the supply ships is “a very significant investment” in the Navy, and “part of the largest recapitalization of the Royal Canadian Navy since the Second World War.”

In early August, the government announced that the Canadian Navy would have to wait longer and pay more for the JSS vessels—a procurement project that successive governments have been trying to deliver for more



On Aug. 9, Defence Minister Bill Blair, centre, visited Seaspan’s shipyard in Vancouver, B.C., where the construction of two new ships is underway. Photograph courtesy of X/Blair

than two decades. The Seaspan contract jumped by nearly \$1-billion to almost \$3.4-billion, up from \$2.44-billion in 2020.

The timeline for delivering both vessels has also been pushed back by two years. The first JSS, originally set for 2023, is now expected in November 2025. The second one, initially slated for 2025, is now expected in 2027. The new support ships will be replacing legacy *Protecteur*-class auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels decommissioned in the last decade.

Operating estimate ‘reasonable’: former CAF officer

The operational cost estimate is not surprising, according to Charles Davies, a former Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) logistics officer, given that cost increases of this magnitude are common in defence acquisitions due to

inflation—specifically for defence equipment.

“The operating cost estimate looks reasonable assuming it comprises all the usual elements: personnel costs, fuel, maintenance, repairs, and so on,” Davies said.

Davies argued that within the first decade of operation, the ships will likely require only modest periodic insertions of advancing technologies, and the 10-year estimate provided by DND should include these.

“Later, we would expect the ships to need at least one and perhaps two, or even three major refits to refurbish and modernize them and keep them operationally effective,” he said, adding that these costs will have been included in DND’s overall JSS program cost estimates.

Observers agree that accurately assessing the cost-effectiveness of the project is a challenge due to the limited details shared by DND.

Liberal MP John McKay (Scarborough-Guildwood, Ont.), who chairs the House Defence Committee, said the numbers alone might not provide a clear picture, given the “strange ways in which the government calculates its costing on a full life cycle” for military procurement.

“Two plus two is four for me, but it might be 14 in procurement,” he joked.

Bloc Québécois MP Julie Vignola (Beauport-Limoilou, Que.) who has been following the government’s procurement practices closely as a member of the House Government operations and Estimates Committee, told *The Hill Times* that operational costs should include everything from supplies loaded on the ship to energy needed to run the ship and salaries.

Both Vignola and McKay told *The Hill Times* previously that they anticipated the supply ship procurement would be costly and delayed.

Vignola said it is difficult to determine whether the projected expenses offer value for money without additional details from DND.

“Medical supplies can be quite expensive, and emergency rescue operations can’t be done without cost. To me, it is important to make sure that operations will be done with the appropriate supplies while being cost-efficient,” she said.

Vignola said it’s important Canada’s Navy has the ability to support allies and endangered populations in critical situations, including for Canada’s international reputation.

Supply ships face varying maintenance costs

Because these vessels take a beating over the decades due to challenging ocean conditions—like large waves, storms, and extreme temperatures—Canada can expect a bill associated with “life cycle management,” said Paul Mitchell, a professor at the Canadian Forces College.

“A ship is an incredibly complex system of systems,” said Mitchell, explaining that supply ship operational costs are “effectively like the maintenance costs you pay to keep your car running.”

There are varying degrees of care and expertise required. Some fall under “first-line maintenance,” meaning fixes the crew can do without help, similar to people changing their vehicle’s oil and tires, explained Mitchell. But some issues need “second-line maintenance,” he said, adding that work is handled by the Fleet Maintenance Facilities on either coast in Esquimalt, B.C., or Halifax, N.S. Then there is “third-line maintenance,” which refers to “refits”—extensive maintenance work that happens about every 10 to 15 years.

Mitchell said the growing costs of the JSS is partly caused by the modifications made to meet Canadian standards, and the differences in weapon systems operated by the CAF compared to European navies.

“But the major factor in price escalation has been the high interest rates of the last two years which have taken a big bite out of the construction budgets as everything is more expensive,” he added. Labour shortages in key trades have also delayed construction times, which contributed to the increasing costs, he said.

“Bottom line is modern combat is a freakishly expensive endeavour. A fundamental truth is you fight with the military and navy you have at the time, not the one you are building for the future,” Mitchell said.

Supply ships boost NATO spending target

The supply-ship price tag and operational costs are part of the effort to meet Canada’s two-per-cent NATO spending target, according to DND.

“This project, of course, counts towards Canada’s defence spending,” Sadiku said.

According to Sadiku, the JSS project is also part of Canada’s track towards exceeding another NATO guideline asking allies to spend at least 20 per cent of defence expenditures on major new equipment.

Canada’s new defence policy, *Our North, Strong and Free*, projects defence spending will reach \$57.8-billion in 2029–30, or 1.76 per cent in terms of spending-to-GDP ratio.

Under pressure from allies, at this summer’s NATO Summit Canada announced plans to hit the military alliance’s target by 2032.

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Liberal MP John McKay previously told *The Hill Times* that he is ‘not very confident’ the supply ships will arrive within the new timeline. *The Hill Times* Photograph by Andrew Meade

Public servants sound off over new return-to-office mandate, while union faces heat over its 'Buy Nothing' campaign

Public service union walks back calls to boycott downtown Ottawa business.

BY SOPHALL DUCH

It's Wednesday morning rush hour in Ottawa and the city's federal public servants hurry past a *Hill Times* reporter who's looking for an on-the-record comment on the new return-to-office mandate.

"How do you feel about the new return-to-work mandate?"

"How have things changed for you with more workers back in the office?"

Just some of the questions these public servants tried to dodge as they come out of the city's light-rail station at Tunney's Pasture, home to a number of federal government buildings.

"Sorry."

"No, thank you."

"Traffic, traffic, traffic."

"Have you talked to our union?"

Those were just some of the responses some public servants replied with as they scurried past to get to work.

Shirley was initially no different from the others. She declined to comment as she first walked past. Several minutes later she would return—this time willing to talk.

"They're full," said Shirley, who didn't provide a last name.

"What?" asked *The Hill Times*.

"They're full," repeated Shirley. "Yeah, we have three floors and



Public service union members rally for remote work rights in Ottawa on Sept. 9, 2024, the same day the new federal return-to-work mandate came into effect. About 200 protesters were present. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

they're all full at 7:45 a.m. this morning."

"Oh my goodness, so you have to go back home now?" asked *The Hill Times*.

"Yes," said Shirley.

Luckily for Shirley, she said she won't be penalized for not securing a desk. But she added that she rushed to the office to snag a spot, and that it takes her an hour to get to work.

"You just have to show up and take your chance. And there's all these people going in there now

and they won't be able to get on those three floors," said Shirley.

The federal public service's new decree requiring its workers to come into the office three days a week came into effect on Sept. 9. The previous rule, implemented in March 2023, was a minimum of two to three days on site a week. For executives, it went from three days to four a week.

The change applied to workers in the federal government's core public administration, or about 270,000 of the 357,000 total number of federal public servants.

In-demand desks

While the change to the federal public service's in-office work policy is new, the change to the civil service's physical workspace is not.

Launched in 2019, the federal government's office modernization pilot project dubbed 'GCworkplace' saw select public service buildings retrofitted away from "department or agency-specific spaces" to a more open-plan setting "where more than one federal organization can benefit from sharing the same space."

The government's new workspace strategy proposed to reduce "traditional office space and adopting collaborative workspaces that support hybrid work models."

This plan was announced pre-COVID-19 pandemic. Little could the government have predicted

how much the pandemic would expedite its transition to the workspace of the future.

In 2019, Labour Minister Steven McKinnon (Gatineau, Que.), then parliamentary secretary to the minister of public services and procurement and accessibility, said in a statement that the project "will build a more accessible, efficient, flexible, and modern public service to better serve Canadians."

Flash forward to the present and "efficient" may not be an adjective public servants would use to describe the current workplace, given that the civil service has moved away from assigned desks to shared desks. Staff end up at different desks every day, meaning workers not only have to find their own desk each day, but have to find where their team is sitting as well.

Shirley said that she had to walk around the office to find her manager and her director after she couldn't get a desk.

"Since they've changed to this model, you're no longer [in] your own office space. It's getting used to the machine that's where you're sitting, and all the rest of it. And then trying to find the washroom, the printer. And you have to change everything because you never know which floor you're going to be on if you're assigned one floor, but if there isn't anything, you're sent to another floor," said Shirley.

Not all buildings have a desk problem though—some have a surplus of empty desks. But those public servants who work in a building with a desk shortage do have the option to book their spot ahead of time.

"You can book it, like, a day in advance, but I like to do it a month in advance so I know where I'm sitting," said Tony Nguyen, a public servant.

But others told *The Hill Times* that they can't plan that far ahead due to being parents and juggling their children's schedules. While others said that they still have to fight for their desk even if they booked it.

"There are always people at my reserve space because they didn't reserve a space," said Ferra, a public servant.

"What do you do? You kick them out?" asked *The Hill Times*.

"Yes. I used to have patience and find somewhere else. But I've lost my patience now that it's happening so frequently," said Ferra, who did not provide a last name.

In response to *The Hill Times'* questions about a lack of desks in some public service office buildings, a Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat spokesperson provided an emailed statement: "some [organizations] will need additional time to ready their workspaces, for example to complete renovations or expand available office space."

"In these situations, departments have adjusted their implementation timelines and have a plan in place to meet the updated direction, but the direction itself has not changed," the statement said.

PSAC strikes back, then backtracks

On Sept. 11, while the public servants who managed to secure a desk settled into their workday, one of their unions was about to launch a campaign they would eventually walk back by that evening.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada's (PSAC) National Capital Region chapter posted on Instagram a call for its Ottawa-area members to "Buy Nothing" from downtown businesses in protest at the return-to-office mandate change. The chapter was urging its members to bring a packed lunch and minimize spending on "in-office days."

"Pack your lunch, buy from small local businesses and keep supporting your neighbourhood businesses! Our members cannot be responsible for revitalizing the downtown core," said the caption on the now-deleted PSAC-NCR's Instagram post.

That post brought in swift disapproval from Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe.

"I'm very disappointed to see @PSACNCR targeting small businesses in their dispute with the federal government. Downtown businesses are not responsible for decisions about back to work. They've suffered significantly as a result of the pandemic. Let's keep

Continued on page 39



PSAC-NCR's now-deleted Instagram post from Sept. 11, 2024, urging its members to participate in a 'Buy Nothing' campaign to protest the new return-to-office mandate for federal public servants. Screenshot from Instagram

News Back to Parliament

Blame games on politically-targeted bot campaigns ‘irresponsible’ without verification, says researcher

Newsrooms ‘didn’t do a great job’ when first reporting on the bots praising a Poilievre rally, and that’s ‘the danger in horse race political coverage,’ says media expert Brian Daly.

BY IAN CAMPBELL

The lead researcher in a report debunking Conservative ties to a bot campaign backing Pierre Poilievre says politicians and the media should stick to verified information given the lag time to investigate the activity’s origins.

Aengus Bridgman, director of the Media Ecosystem Observatory at McGill University, was the co-ordinating force behind a team of academics at multiple universities that analyzed the incident. On Aug. 28, his team released a report that found “no evidence” a Canadian political party or foreign actor was behind the network that posted to the social media platform X. Instead, it appeared to be an amateur experiment, though he said it is “impossible to know with certainty” who was behind the network.

The team published its findings about three weeks after controversy about the Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) rally arose when Liberal and NDP MPs accused Conservatives of operating the network. That’s lightning fast in the world of academics, but still a glacial pace in the 24-hour news cycle.

That’s why it matters how public figures react to unverified information, said Bridgman.

They need to make responsible choices when reacting to incidents until reliable data is available, said Bridgman, who gave *The Hill Times* a behind-the-scenes look into the bot investigation.

Researchers purchased bots, fed tweets to AI

When the controversy broke, the researchers reconstructed the bot campaign to form a better picture of the potential actors involved.



An Aug. 28 McGill University report found ‘no evidence’ that any political party was behind a series of bot posts about a rally held by Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre in Northern Ontario this summer. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The team used multiple techniques, including purchasing bots to determine the market rate. They used cryptocurrency to make purchases from several websites, and found the going rate was about US\$0.20 per bot. Based on the total number of bots they identified in the network—anywhere from a few hundred up to about 7,000—the campaign could have been created at a relatively low cost.

The researchers also used the software program Twitter API to gather posts about July’s Kirkland Lake, Ont., rally. It’s a program that allows users to retrieve posts from X based on keywords, hashtags, or locations. They found 437 bot accounts that had posted about the event. This allowed them to collect all of the other posts from those accounts, and feed them into Large Language Models (LLMs)—artificial intelligence tools that analyzed the thousands of posts they collected.

Most posts followed the pattern of appearing about three days after any event—as was the case for the Poilievre rally. Bridgman said this suggests it was not someone trying to influence the news cycle.

“It reads exactly like somebody’s capacity building and testing something,” he said, calling it “inconsistent with anything a party would genuinely try.”

The evidence pointed to a “pipeline” whereby the bot network gathered news stories or social media posts, then fed that content into LLMs which then generated new posts about those stories and shared them on the bot accounts.

Four-day turnaround possible during an election

Bridgman said the campaign offered a good test of the team’s incident response protocol.

He said it could be applied to a future incident more quickly, particularly during an election when his team would be at a “heightened state of alert.” It also helped having experts at multiple universities working in tandem, and cross-checking their findings. The three-week turnaround for the recent investigation happened despite most of the team being on summer vacation.

Next time, he said it could be done in about four days.

However, in that window of time, media and politicians have a role to play in promoting a healthy information landscape, said Bridgman.

At least two MPs put forward the now-debunked allegation the Conservative Party was behind the bot network promoting the Poilievre rally. Bridgman called the reactions from when the bot posts first emerged “irresponsible,” noting the study found these comments and news stories played a larger role in the incident gaining traction than the initial posts.

On Aug. 6, NDP MP Charlie Angus (Timmins-James Bay, Ont.) released a statement which said: “Unable to generate any momentum, it looks like Poilievre had to turn to foreign bot farms and bogus accounts. This is bush league politics and Canadians deserve better.” He called on the

Commissioner of Canada Elections to investigate.

The same day, Liberal MP Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Ont.) posted to Facebook: “It’s all fake and it’s all paid for by the Conservative Party.”

The Hill Times reached out to both MPs to ask about their reaction to the McGill investigation, and if they wished to address their previous comments.

Gerretsen did not reply.

A spokesperson for Angus asked for a copy of the McGill report. *The Hill Times* sent a copy, and did not receive a further response.

Bridgman said his organization is working to develop relationships with newsrooms to serve as a resource when these incidents occur.

Despite the fast-paced news cycle, he said these stories would benefit from a “two-expert rule” to ensure better reporting.

‘The danger in horse-race political coverage’

Brian Daly, a journalism professor at the University of King’s College, said the media “didn’t do a great job” when the bot posts first appeared.

“What really sticks in my craw as a former news editor and producer are those news agencies that quoted the NDP MP Charlie Angus because they certainly did not substantiate his allegation,” said Daly.

He said the accusation from Angus often led the story, while contextualizing information that the source of the bot posts remained unknown appeared much further down.

“That’s the danger in horse-race political coverage, which everybody’s guilty of,” he said. “Fact checking takes more time.”

He said the McGill report—despite being “issued in milliseconds” from an academic perspective—may not have been enough to correct the record.

“People might remember the initial explosion. They may not remember so much the cleanup,” he said.

Daly said this comes down to news judgment. He said journalists should ask whether the public needs the story right away, or if more days should be given to fact checking. He said the bots allegation was the latter.

Dimitri Pavlounis, director of research for CIVIX—an organiza-

tion that trains educators on how to teach civic literacy—said these situations could benefit from applying a core tenet of digital literacy competency: “critical ignoring.”

“Newsrooms do play a curatorial role,” he said. “I would say that the actual initial bot activity itself ... was not in the public interest [to report on]. It became in the public interest because it got blown out of proportion.”

Pavlounis said at the time of the initial news reports “we didn’t have any evidence about where these things were coming from,” but that context “was rarely in the headlines.”

“That’s going to make people draw conclusions that the Conservatives are behind it,” he said.

Pavlounis said the stakes are high because misinformation tends to have its greatest impact when it comes from recognizable public figures.

Oksana Kishchuk, director of strategy and insights for Abacus Data, said public opinion research backs this up.

One Abacus study asked participants about what “signals” to them that information is accurate. She said the top answer was its source.

Kishchuk said that despite trust in politicians declining information from them is seen as coming “straight from the horse’s mouth.” The public sees them as someone who “presumably knows what’s going on,” and that means politicians are “people that Canadians are going to be listening to on these issues.”

She said public figures should be wary of this for two reasons.

Elected representatives have “the duty to make sure that what they’re sharing and talking about is truthful,” she said. But there’s also an element of self-interest: it can “come back to bite them” if information they share is later found to be false or misleading.

Bridgman said technology has advanced in a way that similar attacks will remain “easy and trivial” to carry out, even by comparison to the 2019 or 2021 federal campaigns. That means future incidents are to be expected. Building a similar pipeline to the one used in the recent incident would take only the level of technical skill that someone could learn in a high school coding class.

Another part of this challenging environment is that technology platforms have been uncooperative with researchers on addressing the problem, said Bridgman, meaning the way media and politicians discuss these incidents serves as a last line of defence.

Looking ahead to the next election, Pavlounis said his greatest concern stems from misinformation driven by public figures.

“The incident that I’m worried about is the one that is carelessly perpetuated by people who actually have positions of influence and power,” he said. “Those are the ones that actually gain traction and that can actually affect human behaviour.”

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Federal procurement watchdog reports 30 per cent surge in complaints

‘There’s no doubt that our recent procurement practice reviews of ArriveCan and contracts awarded to McKinsey & Company have helped raise the profile,’ said Procurement Ombud Alexander Jeglic.

BY IREM KOCA

The federal procurement watchdog saw a nearly 30 per cent increase in complaints from suppliers working on federal contracts compared to the previous fiscal year, which Procurement Ombud Alexander Jeglic says is linked to the office’s investigations into high-profile contracts such as those for the controversial ArriveCan application.

The Office of the Procurement Ombud (OPO), which has a new review of complaint reports on its website, has received 80 written complaints so far in this fiscal year—which began on April 1, 2024, and ends on March 31, 2025. In comparison, the office received 62 complaints throughout the entirety of the last fiscal year, and 68 complaints the year before. Not all complaints lead to formal reviews by the office, as many do not meet the necessary requirements for further investigation. The OPO was unable to provide a breakdown of how many complaints were received for each department by deadline.

Suppliers to the federal government can file complaints with the OPO, which can help resolve procurement disputes between suppliers and federal organizations. As outlined by the OPO, complaints may arise when suppliers believe they should have been awarded a contract, their proposal was wrongly rejected, or think their existing contract was improperly administered. Suppliers can submit complaints regarding the award of a contract valued below \$33,400 for goods and \$133,800 for services, or concerning the administration of a federal contract, regardless of the dollar value.

Forty of the complaints received this fiscal year came from freelance interpreters regarding



Procurement Ombud Alexander Jeglic, right, and Derek Mersereau, left, acting director, inquiries, quality assurance and risk management in the Ombud's Office of Procurement, on Jan. 31, 2024. *The Hill Times* Photograph by Andrew Meade

the administration of contracts with the Translation Bureau. Michèle LaRose, a spokesperson for Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) told *The Hill Times* that the department is “aware” of the complaints submitted by freelance interpreters to the OPO. “The Translation Bureau collaborates fully with the Ombud but cannot comment on active complaints,” she said.

A group of freelance interpreters working for the federal government did not renew their contracts after the Translation Bureau, under PSPC, introduced what they said were “egregious” amendments to their contracts. The budget included more than \$35-million in funding for the bureau with the goal of boosting interpretation capacity. There have been reports of interpreters suffering from hearing injuries due to earpieces getting too close to a microphone in committee meetings. Interpretation capacity issues have put constraints on parliamentary work with reports of House and Senate committee meetings being cancelled due to a lack of available interpretation resources.

The influx of contract administration complaints alongside “a heightened awareness” of the OPO’s high-profile reviews has contributed to the significant increase in complaints, according to the OPO.

“There’s no doubt that our recent procurement practice reviews of ArriveCan and contracts awarded to McKinsey & Compa-

ny have helped raise the profile of our office and the services we offer to Canadian businesses and federal departments,” Procurement Ombud Jeglic told *The Hill Times*.

Procurement watchdog has conducted five reviews so far

Jeglic’s office conducted five complaint reviews during the current fiscal year, three of which relate to acquisition of consultants and project management services, an area that has come under scrutiny over the past couple of years with major procurement projects being outsourced to private contractors.

According to a February report by the Parliamentary Budget Office, the 2023 federal budget proposed a spending reduction of \$500-million on consulting, other professional services and travel in 2023-24—roughly 15 per cent of planned discretionary spending in those areas. Beginning in 2024-25 and ongoing, the planned spending reduction is \$1.7-billion annually.

These include the acquisition of project manager services by Pacific Economic Development Canada (PacifiCan) on April 3, the acquisition of anti-racism consultant services by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) on Aug. 26, and the acquisition of diversity and inclusion network anti-racism training for executives by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) on Sept. 2.

The CRA contract, valued at \$76,000 (taxes excluded) was for “Diversity and Inclusion Network Anti-Racism Training for Executives” which was awarded under a supply arrangement in January. The complaint raised four issues, but only one—regarding the procurement process leading up to the competitive solicitation—carried merit, according to the procurement ombudsman. The OPO found that the initial procurement process followed by the CRA prior to launching the competitive request for proposals was “wrongful,” and, “made it reasonable for the complainant to initially believe a contract would be directed to them.”

Jeglic recommended that the CRA pay \$7,600 in compensation to the complainant for costs incurred in preparing its bid.

In the case of IRCC, the contract in question was for the services of an anti-racism consultancy with professional expertise in systemic biases. The contract, valued at \$102,500 with taxes excluded, was awarded on Dec. 6, 2023. The supplier’s complaint to the OPO was on the basis that they “believed that the qualification requirements precluded it from bidding because they were racist in nature, specifically around the merit-based requirements.” Jeglic found that the mandatory criteria used by the IRCC was “unreasonable,” as it was not aligned with the department’s own stated preference. While the ombud found merit in two out of the three complaints raised in this instance, he did not recommend financial compensation.

Isabelle Dubois, an IRCC spokesperson, told *The Hill Times* that the department “followed the appropriate procurement procedures; however, the supplier noted some weaknesses in the evaluation criteria.” The IRCC is “using this as a learning and training opportunity” according to Dubois, who said that the department is working on an internal action plan to improve its procurement processes.

Jeglic found merit in all of the complaints against PacifiCan contract, valued at \$95,120 (taxes excluded) and awarded on Sept. 6 under a supply arrangement. The contract was for the implementation of an independent departmental financial management system by a project manager. The supplier raised two issues about proper evaluation of their bid, and providing them with an adequate debriefing. The OPO concluded that the department did not properly evaluate the

bid. The review said there was a lack of clarity in the criteria, and insufficient documentation to explain certain decisions. Jeglic recommended that PacifiCan also pay \$8,850 in compensation for costs incurred in preparing its bid.

How does the complaint process work?

The complaint process begins when a written complaint is received by OPO. The office examines the complaint and determines within 10 working days whether a formal review is warranted. If a review is deemed necessary, then the Ombudsman notifies the supplier and the federal organization involved. The OPO collects relevant documentation from both parties, and conducts a review within 120 working days. Finally, the OPO reports the findings to the supplier, the minister of the federal organization involved, and the minister of Public Services and Procurement since the PSPC is the body responsible for the entirety of the federal procurement process.

Jeglic noted that despite the “increased need” for his office’s services, the budget allocated to it has remained static for the last 15 years. He said that, given the ever-growing demand for the OPO’s services, “a permanent funding solution is required.”

“While our office has tried to continue to deliver on its mandate, budget constraints and inflationary pressures have made it increasingly difficult to serve Canadian suppliers and federal departments in the ways required,” he added.

Jeglic’s April 15 report looked at 32 federal contracts awarded to McKinsey and Company, and found that the federal government appeared to “favour” the firm by shifting its procurement strategies and methods, allowing the company to secure millions of dollars worth of contracts.

Jeglic’s January report on ArriveCan provided the first concrete revelations of procurement irregularities associated with the app. The findings showed that most of the subcontractors, who were pitched as sources to secure the millions of dollars worth of contracts with the government, did not perform the work. Jeglic noted at the time that the criteria for the \$25-million contract awarded to GC Strategies—the company in the centre of misconduct allegations—were “overly restrictive and favoured” the firm.

The procurement ombud said before that he found “reasonable grounds” to conduct a procurement practice review looking into “bait and switch” practices across federal government amid ArriveCan revelations, but flagged again then that his office needs additional funding to kick off the investigation.

Jeglic is also working on an annual report looking into federal procurement practices across the board, which his team said will be tabled in Parliament in the next couple of weeks.

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News Back to Parliament

'Tense' fall sitting begins, with Liberals under pressure from Conservatives, NDP, and Bloc Québécois, say pollsters, lobbyists

Continued from page 4

the recent appointment of former Bank of Canada governor Mark Carney as the chair of a Liberal Party task force advising Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.), indicates the economy will be a top priority for the Liberals this fall. Carney's new role was announced on Sept. 9.

"As chair of the Leader's Task Force on Economic Growth, Mark's unique ideas and perspectives will play a vital role in shaping the next steps in our plan to continue to grow our economy and strengthen the middle class, and to urgently seize new opportunities for Canadian jobs and prosperity in a fast-changing world," said Trudeau in a press statement.

"Mark Carney is a central banker. He knows all about interest rates and inflation. Hypothetically, he should be a positive voice at the table, shaping the economic policy of the government. But we don't know whether this is just window dressing or real, and we also don't know ... are the Liberals going to change anything? Are they going to do anything new, or are they going to stay the course?" said Nanos. "It's a little too early to say, other than, at least from an optics point of view, they want to portray that they're focusing more on the economy."

Greg Lyle, president of Innovative Research, told *The Hill Times* that Carney is a general for an uphill Liberal battle, but he has no immediate agenda.

"Their obvious public play is that, 'We've got one of Canada's smartest guys thinking up ideas for us.' The search for ideas, in and of itself, is not a bad thing, right?" he said. "Obviously, anything that Carney can come up with in the immediate future is something they're going to want to act on. The easier thing for them is to start building the case that Conservative change is scary change, and the obvious policy area for that is healthcare. We know they should be spending more time on healthcare, because they're still rolling out the financing agreements with the provinces, which they got very little credit for."

When asked about the possible ramifications of the finished supply-and-confidence agreement, Nanos said he expects the NDP to allow the minority Liberal government to try governing for a short period of time before they render judgment. He added that the end of the agreement makes the Bloc Québécois "relevant again."

"Maybe the one thing that we can be sure of is that for the

government to sustain itself and stay in power, the ... only way to do that is to spend more money and to give something to a bloc of votes, whether it's the New Democrats, who will probably be a little more strident and asking for something for their support, or potentially the Bloc Québécois," said Nanos. "I think one of the other things that I think all politicians have to be aware of is that they don't go too over-the-top with political antics and brinkmanship, because for average Canadians ... want to hear solutions, especially from the two front-running parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals. Perhaps, if there was a little less partisanship and a little more statesmanship, it would probably be well received by Canadians, writ-large."

Stevie O'Brien, a counsel of government and public policy with McMillan Vantage, told *The Hill Times* that she doesn't expect any new signature or flashy policy positions from the Liberals this fall. Instead, the Liberals will want as much "runway" as possible before a federal election, to buy time for existing policy measures related to housing and affordability to come to fruition, she said.

"We've seen the interest rate cuts coming down, but there's still unemployment. We see the economy, hopefully, coming to some sort of a soft landing, but it's not there yet. The right things have been put into housing, but it's not there yet. What [the Liberals] really do need is to push this election out as far as possible," she said. "And what the Conservatives need is to have the election yesterday, so they will be looking for absolutely every opportunity to have it called."

O'Brien said that, for her, the big question about the fall sitting revolves around what the NDP will do. She said that the NDP will likely be interested in seeing the royal assent of Bill C-64.

"[Pharmacare is] one of those reasons that [Singh] can stand up and say, 'I'm going to continue to support the Liberal government ... because we need to get Pharmacare passed.' And I think his base may accept that. But once that's done, I don't know how he continues to resist non-confidence motions," said O'Brien. "It's going to be a very tense session. I think the stakes are going to be high."

Cam Holmstrom, founder of Niipaawi Strategies and a former NDP staffer, told *The Hill Times* that the appointment of Carney to his new role indicates Liberal

priorities in the fall will be "all economy," but it remains to be seen how that plays out.

"Has [Carney] been appointed to give policy and direction, or has he been appointed to, basically, validate what they're already doing? I think that's going to tell the tale," he said.

Holmstrom said that Trudeau is unpopular as prime minister, and "as a result, people are not really listening to what [the Liberals] have to offer."

"The only way that they could potentially shake that loose ... is to actually deliver on some of these economic pieces that they

promised. If it actually goes beyond rhetoric and they're actually able to get some of these things done, I think that would be the best potential outcome they could ask for," he said. "What are people's biggest concern? It's what's directly in front of them. How do I put food on the table? How do I afford rent or a mortgage? Yes, some of these things are improving, but for most people you're still faced with it."

Bloc House Leader Alain Therrien (La Prairie, Que.) called the conclusion of the supply-and-confidence agreement "a window of opportunity," and that

"our balance of power has improved for sure," in an interview with the *Montreal Gazette* on Sept. 8. In exchange for support during confidence votes, the Bloc wants the government to offer royal recommendation to the party's Bill C-319, which seeks to change how monthly Old Age Security payments are calculated, including increasing the basic amount of full monthly payments from \$273.80 to \$756.32. The Bloc also wants Quebec to get more powers in immigration matters, according to *the Montreal Gazette*.

Holmstrom said that the way the Bloc are announcing demands of the government currently is unlike how he's heard them talk in the last 30 years.

"They've always acted as if their presence alone was enough to talk for Quebec — that they didn't actually have to do the work to deliver anything. It wasn't their job to do that—that they were there to oppose this awful federal government," he said. "To see them come out and say that, to me, that was a tell that they don't want an election. They don't want to go to the polls."

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Legislation at a Glance: Status of Government Bills in House and Senate

House of Commons



Senate bills awaiting first reading:

- S-2, An act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other acts
- S-17, the Miscellaneous Statute Law Amendment Act, 2023

Second reading:

- S-7, An act to amend the Customs Act and the Preclearance Act, 2016
- S-11, Federal Law—Civil Law Harmonization Act, No. 4
- S-13, An act to amend the Interpretation Act and to make related amendments to other Acts
- S-14, Protecting Canada's Natural Wonders Act
- C-7, An act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts
- C-17, An act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act and to

authorize certain payments to be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund

- C-23, Historic Places of Canada Act
- C-37, An act to amend the Department of Employment and Social Development Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts (Employment Insurance Board of Appeal)
- C-38, An act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements)
- C-52, Enhancing Transparency and Accountability in the Transportation System Act
- C-63, An act to enact the Online Harms Act, to amend the Criminal Code, the Canadian Human Rights Act and an act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service and to make consequential and related amendments to other acts
- C-66, Military Justice System Modernization Act

- C-71, An act to amend the Citizenship Act (2024)

- C-72, Connected Care For Canadians Act
- C-73, Nature Accountability Act

Bills under consideration in committee:

- S-6, An act respecting regulatory modernization
- S-16, Haida Nation Recognition Act
- C-27, Digital Charter Implementation Act, 2022
- C-61, First Nations Clean Water Act
- C-65, Electoral Participation Act

Bills at report stage:

- C-33, Strengthening the Port System and Railway Safety in Canada Act
- C-53, Recognition of Certain Métis Governments in Alberta, Ontario and Saskatchewan and Métis Self-Government Act

Senate



Second reading:

- C-26, An act respecting cyber security, amending the Telecommunications Act and making consequential amendments to other acts
- C-40, Miscarriage of Justice Review Commission Act (David and Joyce Milgaard's Law)

Bills under consideration in committee:

- C-20, Public Complaints and Review Commission Act
- C-49, An act to amend the Canada—Newfoundland and Labrador Atlantic Accord Implementation Act and the Canada—Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts
- C-64, Pharmacare Act

Bills at report stage:

- S-15, An act to amend the Criminal Code and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act

Source: LEGISInfo

Liberal MPs unclear about party's strategy for 2025 at last summer retreat before next federal election

Continued from page 6

Former Bank of Canada and Bank of England governor Mark Carney also gave a speech to the Liberal caucus members. Some saw it as a speech of a future leadership candidate and his vision for the country. On the day of the caucus retreat, Trudeau appointed Carney as the chair of the leader's task force on economic growth.

"It was well-articulated. He can articulate things in a way that is captivating, almost entertain like it keeps you present," said the MP, adding they were impressed how many MPs Carney knew by name. "Everybody was paying attention in the caucus room. This is unusual because normally the members have too much distractions, and they're too familiar with each other, no matter who is speaking. And so they're not all paying attention, but everybody was paying

attention throughout the whole period of time, or almost all the period of time." This MP described Carney's speech as a "general thesis on what we need to do as Liberals," and covered topics such as inflation, affordable housing, and use of artificial intelligence to benefit Canadian workers, among others. Meanwhile, MPs told *The Hill Times* that the Sept. 16 byelection in Montreal is critical, and a loss for the Liberals could

spell even more trouble for Trudeau. They expressed feeling "kind of overwhelmed" by the party's declining popularity, the absence of a national campaign director, the departure of chiefs of staff, and the recent byelection loss in Toronto, and another potential one in LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, Que., this week. "It'll all come down to the byelection in Montreal," said a third MP who did not want to be identified in order to speak candidly. "You're gonna get people to speak up. I really do think that people have been very gracious, and so far as the prime minister is concerned, we're constantly like, 'okay, okay,' but I think with a loss in the byelection that might very well change. You are going to see people speak their mind because the centre has been afforded every opportunity to say that it's doing things differently, that they have a plan, but at some point, I think people will react." *arana@hilltimes.com*
The Hill Times



Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, left, PMO senior adviser Ben Chin, PMO chief of staff Katie Telford, and Government House Leader Karina Gould all spoke at last week's three-day caucus retreat. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade and Stuart Benson

Public servants sound off over new return-to-office mandate, while union faces heat over its 'Buy Nothing' campaign

Continued from page 35

them out of the line of fire. Let's support them and support a thriving downtown," said Sutcliffe's post on X (formerly Twitter). PSAC's Ottawa chapter did eventually take down its "Buy Nothing" campaign post on Instagram that evening, and replaced it with a re-branded "Buy Local" post.

"We recognize a lot of our members don't have extra spending money with the extra cost of commuting to the office over three days a week. What money left is being spent on additional childcare and commuting," the PSAC-NCR Instagram post's new caption said, in part.

PSAC did secure wage hikes with the feds when they settled their strike last May. In a statement to *The Hill Times*, PSAC-NCR's executive for the region, Ruth Lau MacDonald, said "our intention has never been to pit federal workers against small downtown businesses."

MacDonald added that the "federal government has to work alongside the City of Ottawa and the business community to reimagine our city centres without putting the burden on federal workers."

Businesses in the capital's core have been struggling since the pandemic and 2022's so-called 'Freedom Convoy' protests that blockaded downtown streets.

"We have businesses closing earlier or we're not seeing open when there's opportunity because there's just no traffic coming down. And then there's some businesses that just haven't had a full return since the pandemic period, they never got back business that they had. A lot of it was reliant on lunchtime and government rush," said SabriNa Lemay, executive director of 'Centretown'— the name of the business improvement area for downtown Ottawa just south of Parliament Hill.

Lemay said businesses are "very happy" for more public servants back in the city's core, and that the new return-to-office mandate is "generating a lot of hope."

But Lemay added that it's not only up to federal public servants to restore Ottawa's downtown.

"It's everybody's responsibility within our city to make our city come back to life," said Lemay. "It's not just about downtown, it's about helping our city as a whole."

Lemay provided an analogy comparing downtown to an apple's core.

"If the core of an apple rots, what happens to the apple? The entire apple rots," said Lemay. "If the [downtown] core rots, and there's not enough tourism and there's not enough people down there, it impacts the city as a whole."

Sounding off

Not all public servants have a problem with the new in-office requirements,

since some of them were already on-site five days a week either voluntarily or required.

"If I'm gonna be back at work, it's like, I'd rather be here. I'm a public servant, so if the taxpayers want me to go back to work full time, then so be it," said Raymond, who did not provide a last name.

Others see the conversation as overblown, since there's currently more attention on the return-to-office change.

"I'm noticing a difference because my colleagues are talking about it. But we've all been in the office, so we're just kind of looking at this like somebody else's thing," said Jakob Kuzyk, a public servant.

Regardless, some workers are upset. "It sucks," Nicole, a public servant, put it. *sduch@hilltimes.com*
The Hill Times

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Feature Back to Parliament

Parliamentary Calendar

House is back on Monday, Sept. 16



Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, pictured at a caucus meeting on the Hill. The House of Commons is back on Monday, Sept. 16. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

TUESDAY, SEPT. 10—TUESDAY, SEPT. 24

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

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—Earncliffe, *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 FNCS 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 panellists who will take part in two sessions. Wednesday, Sept. 18, at 2 p.m. ET at the Munk School, University of Toronto. Details: billgrahamcentre.utoronto.ca.

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.

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

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.

Women on the Hill Reception—Earncliffe hosts the "Women on the Hill" reception, a gathering with women from politics, government, media, business, academia, labour, diplomacy, and civil society. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. Space is limited. Thursday, Sept. 19, at the Fairmont Château Laurier's La Terrasse, 1 Rideau St. Details via Eventbrite.

er's La Terrasse, 1 Rideau St. Details via Eventbrite.

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

Panel: 'Burning Questions'—CBC's Nahlah Ayed will moderate a "Burning Questions: Confronting the Challenges of our Global Climate Crisis" conversation between award-winning author John Vaillant and global climate policy thinker Catherine Abreu, part of the ongoing Toronto International Festival of Authors. Saturday, Sept. 21, at 4 p.m. ET at the Harbourfront Centre Theatre, 231 Queens Quay W., Toronto. Details: festivalofauthors.ca.

Canada Strong and Free Regional Networking Conference—Conservative MP John Barlow, Alberta Premier Danielle Smith, and former MP Stockwell Day are 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: cdhoweregentdebate.org.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 25

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

25, at the Hilton Garden Inn Ottawa Downtown, 361 Queen St. Details via Eventbrite.

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

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

THURSDAY, SEPT. 26

Webinar: 'Maximize Impact Post-Lobby Day'—The Beacon North Mentorship Academy hosts the second in a two-part online course, "Maximizing Impact After Your Lobby Day." This second session will explore the steps to take after your lobby day to ensure your advocacy efforts produce results. Thursday, Sept. 26, from 12-1:30 p.m. ET. Details: beaconmentorshipacademy.com.

'Wildfires and the Need for Resilient Communities'—The Canadian Club of Ottawa hosts a lunch event on "Canadian Wildfires and the Urgent Need for Resilient Communities" featuring Celyeste Power, president and CEO of the Insurance Bureau of Canada. Thursday, Sept. 26, at 12 p.m. ET at the National Arts Centre, 1 Elgin St. Details: canadianclubottawa.ca.

Liberal MP Fortier to Host Spaghetti Dinner—Liberal MP Mona Fortier hosts a spaghetti dinner featuring conversations with community members. Thursday, Sept. 26, at 6 p.m. ET at the Centre Pauline Charron, 164 Jeanne Mance St. Ottawa. Details: liberal.ca.

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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.

