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NEWS

Poilievre says
Conservatives
'go around'
Hill media,
alleges 'anti-
conservative
bias' after
ending CTV
News boycott

BY SOPHALL DUCH

The ice has apparently thawed between the Conservative Party and CTV News following the network's airing of an altered clip of the party's leader, and the subsequent firing of two Bell Media employees.

"We are allowing our caucus members to speak with CTV again," said Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) to NewsTalk 580 CFRA's Bill Carroll last week. Bell Media is the parent company of radio station CFRA, as well as CTV News, CP24, Noovo, TSN, and more. "And I'm glad that CTV fired those who are involved. But this is part of a broader pattern of the Parliament Hill media, which is largely state funded or has indirect reasons to suck up to the federal government."

Said Poilievre: "The examples of anti-conservative bias in the bought-and-paid-for Parliament Hill Press Gallery go on and on and on and on. And that's why we go around the Parliament Hill Press Gallery to communicate our common-sense plan to axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget, and stop the crime directly to Canadians."

A Conservative spokesperson previously announced that Conservative MPs would no longer "engage" with CTV News reporters after the party accused them

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NEWS

Liberals at a 'breaking point' as polls show 'deep truth' of historic challenges they face, says author

BY IAN CAMPBELL

The author of a book about how the federal Liberals dominated politics for most of Canadian his-

tory says the party is at a "breaking point" when it comes to maintaining that position.

Richard Johnston, an emeritus political science professor at Uni-

versity of British Columbia, and author of the book *The Canadian Party System: An Analytic History*, told *The Hill Times* the latest round of federal polls point to a

"deep truth" about the long-term challenges the Liberals face.

A Nanos poll, released Oct. 1, found the Conservatives in a

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NEWS

Federal messaging, concerns bleed into campaigns as three provinces head to polls

Leaders seeking re-election in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan paint opponents as Trudeau allies, while B.C. Conservatives adopt similar messaging to Poilievre.

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

Millions of Canadian voters will head to the polls later

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Polls suggest that British Columbia Premier David Eby, left, New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs, and Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe face tight re-election contests this month. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

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Christina Leadley
Heard On The Hill

Costa Rica's ambassador to Canada, Adriana Solano Laclé, has died



Costa Rica's ambassador, Adriana Solano Laclé, centre, pictured in September 2023 with *The Hill Times'* founding editor and publisher Jim Creskey, left, and publisher Anne Marie Creskey. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

Adriana Solano Laclé, ambassador of Costa Rica to Canada, died in Ottawa on Sept. 30. She was 50 years old.

The embassy team in Ottawa said it is "deeply saddened" by the ambassador's

passing, according to a statement shared with *Heard on the Hill* on Oct. 2.

"Ambassador Solano passed surrounded by her loved ones, leaving behind an inspiring legacy built through 22 years of



Adriana Solano Laclé, left, who died on Sept. 30, pictured with Liberal MP Arielle Kayabaga on Feb. 28, 2024. Photograph courtesy of Twitter

passionate work and dedication as a diplomat. Her strength, joyful personality, and deep sense of humanity made Ambassador Solano an exemplary woman, friend, colleague, mentor, wife, stepmother, daughter and sister," reads the statement.

"Her compromise and dedication leave a significant mark in all of us who had the honor of working alongside her. She will be deeply missed."

The cause of her death has "not yet been reported by her relatives," according to an English translation from CRC89.1 Radio online on Oct 1.

Solano officially started her role in Ottawa in January 2023. She was a career diplomat who spent a decade at her country's mission to Belgium, Luxembourg, and the European Union from 2000-2010, and after that was consul general in Singapore. Back at headquarters in San José, Solano was most recently director general of foreign policy.

Liberal MP **Arielle Kayabaga** said she was "heartbroken" as she expressed her condolences on X (formerly Twitter) on Sept. 30. "She had so many dreams and plans on what we can accomplish together!"

The last photos of Solano to appear on the embassy's social media are from May. Since June, chargé d'affaires **Víctor Porrás** has featured as the lead at events and meetings.

Sadly, this is the third envoy to Canada who has died since last Christmas. Norway's Ambassador to Canada **Trine Jøranli Eskedal** died due to illness on June 17 in Norway, while the Dominican Republic's ambassador to Canada, **Frank Hans Dannenberg Castellanos**, died of a heart attack on Dec. 23, 2023, in Montreal, Que.

Conservatives hope new 'Mountain' ad moves voters

"Did **Pierre Poilievre** just win the next election with this ad?" **Stephen Taylor** rhetorically asked on Twitter last week.

The Conservative Party's digital campaign manager was plugging the new ad titled "Mountain," part of a bilingual national campaign appearing on television and online.

The 60-second video features slow-mo shots of **Pierre Poilievre**—showing off his biceps in a tight white t-shirt—and his wife **Ana** in a denim shirt open over a black tank-top, walking hand in hand up a grassy hill.

"Feels like home in the mountains where I grew up," the opposition leader says in the voiceover. "I was adopted by school teachers who taught me that in Canada, if you worked at it, you could climb any mountain. People don't feel that way now."

The ad never mentions the words "Liberal" or "Trudeau." The only reference to politics is a quote from Immigration Minister **Marc Miller** shown over an image of vehicles queuing at the border.

The couple's ascent is spliced with gritty shots showing unhoused people, crimes in progress, and images of downtown Toronto at night.

Forty seconds into the ad, the Poilievres find a flagpole and together hoist a Canada flag as the narrator lists all the things his party will do: "We will cap spending, axe taxes, reward work, build homes, uphold families, stop crime, secure borders, re-arm our forces, restore our freedom, and unite our people with common values, common sense, common hope for our common home."

"This is one of the most compelling campaign advertisements I have seen in many years," **Conrad Black** posted on Twitter on Sept. 29.



Stills from the Conservative Party's new 'Mountain' ad which debuted last week. Screen shots courtesy of YouTube

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Despite plunging polling numbers, some Liberal MPs put on a brave face

Meanwhile, Liberal pundit Scott Reid said on Sept. 29 on social media: 'If you're like me and you were wondering, 'When's a good time to panic? The answer is...right now.'

BY ABBAS RANA

The Liberals' national popularity numbers under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau are tanking, but still some MPs are putting on a brave face, saying they may be down but not out, and will bounce back stronger in the coming months.

"Oh, we've been in the tough situations for a while now, and we're doing what we need to do," said three-term Liberal MP Darrell Samson (Sackville-Preston-Chez-zetcook, N.S.) in an interview with *The Hill Times*. "We're going to surprise many people. You remember, 2015, nobody had us [winning and forming government]. They never thought I was going to win, and I was against [long time NDP MP] Peter Stoffer, of course. And things can change. We're going to turn this around soon. Stay tuned."

Samson said that, prior to the start of the 2015 national campaign, the Liberals were in third place in polling numbers, but still ended up winning a landslide majority government. In federal electoral history, no party ever jumped from third to first place in just one election. Samson said that he was optimistic that his party would regain the lost ground in the coming weeks and months, but declined to say how.

Since the summer of 2023, the Liberals have consistently trailed the Conservatives by a double-digit margin, with the NDP in third place. However, some recent national public opinion polls suggest that they're either tied with or trailing behind the NDP.

A Mainstreet Research poll released on Sept. 28 suggested that if an election were held now, among decided and leaning voters, the Conservatives would receive 44 per cent of the votes, the NDP 20 per cent, and the Liberals 19 per cent. This is the first time in a decade that the NDP is ahead of the Liberals in popularity.

A Nanos Research poll released last week showed that the Conservatives were leading with 41 per cent support nationwide, while the Liberals and the NDP were tied at 21 per cent.

An Abacus Data poll released last week indicated that the NDP was ahead of the Liberals outside Quebec. According to this poll, the Conservatives had the support of 50 per cent of Canadians, the NDP 22 per cent, and the Liberals 19 per cent. In Quebec, the Bloc Québécois had the support of 37 per cent, followed by the Liberals at 28 per cent, the Conservatives at 22 per cent, and the NDP at 10 per cent. Nationally, the

poll suggested the NDP was still two points behind the Liberals at 19 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively, while Conservative support was at 43 per cent.

Liberal pundit Scott Reid said on Sept. 29 on social media, after reading the latest



The Liberals' polling numbers are tanking under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, but they will still win the next election, say some of the party's MPs. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Abacus Data poll, headlined, 'Our latest finds the Conservatives ahead by 22 and the NDP passing the Liberals outside Quebec.': "If you're like me and you were wondering, 'When a good time to panic? The answer is...right now.'

Liberal MP Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay-Rainy River, Ont.) suggested that the NDP's rise to second place might be a short-term trend, adding that the next

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The grape wine business in Canada produces the highest value-added agricultural product in the country, with the potential to uncork billions of dollars of additional economic benefits and drive significant investments for the local, regional as well as national economy.

Today, Canada is home to more than 600 wineries that deliver \$1.5 billion of direct business revenue and stimulate over \$12 billion in national economic impact through a value chain of integrated businesses that attract more than 4 million annual tourists. The developing wine regions in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia, have grown significantly over the past two decades, and continue to offer untapped potential. This is just the beginning of how wine clusters can drive economic development, as proven in many regions around the world from Bordeaux to Napa.

In recent years, Canadian wine growers have faced what many would describe as the perfect storm of operational challenges. From the vagaries of climate to the lingering impacts of COVID-19, our workforce has been impacted and consumer behaviours have been altered. Today the industry is facing many new challenges, but four major ones are hitting us all at once: generational shifts, increased competition, climate change and global efforts to denounce the consumption of beverage alcohol.

Within this state of turmoil, it is critical to engage and educate federal decision makers and provide solutions to ensure that we have an enabling environment that supports both the needs of our sector and the value chain that we support – from economic and social to environmental sustainability. This is the foundation required for the grape and wine industry to support the growth and job

creation required to drive our regional and national economies.

To ensure the continued growth and prosperity of the Canadian wine industry, it is essential that we address these challenges head-on. This will require a collaborative effort involving government, industry stakeholders, and consumers.

Wine regions around the world have come to realize that the wine industry has a significant economic impact, extending far beyond the wineries themselves. Wine businesses support a vast value chain, including businesses in farming, construction, Additionally, wine regions play a crucial role in driving tourism, attracting both domestic and high-yield international visitors seeking authentic wine country experiences.

To compete effectively, efforts must be undertaken to increase domestic wine sales market share, integrate with tourism to create world-class destinations, incentivize investment through competitive tax policies, and support capital investment in agriculture and hospitality. These best practices were identified in Deloitte's 2023 Report on Ontario wine industry entitled "*The Niagara Cluster: Ontario's Untapped Economic Engine*," and are essential to fostering national cluster growth and development in wine regions across the country.

For centuries wine has been crafted to be enjoyed in moderation with friends, family and food as part of a balanced and healthy lifestyle. However, today wine and other beverage alcohol face growing temperance campaigns based on fear, rather than sound scientific evidence. WGC will continue to educate Canadians in our efforts to stop harmful consumption, including binge-drinking, drinking while pregnant and

underage drinking, in support of responsible and moderate wine consumption and positive lifestyle choices.

Wine Growers Canada has been an active contributor to Canada's alcohol harm reduction initiatives for the past 20 years including the development of Canada National Alcohol Strategy, the creation of the standard drink and Canada's Low Risk Drinking Guidelines. As an industry, we also developed a Code for Responsible Advertising and Marketing Practices and the 2021 launch of *TheRightAmount.ca* to help Canadians make informed decisions about their wine consumption. The advertising campaign and interactive website offers information about serving sizes, alcohol, sugar and calorie content and a standard drink calculator with a core message that "*The right amount for some is none, no questions asked.*"

Canadian winegrowing is driven by research and innovation to ensure our industry is economically and environmentally sustainable and socially responsible. As Chair of the Wine Growers Canada Board of Directors I am eager to continue working with the Parliamentary Wine Caucus, Ministers, government officials, civil society and our grape wine value chain to champion our industry and work to uncork the economic, social and cultural potential of Canada's wine sector.

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News

'Hotter and drier' conditions in forests will create greater fire risk in coming decades, Senate committee hears, as House continues Jasper study

Canada's climate is warming at twice the global rate—and three to four times faster in the North. This means hotter and drier conditions in our forests, which increases forest flammability, says Wilfrid Laurier University's Jennifer Baltzer.

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

As a House committee continues to probe the factors leading to fires that devastated Alberta's iconic Jasper National Park earlier this year, a Senate committee has heard that the scale of recent wildfire seasons could substantially change Canada's forests if climate change continues unabated.

"The resulting [2023] wildfire season in Canada was not something we were expecting until at least the middle of the century," said Jennifer Baltzer, the Canada Research Chair in Forests and Global Change at Wilfrid Laurier University. "The summer of 2023 provided a bit of a crystal ball for what the future holds under a best-case warming scenario. Strong climate action must become a real priority."

Baltzer made the comments at the Senate Agriculture and Forestry Committee's Oct. 1 meeting about "the growing issue of wildfires in Canada and the consequential effects that wildfires have on forestry and agriculture industries."

Fires are a natural part of the lifecycle of boreal forests, Baltzer said. But in extreme conditions, such as during 2023's record wildfire season, wetlands and young forests that would ordinarily be firebreaks could not due to a combination of drought and heat.

"The key challenge is that Canada's climate is warming at



'There are people across this country who choose to live in rural and remote communities, and we do that knowing that there's risks involved,' said Sonja Leverkus, a professor, ecosystem scientist, and prescribed fire specialist at Shifting Mosaics, Northern Fire WoRx Corporation, and the University of Alberta. Photograph courtesy of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services

twice the global rate," she said. "In Canada's North, it's even faster, at three to four times the global rate. This means hotter and drier conditions in Canada's forests, which increases forest flammability."

Baltzer said that with hotter and drier conditions, the carbon storage role of boreal forests could be affected, which in turn would exacerbate climate change. In terms of impacts beyond the immediate fire front, wildfire smoke would affect crop growth due to decreased sunlight and a proliferation of chemicals released by the fires.

Witnesses at the committee were also asked about what—if any—effect a federal emergency agency, equivalent to the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the United States, would have on disaster preparedness. When asked by CSG Senator Sharon Burey (Ontario) about such an agency, some speakers noted that equipping locals with the knowledge and resources they needed for emergency preparedness is critical.

"There are people across this country who choose to live in rural and remote communities, and we do that knowing that there's risks involved," said Sonja Leverkus, a professor, ecosystem scientist, and prescribed fire specialist at Shifting Mosaics, Northern Fire WoRx Corporation, and the University of Alberta.

"I think many of us are willing and keen to participate and help... as long as we can do that in a safe way that is under direction by provincial and territorial agencies, I really think that is a positive step forward."

Leverkus, who lives near Fort Nelson, B.C., said a fire continued to burn approximately five minutes from her home. She noted that there were 450 people and 25 helicopters deployed to the town earlier this year, which were later diverted to protect more populated areas. She said locals needed to be equipped with the resources to defend their property when firefighters were reallocated to other areas.

"I'm not sure if anybody in the room has gone through that experience of almost losing your home and your livelihood, and now staying to be present on that landscape when all the resources get reallocated," she said. "There's nothing wrong with reallocating the resources... but that means those of us who stay in our homes still need to be resourced."

For the past decade, Leverkus has been involved in training property owners and ranchers in fire ecology, prescribed burns, and forest and rangeland management.

Jack Thiessen, a rancher, grass manager, and prescribed fire manager from Thiessen Bros Ranch near Fort St. John, B.C.,

told the committee that it was important to have "boots on the ground" that could respond to a fire much faster than a provincial or federally deployed team.

He used the example of a fire at a neighbour's house this summer that was extinguished within five hours due to assistance from local fire management teams and "smokejumpers": firefighters who parachute into remote fire sites from planes.

"If we can have people that are trained right there with boots on the ground, [who are] only three miles or four miles from the fire—or maybe they might be right next door—those are the kinds of things that get us these quick, fast suppressions, and that is the key to stopping those fires rather than allowing them to get to 50 acres, 100 acres, or 500 acres," he said.

Brian Wiens, managing director of the Canadian Partnership for Wildland Fire Science (commonly shortened to Canada Wildfire), said he was "agnostic" on the concept of a federal central agency, noting that there are currently resources that "we haven't figured out how to use" in the current system of resource-sharing between jurisdictions.

"There's bureaucratic reasons that exist for moving people between provinces—some of them are safety based—but they are solvable and they need to be solved. That would be a big step forward," he said. "Is there a way to use those under the existing system or do we need a new system to use them? That's where I would start the conversation, I wouldn't throw it out but I'm not convinced it's the best answer."

'No stone unturned' on fire readiness: Sajjan

As the Senate committee looked ahead to future emergencies, a House committee looked back to analyze the aftermath of a fire that ripped through Jasper National Park this past summer.

Emergency Preparedness Minister Harjit Sajjan (Vancouver South, B.C.) told the House Environment Committee on Oct. 2 that the government left "no stone unturned to get Canadians prepared for the wildfire season this year, especially working with our provincial and territorial counterparts."

He testified at the committee as it continued a study into "factors leading to the recent fires in Jasper National Park." During that late July fire, approximately 30 per cent of the Jasper, Alta., townsite was destroyed, and approximately 20,000 people were evacuated from the park. Firefighter Morgan Kitchen was killed on Aug. 3 while battling a nearby fire. The Insurance Bureau of Canada estimated that the wildfire cost about \$880-million in insured damage.

The damage to the town, and whether it could have been prevented with further mitigation efforts, dominated Conservative questions to the minister. Conservative MP Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, Alta.), whose riding encompasses Jasper, mentioned Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.), who is responsible for Parks Canada, asking whether "his failure to implement proper mitigation" went against Sajjan's "job to prepare for this emergency?"

"The briefing that we got is if it wasn't for the preparation that Jasper had taken on the FireSmart program that was conducted, more importantly, the training and the co-ordinated training that all the different agencies had done just a few months prior, that led to not only saving the town, but making sure that the evacuation was very successful and done quickly," Sajjan replied.

Liberal MP Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, Ont.), meanwhile, asked about the Alberta government's role, and whether cuts to the province's wildland firefighting budget had had an effect.

Sajjan said that he'd never dealt with partisan issues in the emergency management space, and that "Alberta actually collaborates really well when it comes to not only wildfires, but emergency management."

NDP MP Laurel Collins (Victoria, B.C.) noted that her home province of British Columbia was also experiencing multi-year droughts that increased the risk of wildfires. She noted that the committee passed a motion back in December from fellow NDP MP Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, B.C.) for the feds to help build a \$1-billion watershed security fund. She asked why such a fund had not yet been considered by the government.

Sajjan said more could be done, but he also noted that the majority of the resources for emergency management was organized by the provinces. The federal government stepped in if additional resources were needed.

"First and foremost, what we want to do is making sure that their additional resources can be utilized immediately," he said. "The second piece of it is, we are looking at options at the federal level of what we need to do, but we want to make sure that it actually complements the work that's going to be happening on the ground, and that work is ongoing."

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It's time for federal Clean Electricity Regulations.

News

Fight over MAID shifts from Parliament back to the courts amid political stalemate

Supreme Court precedents emphasizing individual rights over 'collective interests' paved the way for dueling cases aimed at moving the law in 'completely opposite directions,' says law professor Kerri Froc.

BY IAN CAMPBELL

With both advocates and opponents of medical assistance in dying at odds with Canada's current MAID laws, the fight is shifting from Parliament back to the courts.

On Sept. 26, a coalition of disability rights groups, alongside two individual plaintiffs, announced a Charter challenge of track two MAID—available to those whose death is not reasonably foreseeable—on the grounds that it has “resulted in premature deaths and an increase in discrimination and stigma towards people with disabilities.”

That follows a Charter challenge launched in August by Dying With Dignity Canada, working alongside two plaintiffs, contesting Ottawa's three-year delay on the expansion of track two MAID for those with mental illness as the sole underlying cause.

Both cases have been filed with the Ontario Superior Court.

These developments mean there will be two cases simultaneously working their way through the legal system, seeking to move Canada's MAID laws in opposite directions. In both cases, the plaintiffs' arguments focus on the same two sections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms: Section 7, which guarantees the right to “life, liberty, and security of person,” and Section 15, which guarantees equality rights.

Canada's MAID laws were passed following a series of court rulings in the 2010s that prompted the Liberal government to first legalize track one MAID in 2016—for those whose death is reasonably foreseeable—and later track two.

In February, the Liberal government passed legislation—supported by all parties except the Bloc Québécois—to delay for a third time a law that would allow



In February, Health Minister Mark Holland introduced legislation that would add a further three-year delay to the legalization of MAID where mental illness is the sole underlying cause. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

MAID where mental illness is the sole underlying cause.

The government's decision to delay until 2027 produced a stalemate with proponents of MAID looking to expedite the timeline, and opponents looking to have the expansion permanently cancelled, and other forms of track two MAID rolled back.

Litigants set for court

Helen Long, CEO of Dying with Dignity Canada, said her organization decided “there was no other way to move forward” after the third delay.

“We hear from so many people,” she said, including the two plaintiffs in this case. “They were insistent that there had to be a way to move ahead and get their rights actually delivered to them, as opposed to just having this never-ending sunset clause.”

Bonnie Brayton, CEO of the Disabled Women's Network Canada—one of the member organizations in the coalition launching the case to challenge track two, said their case is driven by the view that “track two MAID specifically targets people with disabilities ... when they're not near death.”

“It's not based on a thorough understanding of what the needs of people with disabilities are,” she said. “Health Canada has positioned this as a health-care option when we aren't providing the social determinants of health, the fundamental things like housing.”

Brayton said the government's decision to legalize track two MAID was based on a “bad decision” from a Quebec court—the *Truchon* case of 2019—which it never appealed to a higher court

to further consider the key legal issues.

Brayton said “there's a real urgency” to changing the law because members of the disability community feel pressured to choose MAID.

Cases centre Sections 7 and 15

Kerri Froc, a University of New Brunswick law professor, previously supported an unsuccessful motion at a recent Canadian Bar Association meeting calling for it to oppose expanding MAID for mental illness.

Froc said the disability coalition's Section 15 argument makes the case the current law draws a distinction between how it treats different groups.

“They make a fairly persuasive claim to me that track two MAID is making a distinction based on disability,” she said. “As they say in their statement of claim, there's lots of suffering in society, but we only offer MAID to people that have a disability.”

She said at trial they will need to provide evidence that “the distinction causes discrimination,” and the two plaintiffs who say they were offered MAID without asking for it may provide that.

She said for people with disabilities, the current laws may be “undermining the relationship” they have with care providers. “You're afraid to ask for too much support in case MAID is being kind of aggressively proposed.”

She said many countries with legalized MAID ban medical practitioners from suggesting it unprompted, but Canada does not.

Daphne Gilbert, a University of Ottawa law professor who

is also vice-chair of the board for Dying with Dignity Canada, described the main thrust of the group's case.

“The Section 7 argument is the classic security of the person argument,” she said. “By denying MAID to those people who are suffering intolerably on the basis of a mental illness, [the state is] imposing both psychological and physical harm” on them.

She said the Section 15 argument makes the case “the government has singled out one kind of disability—mental illness—for special treatment,” when someone with any other kind of illness or disability qualifies.

Precedents open door to cases that 'push in opposite directions'

With both sets of plaintiffs focused on the same two sections of the Charter, Froc said this points to “a problem” in law where past Supreme Court rulings created a “highly individualized analysis” of the Charter that does not give weight to “collective interests.”

“If even one person has their right to life, liberty, and security of the person infringed in a fundamentally unjust way, it's going to violate Section 7” based these precedents, said Froc.

These “dueling Section 7 cases” are possible, she said, “because they're focused on the rights of the individual claimants, although they seem to go in completely opposite directions.”

She said that means courts may issue rulings that “push in opposite directions based on who the litigants are.”

Gilbert argued there are problems with the coalition's legal case.

She said their Section 7 argument is based “entirely in this speculative zone” of people with disabilities “fearing that MAID is going to be forced upon them, when really what they need is other kinds of social supports and treatments.”

She questioned their Section 15 argument saying she disagrees that “anybody who is eligible for MAID has a disability,” saying the law makes a distinction between illness and disability.

Likely destined for Supreme Court

With multiple cases working their way through the legal system, the matter is likely destined for the Supreme Court.

Appeals are expected regardless of who wins, and it's also possible the government will choose to seek a Supreme Court

reference—especially if Ottawa is handed contradictory rulings in the two Ontario cases. There's also the matter that Quebec's *Truchon* ruling was never appealed to a higher court, creating the possibility of conflicting rulings between jurisdictions.

Froc said there are advantages and disadvantages to a reference.

“The benefit to a Supreme Court reference is that you can kind of have the government somewhat dispassionately say, ‘Here court, we have a legitimate question here. We need some guidance,’” she said. “The problem is that when you do that, the court doesn't necessarily have a good factual matrix that comes from the record from courts below—you don't have trials where evidence is presented.”

Gilbert also said that trial record is important.

“The downside to a reference is it's a theoretical question that's put to the court, and not one that is based or grounded on facts,” said Gilbert. “There wouldn't be people with stories and lived experiences and harm that they could actually attest to. ... What's lost there is how this is coming home to the people who are facing this choice of MAID or not—or intolerable suffering.”

Parties tight lipped on MAID's future

Both Long and Brayton called on all parties to clarify their positions on MAID before the next election.

The Hill Times reached out the Health Minister Mark Holland (Ajax, Ont.) and Justice Minister Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Ont.), who share responsibility for the government's MAID policy.

Neither ministers' offices replied regarding how these cases might affect their planned expansion of MAID in 2027, or whether they would consider a Supreme Court reference.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) has said he would stop the pending expansion of MAID, but has not indicated if a Conservative government would roll back the forms of track two MAID already available.

His office did not reply to questions about this, or his views on a Supreme Court reference.

NDP MP Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, B.C.), his party's critic for MAID, said in a statement his party is opposed to the expansion for mental illness.

He said in a statement the NDP's position “has not changed since our opposition to the Senate amendments” that first opened the door to this expansion. His response did not address the party's views on fully rolling back track two MAID.

“The Liberal government's ill-advised decision to accept the Senate's amendment to Bill C-7 ... got us to where we are today. They changed the law before any kind of comprehensive review ... and we've been trying to play catch-up ever since.”

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Parliament at a standstill as Conservative MPs push for release of green tech fund papers

Conservative House Leader Andrew Scheer's privilege motion on the government's failure to comply with an order to release documents related to the Sustainable Development Technology Canada fund has brought Parliament to a standstill. *The Hill Times* Photograph by Andrew Meade



Government House Leader Karina Gould said there will be no chance to discuss key legislation in the House until the privilege debate ends.

BY IREM KOCA

An ongoing privilege debate in the House has led to a standstill in parliamentary proceedings, as Conservatives push for the release of all documents linked to a scandal-plagued green tech fund that disbursed millions in funding.

The House has been bogged down with a privilege debate since last week after House Speaker Greg Fergus (Hull-Aylmer, Que.) ruled that the government's failure to provide records related to the Sustainable Development Technology Canada (SDTC)—a now-defunct foundation that distributed millions of dollars in federal funds for questionable green technology projects—constituted a violation of parliamentary privilege.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) said "Parliament is paralyzed," speaking in the House of Commons on Oct. 3. "Why is the prime minister breaking the Speaker's ruling to cover up criminal evidence in the latest Liberal scandal?"

A Conservative motion asked the federal government, SDTC, and the Office of Auditor General to hand over all documents including memos, emails, and any other communications shared between government officials and the fund. This included financial records and declarations of potential conflicts of interest involving SDTC going back to 2017.

The June 10 motion put forth by Conservative House Leader Andrew Scheer (Regina-Qu'Appelle, Sask.) passed with support from the New Democrats, Green Party, and Bloc Québécois, despite nays from Liberal MPs. It had asked for the release of all

these documents within 30 days, which did not happen. But more than a dozen departments have indeed submitted their records—some redacted, and some not—related to the SDTC by the deadline.

The motion also asked the Parliament to share these papers with the RCMP for its independent determination on whether or not a criminal investigation into the matter is warranted.

The Conservatives have intensified pressure on the government ever since the Speaker's ruling related to what they call the "green slush fund," while the Liberals counter that the request of documents to be shared with the RCMP is unprecedented, and threatens the separation of legislation and the judiciary powers.

Liberals want debate to collapse, says House leader

Government House Leader Karina Gould (Burlington, Ont.) told reporters before Question Period on Oct. 3 that until the privilege debate ends, there will be no opportunity to discuss important legislation. Gould said the Liberals "would like to see debate collapse," and argued that the motion puts forward a "dangerous precedent."

Gould also told reporters that she believes the motion "is compromising police independence," and noted that both the RCMP and the auditor general have sent letters to the House of Commons "outlining their extreme discomfort" with the order of production of documents related to the SDTC.

"As a citizen in this country, I don't want to live in a country where politicians can direct the police on what to do," she said.

Gould blamed Conservative MPs for working for "their own political, personal objectives" which she said should be "extremely alarming" to everyone.

"We're seeing the Conservatives attempting to use those extraordinary powers and extraordinary privileges to get around judicial oversight and to basically trample the Charter of Rights of Canadians," she said speaking in the House on Oct. 3.

Both Liberal and Conservative House leaders had a fiery exchange during Question Period on Oct. 3.

"These Liberal insiders funnelled almost \$400-million to their own companies," Scheer said. "The government is refusing to hand over the documents to the RCMP for a potential criminal investigation. What does it have to hide?"

Gould called Scheer's statement "completely false," and described his behaviour as "erratic and unhinged." Gould said the Conservative motion calling for the release of all documents relating to the SDTC and sending them to the RCMP "would blur the lines between the independence of the legislative and judicial branches of government."

"The Charter is there to protect people from the government, not to protect the government from accountability," Scheer responded. He accused the government of "preferring that Parliament grinds to a halt" by not handing over the documents.

Fergus said on Sept. 26 that the House's order to produce the documents has "clearly not been fully complied with." He said that he "cannot come to any other conclusion," but to find that a question of privilege has been established.

Fergus noted that the order "is indeed unusual, novel, and unprecedented" given the order was not made for the House's own purposes, but for a third party. Fergus also noted that the House has the "undoubted right" to order the production of any and all documents from any entity.

The Speaker stressed that the RCMP did not want the documents.

"The RCMP has expressed to our law clerk its serious reservations about receiving these documents, at least in their current form," said Fergus, adding that the

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Editorial

Accountability matters now more than ever

A fraught, but symbiotic relationship exists in this city between two of the least trusted groups of professionals in the country: journalists and politicians.

A 2022 Maru Public Opinion survey on respect for professions showed journalists somewhat ahead of politicians—17th versus 25th on a list of 29 careers—but it's hardly a position from which to gloat.

That trust is further eroded with incidents like that two weeks ago, when CTV News edited a clip from a speech by Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre in a way that misrepresented his comments, making it appear as if he was introducing a non-confidence motion to get rid of the government's dental care program.

That was not what Poilievre was suggesting in the scrum—though the Conservatives' position on the future of dental care remains a mystery—and both the party and its leader were understandably furious about this editing.

By week's end, Poilievre and his office had implemented a boycott on any of his Conservative MPs speaking to CTV or representatives of its parent company, Bell; and party members suggested that the spliced footage was a deliberate act to undermine the party.

After two CTV staff members were let go as a result of the incident and a second apology was issued, Poilievre ended his boycott. But the damage has been done both for accountability, and the reputation of the federal news media.

Mistakes happen. Don't take our word for it—those were the two words used by a Conservative spokesperson when the party took down a campaign video ostensibly showing "Canadian" scenes that were instead from other countries, including a pair of Russian fighter jets.

But such mistakes cannot become commonplace at a time when a party vying for power seems determined to portray the media as just another arm of the incumbent government. Conservative ads decry the "bought-and-paid-for media," suggesting that federal subsidies and grants to groups are there to silence criticism of the incumbents.

While a scan of any major news organization's homepage would show that to be ridiculous, Liberal MPs are doing themselves no favours in beating that assertion. On Sept. 7, Liberal MP Taleeb Noormohamed responded to a *National Post* columnist that "your paper wouldn't be in business were it not for the subsidies that the government that you hate put in place."

All this contributes to a serious trust deficit, which will continue to breed mistrust and a breakdown in faith in our most trusted institutions. Politicians seeking to denigrate the media in order to seek a scrutiny-free term in office could be in for a shock as this spiral of mistrust continues.

Everyone—media and politicians—needs to lift their game if we're to stem misinformation and a further collapse in trust.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

True reconciliation requires tangible, impactful change, writes Sudbury reader

I'm writing to express my frustration with the disconnect between symbolic gestures of reconciliation and the real, ongoing needs of Indigenous communities in Canada. While the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is an important recognition of past wrongs, it's troubling that approximately \$98-million is spent annually paying federal employees for this day off, while many First Nations communities still lack clean drinking water.

This feels like an empty gesture when those who were wronged are still suffering from basic inequalities such as not having access to safe drinking water.

Instead of benefiting federal employees, wouldn't it make more sense to allocate those funds toward providing clean water systems for Indigenous communities? It would be more meaningful if we directed resources to address the ongoing injustices, like the water crisis in many reserves, rather than limiting reconciliation to symbolic actions.

True reconciliation requires tangible, impactful change, and ensuring that every Indigenous community has access to clean drinking water would be a real step forward.

Richard W. Cole
 Sudbury, Ont.

Kamala Harris deserves to win, for the sake of the planet: Ottawa reader

In 2008, the United States Congress unanimously passed a resolution to recognize a structure, erected at Franklin Square, to commemorate the courage of Haitian soldiers who fought for American independence along with American troops and against the British Army in Savannah, Georgia, back in 1779.

Fast forward to today. By contrast, on Jan. 11, 2018, former U.S. president Donald Trump, during an Oval Office meeting with others, referred to Haitian and African nations as "shit holes." On Sept. 11, 2024, Trump, now the Republican

presidential candidate, during the televised presidential debate with Democratic Vice-President Kamala Harris, said that Haitians living in Springfield, Ohio, have been eating cats and dogs.

Harris deserves to win the next presidential election for the sake of the whole planet, and I salute those who have publicly endorsed her for president, including Oprah Winfrey, George Clooney, Taylor Swift, and American University professor Allan Lichtman.

Jean-Claude Pierre Dessalines Laguerre
 Ottawa, Ont.

Words that don't describe Poilievre: 'refined, respectful, open-minded,' writes British Columbia reader

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, much like U.S. presidential candidate and former president Donald Trump, takes bully-boy pleasure in concocting undignified phrases to describe people he deems to be a threat to his "anything-goes" quest for power. There is a myriad of descriptive phrases that could be used to describe Poilievre, but the following words would not be included: sincere, refined, respectful, forthright, open-minded, conciliatory,

visionary, polite, honourable, or inspirational.

Our politicians should be clearly explaining, costing out and courteously debating their policies and programs. Instead, they are trying to denigrate each other by using schoolyard name-calling. Most Canadians are fed up that there is not a credible alternative to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. This is a pox on both their houses.

Lloyd Atkins
 Vernon, B.C.



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World waits with bated breath as we teeter on the edge of a world war

Iran's decision to rain missiles upon Tel Aviv last week will unleash a response that means trouble for the whole world.

Sheila Copps

Copps' Corner



OTTAWA—We are commemorating the one-year anniversary of the Hamas slaughter of innocent Israelis this week.

On Oct. 7 of last year, Hamas attacked young people attending a music festival and old people quietly living in their homes with a fury that seems impossible to understand.

But those of us who don't understand why have only to take a page from the book of Iran's supreme leader.

He can tell women what to do and what to wear, and what the penalties are for not following his advice.

If you don't have your head covered in the right way, you can be subjected to physical attacks and imprisonment. In some cases, those attacks have led to death.

In 2022, Mahsa Amini was killed while in custody after being arrested for not properly wearing her head covering.

Penalties can also be levied for sexual relations outside of marriage, including stoning someone to death.

Likewise, if someone is not heterosexual, sexual relations with a same-sex partner is also punishable by death.

Death as punishment for homosexual relations is unique to Iran in the world, although Afghanistan is currently reviewing the application of a similar policy.

There is a reason that hundreds of ex-patriot Iranians around the world were celebrating the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

Iran is the chief patron of Hezbollah, and has supported Nasrallah's leadership for 32 years.

Ex-pats blame Nasrallah and the Iranian government for the oppression that has dampened the spirit of Iranian people for years.

A United Nations fact-finding mission concluded that the Iranian government was responsible for Amini's death, and accused Iran of committing "crimes against humanity" as the result of a months-long security crackdown that killed more than 500 people, and detained more than 20,000.

The UN report said that Iranian security forces regularly used submachine guns and assault rifles against peaceful demonstrators, and noted a pattern of protesters being "branded" by shooting them in the eye, leading to permanent damage.

Iran's Supreme Commander Ayatollah Ali Khamenei doesn't see any problem with his country's internal situation, although thousands of Iranians may think otherwise.

He has been in power since 1979, the year which marked the end of "westernizing" Iran with the departure of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

His government's view of the Middle East is that all problems would be solved if only Israel would disappear. He blames all challenges there on the Israeli attacks in Gaza and Lebanon.

Thousands of Canadian supporters of Palestine have been lobbying non-stop for an end to the war in Gaza in an effort to save thousands of lives, and end the displacement of thousands more.

There are now more than one million Lebanese who are on the move to get away from the fighting, and to find safety for their families.

Most protesters would not want to strengthen Iran's hand, but they have been silent on surrogates in the region like Hamas and Hezbollah.

Hamas carried out an unprecedented civilian slaughter on Oct. 7, 2023.

Silence doubles as support for Hamas, and one result of the Iranian attack on Israel is that Iran is no longer silently fuelling Israel's enemies.

Instead, it is leading the charge with its stated intent to eliminate Israel's existence.

Israel is receiving international support for the right to defend itself against the Iranian incursion.

Its ground invasion of Lebanon has already led to military casualties.

But the incursion into Gaza and the wanton deaths of thousands of civilians have raised the global ire of millions.

To date, most of the pressure has been focused on Israelis to withdraw from Gaza as the only way to secure the release of the hostages who have now been held for a full year.

But now the pressure point will be on Iran. And those in the Arab world who do not support Iran will be called to engage in the fight.

Iran's decision to rain missiles upon Tel Aviv last week will unleash a response that means trouble for the whole world.

Already one of the outcomes is a rapid hike in the price of oil, which puts the fragile economic recovery under threat.

The hike may help producers, but will put further stress on Canadian consumers.

Meanwhile, the world is waiting with bated breath as we teeter on the edge of a world war.

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

The Hill Times

It's okay to judge politicians on how they play the game

Part of playing the game in politics is working to keep persuading the public about your policies' benefits. By the way, this is a smirk-free analysis.

Gerry Nicholls

Post Partisan Pundit



OKAVILLE, ONT.—Having the ability to explain the workings of political strategy is a skill that isn't always appreciated.

In fact, if you rate politicians or their policies based on a realistic, rational analysis, it might come across to some as an exercise steeped in objectionable crassness.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks with reporters before a Liberal caucus meeting in West Block on Oct. 2, 2024. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

For instance, in a recent *Globe and Mail* column, Andrew Coyne scolded those who, he says, rate politicians not on the merit of their policies, but "strictly according to how they play the game."

It irks him, for example, that the carbon tax—which he views as a "fair" and "efficient" policy—is often portrayed as nothing more than an albatross around the Liberal government's neck.

Laments Coyne: "the Liberals are marked down for proposing a policy that, however superior as policy, was hard to explain to the public, while the Conserva-

tives are congratulated, explicitly or otherwise, for shamelessly exploiting popular confusion around the tax."

He calls this "smirking cynicism."

Now, while I get Coyne's point, I'd argue that rating politicians on how they "play the game" is actually important because—let's face it—the primary purpose of political parties isn't really to come up with "good" policies. It's to get elected; it's to win.

This is why political parties don't hire economists or academics or philosophers to run their

election campaigns; they hire political consultants, pollsters, and communication professionals, people who are experts in knowing how to move the pieces around the playing board.

And one main job of these experts is to judge whether a policy will resonate with the public, and thus help them to win an election.

That's why I'd argue the Liberals embraced the carbon tax in the first place because they actually thought it was both good policy and good politics.

In short, the carbon tax would help them win the game.

Yes, I know that sounds counter-intuitive, but remember not that long ago pollsters were telling us Canadians were concerned about climate change, and that they wanted the government to take action to stop it, even if that meant adopting "carbon pricing."

Some even believed the carbon tax was so well-liked that it gave the pro-carbon tax Liberals an advantage over the anti-carbon tax Conservatives.

Former Conservative strategist Ken Boessenkool wrote in 2021, "After more than a decade of hard, public democratic

debate between the 'no carbon tax' crowd and those advocating for a 'carbon tax now'; the latter has won. Today, in Canada, there is no credible winning political coalition for any party that can be constructed without some form of carbon tax."

This is why I don't buy the argument that support for the carbon tax is falling because it's a policy that's "hard to explain to the public."

Clearly, the Liberals, at one time, didn't think it was hard to explain, nor did a political expert like Boessenkool.

So, what went wrong?

Well, part of playing the game in politics is working hard to continually persuade the public as to the benefits of your policies.

Simply put, when it came to the carbon tax, the Liberals didn't do this. They sat back and assumed it would retain public favour, even as the price of gas soared.

That turned out to be a strategic error.

So, if you want to praise them for adopting the carbon tax, that's fine; but if you want to understand how they took a potentially popular idea and turned it into a liability, you need to rate how they played the game.

In this case, they deserve to be "marked down."

By the way, this is a smirk-free analysis.

Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.

The Hill Times

Opinion

Adaptation to climate change should be a non-partisan priority



While we can debate emission reduction strategies, there's no avoiding the reality that climate change is having a costly impact of households and businesses, one that will only increase over time, writes Shawn McCarthy. Photograph courtesy Marc-André Leclerc, DND Canada

Climate change is now upon us. We need to prepare for the inevitable consequences of our failure to head off the crisis.

Shawn McCarthy



Opinion

It was a summer of weather-related losses in Canada. And it's clear that we need to better prepare for inevitable record-breaking seasons of catastrophic fires and floods in the future.

Adaptation to climate change should be a non-partisan priority. While we can debate emission reduction strategies, there will be no avoiding the reality that climate change is having a costly impact of Canadian households and businesses, one that will only increase over time.

As atmospheric and ocean temperatures rise with global warming, people around the world are feeling the effects through deadly heat waves; droughts and wildfires; extreme rainstorms that cause flooding and other wild weather. Hurricane Helene, which caused devastation in the southeastern

United States recently, gained such force due to unusually warm ocean temperatures, according to NASA's Earth Observatory.

In Canada, four extreme weather events in July and August drove insured property losses to a record \$7.1-billion this summer, the Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC) reported on Sept. 24. That's nearly \$1-billion more than losses sustained during the summer of 2016, which featured the devastating Fort McMurray fire in Alberta.

This summer, we saw the Jasper wildfire (\$880-million); flooding in Toronto and other parts of southern Ontario (\$940-million); flooding in Quebec (\$2.5-billion), and a hailstorm in Calgary (\$2.8-billion).

The toll on human health and well-being is staggering. The rising cost to our physical infrastructure—homes, businesses and electricity grid—will mean higher insurance costs, more government spending on disaster prevention and recovery, and higher food and consumer prices due to supply chain disruptions.

The number and severity of storms, fires and floods is "escalating at a shocking rate, and Canada is simply not prepared," IBC chief executive Celyeste Power said in the release.

The federal government unveiled its national adaptation strategy last June in which it pledges to work with provinces, territories, and local communities to identify and mitigate risks, and ensure damage is contained and recovery happens quickly and efficiently.

“Climate resilience must be built into every decision made with regards to the building of Canada's physical assets: homes, businesses, infrastructure and highways.”

But little progress has been made by any level of government towards achieving the strategy's targets, the Insurance Bureau said in its release. The industry is now paying more for losses for a single extreme-weather event than the \$1.9-billion the federal government has allocated to adaptation in the past decade.

The payoff for forward-looking action will be substantial. In a report on damage control, the Canadian Climate Institute estimates that for every \$1 spent on adaptation measures today, \$13 to \$15 will be returned in years ahead in direct and indirect savings and benefits.

Still, increased adaptation effort can't come at the expense of climate policies that reduce fossil fuel emissions, which are the main drivers of climate change.

We can't adapt our way out of the climate crisis. The extreme weather events we are seeing today will become far worse as average global temperatures rise to 1.5-degrees C above pre-industrial levels and beyond.

As a G7 nation and major exporter of oil and natural gas, Canada must not only participate, but also play a leadership role in global efforts to transition off fossil fuels.

That said, there are some important principles that should apply in pursuing greater adaptation efforts.

Like the net-zero energy transition, the adaptation strategy must be an "all of society" effort. The federal government can't do this alone. Provinces and municipalities will have to coordinate their

actions with one another, with Ottawa and with the private sector.

Businesses need to undertake comprehensive risk assessments, and understand the challenges they face and the most effective measures they can take to address them.

The same goes for households. The unfortunate truth is it may become prohibitively expensive to rebuild and insure some of the most vulnerable homes and communities. In the United States, insurers are already pulling out of areas in Florida and California where they deem the extreme weather risks to be too great.

Quebec instituted a buyout program for homes damaged in floods in 2017 and 2019, a practice known as "managed retreat." More governments may have to institute such program as flooding risks increase, says a report from the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction at the University of Waterloo.

Short of that managed retreat option, there is a variety of actions that governments at all levels can take to support property owners in reducing to their climate risks.

Climate resilience must be built into every decision made with regards to the building of Canada's physical assets: homes, businesses, infrastructure and highways. The Climate Institute recommends governments adopt land-use planning that prohibit construction on lands designated as highly vulnerable to fire and floods.

Governments are pushing intensification in urban communities in order to accommodate a growing population and address the housing crisis. Greater density in our cities makes sense.

However, planners need to take into account the resulting pressure on storm sewers and other infrastructure, as well as the loss of green spaces that absorb storm runoff and provide cooling during heat waves.

Natural spaces are increasingly valued for the environmental services that they provide, and must be protected. The contribution to adaptation strategies is complemented by all the biodiversity and psychological benefits that nature offers.

Wetlands and forests can retain storm water that—in their absence—would be flooding into communities. Alternatively, such at-risk communities would require expensive concrete drainage systems.

Climate change is now upon us. We require an all-out global effort to slow and eventually reverse the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

At the same time, we need to prepare for the inevitable consequences of our failure to head off the crisis.

Shawn McCarthy is an independent writer who focuses on energy transition and climate change. He does occasional work as senior counsel with Sussex Strategy Group and is on the executive of World Press Freedom Canada.

The Hill Times



A woman, pictured Feb. 21, 2024, skating on the Rideau Canal in Ottawa. The historic canal was only open for a few days this year, and the year before that, it never opened. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

ation economy supports progress toward the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action no. 92: “building respectful relationships and ensuring that Indigenous communities gain long-term economic benefits from activities taking place on their lands or using their resources.”

Yet, while Statistics Canada accurately measures the size and characteristics of many smaller industrial sectors, there is no tracking of the Outdoor Recreation Economy.

We are also not taking into account the speed with which our changing climate is impacting this sector. Consider the impacts on winter sports. On our current trajectory, only one reliable host city for the Winter Olympics—Sapporo, Japan—will remain by the 2080s. The season for skiing and snowboarding has already shortened significantly due to more extreme temperatures. Last year, the International Ski Federation cancelled seven of the first eight World Cup races due to warm temperatures and lack of snow.

Across Canada, hunting and angling have been severely impacted by climate change. Wetlands are being degraded due to climate impacts such as drought, rising temperatures, invasive species, and sea level rise—impacts that are greatly reducing waterfowl populations. Warmer winters increase the threat of tick infestations on moose populations. And cold-water fish populations such as salmon, trout, and lamprey are being devastated by decreased snowpack, reduced stream flows, and rising water temperatures.

As we approach the next federal election, each party’s platform must outline a detailed plan to reach our international climate targets, which Canada is not yet on track to reach. Each party may take a different approach—choosing their own mix of regulatory measures, tax incentives, direct subsidies and carbon pricing. What is most important is that that each plan must credibly reduce emissions overall, while creating sustainable jobs as the world continues its transition to a cleaner economy.

These commitments are essential if we hope to protect the outdoor activities we love, and the livelihoods that depend on them.

*David Erb is the executive director of Protect Our Winters.
The Hill Times*

Protecting Canada’s outdoor recreation sector

Each party’s election platform needs a detailed plan to reach our global climate targets. Each party may take a different approach—choosing their own mix of regulatory measures, tax incentives, direct subsidies, and carbon pricing.

mental health, reducing stress, anxiety and depression, while promoting physical health and fitness. These benefits also reduce health-care costs associated with sedentary lifestyles.

We now have a better idea of what the economic impact of these activities is. According to a recently released study by Protect Our Winters, outdoor recre-

ation is one of Canada’s largest economic sectors, creating \$101-billion in economic activity—comparable to the oil and gas industry—and nearly one million jobs in fields ranging from product design, manufacturing, global commerce, and tourism. It is the lifeblood of hundreds of Canadian communities, including Indigenous communities. The outdoor recre-

David Erb

Opinion



Most of us are aware that climate change is having a significant impact on Canadian livelihoods. Extreme wildfires are forcing tens of thousands of people from their homes, and are sending far more to emergency rooms with respiratory illnesses, while flooding and severe drought is causing billions of dollars in damage to farmers and other industries.

Climate change is also presenting a growing threat to activities that many Canadians love and depend on. For decades, we’ve known that outdoor recreational activities deliver personal and social benefits to help communities thrive, improving



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Comment

Survivor Keith Chiefmoon speaks at the Truth and Reconciliation Day event on Parliament Hill on Sept. 30, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Residential school denialism should be illegal

The residential schools system was a genocide, and Indigenous Peoples don't need more hatred today. For the love of this country, all political party candidates should have basic knowledge of what Canada did to its Indigenous Peoples.

Rose LeMay

Stories, Myths, and Truths



OTTAWA—Here's a bold idea: let's set out the basic knowledge and capacity to run in federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal elections.

Candidates should have knowledge about and belief in



Stephanie Scott, with the Centre for truth and Reconciliation, speaks at the Truth and Reconciliation Day event on Parliament Hill on Sept. 30, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

government, and they should understand that governance is essential for democracy. They should have the capacity to hold respectful conversations, and have some proven conflict resolution skills. They should have an understanding of how

this country stretches from coast to coast to coast with its amazing diversity of land, people, and cultures. They should also have good knowledge about this country's history, including its international relationships, and the history of how this country commit-

ted crimes against Indigenous Peoples, and why we are doing reconciliation as a result.

It's somewhat heartbreaking that this is a bold idea.

Without some basics of knowledge and commitment to inclusion, we get individuals like Sherry Wilson, a candidate in New Brunswick making up wild comparisons that the policy to protect LGBTQ2S kids in schools is somehow like the genocide that Indigenous Peoples endured. She is not the first. Faytene Grasseschi said something similarly disgusting in 2018. The backstory is regarding Policy 713 giving LGBTQ2S students the protection to change their pronouns without parental consent. This is not about the policy's content; this is about the shameful comparison that Wilson made. She said that 713 and the lack of parental involvement is like residential schools, which happened because of lack of parental involvement.

Right (said with dripping sarcasm). Sure, it was because of the lack of Indigenous parent involvement that police forcibly stole children from their homes, and brought them to prison-like institutions. It was the lack of Indigenous parent involvement that the white men of the day wrote the Indian Act, giving themselves legal decision-making over those savages while handily patting themselves on the back for being so civilized and wise.

You know what Wilson's comment was made on Sept. 30? Residential school denialism. On the National Day of Reconciliation, just to rub it in. Denialism is both about a refusal to admit that historic events happened, and downplaying it all. This was denialism, infused with no small amount of racism. She really did blame Indigenous parents for residential schools there. Wilson has shown a lack of knowledge about Canada's history, and a dearth of understanding on the residential school genocide. I will not sanewash this incident. Residential school denialism should be illegal.

Indigenous Peoples do not need to be confronted with this type of hatred. For two-spirit First Nations individuals like me, I do not want to put up with this type of behaviour in politics. If party platforms are not about inclusion, we should believe them the first time.

Every political candidate needs to learn more about this country's history, including the crimes done out of white supremacy to harm Indigenous Peoples, including residential schools. Ignorance is not a protection, it's a liability. We have had 10 years now since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. How much more time do potential leaders in politics need to learn the facts? If political leaders haven't learned them by now, it's their fault. But should we as citizens suffer the consequences of their refusal to learn?

The moral imperative of inclusion in Canadian politics is not some airy-fairy or abstract theory. The whole point of governance is for the people, and for all the people. We need to say it out loud to remind ourselves that political parties don't turn into private clubs. We don't need a Mar-a-lago private political party anywhere else, as that isn't working out so well. Either you govern for all, or you don't govern at all.

The Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Bloc Québécois, and Green parties, and all your provincial and territorial variations: for the love of country, would you please demand some basic knowledge in your candidate selection process? It is in your best interest.

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.

The Hill Times




Embassy of Italy
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Comment



Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne at BIOTECanada's BIONation conference in Ottawa on Sept. 24, 2024. Overall, Canada needs a new, independent, arm's length body that can monitor how well our innovation programs are working, writes David Crane. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

It's a Brit problem, it's a Canadian problem

A recent British study argues that one of the top issues for U.K. innovation and industrial policy is the early sale of promising new science and tech firms to overseas-based corporations, and the truncation of further growth at home. This is our challenge, too.

David Crane

Canada & the 21st Century



TORONTO—It is set out as a British problem. But it is exactly the same problem in Canada. We are failing to capture the benefits from our big investments in talent, discovery-based research, and early-stage next-economy businesses. Instead of supporting our best entrepreneurs to build their ideas into global-scale businesses, we are

selling off our potential to foreign owners who will reap the benefits. We face a diminished future as a result.

A recent study—*Selling less of the family silver: boosting U.K. growth*—published by the Centre for Business Research at Cambridge University, argues that this is “one of the most important issues for U.K. innovation and industrial policy: the early sale of many of our most promising new science and technology companies to overseas-based corporations, and the truncation of further growth in the U.K.”

This is our challenge, as well. Our need to grow new Canadian firms as old industries fade away is not well-aligned with the current mix of innovation policies. We are not achieving our potential.

As the Cambridge study by David Connell and Bobby Reddy, states, “if we want the U.K.’s economy, the savings and pensions of individuals, and society, generally, to fully benefit from the U.K.’s science, technology, and entrepreneurial talent, we must also adopt policies that enable visionary individuals with the desire and ability to grow a significant U.K.-based business over the long-term to achieve that goal.” As they stress, “it is essential that ambitious entrepreneurs with the desire and ability to grow a major U.K. corporation are given as much help as possible to do so, whether this be as a public or private company.”

Ditto Canada.

Discovery of new knowledge takes place in universities, but successful commercialization of new knowledge into business success and the creation of new jobs takes place in companies. If we want a more innovative Canada with higher growth in productivity and the wealth creation to support our way of life and replace fading industries, then we need strong Canadian-based companies.

Indeed, without large domestic tech firms then small tech companies—if they are to be sold—will almost always be sold to a foreign corporation. There will be no Canadian acquirer. Moreover, large businesses are important as a market for emerging tech firms that can become supply chain participants with big companies even acting as lead customers for emerging firms.

So how do we support our best entrepreneurs so they can build the companies of the future? How do we ensure that the significant public funds invested in the innovation process are well-aligned with the need to build and scale up so the best prospects for future growth and success?

The Cambridge report has many ideas that are worth examining here. Among them:

- Is venture capital the most effective way to grow companies? Or does venture capital have a built-in incentive to exit from investments in young businesses by selling them to foreign corporations rather than through initial public offerings on the TSX?

- How do we attract other sources of capital—pension funds and other pools of capital—to provide long-term patient capital to grow more small firms into big companies? One possibility might be to create portfolios of small and midsize growth companies—professionally managed—in which pension and other funds could invest.

- Should we look to changes in the TSX to be more accessible as a source of growth capital for scaling tech companies? One way would be to promote the use of dual-class shares with founders holding shares with multiple voting rights while post-IPO shareholders acquire shares with no votes, or limited to one vote per share. This approach, used by firms such as Magna International and Shopify—as well as Google and Facebook—allowed them to raise capital from stock market investors without risking loss of control—including an unfriendly takeover—risks that discourage funders from listing on the TSX. Canadians also need better research on growth companies to help them make investment choices.

- Can we use government as a lead customer to fund and advance young firms developing new technologies as the United States does with its Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program? The role of lead customer is often a highly effective way of supporting a tech start-up develop its technology. SBIR allocates a share of government R&D spending to small businesses to

develop new technologies needed by government departments.

- How do we spread the use and application of breakthrough technologies by Canadian businesses across the economy? Our nation lags in capital investment in new technologies, yet these technologies could boost productivity and competitiveness. Technology diffusion is vital.

There are other ideas in the Cambridge report. But the essential point is that we need to take a hard look at how well our current mix of policies is aligned with the need to ensure that we are providing our entrepreneurs with the help they need to achieve success.

We need to be more than a nation that simply supplies foreign corporations with the seed corn they need for their own growth, and we need to be something more than a branch plant economy in which the engines of growth are owned elsewhere. Not are we going to build a stronger economy through the current misguided embrace of protectionism.

Overall, we need a new, independent, and arm's length body that can monitor how well our innovation programs are working, as well as pursuing new possibilities so that our innovation spending achieves the best possible results. At present, we have little independent evaluation. For example, since 2001, the federal government has allocated \$2.2-billion to the Business Development Bank of Canada for venture capital investments. But how effective have these funds been in developing successful Canadian companies—including how many have remained under Canadian ownership. This kind of monitoring should apply to all of our innovation programmes.

There's much at stake. Without a strong future economy, we will have a poorer and more divided country fighting over a smaller pie.

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

The Hill Times

MENTAL HEALTH

THE HILL TIMES
POLICY BRIEFING
OCTOBER 7, 2024

Linking affordability
CRISIS
AND MENTAL
HEALTH REQUIRES
'TRANSFORMATIVE
CHANGE'
IN HEALTH
CARE

THE KIDS
are not
ALRIGHT

RAPID ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE
MENTAL
HEALTH
CARE
for youth should
be national priority

Time for
Canada
TO TREAT MENTAL
HEALTH LIKE
PHYSICAL HEALTH

FEDS MUST
REMOVE BARRIERS
to improve access to mental
health and substance use

CANADIANS'
MENTAL
HEALTH:
LOOKING TO
THE FUTURE

PERINATAL
mental health strategy
CRITICAL STEP

Canada's federal Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Ya'ara Saks. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Mental Health Policy Briefing

Linking the affordability crisis and mental health requires ‘transformative change’ in health care, say critics and experts

The affordability crisis has exposed Canada’s mental health-care system as being “behind a paywall,” according to the Canadian Mental Health Association’s Sarah Kennell.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

A wave of mental strain facing Canadians in response to affordability challenges—including housing and putting food on the table—requires an overhaul of the public health-care system to include mental health supports, according to the NDP mental health critic.

“Certainly, coming after COVID, it’s obvious people are struggling just to make ends meet. Basic needs like food and shelter, which are creating stress for people and families, and the chronic stress that impacts people’s mental health, especially young people,” said NDP MP Gord Johns (Courtenay-Alberni, B.C.). “[The NDP are] going to be continuing to put pressure on the government, as we have been, but especially this fall we’re going to ramp it up even more. We can’t afford not to make transformative change to mental health-care in Canada, and the failure for the government to treat mental health equally to physical health under our current public health-care system has had enormous costs for Canadians.”

Economic factors, such as the rising cost of living, are affecting Canadians’ health, according to a report released by the Canadian Institute for Health Information on March 21, 2024. The report cited survey data gathered between Nov. 1 and Nov. 16, 2023, by Pollara Strategic Insights, which



Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Ya’ara Saks said that the 2024 federal budget’s \$500-million Youth Mental Health Fund will ‘help fill gaps in our mental health support system and ensure young Canadians get the help they need to succeed, right in their communities,’ in an April 9 press release. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



NDP MP Gord Johns says he has been ‘calling for the federal government repeatedly to create parity with mental and physical health.’ *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Sarah Kennell, national director of public policy with the Canadian Mental Health Association, says the affordability crisis is creating ‘a real strain on the ability of frontline community mental health and substance use health service providers to deliver on those social determinants of health.’ Photograph courtesy of the CMHA



Allison Cowan, vice-president of external affairs and development with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, says ‘as we’ve moved into this post-pandemic phase, not only do we have the ongoing mental health challenges persisting, but [we are] also facing increased costs of living, inflation, [and] soaring housing costs.’ Photograph courtesy of the MHCC

therapy, are excluded from this country’s universal public health care system.

Canada doesn’t have universal mental health care, which means some services—such as visits to registered psychotherapists or psychologists—must be paid for out of pocket.

Johns said it’s long overdue for the government to bring mental health services into the public health-care system to remove the financial barriers.

Recent government-led efforts to support mental health in Canada include \$500-million announced in the 2024 federal

budget for a Youth Mental Health Fund so that community health groups can provide more care for youths.

Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Ya’ara Saks (York Centre, Ont.) called the fund “a once-in-a-generation investment in youth” in a Finance press release on April 9, 2024.

“This fund will help fill gaps in our mental health support system and ensure young Canadians get the help they need to succeed, right in their communities,” said Saks in the press release.

Liberal MP Elisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Que.), Saks’ parliamentary secretary, told *The Hill Times* in an emailed statement on Sept. 24 that Canadians are facing mental health challenges like never before because of the stressors of the pandemic and affordability challenges.

“We have transferred billions of dollars to the provinces and territories to support health care, including mental health care, overing coming years, through both an increase of the Canada Health Transfer, and the new ten-year bilateral agreements,” said Brière in the emailed statement.

“Mental health is one of the four shared priorities in the new bilateral agreements and integrated into the other three. As a result, more than one-third of all spending in the bilateral agreements has gone to mental health and substance use services. This is in addition to the \$5-billion provided to the provinces and territories, starting in 2017 to increase the availability of mental health care and substance use services.”

To help address the costs of some mental health supports, the Canada Revenue Agency announced on July 15, 2024, that certain psychotherapists and counselling therapists would no longer be required to collect GST and HST on their services as of June 20, 2024.

“We’ll keep working with all partners to ensure all Canadians get the mental health-care they need to thrive,” said Brière in the emailed statement.

Canada is also currently facing an overdose crisis, with an average of 22 people losing their lives each day in 2023 to opioids, according to a June 28, 2024, press release from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

“There is no single solution to addressing this crisis and no organization or level of government can solve this crisis alone. Together with our partners, we must continue to look at every tool we have available to support both public health and public safety,” said Saks in the press release.

Measures taken by the Liberal government have included commitment of \$150-million announced in the 2024 federal budget for an Emergency Treatment Fund to help provide a rapid response to the overdose crisis.

When asked about Saks performance on the mental health portfolio, Johns referred to

Continued on page 26



Time for a shift: Canada must treat Alzheimer's like other progressive diseases

By Adam Morrison, Senior Director, Public Policy & Partnerships, **Alzheimer Society of Ontario**

Every day, more than 350 people in Canada will develop Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia¹. The Alzheimer Society of Canada's Landmark Study found that by the end of this decade, more than 1 million Canadians will live with this disease and by 2050, this number will surpass 1.7 million². There is no denying that Alzheimer's disease is one of the most significant public health challenges of our time, but unlike other progressive conditions such as cancer, it lacks the urgency and comprehensive care it deserves.

There are many misconceptions and stereotypes that have become synonymous with Alzheimer's. When a disease this prevalent continues to be poorly understood, it creates an environment for false beliefs to spread and thrive. This means for those living with the disease, symptoms including cognitive decline and personality changes are regularly dismissed or met with uncertainty and fear – forming a culture where barriers to early diagnosis, treatment, and social support for those living with it are all too prevalent.

Through our work, we have seen firsthand how this narrative has lasting impacts on patients and their loved ones. Many feel ashamed, isolated, or hesitant to seek care until the disease has drastically progressed. Compare this with cancer, where early detection is praised, and patients from the beginning are regularly encouraged to pursue aggressive treatment options. If we want to improve the lives of those with Alzheimer's, we must actively dismantle these falsehoods, normalizing conversations about cognitive health and dementia.

Inequality in treatment approaches is evident in research funding. While Alzheimer's is the seventh-leading cause of death worldwide, it receives less than 1.5 per cent of health research funding³. Despite this, new and emerging treatments are shaping the future of the disease. Significant efforts by researchers and patients, including those in Canada, have led to full U.S. FDA approval of two disease modifying treatments that can slow the progression of Alzheimer's in the past year. These medications target individuals with mild cognitive impairment or mild dementia due to Alzheimer's to help slow decline⁴.

With Health Canada's decision on the approval of these medications still to come, efforts to help shift the approach to Alzheimer's care must continue. This starts with ensuring that patients have equitable access to testing, community support services, and care partner support – no different than those facing other progressive conditions.

The approval of new treatments – the first in 20 years – is an important and welcomed first step in the fight against Alzheimer's. We share the excitement of hundreds of thousands of Canadians impacted by this disease as advancements help inspire hope about a new future. As these treatments move closer to approval, policymakers must take action now to prepare the health system. This includes improving access to screening and assessment in the community, diagnostic testing that includes biomarker and genetic tests, making more flexible use of existing imaging devices, and increasing the number of dementia specialists, such as neurologists and geriatricians.

Alzheimer's disease, like cancer, deserves to be treated with urgency, compassion, and comprehensive care. Changing the narrative surrounding the disease is crucial to normalizing early diagnosis and providing the resources and support necessary for both patients and care partners. We must invest more in Alzheimer's research, expand treatment options, and create healthcare models that address the full spectrum of patient needs—from early intervention to end-of-life care.

By rethinking Alzheimer's care in this way, we can give those impacted by this disease the chance to live out their life on their own accord.

¹ Alzheimer Society of Canada "Dementia numbers in Canada". Available at: <https://alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia/what-dementia/dementia-numbers-canada>. Last accessed: September 2024.

² Alzheimer Society of Canada "Navigating the Path Forward for Dementia in Canada: The Landmark Study Report #1". Available at: <https://alzheimer.ca/en/research/reports-dementia/navigating-path-forward-landmark-report-1>. Last accessed: September 2024.

³ World Health Organization "Launch of WHO's first blueprint for dementia research". Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/04-10-2022-who-launches-a-blueprint-for-dementia-research>. Last accessed: September 2024.

⁴ Alzheimer Society of Canada "Your questions, answered: what should Canadians know about lecanemab". Available at: <https://alzheimer.ca/en/whats-happening/news/updated-your-questions-answered-what-should-canadians-know-about-lecanemab>. Last accessed: September 2024.

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Alzheimer Society
ONTARIO

Mental Health Policy Briefing



Quick access to proper care for those who need it is the key to helping young people who are suffering now grow into more healthy and productive adults in the future, write Senator Stan Kutcher and Alexa Bagnell. *Image courtesy of Pixabay*

Rapid access to effective mental health care for youth should be a national priority

Instead of one-size-fits-all, we need many types of access points integrated with mental health services offering different levels of care.

ISG Senator Stanley Kutcher & Alexa Bagnell

Opinion



The mental health of young people can be categorized into one or more of four states at any point in time. These are: resting baseline; emotional distress; mental health problem; and mental disorder. The first two characterize normal everyday life with its expected existential challenges, joys and sorrows, disappointments, successes, and failures. Young people in these states do not require mental health care.

They need to learn how to cope with uncertainty, fall and get up again, and how to differentiate normal negative emotions from states that may require additional assistance. The second two states are of greater concern.

For these, rapid access to effective mental health care can make all the difference for the lives of young people and their families.

Adverse life experiences such as the death of a parent or caregiver, violence in the home, bullying, serious physical illness, or the experience of a pandemic can create substantial emotional distress. These situations may challenge a young person's coping capacity. Young people may need additional personal supports—family and friends—to get through these times, but do not always require mental health care. Occasionally, care may be required if coping strategies are overcome, or social supports are inadequate. This may include mental health professionals such as counsellors, therapists, and psychologists.

Providing mental health care to those who do not require it interferes in the normal emotional, cognitive, and social development

of young brains. It additionally plugs up the health-care system, increasing barriers to those who need mental health care.

Quick access to care must be available to young people whose coping capacity has been overwhelmed by mental health problems, and must be prioritized for those who have mental disorders. It is well recognized that young people may experience severe mental disorders. Over 75 per cent of these first present in youth (under 25 years of age). This includes: anorexia nervosa; bipolar disorder; schizophrenia; substance use disorder; and major depressive disorder.

Rapid access to effective treatments for youth with mental health problems depends on the availability of community-based care, such as Integrated Youth Service Hubs, or through community-based pediatricians and family physicians practicing with psychosocial support teams. But one size does not fit all. What's needed is different types of access points that are seamlessly integrated with mental health services that can provide more complex levels of care if required.

School-based care sites such as Youth Health Centers pro-

vide excellent and cost-effective access to care for youth with mental health problems who are attending school. School is where most young people can be found, and a youth health center can provide holistic health care that does not stigmatize those seeking help for a mental health problem. It's really health for all just down the hall.

Integrated youth service hubs can also provide a youth-centered community approach with walk-in access available for youth aged 12-25 years, and can help bridge the gap for culturally supportive and inclusive spaces for young people and their caregivers.

Mental disorders have a substantial negative personal, social, physical, and economic toll. Fortunately, early identification and rapid access to best available evidence-based treatments can mitigate their negative impact, improving the lives of young people and their families in both short and long terms. This is why rapid access to effective mental health care for young people is so important. In school settings, properly trained teachers can assist in early identification and referral to needed mental health care resources. Sadly, this type of

support—though readily available through existing training programs—is not widely offered in Canadian schools.

Rapid access to care for youth with mental disorders must be a priority, for without that, illnesses that otherwise would have responded to treatment will not be effectively mitigated. Thus, all community access points must be seamlessly linked to specialty mental health services where providers with the necessary competencies—such as child and adolescent psychiatrists—are available.

To put it into a better-known medical context: everyone with chest pain does not need an intensive care unit, but those who do need it must be able to access it immediately.

We applaud the positive steps being made by the federal government in addressing the necessity for rapid access to mental health care for young people who require it. We support additional investments that will result in the creation of early identification capacity in the school system, and easily available access points based on need for care as well as smooth pathways to more intensive services for young people who need them.

Rapid access to effective care for those who need it is, after all, the key to helping young people who are suffering now grow into more healthy and productive adults in the future.

Stanley Kutcher is an Independent Senator representing Nova Scotia. Dr. Alexa Bagnell is the head of the child and adolescent psychiatry division at Dalhousie University, and is chief of psychiatry at IWK Health.

The Hill Times

The kids are not alright: Canada needs a youth mental health strategy

Evidence suggests the pandemic spurred a trend of declining child and youth mental health that began two decades ago, and is ongoing.

NDP MP
Gord Johns



Opinion

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, conversations about child and youth mental health in Canada have grown louder. There is an urgent need to turn this attention into action that will improve outcomes for generations to come.

Young Canadians are growing up in challenging, uncertain times, and research paints a troubling picture of their mental wellbeing.

In 2020, nearly a quarter of hospitalizations of Canadians aged five to 24 years old were due to mental health problems, with

alarming increases in hospitalizations for self-harm, eating disorders, and substance use. Evidence suggests the pandemic accelerated a trend of declining child and youth mental health in this country that began two decades prior, and remains ongoing.

Coming out of the pandemic, data show young Canadians are experiencing higher rates of depression and anxiety than adults, but are less likely to access supports. Up to 1.6 million Canadian children and youth are estimated to have a mental health disorder, while suicide and drug poisoning remain leading causes of death. The kids are not alright, and it's clear we must do more to confront the youth mental health crisis.

Some of the issues that have been identified as contributors to growing mental health challenges among young people include the lingering impacts of pandemic isolation and disruptions, increased parental stress, pervasive use of social media, the rising cost of living, climate anxiety, global conflict, and a loss of hope for their future. There is a pressing need to restore hope for Canadian youth, and ensure they have timely access to mental health supports.

During the last election campaign, the Liberals promised to ensure mental health care is treated as a full and equal part of



Coming out of the pandemic, data show young Canadians are experiencing higher rates of depression and anxiety than adults, but are less likely to access supports, writes NDP MP Gord Johns. Image courtesy of Pixabay

our universal public health care system, but they have failed to deliver. Chronic underinvestment in mental health and the ongoing exclusion of community-based supports under the *Canada Health Act* have left families seeking help for their children facing limited services, long waitlists, and out of pocket costs.

As most mental health issues begin before age 18, childhood is a critical time for prevention and early intervention initiatives. While families struggle to access supports, opportunities to intervene before severe or persistent mental health issues develop are missed.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates investments in children's mental health could produce \$28-billion of annual savings.

While the federal government committed in the 2024 budget to invest \$500-million in a new Youth Mental Health Fund, it remains to be seen if or when funding will get out the door and begin producing measurable results. The government's track record of fulfilling its commitments on mental health is concerning. For example, the government abandoned its previous promise to establish the Canada Mental Health Transfer while it spent three years developing a roadmap towards national standards for mental health and substance use services.

Further, there is a need for federal leadership that goes beyond funding. Canada needs a comprehensive plan to improve the mental health of children and youth across the country. Such a plan should be informed by the voices of young people, and include strategies to help communities deliver mental promotion initiatives, address threats to youth wellbeing, and dismantle persistent barriers and inequities in mental healthcare. A plan should also facilitate improved data collection to measure progress, ensure accountability, and guide the path forward.

Specific policy proposals that deserve the attention of policymakers this fall include calls to revisit the *Canada Health Act's* exclusion of services like counselling and psychotherapy and efforts to make social media platforms safer for minors by design. Despite the charged political environment in Ottawa, I hope Members will find ways to work collaboratively and deliver positive change. Canadian youth and families are counting on us.

NDP MP Gord Johns (Courtenay-Alberni, B.C.) is his party's critic for mental health and harm reduction.

The Hill Times

Investing in the Future of Northern Communities

From clean energy and broadband to transportation, training and housing, infrastructure investment is key to unlocking the potential of Canada's North and driving sustainable, social, and economic growth.

Time for Canada to treat mental health like physical health

All of us know someone who has suffered mental health problems, and who had trouble finding help. We must do better. It's time to do it.

CSG Senator Sharon Burey



Opinion

In my decades as a practising paediatrician, I have seen a heart-breaking and frustrating scenario play out far too often: a frantic parent comes into my office with their child facing a mental health crisis. Perhaps it's anxiety, or severe depression. The young person may be contemplating suicide. But I saw first-hand the difference in access, wait-times, and available acute and community mental health care, and

the sometimes-devastating impact on children and families.

If the child had a broken leg or a cancer diagnosis, they would get care immediately. That is what we rightly demand of our health system. Not so if it is a mental health issue, even if a life is at imminent risk.

We have come a long way in acknowledging the importance of mental health. But the stubborn fact remains: the outcomes that all of us desire—universal and equitable access to mental health and addiction services, evidence-based treatment and support in the community, and better recovery outcomes—are increasingly out of reach.

Canada is in desperate need of an attitude shift, a reorganization of priorities. It can start with a concept called "mental health parity" or "parity of esteem." Already adopted in various forms in the United States and the United Kingdom, it is a recognition that people who suffer from mental health problems—including substance abuse—should receive the same level of care as people with physical ailments.

Several mental health organizations have been advocating for years for parity of esteem. It is



time that it get on the agenda of governments.

That's why I hosted a roundtable called "Mental Health, Sub-

stance Abuse and Addiction Parity Across the Lifespan" on Sept. 20 in Ottawa. I invited legislators and ministers, eminent medical profes-

sionals, mental health organizations and policy experts, but—most importantly—individuals with lived experience in mental health.

They spoke passionately about the many challenges and barriers to accessing mental health care in Canada, and about the costs, both

human and economic. And about the importance of seeking parity. Their comments and insights represent just the beginning. It is my

intention to produce a paper summarizing the discussion and areas where there is agreement on actions to prioritize, and to act on them.

A report from the Mental Health Commission of Canada found that the annual direct and indirect costs associated with mental illness reached approximately \$90-billion in 2021. Over the next 30 years, the cumulative economic impact of these costs is expected to exceed \$2.53-trillion, writes Senator Sharon Burey, who is also a paediatrician. Image courtesy of Pixabay

I have also given notice that I will use a Senate inquiry to call attention to this issue in the Red Chamber. An inquiry is a way of allowing Senators to exchange views about an issue, calling upon their considerable expertise in health care, policy design, the economy, legal affairs, and business to help develop a wholistic approach to the pursuit of mental health parity.

Ultimately, I hope to spark legislation that will make mental health parity a requirement. Recognizing that health-care delivery is largely within provincial and territorial jurisdiction, any federal legislation would have to be done in consultation with provinces, territories, Indigenous governing bodies and build on the principles of shared priorities and agreements.

It will be difficult, but it is necessary. Our continued neglect of mental health care comes with a steep economic and human cost.

A report from the Mental Health Commission of Canada found that the annual direct and indirect costs associated with mental illness reached approximately \$90-billion in 2021. Over the next 30 years, the cumulative economic impact of these costs is expected to exceed \$2.53-trillion. Moreover, a sub-

mission by the Canadian Mental Health Association notes that "every dollar spent in mental health returns \$4 to \$10 to the economy."

Meanwhile, the number of people living with mental illness in Canada is expected to grow to almost nine million within a generation. By 2050, one in two Canadians will have had a mental health problem before their 40th birthday.

The federal government has recognized the need to act, but it has so far fallen short in delivering those funds they had pledged. The Youth Mental Health Fund announced in budget 2024 was a good start, but \$500-million over five years isn't close to what is needed.

I hope the roundtable and Senate inquiry will start to develop a strong consensus on how to make mental health parity a reality. All of us know someone who has suffered mental health problems and who had trouble finding help. We must do better. It's time to do it.

Ontario Senator Sharon Burey is a paediatrician who has dedicated her career to children's mental health, equity, and social justice. She is a member of the Canadian Senators Group. The Hill Times



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Mental Health Policy Briefing

National Summit on Indigenous Mental Wellness: moving beyond gestures to real action

If we're truly committed to advancing reconciliation, supporting Indigenous workers, and building a robust economy, reinstating Canadian Certified Counsellors in the NIHB program in unregulated provinces is key.

Anangkwe Charity Fleming

Opinion



I was honoured to attend the National Summit on Indigenous Mental Health in October 2023, hosted by Indigenous Services Minister Patty Hajdu, and Minister of Mental Health Minister Ya'ara Saks. However, a critical question lingers one year later: is this event a genuine effort to

address Indigenous mental health needs, or merely another performative gesture that ultimately harms Indigenous Peoples?

Gathering with Indigenous leaders, workforce, elders, and youth to honour our heritage and discuss mental health needs across Turtle Island was enriching. Yet, after voicing our concerns, we are left wondering: will these needs be prioritized in federal policy and budgets? For Indigenous workforce members like me, the silence that follows such discussions can be deafening.

I am the Indigenous-relations lead of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA), which includes over 15,000 members and a strong Indigenous circle chapter. Our members provide grassroots, innovative, and Indigenous-specific mental health care nationwide.

For decades, Indigenous Peoples have shared lived experiences illustrating how historical trauma continues to burden our communities. The summit highlighted these persistent challenges: alarming rates of suicide, homicide, and overdoses, alongside mental health needs such as anxiety and depression, and hospitalization for acute mental illness that are twice the national average. These numbers reflect the ongoing suffering that perpetuates disparity.

My own family history reflects these deep-rooted traumas. My

great uncle died shortly after escaping residential school, and the scars from my grandparents' experiences at McIntosh Residential School affect my family today. My mother and her siblings were part of the Sixties Scoop, and my auntie was a missing Indigenous woman who was later found dead. Mental health struggles, PTSD, addiction, and suicide have devastated my family and community.

Despite decades of calls for change, I wonder: should we embrace hopelessness just to cope?

While the summit inspired hope, it also evoked a sense of urgency. A key issue I raised was the critical need to reinstate Canadian Certified Counsellors (CCCs) under the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program in unregulated provinces. Provinces that have yet to regulate the counselling/counselling therapy/psychotherapy professions include Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

In 2015, the NIHB program quietly delisted CCCs—qualified, master's degree-trained professionals, many of whom are Indigenous women serving their communities. The CCC designation certifies psychotherapists and counsellors, regardless of whether a province has regulatory legislation or a professional regulatory body, which is about half of the provinces across Canada. Ironically, this exclusion occurred as the Truth and Rec-

onciliation Commission's Calls to Action were being released. This decision has contributed to workforce burnout, and has forced skilled professionals into lower-paying positions, despite their qualifications.

The exclusion seems particularly unjust considering the Public Service Health Care Plan and Veterans Affairs Canada include CCCs as approved providers. Additionally, British Columbia's First Nations Health Authority recognizes CCCs in its mental health program, previously part of NIHB. Why don't First Nations and Inuit under NIHB receive the same access to health care as non-Indigenous People across Canada and Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia? Have we made this issue visible enough?

The CCPA has long advocated for reform of the NIHB program. We presented to the House Indigenous and Northern Affairs Committee in May 2022, which led to a recommendation for the "immediate reinstatement" of CCCs in INAN's December 2022 report. Our advocacy has continued at national summits and the Assembly of First Nations dialogue sessions, most recently in October 2023. The AFN made a formal recommendation in support of reinstating CCCs in their summary report. Influential voices, including Senator Mary Jane McCallum, echoed our call: CCCs

must be reinstated in unregulated provinces without delay.

Reinstating CCCs is not just a health issue, it's also an economic one. Doing so could enable approximately 2,000 CCCs to serve an estimated 140,000 more Indigenous people annually, strengthening the Indigenous workforce, and fostering sustainable, community-driven solutions. This aligns with this year's Mental Illness Awareness Week theme—Access for All: Time for Action, Time for Change—providing a clear opportunity to promote both health equity and economic growth.

If we are truly committed to advancing reconciliation, supporting Indigenous workers, and building a robust economy, reinstating CCCs in the NIHB program in unregulated provinces is essential. I urge policymakers to act now—to reinstate CCCs in unregulated provinces to the list of NIHB approved service providers and take meaningful steps to improve health outcomes for Indigenous peoples across Canada.

Anangkwe Charity Fleming is Anishinaabe from Treaty 3, and CCPAs lead on Indigenous Relations. Anangkwe also co-owns five mental health clinics, and teaches Indigenous adapted mental health courses at both Wilfrid Laurier and McMaster universities.

The Hill Times

Looking to the future of Canadians' mental health

As meagre as funding has been for health research in general, the situation for research into mental health is much worse.

Hymie Anisman

Opinion



Mental illnesses have been a scourge that affects all segments of society with the incidence of various disorders increasing progressively over the past 30 years. Regrettably, treatments for these illnesses have been only moderately effective. The importance of dealing with these conditions not only stems from their devastating

direct effects—undermining quality of life—but they may also presage physical illnesses, including Type 2 diabetes and heart disease that share several underlying processes.

Conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, and developmental disorders account for approximately 30 per cent of the non-fatal disease burden. The frequency of such disorders has typically been estimated to be about 20 per cent, but may be appreciably greater since many people fail to seek help owing to the stigma associated with being labeled as suffering 'mental problems', and consequently they remain in the shadows.

When they do look for help, affected individuals frequently encounter diverse problems. People with serious physical illnesses already experience long delays in obtaining therapies, and it is no better for patients seeking psychiatric help, who have to routinely wait for more than a year. Outside of hospitals, medications are often not part of our health care system,

but hopefully, this will change. The passage of Bill C-64, the Pharmacare Act, may improve patients' ability to afford medications.

Compounding the problems in receiving adequate care, funds for research to determine the processes that underly mental illnesses, as well as prophylactic and therapeutic strategies to deal with them, have been woefully inadequate and have worsened over the past two decades. On a per capita basis, health-related research funding in Canada is far behind that of most of the G7 countries, as well as Israel, South Korea, and China.

Funding for research through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research has increased marginally since 2000, and success rates of grant applications has fallen from 31 per cent in 2005 to less than 15 per cent since 2018. Thus, many promising research programs go unsupported, and overall funding is far too low to sustain a vibrant and productive research environment. The Natural Science and Engineer-

ing Research Council has similarly become less generous to health-related research. Moreover, studentships and scholarships devoted to training new scientists have been inadequate, so there will be a dearth of next-generation researchers engaged in health-related issues.

As meagre as funding has been for health research in general, the situation for research related to mental health is considerably worse. Private foundations exist that support research for cancer, heart disease, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease, and varied immune-related disorders. In contrast, private funding for mental illnesses is not as readily available. It has been said that mental illness is the orphan of the medical establishment, and funding for research related to mental illnesses is the orphan's orphan.

As dismaying as the picture may be, it is even more disturbing among Indigenous Peoples. The history of abuse and neglect, the impact of poverty, and limited availability of medical care, access to healthy foods on Northern reserves, together with overcrowding and the presence of poor air quality in homes, as well as other stressors, have taken a toll on their physical and mental health. Moreover, there is a strong possibility that these impacts are transmitted across generations.

The Royal Society of Canada, together with several partners, provided a series of actionable recommendations that encompass governance/stewardship, financing, capacity building, as well as research, which could enhance Canada's health research system. These recommendations address many of the systemic shortcomings that were mentioned earlier. Importantly, tackling the ongoing health crisis requires increased spending so that enough health facilities are established, and a greater number of physicians and health researchers are available. It is often assumed that we're dealing with a zero-sum game in which increased spending on health research and health care means that cuts are necessary for other important endeavours. Yet, the World Health Organization has made the very salient point that for every dollar invested in scaling up treatments for mental illnesses, a fourfold return on investment is realized. Mental health is an issue that directly or indirectly affects most Canadians and it's time that a more proactive approach be adopted by federal and provincial governments.

Dr. Hymie Anisman is a professor in the department of neuroscience at Carleton University in Ottawa.

The Hill Times

Mental health funding must keep pace with the growing demand for accessible and inclusive mental health supports for youth

When we invest in youth, we are ensuring that they can grow into the leaders of tomorrow, supported and empowered to thrive.

Liberal MP
Élisabeth
Brière

Opinion



Young people today are facing new realities in a changing and complex world.

From the climate crisis, to the traumas of global conflicts and the stressors of a life where it is hard to disconnect, children and youth are facing increased mental health issues like never before.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also had a profound effect on youth mental health. We also know that teenage girls, in particular, are facing significant challenges,



The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also had a profound effect on youth mental health, writes Liberal MP Élisabeth Brière. *Image courtesy of Pixabay*

with one-third of girls aged 16 to 21 reporting a decline in their mental health since 2019. Many of us have seen first-hand the many challenges that our kids are confronting as they deal with shifting realities.

The need to overcome existing barriers to better mental health of youth must be one of our main priorities. As leaders, as parents,

as communities, we must ensure our youth have the tools they need to thrive.

Mental health funding must keep pace with the growing demand for accessible and inclusive mental health supports for youth. We know that youth mental health is declining, and services are not as comprehensive as they should be. The time to act and

meaningfully address these issues is now and is a top priority.

To meet the challenges of the moment, as well as a platform commitment in the last election, we announced a generational investment of \$500-million to create a Youth Mental Health Fund.

Together, we can make sure young people can access the mental health care they need by

the organizations and service providers they trust the most.

Investing in the mental health of young people is an investment in our collective future. It is not a choice but a necessity. And the time for action is now.

Accessing the health-care system can be stressful and confusing. This is one of the major challenges to care. A challenge we wanted to address head on.

In partnership with provinces and territories and community organizations we saw that providing a “one-stop-shop” would be the key to resolving this challenge. Through the Integrated Youth Services model, we can simplify access to care and streamline services through a hub that serves as community safe havens for youth.

Last year we also launched, 9-8-8, Canada’s National Suicide Crisis Helpline. We made trauma-informed help readily available, 24/7, recognizing that in a moment of crisis people need to know where they can turn to.

These initiatives are not just investments to address the mental health of young people but are crucial in building the resilient communities of the future. When we invest in youth, we are ensuring that they can grow into the leaders of tomorrow, supported and empowered to thrive.

While there is still more work to be done, with a dedicated focus, we can turn the tide on this crisis and ensure a brighter tomorrow for all young Canadians. The kids may not be alright—but if we all work together, they can be.

Liberal MP Élisabeth Brière, who represents Sherbrooke, Que., is the parliamentary secretary to the minister of mental health and addictions and to the minister of families, children and social development.

The Hill Times

Perinatal mental health strategy is a critical step

Let’s commit to women’s mental health, and invest in the future of Canadians.

Patricia
Tomasi

Opinion



What’s it like to experience postpartum psychosis? In my case, it was life altering.

I lost my house, my career, and my sanity. Not to mention what it did to my marriage and my kids.

But I’m still here. I survived. Unfortunately, the same can’t be said for other mothers across Canada, like Flora Babkhani.

Babkhani was a thriving single mom by choice who gave birth to Amber on Nov. 4, 2021, in a Toronto hospital. Just two months later, she was gone. Babkhani tragically lost her life due to a condition that’s been studied since the 1800s, yet isn’t recognized as a distinct disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

I only learned about Babkhani’s story through a friend of a friend. In Canada, we don’t keep track of mothers who have died due to perinatal mental illness even though worldwide statistics tell us that suicide is the fourth leading cause of maternal death.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of women give birth in Canada, and tens of thousands of those women—80,000 in fact—will develop a perinatal mental illness of which postpartum psychosis is the most severe. The rate is upwards of 20 per cent for depression and anxiety, and higher for BIPOC, disabled, and LGBTQ+ women, men, partners, and birthing persons.

Perinatal mental illness is the most common complication of pregnancy and postpartum. It’s more common than gestational diabetes, and yet we still don’t have a National Perinatal Mental Health Strategy to make sure every single Canadian woman and birthing person is properly screened.

If we’re truly invested in solving the mental health crisis in

Canada, we should be investing in perinatal mental health care. Because that’s where the path to mental health well-being for all of us truly begins: before birth. Infants and children of parents with untreated perinatal mental illness are a higher risk of developing mental illness in adulthood.

Once the Health Canada-funded, Canadian Network for Mood and Anxiety Treatments 2024 Clinical Practice Guideline for the Treatment of Perinatal Mood, Anxiety and Related Disorders guidelines are released, we want the federal government to invest in a national strategy to ensure the guidelines are properly implemented and followed.

I co-founded the Canadian Perinatal Mental Health Collaborative in 2019. Along with countless advocates, we’re working to improve perinatal mental health care across the country. Since then, we’ve had a meeting with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau where he promised to deliver timely access to perinatal mental health services in his mandate letter to the minister of mental health and addictions. We believe a national strategy is the best way to deliver on this promise.

We don’t want what happened to Babkhani to ever happen again. Sadly, this past year, we learned about the death of Renée Ferguson in Regina who had been struggling with postpartum anxiety and depression.

The government has a chance to bring Canada on par with other countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States, which all have adopted national legislation and a national perinatal mental health strategy, and invested millions of dollars in perinatal mental health care. Don’t families deserve to have the same in Canada?

Let’s commit to women’s mental health, and invest in the future of Canadians. Let’s see legislation committing to a National Perinatal Mental Health Strategy happen as soon as possible so we can start saving lives. Let’s all work together to make sure what happened to Babkhani and Ferguson—and all the mothers we have yet to hear about through the grapevine—never happens again.

Patricia Tomasi is executive director of the Canadian Perinatal Mental Health Collaborative.

The Hill Times

Mental Health Policy Briefing



Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Ya'ara Saks, pictured on July 26, 2023. Instead of funding a Canada Mental Health Transfer as was committed in the minister for mental health and addictions' mandate letter, the federal government negotiated 10-year bilateral deals with each province and territory, writes S.M. Leduc. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Fact check: 2023 bilateral investments in mental health care less than half of what feds claim

Too often, governments use rote messaging about money as a cudgel to shut down innovations that the mental health sector can offer.

S.M. Leduc

Opinion



Attempting to understand federal funding for mental health care is a rather opaque exercise. Instead of funding a Canada Mental Health Transfer as was committed in the minister for mental health and addictions' mandate letter, the federal government negotiated 10-year bilateral deals with each province and territory last February towards meeting the mental health-care needs of Canadians.

The 2023 bilats add a level of budgeting bewilderment: they stir together existing expenditures alongside newly committed invest-

ments. This is clear as mud since the federal government claims, on average, that more than 30 per cent of bilateral funding is dedicated to mental health initiatives.

The 30 per cent figure could be considered misleading.

In a report released this week by the Canadian Mental Health Association, a deeper analysis of the bilats reveals that, in fact, the average percentage of new federal money going to mental health care is only 15 per cent, with Yukon spending approximately 66 per cent and acting as a significant outlier, raising the average. Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, and British Columbia are not using any new bilateral dollars for mental health services.

Therefore, the government is spending less than half of what it claims, at least in terms of new dollars.

This isn't a case of being pedantic about numbers. In the face of a mounting mental health and addictions crisis in our country, understanding the difference between repackaging existing expenditures versus making new investments matters. It's through these numbers that we can hold the government accountable for its commitments.

Let me clarify: The government had already gone down the road of signing health bilats back in 2017 with about \$500-million annually for 10 years set aside for

“Bilateral agreements are not adequately serious mechanisms for confronting the urgency of an unrelenting toxic drug crisis, prolonged wait-times for mental health services, and the normalization of suicide in the North.”

mental health. When the pandemic battered Canadians' mental health, the Liberals recognized a need to act, and during the 2021 election they promised—in addition to the existing 2017 bilat dollars—a new permanent funding transfer specifically for mental health care.

That promise, however, never materialized.

Amid mounting pressure from the premiers about cost-sharing for public health care, the federal government did an about-face on permanent funding in 2023. Instead, the premiers were offered the remainder of the 2017 bilat dollars and another 10-year funding pocket for mental health and other emerging health priority areas.

In the end, what should have been a permanent \$2.5-billion annual investment for mental health and addictions health care turned into an annual spend of \$901-million. When the 2017 bilats expire in three years, that annual amount is further reduced to a mere \$301-million.

The government repackaged existing funding for mental health care, and did not clearly communicate how much funding was new. As a result, policy decision-makers—and the voting public—could not determine whether need was being sufficiently addressed.

Mental health sector stakeholders know that the govern-

ment is failing Canadians, and they know why. It's because federal health legislation only funds the provinces and territories for medically necessary services, leaving many mental health services outside the scope. But when stakeholders tell this to the government, the response is a fixation on funding. And even that funding is being misrepresented.

Investments alone are not a solution to our mental health crisis. And yet, too often, governments use rote messaging about money as a cudgel to shut down innovations that the mental health sector can offer.

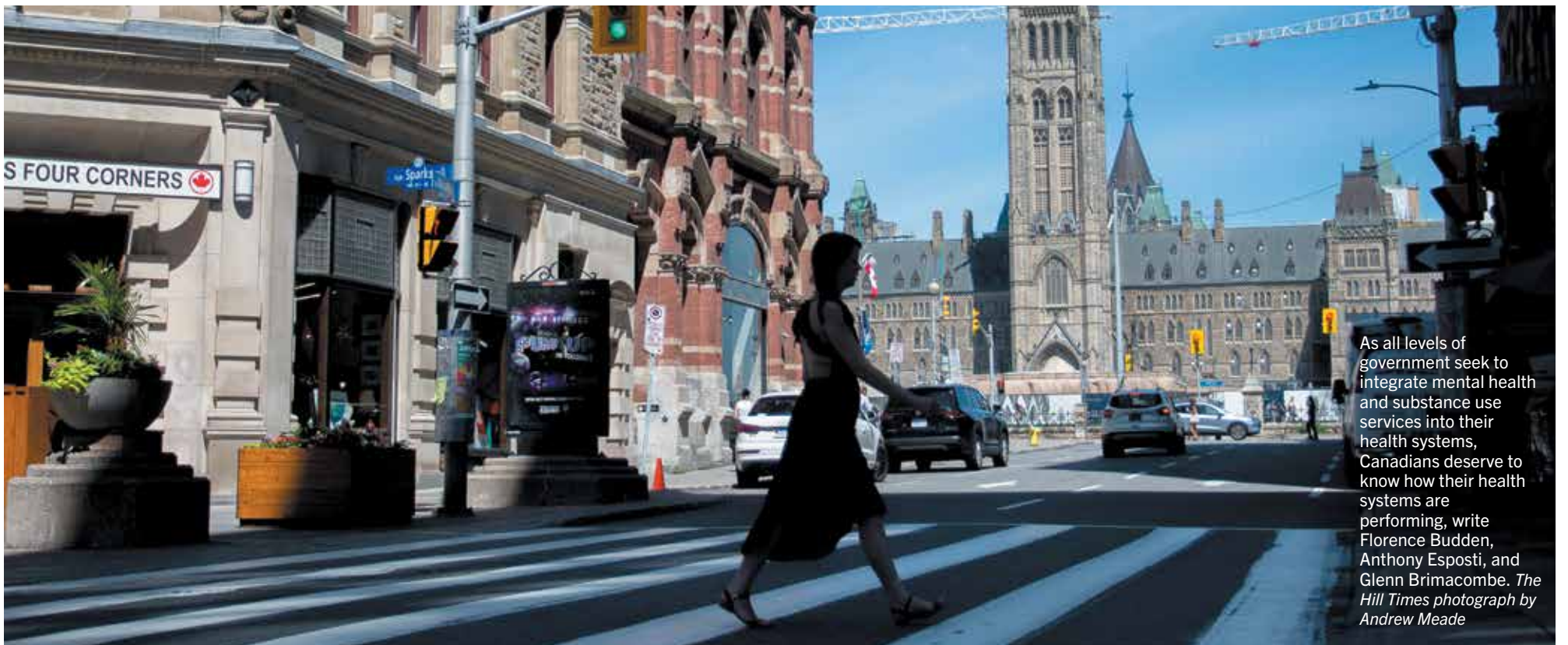
It is questionable whether bilateral agreements are an effective policy tool for meeting the mental healthcare needs of Canadians, so it's perplexing why the government keeps returning to them.

Bilateral agreements are not adequately serious mechanisms for confronting the urgency of an unrelenting toxic drug crisis, prolonged wait times for mental health services, and the normalization of suicide in the North. These agreements are vulnerable to political shifts because they are short term, and, therefore, contribute to the instability routinely encountered by the mental health sector.

The federal government must think differently about how it invests in mental health care. Instead of an approach that perpetuates pilot projects, the government needs to examine legislative levers—such as amending the Canada Health Act—that would sustain investments and the delivery of mental health care by the provinces. Because ultimately, while money may talk, it doesn't always tell the whole story.

S.M. Leduc is the national government relations adviser for the Canadian Mental Health Association, the most extensive frontline provider of community mental health services in Canada. She is the author of a new report titled *Overpromised, Underdelivered: Analysis of Federal Mental Health Care Investments in the 2023 Working Together Health Bilateral Agreements*.

The Hill Times



As all levels of government seek to integrate mental health and substance use services into their health systems, Canadians deserve to know how their health systems are performing, write Florence Budden, Anthony Esposti, and Glenn Brimacombe. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Governments must remove barriers to improve access to mental health and substance use services

Now is the time to take action to support the mental and substance use health of Canadians.

Florence Budden,
Anthony Esposti &
Glenn Brimacombe

Opinion



Governments across Canada are falling short in their obligation to provide timely access to mental health and substance use services, leaving many Canadians without the care they desperately need.

The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) has found that federal and provincial government efforts to address this longstanding issue are inadequate with both levels of government receiving failing grades in CAMIMH's second annual report card.

Mental health and substance use health issues affect one in five Canadians each year, yet access to timely and effective care remains a significant challenge. Despite the federal government's initiatives—including the \$500-million Youth Mental Health Fund and the removal of GST from counselling and psychotherapy services—these measures have proven insufficient. The long-promised Canada Mental Health Transfer, valued at \$4.6-billion over five years, has yet to be delivered, further exacerbating the crisis. Moreover, the federal government's decision to collapse the Wellness Together Canada portal, which provided crucial mental health supports during the pandemic, has left a void in the availability of accessible services.

Canadians overwhelmingly recognize the need for better access to mental health care. CAMIMH's findings reveal that 90 per cent of Canadians believe timely access to publicly funded mental health resources is important, and 83 per cent agree that provincial governments should hire more mental health care providers. Yet, despite this high degree of public consensus, these views have not translated

into meaningful government action.

The patchwork approach currently adopted by governments is not only inadequate, but also harmful. Mental health care must be treated with the same urgency and priority as physical health care. CAMIMH and other organizations across Canada continue to advocate for a Mental Health and Substance Use Health Care For All Parity Act, proposed federal legislation that would enshrine the importance of timely, inclusive, and accessible mental health and substance use health care in law. This act would establish clear objectives and standards for provinces and territories, while ensuring that mental and substance use health care receives the sustained investment it requires.

The need for increased investment is clear. The federal government has allocated an additional \$25-billion over the next 10 years to the provinces and territories to advance shared health priorities, including mental health and substance use health. However, only an average of 16 per cent of these new federal funds are being directed toward mental health and substance use services—a

figure that falls far short of what is needed.

These low levels of investment are tangible evidence that mental health and substance use health care is not being treated with the seriousness it deserves by Canadian policymakers. Without significant, targeted funding, the gaps in mental health and substance use health services will continue to grow, leaving more Canadians without the support they need.

Transparency is another critical issue. As all levels of government seek to integrate mental health and substance use health programs into their health systems, Canadians deserve to know how their health systems are performing. The Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) provides a publicly available database showing how health systems are managed, measured, and monitored. However, CIHI's mental health and substance use health indicators and expenditure data is currently limited; in the former, mostly coming from hospitals and physicians rather than the community, and in the latter, not accounting for the private sector or out-of-pocket payments. This lack of comprehensive

data hinders Canadians' ability to understand how effectively their mental health systems are functioning.

To address this, CIHI needs the resources to collaborate with provincial and territorial governments to develop a national database that includes public, community-based, and private health expenditure data, along with comprehensive performance indicators. This would provide Canadians with the transparency they deserve, and hold governments accountable for the mental health and substance use health services they provide.

The urgency of the mental health crisis in this country cannot be overstated. Governments at all levels must take immediate action to remove the barriers to accessing mental health and substance use health services. Mental health and substance use health is health and treating it as anything less is not an option. The time for talk is over: Canadians need and deserve real, sustained action to ensure that mental health and substance use health care is accessible to all.

As a coalition of 18 groups representing individuals with lived and living experience, their families and caregivers, as well as health care providers, CAMIMH is committed to collaborating with all levels of government, employers, and other stakeholders to make meaningful progress on these issues.

Florence Budden is co-chair of CAMIMH, and represents the Canadian Federation of Mental Health Nurses. Anthony Esposti is co-chair of CAMIMH, and CEO of Community Addictions Peer Support Association. Glenn Brimacombe is the chair of CAMIMH's Public Affairs Committee, and is the director of policy and public affairs at the Canadian Psychological Association.

The Hill Times

Mental Health Policy Briefing

Linking the affordability crisis and mental health requires ‘transformative change’ in health care, say critics and experts

Continued from page 16

Liberal government measures as a “piecemeal approach.”

“I’ve been calling for the federal government repeatedly to create parity with mental and physical health,” said Johns. “We’ve been calling on her to do that. I wouldn’t just put it on her. I’d put it on the prime minister and the whole cabinet. They’re not treating the mental health crisis or the toxic drug crisis like the emergency that it is.”

Sarah Kennell, national director of public policy with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), told *The Hill Times* that social and economic status play a major role in determining health outcomes, even if the patient has access to the best of physical care and mental health supports. Non-medical factors—such as income, unemployment, and job security, food security, and housing—account for between 30 to 55 per cent of health outcomes, according to the World Health Organization.

“What we’re seeing right now, in terms of the impact of the affordability crisis, is a real strain on the ability of front-line community mental health and substance use health service providers to deliver on those social determinants of health,” said Kennell. “When we don’t have access to housing supply, affordable rental units, [and] when income supports delivered through provincial and territorial sources are not keeping up with inflation, it really hampers the ability of our frontline staff to keep people well and get them towards a place of long-term recovery.”

Kennell said that the current affordability crisis is placing strain on Canadians’ mental health almost as high as what was experienced during the pandemic. To help address the demands placed on mental health-care, Kennell argued the federal government should reopen the Canada Health Act “with a view to explicitly include community-delivered mental health and substance use health services.” Besides counselling and psychotherapy, other services that fall outside of the Canada Health Act include eating disorder treatments and addiction treatments, she said.

“The current affordability crisis is really exposing, once again, the fact that our mental health system is behind a paywall,” she said. “It’s about really fundamentally changing the way we

view mental health services and putting them on par with physical health services, which would go a long way to making them affordable and accessible for people as part of our public, universal healthcare system.”

Kennell said that the CMHA is currently preparing a report on the state of mental health in Canada, which will look at factors such as poverty, employment, and housing. The report is expected to be released in November, she said.

Allison Cowan, vice-president of external affairs and development with the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), told *The Hill Times* that the link between mental health and financial health is undeniable, and “we’re seeing this play out in real time across Canada.”

“As we’ve moved into this post-pandemic phase, not only do we have the ongoing mental health challenges persisting, but [we are] also facing increased costs of living, inflation, [and] soaring housing costs. Really, underlying this reality is a financial strain that can chip away at our resilience,” said Cowan. “It’s truly a cycle—that financial stress can lead to mental health challenges, which in turn can really make it harder to maintain employment, manage finances effectively, and really have overall mental well-being.”

The MHCC released a policy brief discussing mental health and high living costs on Feb. 13, 2024. The commission argued in the brief that high inflation has made it more difficult for many households to meet their financial needs, and poverty and low-income puts people at a greater risk for mental illness, worsen existing mental health concerns, and creates significant barriers to accessing services and supports. Food insecurity has also become a nationwide problem, with about 5.8 million Canadians across 10 provinces living in food-insecure households in 2021, according to the brief.

To address the mental challenges associated with affordability concerns, the MHCC recommendations in the brief include strengthening the full range of income and benefit supports for people living in Canada, monitoring their associated impacts on mental health, and providing new National Housing Strategy funding for Housing First and supportive housing programs

for people living with mental health concerns.

“We need to tackle not just housing, not just food, not just poverty, [and] not just mental health. It’s all connected, and everyone’s experience is unique. Individual experiences are shaped by factors like race, gender, sexual orientation, physical health and disability. Solutions need to consider the whole person, and the policies and support systems need to work for everyone, especially those of who are vulnerable and facing multiple barriers due to who they are, [and] where they come from,” said Cowan. “One of the areas that the Mental Health Commission is working to address gaps in the system is really advocating for more accessible and affordable mental health care options for everyone in Canada.”

Nicole Racine, a clinical psychologist and assistant professor in the School of Psychology at the University of Ottawa, told *The Hill Times* that the current housing and affordability crisis will undoubtedly have implications for mental health.

“We know from other research we’ve done also that experiencing disruptions in income, and basically the stress that people experience when they can’t afford simple things like housing [and] groceries ... is a real catalyst for mental health concerns like anxiety, [and] like depression,” she said. “Increases in pricing and decreasing in housing—when you’re living below the poverty line—has an even more substantial impact to the point where there are families who are homeless and they can’t engage in addiction services, addressing their trauma, [or] trying to promote child development if they’re unhoused and if they actually can’t feed their families.”

Racine suggested this situation could be helped by the federal government “strengthening the full range of benefit supports” which includes housing paid for by the government.

“The percentage of individuals every night who can’t even get shelter is jarring, and so, those are individuals who will certainly have mental health difficulties, and then those show up in our communities and in our emergency departments seeking services when so many of those things could be alleviated by stable housing and income support,” she said.

The affordability crisis has only added to the strain on men-

tal health that already existed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Racine.

“I think we’re seeing perhaps some gradual declines [in strains on mental health], but on the whole we haven’t gone back to pre-pandemic levels,” she said. “It just means that when we’re faced with these additional stressors, we’re already in a place that’s more precarious than we were before. I think sometimes people forget that for children and youth

mental health, we had a crisis on our hands before the pandemic happened. We already had wait lists that, in some places in Ontario, had an upward limit of two years, where only one in four kids who needed mental health support actually got it. And then we layered on the pandemic. We’ve layered on the affordability crisis.”

During the pandemic, about 61.8 per cent of sexual and gender diverse (SGD) youths experienced clinically elevated levels of depression, 55.4 per cent had clinically elevated anxiety levels, and 50.9 per cent contemplated suicide, according to a study released on June 24, which was conducted by Racine in collaboration with Ian Colman, a professor in the School of Epidemiology and Public Health at the University of Ottawa, along with students and trainees.

These rates are nearly twice as high as those reported for non-SGD youth during the same period, according to the report.

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The Hill Times

Mental Health Statistics:



- In 2022, more than five million people in Canada met the diagnostic criteria for a mood, anxiety, or substance use disorder with the prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders increasing substantially over the previous 10 years
- According to the 2022 Mental Health and Access to Care Survey, among the 18.3 per cent of Canadians aged 15 years and older who met diagnostic criteria for a mood, anxiety or substance use disorder in the 12 months before the survey, about half (48.8 per cent) reported that they had talked to a health professional about their mental health in the past year.
- The proportion of Canadians aged 15 years and older with a generalized anxiety disorder doubled from 2012 to 2022, from 2.6 per cent to 5.2 per cent. Similar increases were seen for the 12-month prevalence of major depressive episodes, up from 4.7 per cent in 2012 to 7.6 per cent in 2022, and of bipolar disorders, which went from 1.5 per cent to 2.1 per cent over the same period.
- People who met diagnostic criteria for a mood, anxiety or substance use disorder were more likely to report having received counselling (43.8 per cent) or information (32 per cent) for their mental health.

Source: Mental Health of Canadians—it matters, released by Statistics Canada on Oct. 10, 2023

Housing affordability statistics



- The share of households living in unaffordable housing—defined as spending 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter costs—was 22 per cent in 2022, virtually the same as it was in 2018 (21.5 per cent), before the COVID-19 pandemic
- In 2022, 14.5 per cent of households were dissatisfied with the affordability of their housing, marking a 3.4 percentage-point increase from 2018 (11.1 per cent). Renters (20.8 per cent) were more likely to be dissatisfied with the affordability of their housing than owners (11.2 per cent) in 2022, but the rates of both groups grew by more than 3.0 percentage points since 2018.
- In 2022, renters (33 per cent) were more than twice as likely to spend 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter costs than owners (16.1 per cent), a gap that has persisted over time.
- From 2018 to 2022, shelter costs increased nationally by 20.6 per cent. Against this backdrop, a larger share of Canadians were dissatisfied with the affordability of their housing in 2022 than in 2018.
- Households felt the pressure on their overall household budget in 2022, because of an overall rise in shelter costs, as well as price increases for other items that make up the Consumer Price Index, such as gasoline (+34 per cent since 2018) and food (+22.7 per cent since 2018)

Source: Housing affordability in Canada, 2022, released by Statistics Canada on Sept. 10, 2024.



Heinrich Himmler inspects the Galicia Division in May 1944. Otto Wächter is in the background. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Release the names

The best way to counter Russian propaganda is not to be silent, but to tell the whole truth. That's what the Library and Archives Canada should be giving us regarding the Galician Waffen SS Division in this country.

David Matas

Opinion



WINNIPEG—Library and Archives Canada has been urged to keep secret the names of around 900 members of a Nazi Galician Waffen SS Division who came to Canada after the Second World War. The reason given for the silence request is that naming the members of the division would help to justify the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In assessing this request, Library and Archives Canada must

keep in mind that the members of the division are, according to international law, Nazi war criminals. The SS, including the Waffen SS, was prosecuted before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg as being a criminal organization.

In a judgment of Oct. 1, 1946, the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal wrote: "In dealing with the SS the Tribunal includes all persons who had been officially accepted as members of the SS, including ... members of the Waffen SS ... who became or remained members of the organization with knowledge that it was being used for the commission of acts declared criminal by Article 6 of the Charter, or who were personally implicated as members of the organization in the commission of such crimes, excluding, however, those who were drafted into membership by the State in such a way as to give them no choice in the matter, and who had committed no such crimes."

There is no evidence that any of the 900 members of the Nazi Galician Waffen SS Division was drafted into membership in such a way as to give them no choice in the matter. On the contrary, the narrative supporting the Galician Division of the Waffen SS is that they were a Ukrainian liberation army and that its members volunteered to do just that—liberate Ukraine—failing to note that the object of the division was to lib-

“The notion that releasing the names of the members of the division would somehow assist the Russians in their invasion of Ukraine is perverse. Silence, rather than helping Ukraine and harming Russia, would have the opposite effect.

erate Ukraine from Soviet rule so that it could fall under Nazi rule.

The Nuremberg International Military Tribunal also wrote about the SS that “its criminal programs were so widespread, and involved slaughter on such a gigantic scale, that its criminal activities must have been widely known.” Knowledge includes willful blindness. Any claim that the members of the Galician Division volunteers never heard of Nazi atrocities, insofar as this claim exists, can be explained only by willful blindness.

The Charter of the International Military Tribunal provided that: “In cases where a group or organization is declared criminal by the tribunal, the competent national authority of any signatory [to the Charter] shall have the right to bring individuals to trial for membership therein before national, military, or occupation courts. In any such case the criminal nature of the group or organization is considered proved and shall not be questioned.”

Every voluntary member of the Galician Waffen SS Division is a war criminal just by being a member, whether or not the member personally participated in war crimes.

By coming to Canada, the members of the Galician SS Division were able to find immunity for their criminality. The Canadian Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals in 1986 did not find the members of the division war

criminals because the commission did not use the Nuremberg Tribunal definition of war criminals, but rather a Canadian-specific limited definition. Canada did not sign the Nuremberg Charter, and its own legal definition of war crimes excluded the possibility of finding a person criminal by reason of membership in a Nazi mass atrocity organization.

It may be too late to reverse that immunity. However, we should not erase the historical record of what happened, which includes, of course, who these people were.

The notion that releasing the names of the members of the division would somehow assist the Russians in their invasion of Ukraine is perverse. Silence, rather than helping Ukraine and harming Russia, would have the opposite effect. Disinformation, misinformation, denials, cover up, the search for immunity, and fantasy counternarratives are tactics of the Russian propaganda machine which, ultimately, discredit their cause.

The most effective way to counter Russian propaganda, to show the difference between tyranny and democracy, is not to be silent, but rather to tell the truth, the whole truth. That is what the Library and Archives Canada should be giving Canadians when it comes to the Galician Waffen SS Division in Canada.

David Matas is an international human rights lawyer based in Winnipeg, Man. He is senior honorary counsel to B'nai Brith Canada, and has represented the organization at the Canadian Commission on War Criminals in Canada.

The Hill Times

News

Federal overtime payments on decline, but total paid out still tops \$1-billion mark

Latest government data shows RCMP, Correctional Services Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, as well as Canada Revenue Agency paid the most overtime in 2023.

BY SOPHALL DUCH

The federal government doled out 12.96 per cent less overtime in 2023 to its workforce than the year before.

In 2023, the feds paid out over \$1.19-billion in overtime (OT) to its employees working across more than 100 governmental departments, agencies, and Crown corporations. In 2022, that OT figure was \$1.34-billion.

These figures came to light on Sept. 16, the start of Parliament's fall sitting, in response to Conservative MP Earl Dreeshen's (Red Deer-Mountain View, Alta.) Order Paper question about overtime pay for all federal government employees from 2016 up until June 2024.

When asked why he was interested in government overtime pay, Dreeshen told *The Hill Times* he wants "to take care of the money that's being spent on government projects."

For context, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Office estimates that the federal government spent approximately \$39-billion on personnel salaries in 2022. OT for that year amounts to 3.4 per cent of salaries. The PBO did not have salary figures for 2023.

A spokesperson for Treasury Board President Anita Anand's (Oakville, Ont.) office told *The Hill Times* that the government's priority is to deliver essential services to Canadians while being "prudent" of taxpayer dollars.

"Overtime is assigned at management's discretion to meet a department's operational requirements while avoiding its excessive use. It is expected that all departments manage overtime responsibly and ensure that its use is appropriate and justified," said Myah Tomasi, Anand's press secretary, in a statement to *The Hill Times*.

Some incidents that could call for the use of OT include emergency or urgent situations, a surge in workload, and the



Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc's portfolio includes the RCMP and Canada Border Services Agency. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

backfilling of an absence. But a Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) spokesperson told *The Hill Times* that federal staff can only claim overtime when that OT work is authorized in advance by the manager and if it's in accordance with their collective agreement.

"Overtime payments as a share of total salary have remained stable in most organizations, except during the pandemic years when more overtime was worked," said Rola Salem, a TBS spokesperson, in a statement to *The Hill Times*.

But out of the 108 federal departments, agencies, and Crown corporations that provided their overtime figures, just under half of them—about 48 per cent—are seeing OT spending trending downwards.

Sizing up the issue

While overall year-over-year OT pay has gone down, the size of the civil service has continued to grow since 2015 levels. The federal public service has grown to 357,247 in 2023—that's about 21,000 more employees than the previous year. (These figures don't include Crown corporations).

TBS said that annual growth in the federal public sector has "slowed" as the feds look to shrink the sector in the coming years to save costs. For 2024, the population of the federal public service grew by about 10,500 jobs.

"The size of the public service changes to adapt to government priorities and program requirements, and program funding available through federal budgets," said Salem.

Some of the departments and agencies seeing a steady increase

in employees include: Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA); Correctional Services Canada; Employment and Social Development Canada; Environment and Climate Change Canada; Fisheries and Oceans Canada; Royal Canadian Mounted Police's civilian staff; Canada Revenue Agency (CRA); Shared Services Canada; Elections Canada; and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

But does hiring more staff help departments cut down their OT costs? The data is mixed.

A mixed bag

Federal departments and agencies like the CRA, Correctional Services Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, as well as Employment and Social Development Canada have seen their OT payments declining over past years.

Overtime payments at CBSA have been trending upwards since 2020-2021, despite hiring more workers. Same goes for the RCMP's civilian staff, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

One agency saw overtime more than triple from 2022 to 2023. OT payouts at the Canadian Transportation Agency jumped from \$72,537.04 to \$222,584.30 last year. The agency did not provide a response to *The Hill Times* by deadline to explain this increase.

Public Safety Canada, whose portfolio includes the RCMP and CBSA, told *The Hill Times* that its workers had to deal with "exceptional circumstances" in the past few years.

"From supporting the Government of Canada's efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, to managing the federal coordination and response to a record-breaking wildfire season in 2023, Public Safety Canada employees have been diligently advancing the work of the department which at times requires working beyond typical business hours," said Noémie Allard, a spokesperson for Public Safety Canada, in a statement.

An IRCC spokesperson also pointed to the pandemic as a contributing factor to her department's increased workload.

"The increase in overtime compensation between 2021 and 2023 was also necessary to respond to the challenges posed by COVID-19 and to reduce processing times and backlogs for immigration and citizenship applications," said Michelle Carbert, an IRCC spokesperson, in a statement to *The Hill Times*.

The backlog in cases stemming from the pandemic was exacerbated by an increase in international student visa applications and new refugee programs for Ukrainians and Afghans.

To address this surge in applications, in the past year Immigration Minister Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Îles-des-Soeurs, Que.) has signalled his government's plans to reduce the number of temporary residents in Canada by capping international students visas and limiting temporary foreign workers.

It's still early to tell whether these new measures will see an impact on OT pay in IRCC, but these measures come at a time

when Anand has tasked her cabinet colleagues to find billions of dollars in savings.

Following last April's federal budget, Anand told reporters "we are simply looking at ways in which we can save money, cut red tape, and ensure our taxpayers dollars are allocated towards our government's priorities."

A sector in the crosshairs

The Liberals are not the only ones looking to cut red tape.

After tabling his first non-confidence vote of the fall sitting on Sept. 24, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) said his party "will cut bureaucracy, waste and consulting contracts" to get the federal budget to balance.

Whether these new OT figures will help the Tories decide where to cut in the public service is still unclear as Dreeshen, who put forward the question on federal overtime pay, wouldn't provide an opinion on whether he thought these payments were a problem.

"I'm not the one responsible for the various departments and so on. So, you know, this gives them a chance to take a look at them and see what's happening," said Dreeshen.

"Do you think there's a lot of overtime being spent?" asked *The Hill Times*.

"I can't comment on that, but it depends on which one they are, and I don't really engage in that," said Dreeshen.

The Conservatives' national revenue critic, Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, Ont.), told *The Hill Times* he was "still working through the data."

Many public servants will remember the Harper era cuts to the civil service. Then-Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper's Red Tape Reduction Action Plan saw the federal public service shrink by about 25,000 jobs from 2011 to 2015.

"My area of study is information management, library tech. Nobody cares about that. So libraries, archives, scientific libraries—those were all gutted at that time. And, obviously, working in a place that deals in information now is a very nerve-wracking experience seeing what's on the horizon," said Lauren, a public servant at Statistics Canada, to *The Hill Times*.

Lauren, who did not provide a last name, said she's "100 per cent" concerned about potential Conservative cuts to the public service. While another civil servant said she already sees the writings on the wall.

"Actually, I think cuts are inevitable no matter who's in," said Stella, a public servant at Health Canada who did not provide a last name, to *The Hill Times*.

"We already know that Anita Anand was charged with finding billions of dollars of savings. So regardless of who comes in, there's going to be cuts. We did staff up by 20 per cent, I think, during the pandemic. So to me, it's not really going to be a surprise if anybody cuts."

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Feds aim to clear 112,000 Phoenix backlog cases by fiscal year-end, but unions call efforts ‘too little too late’

Ottawa says it is working to fix the costly and problem-plagued Phoenix pay system, but the unions say they have ‘heard this before.’

BY IREM KOCA

The federal government says it is setting “aggressive targets” to clear about 112,000 public servant payment claims by March 2025, but one union says the ongoing delay and current backlog shows it’s time for new talks about additional compensation for damages related to the Phoenix pay system.

Alex Benay, associate deputy minister at Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), gave an Oct. 2 quarterly progress report on the years-long effort to replace the problem-plagued pay system.

He said that by fiscal year end, the government plans to tackle 112,000 backlog cases, starting with the 19,000 people hardest hit. He said PSPC has already closed 5,000 of those priority cases. Benay said eliminating Shared Services Canada’s 12,000-case backlog is another goal for this year. That department will also be the first to be integrated into the new system on trial bases.

Benay said PSPC reduced the net backlog by 14 per cent of the total. But in a July 2024 update, the government outlined plans to clear the backlog by March 2025.

He noted that the number of new claims could affect this target. Given that intake is outside the government’s control—and remains “steadily high”—Benay said it becomes harder to reduce the backlog.

“As we clear cases, it means that new backlog cases can simply emerge,” he explained, adding the focus is on reducing the intake from departments, and increasing the speed at which cases are processed.

As of August 2024, the Phoenix backlog has 408,000 financial transactions in limbo, with 209,000 of those cases waiting to be resolved for more than a year, according to PSPC.

He told reporters the Treasury Board Secretariat made “significant progress” in improving HR and pay services for federal public servants over the past three months.

Benay stressed the government does not want to transfer any cases older than a year into the replacement system that is in



Alex Benay, associate deputy minister at Public Services and Procurement Canada, gives an update on the government’s efforts to replace the Phoenix pay system at a July press conference. *The Hill Times* Photograph by Andrew Meade

the works. He added that the plan is to approach this on a department-by-department basis over multiple years.

Phoenix was initially intended to centralize payroll administration for federal employees. The IBM-made system was created in June 2011 through a competitive procurement process under the Conservative government. After the program was rolled out by the Liberal government in 2016, unions raised the alarm that the system was being prematurely rushed out the door. The errors in its implementation resulted in substantial inconsistencies from early on, with hundreds of thousands of public servants being overpaid, underpaid, or not paid at all in some cases. The program, once billed as a cost-saver, has so far cost more than \$3.5-billion.

“The current platform is not fit for purpose. We have too many customizations,” Benay said. “And it was not well implemented.”

Francis Trudel, associate chief human resources officer at the Treasury Board Secretariat, said the environment they are operating in is “quite complex” with more than 400,000 employees represented by 17 unions and 58 collective bargaining agreements, but they are working to “simplify” some of those conditions of employment to minimize the impact on pay.

Treasury Board ‘dragging its feet’ on damages deal, says PIPSC

Sharon DeSousa, Public Service Alliance of Canada national president, said PSAC expects

to see “real progress” to address ongoing Phoenix pay issues and the staggering backlog.

“New tools to help compensation advisors handle pay issues are a good start, but eight years later, it’s too little too late,” DeSousa said by email following the government’s update.

DeSousa, whose union represents more than 240,000 workers, said that progress would mean hiring and training more experienced compensation advisors to fix new issues, as well as eliminating the massive caseload.

The government says it has hired more than 1,100 compensation agents since September 2022, but union representatives say some have since left, so there are not enough advisers available to address the issues. It means the government is increasingly relying on artificial intelligence to do the work.

Jennifer Carr, president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, said she is “cautiously optimistic,” but the government has long promised to address the problems, “and we’re still waiting.”

“We have heard this before,” said Carr, whose union represents 75,000 members across the country.

Carr said the government needs to recognize the harm caused by the broken pay system over many years, and its impacts on employee morale. Carr said the union is trying to broker another damages deal, but said the Treasury Board has been “dragging its feet.”

In 2019 and 2020, the federal government offered financial compensation up to \$2,500 to current and former employees for

damages related to the Phoenix pay system, covering the period between 2016 and 2020, following agreements reached with unions.

“You can’t come and ask us to sit at the table and negotiate with you without recognizing the harm Phoenix has done to federal public servants,” Carr said, adding that not having stable pay for years has a detrimental effect on the public servants.

Carr also noted that the delay in paycheques has forced some employees to leave the federal public service and become contractors.

“Because when they become contractors, not only are they paid correctly and on time, but they also get reimbursements for any out of pocket expenses, as well as their overtime. So at some point, it’s the cumulative effects of everything that is going on,” she said.

Pay system cost ‘a lot to get it wrong last time,’ says Benay

Benay said the government is planning to “iterate slowly” the launch of Dayforce—the replacement system for Phoenix.

“I am not personally in favour of a big bang approach like we did last time, which is simply pressing a button and launching it to 100 departments,” he said.

“We don’t want to replicate the mistakes of the past,” said the senior official.

According to Benay, the government will have a clear idea of how much the new system will cost, and how it will be rolled out by the end of this fiscal year in March 2025. The system launch is expected to take multiple years.

Projected costs for 2024-25 sit at over \$800-million for the current pay centre’s operations, of which the centre and its staff account for \$350.3-million, followed by \$234.6-million for applications and IT support. The “transformation” of that system is already set at more than \$160-million for this fiscal year.

PSPC signed a contract with Dayforce Inc. (formerly known as Ceridian) in September 2021 to test its human resources and pay systems platform, and has been testing the human capital management platform provided by the contractor since 2022.

The department’s Feb. 1, report identified Dayforce as a “viable option” for the federal government’s next HR and pay system. The system uses a Software as a Service delivery model, which provides users with access to a service via the internet. The Canada-made platform combines payroll, HR, benefits, talent, and workforce management in a single cloud application.

“Now we have to determine the feasibility of deploying the solution. How ready are we to deploy Dayforce is the question,” said Benay, explaining this means confirming that the program has the right features, and that it can be configured to address the needs of the government.

“We’re going to be looking at running two systems in parallel because it’s the safer bet,” Benay said. “It has cost us a lot to get it wrong last time.”

The Phoenix pay system was designed to streamline the government’s 40-year-old system administered manually and save \$70-million annually. Government records show there have been 50 amendments to the initial Phoenix contract to fix errors within the system between June 2011 and December 2020.

The current HR and pay systems administer the payroll for over 430,000 current and former public servants from over 100 departments and agencies. In 2023, this represented more than 13-million payments, totalling approximately \$36-billion.

Budget 2024 earmarked \$135-million to test a new HR and pay solution to replace Phoenix, with \$112.1-million allocated to PSPC, and \$22.7-million to the Treasury Board. The total also includes the \$85-million the government spent to amend its contract with Dayforce to continue testing and customizing the system in line with its needs.

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Transactions ready to be processed: 408,000

- 255,000 financial transactions
- 28,000 financial transactions sent to home departments and agencies for processing and closure
- 63,000 transactions with no financial impact, or general inquiries
- 7,000 collective agreement transactions
- 55,000 transactions waiting to be closed for which employees have already received payment

News

Poilievre says Conservatives 'go around' Hill media, alleges 'anti-conservative bias' after ending CTV News boycott

CTV News dismissed two staff over altering a soundbite from Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, which the union says it's looking into. Meanwhile, Poilievre says the Hill media is 'largely state funded or has indirect reasons to suck up to the federal government.'

Continued from page 1

of "splicing" a clip of Poilievre out of context on the network's flagship CTV National News program.

The "splicing" incident at the heart of the matter concerns an altered clip of Poilievre that misrepresented the leader's then-forthcoming non-confidence motion, and his calls for a "carbon tax election."

Poilievre said in a scrum to reporters on Sept. 18: "That's why it's time to put forward a motion for a carbon tax election."

However, the Poilievre clip that CTV aired on Sept. 22 in a



Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre has given his caucus the green light to speak to CTV News after his party boycotted the network for airing an altered clip of his words. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

segment about the federal dental care program: "That's why we need to put forward a motion."

The spliced soundbite followed a CTV reporter saying "the events of the last week have raised new questions over the plan's future"—giving viewers the impres-

sion that Poilievre's non-confidence motion was related to the dental care program negotiated between the Liberals and NDP.

The next day CTV National News issued an on-air apology and retraction saying a "misunderstanding during the

editing process resulted in this misrepresentation."

But that wasn't good enough for the Conservatives.

"Yesterday's so called 'apology' from @CTVNews doesn't cut it. This wasn't a simple 'misunderstanding'. Until they explicitly acknowledge their malicious editing & omission of context to undermine @PierrePoilievre, Conservative MPs won't engage with CTV News & its reporters," posted Sebastian Skamski, director of media relations in Poilievre's office, on X (formerly Twitter).

Three days after Skamski's social media post, two CTV News employees were dismissed after the network launched an internal investigation into the incident.

"The investigation found that two members of the CTV News team are responsible for altering a video clip, manipulating it for a particular story. Their actions violate our editorial standards and are unacceptable. Those individuals are no longer members of the CTV News team," said a CTV National News statement.

A tale of two cities

The Hill Times spoke to some CTV News employees on background about what happened.

The problems for the network stemmed from their recording of the Sept. 18 Poilievre scrum, which was missing part of the leader's "that's why it's time to put forward a motion for a carbon tax election" quote.

Audio and video from different parts of Poilievre's scrum were patched together in an effort to salvage the soundbite.

Sources told *The Hill Times* that the part where Poilievre said "for a carbon tax election" was originally in the reporter's script, but ultimately did not make the final published item—unintentionally resulting in the original context of the quote being lost.

This situation featured a 'remote edit' where the news file's reporter and the editor were operating out of different bureaus. In the case of this incident, the reporter was in Toronto, and the editor was in Ottawa.

Remote edits are not uncommon, but ideally there would also be a producer involved on the news item to help co-ordinate things between the reporter and the editor in different cities. In this case, there wasn't a producer in the parliamentary bureau assigned to oversee the reporter's story on the dental care file.

But why was a Toronto reporter assigned a federal political story? *The Hill Times* didn't get an answer for that.

The network has relied more on its national reporters in Canada to cover international stories since CTV News shuttered its foreign bureaus in 2023—with the exception of its Washington, D.C., bureau.

That same day—Sept. 22—a CTV National News parliamentary reporter was assigned the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, while another reporter was in New York City to cover Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's (Papineau, Que.) speech at a United Nations summit.

Fourth-estate fallout

The incident led to a firestorm of criticisms of CTV News, with some people accusing the network of liberal bias. Conservative House Leader Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, Sask.) said this incident was a case of the network trying to "protect the Liberals."

Pendulum Group's Yaroslav Baran, a former Conservative Party campaign communications lead, described the incident as "pretty egregious" and an "outlier," and said the now-ended boycott engagement with CTV News was a "fair response."

"I've been working media relations for a long, long time, and I don't think I've ever seen that before in Canada. So this incident is definitely in a league of its own," said Baran to *The Hill Times*.

Others pointed to the diminished state of the media industry as a whole for creating the perfect storm for journalistic errors.

Unifor, the union which represents one of the fired CTV employees, said "Canadian media is in crisis."



Sebastian Skamski (pictured right in green), director of media relations for Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre's office, posted on social media that Conservative MPs 'won't engage' with CTV News after airing an altered clip of the party's leader. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade.

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“Unifor has repeatedly warned of the consequences of the erosion of journalism across the country. Newsrooms have been devastated everywhere, including by the latest round of massive cuts by Bell Media earlier this year,” said Lana Payne, Unifor national president, said in a statement to *The Hill Times*.

Unifor also said it’s investigating the incident, and “will use the tools available under the collective agreement on behalf of our member.”

When asked to respond to Unifor’s statement, Bell Media did not provide a response to *The Hill Times* by deadline.

Last February, Bell Media laid off a number of CTV National News reporters and producers. The year before that, CTV News’ parliamentary bureau chief in Ottawa was swept up in a round of layoffs.

Pressing on

Now that the boycott has been lifted, can we expect to see Poilievre on CTV News? Based on his track record, it depends.

Poilievre has not done a televised one-on-one interview with CTV News’ parliamentary bureau in the past year. However, the Conservative leader has done interviews with Bell Media’s local CTV News stations, CP24 in the Greater Toronto Area, and various radio stations, including CFRA in Ottawa.

Poilievre’s media strategy to generally eschew parliamentary media has garnered applause from some conservative circles, and raised concerns from Hill media.

Months after winning the party leadership in 2022, Summa Strategies wrote a report that said “Poilievre’s team relies heavily on social media—a direct messaging doctrine that circumvents traditional media intermediaries. In the leadership campaign, this served his candidacy well.”

This strategy to disengage with Hill media is also serving Poilievre well as leader of the official opposition given that his Conservatives have steadily maintained a sizeable lead over the governing Liberals in national polling.

Enterprise Canada’s Mitch Heimpel, a former director of parliamentary affairs for then-Conservative leader Erin O’Toole, said that Poilievre can reach a larger audience via social media than through traditional news outlets.

“If I can, through social media, talk to 200,000 people who are at least open to talking to me, why give an interview to *The Toronto Star* who probably doesn’t even have 200 subscribers that are considering voting for me? It’s not just about your ability to control the content, it’s about your ability to pick your audience,” said Heimpel to *The Hill Times*.

Baran said a party’s relationship with media is on an “ever-sliding scale of who needs who more.”

“In a formidable situation, they find themselves in a situation where the media tends to need them more than they need the media. If you are the leader of the third or fourth party, and you’re trying to get exposure, you’re trying to get attention, etc., and you’re well behind, then you need the media more than they need you,” said Baran.

He pointed out that the inherent clash between the media and political parties is that journalists view political media relations through an “ethical lens”—a function of the democratic system—while political communicators look at journalism through a “pragmatic lens”—which outlet has the best reach and the right target audience.

But disengaging with parliamentary media is one thing. The party’s attack on media is raising some alarm bells.

For *The Globe and Mail*, right-wing media personality Andrew Lawton contributed an essay earlier this year titled ‘Pierre Poilievre’s attacks on the media are bearing fruit for the Tories,’ where he wrote that the leader “often goes on the offensive, attacking premises he and his Conservative colleagues view as being inherently and unfairly biased against them.”

Lawton, who’s seeking the Conservative Party nomination for the riding of Elgin-St. Thomas-London South, Ont., and who has authored a book about Poilievre, wrote that the leader “holds a healthy suspicion of most members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery.”

Searchlight Strategy Group’s Greg Weston—also a Parliamentary Press Gallery honorary life member—said fights with reporters and trying to go over the press gallery are nothing new for political leaders.

But he added that things are different now since the Conservatives appear to be taking a “big page out of the Trump playbook.”

“If you want to say a lot of really crazy stuff and you don’t want people then to hear that it’s crazy and that it’s not truthful, there are two ways of doing it. One is you use social media where you can speak directly to the masses. Or ‘B,’ in running almost a campaign to disparage the media so that readers, listeners, viewers, no longer believe media,” said Weston to *The Hill Times*.

Baran said he does not see Poilievre’s media strategy as an ‘attack’ on traditional media.

“I think what’s happening there is that he’s laying down a marker that I will not be pushed around, and I expect to be dealt with fairly and ethically,” said Baran.

The future of the free press

When asked if Poilievre’s media strategy might change if the Conservatives were to form a majority government, Heimpel said the Tories might be cautious of changing tactics in light of the current prime minister’s political fortunes.

“I think we’re seeing, from a media strategy perspective, issues with overexposing the prime minister to media just in what’s happened to Justin Trudeau in the last two to three years. There’s a risk to being too visible. You get kind of an allergen effect with the Canadian public,” said Heimpel.

Heimpel also said that there will always be an audience and a “necessity” for traditional media, but he added that news outlets need to get better at adapting to how audiences have changed.

“The idea that they can succeed on the same content models and business models they did in the 1990s is what they’re struggling with,” said Heimpel.

Weston agreed that media are struggling. He said national media are now dangerously “running on a skeleton staff.”

But Weston added that “journalists are always equipped to handle it, and it just means you need to work twice as hard to report on political parties.”

“No political party in this country can afford to completely remove itself from the coverage by a major network,” said Weston.

He said major networks will continue to cover politics with or without comment from the parties, and that the parties will eventually want to comment to refute allegations or provide their angle on issues.

“It makes for a big good show for a couple of days to say we’re going to ban somebody, but after that, it’s just not smart politics, not smart communications, just generally not smart,” said Weston.

Disclosure: This Hill Times reporter was part of the June 2023 Bell Media layoffs.

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Despite plunging polling numbers, some Liberal MPs put on a brave face

Continued from page 3

election will primarily be a contest between the Conservatives and the Liberals.

“There’s never been an NDP prime minister, I’m not particularly impressed with [NDP Leader] Jagmeet Singh or his policy positions, nor do I think most Canadians are,” said Powlowski. “He’s gone through two elections, and he hasn’t done very well. Do I think Jagmeet Singh is going to come up the middle between the two big parties and win? No, I don’t.”

Powlowski said that his party is focused on governing with a long-term perspective. He argued that during election periods, party leaders are judged against each other, not against perfection. Powlowski said that, when Canadians see Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) alongside other leaders in the course of an election campaign, they will choose the Liberal leader over the Conservative.

“I would encourage people, the people that are, ‘sick of Trudeau,’ listen to [Conservative Leader] Pierre Poilievre for a couple hours,” said Powlowski. “Literally, I say, everyone who’s saying, ‘I’m sick of Trudeau,’ listen to Pierre Poilievre for a couple hours, and my guess is 60 or 70 per cent of them would be more sick of Pierre Poilievre than they are of Trudeau.”

But some Liberal MPs, and current and former senior Liberals, are worried that the Conservative Party’s lead has persisted for too long. They are particularly concerned about recent byelection losses in traditionally safe Liberal ridings like Toronto-St. Paul’s, Ont., and LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, Que. The upcoming byelection in the swing riding of Cloverdale-Langley City, B.C., which the Liberals previously held before it became vacant in late May, is also causing concern. They fear that, unless the current public opinion trends change significantly, the party may lose this seat, as well. The seat opened up after Liberal MP John Aldag stepped down to run provincially for the NDP.

At the same time, Liberal MPs and current and former senior Liberals are concerned that the party has yet to appoint a new campaign director following Jeremy Broadhurst’s resignation in early September, despite the concern that an election could be called at any time. While Canada’s fixed date election law sets the next national vote for Oct. 20, 2025, in a minority government, an election can be triggered at any time.

Meanwhile, the NDP has withdrawn from the supply-and-confidence agreement which kept the Liberals in power from March 2022 to the summer of this year. The Liberals are now hoping to rely on the Bloc Québécois, but the Quebec-based party’s demand regarding Old Age Security carries a price tag of \$16-billion over five years, and the Liberals are unlikely to meet it. Based on public posturing, it appears unlikely that the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois will reach an agreement in the coming days.



Liberal MP Marcus Powlowski says that when Canadians compare Pierre Poilievre with Justin Trudeau, they will choose the prime minister. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

If no deal is made, the Liberals may have to go back to negotiating with the NDP, but it’s unclear if that will succeed. This scenario increases the likelihood of a fall election becoming a realistic possibility. The Liberals have, however, been operating on the assumption that the earliest an election could happen is in the spring.

“Our fortunes are going downhill, not uphill, so that means Canadians have disconnected,” said a former senior Liberal. “It doesn’t matter what it does, they’re not emotionally connected to this government.”

During Peter Mansbridge’s *The Bridge* podcast on Sept. 24, Trudeau’s former principal secretary Gerald Butts suggested that, “If I were a betting man, which I am not, I would circle maybe the last 10 days on the calendar in October for the House to fall for a December election.”

James Moore, a former cabinet minister in Stephen Harper’s government, replied that if Trudeau is staying, that the “assessment could very well be true. Part of the arithmetic on this is that minority parliaments don’t always fall by design.”

Veteran journalist Chantal Hébert, meanwhile, offered the possibility of an election being called after Thanksgiving.

“In theory, the pharmacare bill is going to get through the Senate before Thanksgiving, and then there will be a break,” she said. “The fourth option would see Justin Trudeau call us in on the day after Thanksgiving to announce that he’s both proroguing Parliament until February and then stepping down.”

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News

Liberals at a 'breaking point' as polls show 'deep truth' of historic challenges they face, says author

The Liberals have been 'on the brink' for all of this century, and simply 'dodged the precipice' in the last three elections, says Richard Johnston, author of *The Canadian Party System*.

Continued from page 1

20-point lead, while the NDP and Liberals were tied for second at 22 per cent support each. That's the first Liberal-NDP tie in a Nanos poll since 2015.

Those numbers came on the heels of an Abacus Data poll released Sept. 29, which found that when Quebec is removed from the national aggregate, the NDP is ahead of the Liberals. Those parties have 22 per cent and 19 per cent support, respectively, while the Conservatives sit at 50 per cent outside the province. Inside Quebec, the Liberals remain the leading federalist party with 28 per cent support. That puts them well ahead of the Conservatives at 22 per cent, and the NDP at 10 per cent, but well back of the Bloc Québécois at 37 per cent.

Johnston's book makes the case that the Liberal Party's dominance of Quebec throughout much of Canadian history was integral to maintaining its electoral viability as a centrist party—instead of it being relegated to third-party status like centrist parties in most Anglo-American democracies.

He said these polls point to the fact the Liberals' advantage outside Quebec was "never that



Richard Johnston, author of *The Canadian Party System: An Analytic History*, said recent elections have 'masked an underlying weakness' in the Liberals' popular vote. Photograph courtesy of UBC



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh. The Liberals and NDP are in a tight race in the latest national opinion polls, which could lead to 'progressive voter stalemate,' says pollster Nik Nanos. Meanwhile, the Conservatives are 20 points ahead. *The Hill Times* photographs by Sam Garcia and Andrew Meade

great," and highlight an "even deeper truth" that Quebec is "no longer the pivot for government" the way it was for much of Canadian history.

He added that recent elections have masked the reality that the Liberals have been at this breaking point for some time. Since 2015, the Liberals have "extracted more seats per vote than they ever had in their early history," said Johnston.

In the last federal election, the Liberals lost the popular vote, taking 160 seats with only 32.6 per cent of the vote across Canada.

This has "masked an underlying weakness," said Johnston.

"The Liberals have been on the brink, in a way, for all of this century," he said. "They just happen to have dodged the precipice in the last three [elections]."

Liberals must 'dramatize their distinctions' from the Bloc: Johnston

At present, the Liberals remain the leading federalist party in Quebec. Even if that's not enough to form government, it's still a potent force to help them retain their national viability in the long term, said Johnston.

But he said it's "all contingent" on whether they continue to hold that support.

He said the party's actions in recent weeks show there is a "strategic realization" on the Liberal front bench about Quebec's importance, and a recognition that Liberals are often the beneficiary when nationalist forces in the province are "energized."

He sees this playing out in the Liberals' response to demands issued by the Bloc for their support in the House.

"I think they realize that they need to dramatize their distinctions from the Bloc. That the price of Bloc support on a confidence motion may be too high," said Johnston.

He said even if Quebec is no longer "the pivot" for determining when the Liberals form governments, the "bastion-like nature" of the Liberal vote in the province is an "insulation" against existential threats.

The fact that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) maintains that he plans to fight the next election is a sign the party realizes Quebec may be key to saving the furniture, said Johnston.

"A leader from Quebec is actually really important to their survival."

'High likelihood' of Liberal-NDP stalemate: Coletto

David Coletto, CEO of Abacus Data, said the latest polls are signalling that circumstances for the Liberals could still get worse, and they need to be concerned about retaining even their support in Quebec.

"They can't assume that they're going to be able to hold together even the portion of the electorate that they have right now," said Coletto.

Pollster Nik Nanos said the Liberals are in a "danger zone," and polling shows the "main battle lines" leading up the the next campaign are "fundamentally between the New Democrats and the Liberals" to determine who will be the main challenger to the Conservatives.

"We're seeing even their core base in the province of Quebec being put at risk," he said.

However, Nanos said Jagmeet Singh's (Burnaby South, B.C.) NDP is not yet poised for a breakthrough, setting up a potential "progressive voter stalemate."

Coletto said the trend is "much more about the drop in Liberal support than it is necessarily a rise in New Democrat support."

He said the NDP boost could be partly an "artifact" of provincial elections in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, but it's possible that bump could hold after those campaigns.

The regional breakdown in the Abacus poll shows the Liberals remain more competitive than the NDP in Atlantic Canada. The Liberals have 32 per cent support, compared to 14 per cent for the NDP. Both are far behind the Conservatives at 47 per cent.

However, the NDP is polling well ahead of the Liberals in each of the western provinces.

Coletto said there's a "high likelihood" that regional breakdown could produce a stalemate where each party has some pockets of the country where it's competitive, and others where it cannot break through.

"And even if they're competitive enough to win any seats," said Coletto. "So the real beneficiary of this becomes the Conservatives."

Perceptions of which party holds a broader national appeal could also have an impact in Ontario, said Coletto, where the Liberals cling to a narrow lead of just two points over the NDP in the Abacus poll.

Coletto said the Liberals should be "really worried" about the "psychological effect" of slipping into third in the national polls.

A key strength of the Liberals is "being seen as a party that

can win," said Coletto, "and the moment you lose that, there's not much left."

Liberals built around Justin Trudeau, not grassroots: Holmstrom

To stay competitive in the long run, former Liberal staffer Dan Arnold said it's vital for the party to maintain its historic footing in Quebec.

He said it's important when it comes to seat count, but also to the way it affects top-line polling numbers, and impacts perceptions of party competitiveness.

"It makes a difference when it comes to just the perception of [the Liberals] as a viable party to form government, and the perception of the NDP as not a viable party," said Arnold. "People in Ontario and other places have a hard time imagining the NDP in power when the NDP aren't really in the game in Quebec."

He said for the Liberals to maintain their long-term competitiveness, maintaining and rebuilding provincial parties will be key—particularly the Liberals parties in Ontario and Quebec which have had a string of tough election losses.

Former NDP staffer Cam Holmstrom said those provincial ground games are a key reason he believes the NDP has a more viable long-term path to be the dominant alternative to the Tories.

He said if the NDP were to leap ahead of the Liberals in the polls federally, it can gain traction in regions where it already has a provincial ground game.

He said the Liberals are lacking that kind of grassroots movement in too many regions of the country.

"The time that they needed to rebuild that party was 2015 when they won," said Holmstrom. "They were given a lifeline. They were given the chance to actually rebuild the grassroots."

Holmstrom said the Liberals didn't do this, and are now paying a price.

"They built the party around one pillar—a pillar of Justin Trudeau—and unfortunately, that doesn't build up the grassroots," he said.

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Former NDP staffer Cam Holmstrom said the Liberals were given 'a lifeline' but rebuilt their party around 'one pillar.' Photograph courtesy of Cam Holmstrom

Federal messaging, concerns bleed into campaigns as three provinces head to polls

Leaders seeking re-election in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan paint opponents as Trudeau allies, while B.C. Conservatives adopt similar messaging to Poilievre.

Continued from page 1

this month, and though neither Prime Minister Justin Trudeau nor Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre will appear on any ballots, federal parties' messaging and policies are showing up in the three provincial contests.

British Columbians will go to the polls on Oct. 19. The provincial NDP, led by Premier David Eby, is seeking a third term in government. The NDP's primary opponent in the election is the Conservative Party of B.C., which has not held government in the province since the 1950s, but has gained popularity under the leadership of former B.C. Liberal cabinet minister John Rustad.

The British Columbia Liberals—which rebranded as BC United in 2023—suspended its election campaign on Aug. 28 as leader Kevin Falcon asked supporters to instead back the Conservatives. The result has thrown the election from an expected comfortable win for Eby and the NDP into a statistical tie, with the centre-right vote no longer split between two parties.

Professor Kathryn Harrison, who is Brenda and David McLean chair in Canadian Studies at the University of British Columbia, said the provincial election has provided two ideas that are relevant to federal politics: the strength of the federal Conservative brand, and dissatisfaction with the status quo.

The federal Conservatives—who are unaffiliated with the provincial party of the same name—enjoy 43 per cent support in British Columbia, compared to 31 per cent support for the NDP, 18 per cent for the Liberals, and seven per cent for the Greens according to an Abacus Data poll released on Sept. 15.

If replicated federally, it would turn what was a three-way contest at the last election into

a Conservative rout. In 2021, the Liberals won 15 of the province's 42 seats, the Conservatives and NDP 13 each, and the Green Party just one.

"I don't think it is the strength of the [provincial] Conservative candidates suddenly causing this surge, and I don't even think it's really the former Liberals changing their name to BC United," Harrison said. "I think it is the word 'Conservative' in the name of the B.C. Conservative Party, as the federal Conservatives have really surged in popularity with enough of a surge that they're bringing along a party from low single digits to competitive to win this election."

On the idea of the status quo and incumbency being punished, Harrison said affordability issues have dominated in British Columbia during the campaign.

"It's all about cost of living, cost of housing, and although this is a phenomenon that extends well beyond British Columbia, well beyond Canada, [voters] are willing to turn to a party that offers change," Harrison said. "We don't know who will win, of course, but the polling suggesting the strength of support for the B.C. Conservative Party is quite remarkable."

A Sept. 25 Leger poll showed the Conservatives ahead of the NDP among decided voters in British Columbia by 45 per cent to 43 per cent. The most recent seat projection from polling aggregator 338Canada at the time of publication showed the provincial Conservatives with 47 of 93 seats in the legislature and the NDP with 45.

Unlike in neighbouring Alberta, where the United Conservative Party evoked Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and federal NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.) in attacks against the provincial NDP during the 2023 election, the B.C. election has thus far been relatively clear of federal references, though some politicians have weighed in.

Federal NDP MPs such as Peter Julian (New Westminster-Burnaby, B.C.), Laurel Collins (Victoria, B.C.), and Gord Johns (Courtenay-Alberni, B.C.) have either campaigned for or retweeted support for provincial candidates vying for nearby ridings, while Conservative MP Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows-Maple Ridge, B.C.) called on the BC Conservatives and Rustad to "bring it home" in a Sept. 25 post on X (formerly Twitter): "British Columbia can't afford another four years of the NDP."

The federal spectre has, however, been raised out East in New Brunswick where voters will go to the polls two days after British Columbians. Similarly to the BC NDP, the Progressive Conservatives under leader Blaine Higgs are seeking a third mandate. The provincial Liberal Party under leader Susan Holt will attempt to win government back for the first time since 2017.

Higgs includes a pledge to "stand up to Trudeau" in campaign ads on Facebook. On Oct. 1, Higgs announced his government would launch a new legal challenge against the federal carbon pricing regime, stating that "Justin Trudeau taxes New Brunswick every time we fill up an ambulance, build a school, or heat a hospital."

The PC campaign has also sought to tie Holt with Trudeau. On Sept. 14, the party claimed that "Justin's ally in New Brunswick, Susan Holt, is planning to form her own costly coalition with David Coon and the Green Party," while alluding to the now-terminated supply-and-confidence agreement between the federal Liberals and NDP.

In an update on the PC website prefaced with "Just The Facts"—a phrase commonly used in federal Conservative media release headlines about Liberal policies—the party also accused Holt of recycling Trudeau's messaging, and of being a "carbon copy of Justin Trudeau."

A Sept. 17 Mainstreet Research poll showed the New Brunswick Liberals with 41.4 per cent support, the Progressive Conservatives with 38.5 per cent, and the Greens with 13.3 per cent. The most recent 338Canada modelling projects the PCs would win 25 seats—a bare majority in the 49-seat Legislative Assembly—while the Liberals would win 22 and the Greens two.

An Angus Reid poll released on Sept. 19 showed that Higgs had the lowest approval rating of any provincial premier at just 30 per cent. The most popular premier was Manitoba's Wab Kinew at 66 per cent.

One week after New Brunswick's election, the Saskatchewan Party will attempt to win a fifth consecutive election on Oct. 28. The party under leader Scott Moe faces its greatest challenge from the Saskatchewan NDP and leader Carla Beck, while the new Saskatchewan United will compete with the incumbents on the right.

The Saskatchewan Party has directly tied Beck with the federal NDP and Liberals, claiming

in an ad that "Trudeau wants a government he can control, like he controls Jagmeet Singh and the federal NDP." The Moe government stopped collecting the federal carbon tax on natural gas back in January, leading to a constitutionality challenge in the Tax Court.

A Sept. 26 Insignix and CTV News poll suggested that 49 per cent of decided voters backed the NDP, compared to 48 per cent for the Saskatchewan Party. Still, the most recent 338Canada projection anticipated 39 of the 61 seats in the legislature, and 22 seats for the NDP.

Back in British Columbia, such direct federal comparisons have been less common, Harrison said, mainly due in the past to the presence of the BC Liberals. While sharing a name with the federal party, the BC Liberals broke their affiliation in 1987, and were the predominant centre-right party in the province through a "much broader coalition of federal Conservatives and federal Liberals," she said.

"Just having a different party system in B.C. has, I think, limited the utility of that argument in a provincial campaign," she said.

At the same time, Rustad has adopted some of the key language of Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.). Primarily, that has been a commitment to "axe" the carbon tax, and promising "common sense" change.

The tax promise has worked well for both Rustad and Poilievre as it has "diagnosed a problem and they can fix it" when it comes to affordability, Harrison said.

"Common sense," meanwhile, could be saying two different things.

"Common sense is reassuring to regular folks, 'someone understands our experience,'" she said. "But I think it also speaks to a different group who are rejecting expert knowledge. It's legacy of the pandemic and people's resistance to things like vaccine and mask mandates, with 'we've got our own common sense, we know how to make good decisions ourselves.'"

The COVID-19 pandemic has re-emerged in the campaign after video appeared of Rustad saying he regretted getting the "so-called vaccine" against the virus. The BC NDP has accused several BC Conservative candidates of believing "crackpot" conspiracy theories, including that former U.S. president Donald Trump won the 2020 election.

This attempt to paint opponents as extremists is similar to the federal Liberals' attempts for months to paint the federal Conservatives as using "MAGA" tactics, referencing Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan.

At the same time, Harrison said the NDP has had to focus on other announcements in order to quell opposition momentum on cost of living concerns.

"It's not a one note campaign, counting on depicting the opponents as extreme, because the reason those opponents have picked up so much of that support is because people really do have deep concerns about affordability, the cost of housing, health care," she said. "So we are seeing the NDP respond with all kinds of announcements that are about that, not just dismissing their opponents as extreme."

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British Columbia



- Election Day: Oct. 19, 2024
- Seats in Legislative Assembly: 93
- Current head of government: David Eby, BC NDP
- Incumbent party in power since: 2017
- Primary challenger: John Rustad, Conservative Party of BC

New Brunswick



- Election Day: Oct. 21, 2024
- Seats in Legislative Assembly: 49
- Current head of government: Blaine Higgs, Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick
- Incumbent party in power since: 2018
- Primary challenger: Susan Holt, New Brunswick Liberal Party

Saskatchewan



- Election Day: Oct. 28, 2024
- Seats in Legislative Assembly: 61
- Current head of government: Scott Moe, Saskatchewan Party
- Incumbent party in power since: 2007
- Primary challenger: Carla Beck, Saskatchewan NDP

News



Government House Leader Karina Gould called out the Conservatives for using procedural tactics to interrupt Parliament.
The Hill Times
photograph by Andrew Meade

Parliament at a standstill as Conservative MPs push for release of green tech fund papers

Continued from page 7

RCMP can choose to refuse the data.

Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne (Saint Maurice-Champlain, Que.) who has been responsible for the SDTC file, announced on June 4 that the fund would be integrated into the National Research Council of Canada and appointed a new board chair, as well as new directors to oversee transition of the funds and the staff to the NRC. The new board was given a year in the position to implement the government's mandate of applying Auditor General Karen Hogan's recommendations.

When asked by *The Hill Times* for his reaction to developments in the House, Champagne's spokesperson, Audrey Champoux, said in a statement that "as soon as allegations regarding SDTC were brought forward, [Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada] acted swiftly to address the situation."

Champoux said the minister has sent clear mandate letters to the new board members at SDTC as they continue implementing the transition plan.

Cassie Doyle, one of the new board directors at SDTC who's been in this role since June,

told MPs at the House Public Accounts Committee on Oct. 2 that the new board, tasked with overseeing SDTC's integration into the NRC, has focused on implementing advice from Hogan's report.

Doyle said of those 11 recommendations, 10 have now been implemented. She explained the work on the one remaining recommendation involves reviewing every single project, a process currently being conducted by two independent consultants contracted by the new board. Doyle said the board is close to releasing their first disbursements to firms cleared of conflict of interest or eligibility issues by the auditor general.

A Sept. 17 report by the House Public Accounts Committee, which has been studying the conflicts of interest at the SDTC, "expressed extreme concern with the blatant disregard of taxpayer funds" and called on the government to recoup these funds for Canadians taxpayers.

What happened?

The Conservative push to involve the RCMP in the SDTC debacle goes back to a series of parliamentary committee hearings, which also prompted

investigations by Hogan and by Ethics Commissioner Konrad von Finckenstein.

Von Finckenstein concluded in his July 24 report that Annette Verschuren, the former chair of the SDTC, had a private financial interest in funding decisions related to NRStor. "She participated in those decisions knowing that NRStor would benefit from the funding," read the report.

The commissioner said these decisions furthered Verschuren's private interests, and that she

should have recused herself, adding that she violated the rules by not doing so.

Verschuren resigned from her role in November 2023—as did then-SDTC CEO Leah Lawrence—after the federal ethics commissioner launched an investigation into Verschuren's alleged misconduct. Both have denied the allegations made by the whistleblowers.

Verschuren had also confirmed at the House Ethics Committee on Nov. 8 that, as chair, she partic-

ipated in approving COVID-19 relief grants to NRStor—an energy company of which she is the CEO—in 2020 and 2021, totalling more than \$200,000.

According to Hogan's June 4 report, SDTC violated its own conflict-of-interest policies in 90 cases that were connected to approval of nearly \$76-million in funding awarded to projects. The report also found the foundation gave cash to 10 ineligible projects out of the 58 reviewed. These 10 projects were awarded \$59-million despite not meeting key requirements set out between the government and the foundation.

During her appearance at the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee on June 10, Hogan said the Conservative motion to produce the documents impedes her independence.

The now-defunct not-for-profit SDTC was established in 2001. It supported the development and implementation of clean technologies that provide solutions to climate change. The agency had a \$1-billion to distribute to small and medium-sized enterprises in the clean-tech sector under its five-year agreement with ISED that started in 2021.

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House Speaker Greg Fergus says the Conservative motion's ask is 'unusual, novel, and unprecedented.'
The Hill Times
photograph by Andrew Meade

The Big Photo

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured Oct. 2, 2024, speaking with reporters before the Liberal national caucus meeting in the West Block. *HT* photographer Andrew Meade on this particular shot: 'With Parliament back in session, Wednesday morning caucus arrivals leave journalists stacked up behind stanchions shouting questions at MPs. This time, I picked the wrong spot and had to work to make a picture of the prime minister and decided to incorporate the reporters and chaos into the photo, using them as elements to frame Trudeau as he spoke about the situation in Lebanon and Gaza.'



Heard on the Hill

Senator Klyne ‘thrilled’ by Cher’s shout-out: ‘No one can turn back time on what science tells us about these magnificent creatures’



A bill sponsored by Senator Marty Klyne, left, has garnered the support of Cher, Sam Roberts, Jann Arden, and Serena Ryder. Photographs courtesy Senate of Canada, Wikimedia Commons, and The Hill Times photographs by Jake Wright

Continued from page 2

What did Progressive Senator **Marty Klyne** think about superstar’s **Cher** support last week for his Bill S-15?

“I’m thrilled by Cher’s endorsement of an elephant captivity ban in Canada. No one can turn back time on what science tells us about these magnificent creatures,” said Klyne in a statement hinting at one of her big hits, *If I Could Turn Back Time*.

The Saskatchewan Senator became this bill’s sponsor after his original Senate Public Bill S-241, known as the **Jane Goodall Act**, was dropped from the order paper earlier back in February.

S-15 aims to update the Criminal Code “to create offences related to keeping elephants and great apes in captivity, subject to certain exceptions” reads the bill summary, and also to amend the rules about importing and exporting “living elephants and great apes” in the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation

of International and Interprovincial Trade Act.

Cher joins the ranks of well known Canadian musicians who have been vocal supporters of protecting captive wild animals in this country.

Singer **Jann Arden** “stop live horse export” has written her support into her Twitter handle. “The Canadian government thinks it’s perfectly ok to fly terrified pregnant draft horses in boxes to Japan so Wealthy people can eat them raw. Pass bill C-355. End this hell.” she posted on Sept. 15.

Serena Ryder tweeted her support back in 2022 for Klyne’s original bill: “I am happy to support the #JaneGoodallAct that would change the lives of more than 800 animal species in Canada and protect wild animals from being used as entertainers.”

And **Sam Roberts** (frontman of the eponymous band) echoed Ryder’s sentiment on Facebook at the time: “Proud to support the #JaneGoodallAct that would change the lives of more than 800

animal species in Canada and protect wild animals from being used as entertainers.”

“THANKS Cher + all supporters. Let’s speak for those who cannot speak for themselves! Senate debate to resume this week,” Klyne wrote on Twitter on Sept. 25.

Is De Adder being shadow banned?

Hill Times cartoonist **Michael De Adder**, one of the best political cartoonists in the country, said he thinks Twitter is restricting his drawings’ reach.

“My images are being shadow banned. Shadow banning, also known as stealth, ghost, or hell-banning, is the practice of quietly restricting a user’s content in an online community, making it less visible without the user knowing, whether done by an individual or an algorithm,” he posted on Sept. 29.

GG hands out Order of Canada honours

Fifty-six eminent Canadians gathered at Rideau Hall on Oct. 3 to receive their Order of Canada insignia. All honours for all three levels—companion, officer, and member—were previously announced, some as far back as 2022.

Hill Times columnist **Michael Harris** received his membership for having “shone a light on our country’s past and present” through his reporting into abuses at the Mount Cashel Orphanage in St. John’s, N.L., which led to a royal commission and to reforms, according to the press release.

New officers include the first-ever Inuit Senator **Willie Adams** who sat in the Red Chamber from 1977 to 2009, who “dedicated his career to Indigenous representation at the regional, territorial and federal levels,” and 1996 Olympic gold medalist **Donovan Bailey** for being one of the fastest sprinters of all time. He is now a mentor, speaker, philanthropist and activist for fair play and clean sport. Former Latvian president **Vaira Vike-Freiberga** received an honorary appointment for having “enriched Canada-



Michael Harris in 2014. *The Hill Times* photograph by Jake Wright

Latvia relations and reflected Canadian values abroad.” She is a professor emerita in psychology at l’Université de Montréal.

And highlights in the companion category include former Supreme Court judge **Clément Gascon**, who is now in private practice, being honoured for his “extraordinary contributions to Canadian law.” And former Truth and Reconciliation commissioner, an ex-Progressive Conservative MP, and founder of the World Indigenous Nations Games Chief **Wilton Littlechild** was promoted from officer to companion for being “a leader at the forefront of reconciliation.”



The Order of Canada goes to: Donovan Bailey, left, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, and Chief Wilton Littlechild. Photographs courtesy of Twitter, and *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

Mickey Djuric joins the *Politico* team

Reporter **Mickey Djuric** has left *The Canadian Press* for a new gig at *Politico*.

“Hard launching some personal news: I am so, so thrilled to announce I started a new job reporting for POLITICO here in

Ottawa. I’m overjoyed to be a part of this strong Canadian team to break news and have fun while doing it,” she posted on X on Oct. 1.

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The Hill Times

Monday’s photo

Walk this way

Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet, pictured shortly before holding a press conference on Parliament Hill on Oct. 1, 2024. Blanchet said his promise to vote against the government still stands after most of the Liberals voted down a Bloc motion calling on the federal government to support Bill C-319, a Bloc Québécois private member’s bill that would increase Old Age Security (OAS) payouts for seniors between the ages of 65 and 74 by 10 per cent. He has given the Liberals until Oct. 29 to support two bills.

The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade





Laura Ryckewaert Hill Climbers

Senior staff changes for ministers Valdez, Vandal

Trade Minister Mary Ng has hired Caroline Bourbonnière, former policy director to the northern affairs minister, to lead her communications team.

Small Business Minister **Rechie Valdez** saw a number of changes to her ministerial team this summer, including on the communications front with the departure of both her director of communications, **Nadine Ramadan**, and her *de facto* press secretary **Madeleine Robert**.

But senior-most of the changes to catch up in Valdez's shop is the fact that director of policy and stakeholder relations **Kendra Wilcox** stepped in as acting chief of staff to the minister this past June, filling in for **Angad Dhillon** while he is on leave.

Wilcox has been working for Valdez since shortly after the 2023 summer shuffle, and before then was director of policy and programming to Rural Economic Development Minister **Gudie Hutchings** for whom she also briefly stepped in as acting chief of staff last year. Wilcox's CV on the Hill includes time spent working for then-minister of women and gender equality and rural economic development **Maryam Monsef**—starting as a policy adviser and ending as director of operations—and as a special assistant for the Atlantic to then-rural economic development minister **Bernadette Jordan**. She's also an ex-aide to Jordan as the then-MP for South Shore-St. Margarets.

On the communications front, Ramadan was the first to exit Valdez's office, having done so in August, and was followed shortly after by Robert.



Nadine Ramadan has left Minister Valdez's office. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

A former issues manager and later press secretary to then-transport minister **Omar Alghabra**, Ramadan had been leading communications for Valdez since September 2023. She first came to work on the Hill in January 2020 as an assistant to Defence Minister **Bill Blair** as the MP for Scarborough-Southwest, Ont., having spent the previous fall's election working on his successful campaign.

Robert started on the Hill as a special assistant for communications to International Trade Minister **Mary Ng** in the spring of 2023, and joined Valdez's team as a digital media and communications adviser that fall. As such, Robert handled

the responsibilities of press secretary to the minister.

Senior policy and Atlantic adviser **Chris Zhou** is now both acting director of communications, and acting director of policy to Valdez. He's been with the minister since the fall of 2023, and was previously a policy adviser and issues manager to Ng.



Chris Zhou is now acting director of communications and policy to Minister Valdez. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Callie Franson, who was originally hired as a communications and parliamentary affairs adviser to Valdez near the end of 2023, is now a communications adviser and issues manager. In addition to experience working for the Nova Scotia Liberal Caucus, at the federal level she's previously also been an Atlantic regional affairs adviser to then-public safety minister **Marco Mendicino**, and an assistant to Nova Scotia Liberal MP **Kody Blois**.

Christiana Osei joined Valdez's office over the summer as a new digital media and communications adviser. She'd most recently been working as a social media and content strategist with Innovative Medicines Canada, and is also a past communications and social media specialist with the airline Canadian North, and a former junior communications officer with the Food Inspection Agency.

Another new face on Valdez's team is **Lauriane Songuissa** who's been hired as director of operations to the minister.

In something of a staff swap, Songuissa was most recently working as an outreach adviser in Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**'s office, and in Valdez's office, she fills a role last held by **Zachary Nixon**, who exited this past summer to join the PMO as an Ontario regional affairs adviser.

Songuissa is a former assistant to now-House Speaker **Greg Fergus** as the MP for Gatineau, Que., and prior to her time in the PMO, she spent about a year and a half working for then-justice minister **David Lametti**, beginning as a junior communications adviser and special assistant to the chief of staff, and ending as a senior special assistant for issues and parliamentary affairs.



Lauriane Songuissa is now director of operations to Minister Valdez. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Capping off the list of new hires is **Hamid Mohamed** who joined the small business minister's team back in May as executive assistant and operations assistant to Valdez and her chief of staff. Mohamed is a former assistant to Justice Minister **Arif Virani** as the MP for Parkdale-High Park, Ont.

Valdez's office also currently includes: **Yves-Joseph Rosalbert**, director of parliamentary affairs and issues management; **Jibril Hussein**, regional adviser for the West and North; and **Ajay Rakhra**, senior regional adviser for Ontario and stakeholder relations;

Minister Ng scoops up two from Vandal's team

Northern Affairs Minister **Dan Vandal**, who's also responsible for both Prairies Economic Development Canada and the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, has promoted a new director of policy from within his office following **Caroline Bourbonnière**'s exit to become communications director to International Trade Minister **Mary Ng**.



Caroline Bourbonnière is now director of communications to Minister Ng. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Bourbonnière left Vandal's office last month after almost two years on the job, having started in late November 2022. Before then, she'd spent the year as director of labour relations to then-Treasury Board president **Mona Fortier**.

Bourbonnière is also a former head of appointments and senior digital policy adviser to then-heritage minister **Steven Guilbeault**. Prior to joining Guilbeault's office in January 2020, she did public relations work for Element AI in Montreal, and her CV also includes time spent as a senior account executive for corporate communications and public affairs with Edelman, and as an advocacy and public affairs co-ordinator with the Canadian Medical Association, among other things.

In Ng's office, Bourbonnière fills an opening left by the departure of **Giulia Doyle** back in August. Doyle had been head of communications to Ng—her first gig working in federal politics—since January, and before then was a principal with her own eponymous communications consulting firm. She's also an ex-communications director with the Canadian Real Estate Association, and former manager of communications with MD Financial Management, among other past jobs.

Doyle has already started in a new role off the Hill as director of communications for the Federation of Law Societies of Canada.

Vandal has since elevated senior policy adviser **Anna Bodnar** to take over as di-

rector. **Hill Climbers** understands Bodnar is the longest-serving member of Vandal's team, and she's steadily worked her way up the proverbial ladder since first joining as executive assistant to both the minister and his chief of staff in February 2021. She was promoted to policy adviser after the 2021 federal election, and to senior policy adviser at the start of 2023. Prior to working for Vandal, Bodnar was an assistant to Ontario Liberal MP **Peter Fonseca**, for whom she also previously interned for through the Ukrainian Canadian Congress' parliamentary internship program.



Anna Bodnar is Minister Vandal's new director of policy. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Bourbonnière isn't the only member of Vandal's team to have recently left to work for Ng: senior policy adviser **Jonathan Alomoto** has also exited to do the same for the trade minister.

Alomoto had been working for Vandal since April 2023, and before then had spent roughly four years working for the Government of Nunavut, ending as a lead negotiator and senior adviser for international and internal trade with Nunavut's central administrative department, the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs. As such, he advised the territory's premier, trade minister, and other senior officials on trade and foreign affairs issues, and was the lead territorial negotiator in talks related to the intergovernmental Canadian Free Trade Agreement. Amongst other past roles, Alomoto is also a former board member with the Internal Trade Secretariat, and briefly worked as a communications adviser with then-Ontario health and long-term care minister **Helena Jaczek**, who is now the MP for Markham-Stouffville, Ont.

Niloofer Boroun is director of policy to Ng, whose office is run by chief of staff **Kevin Coon**, supported by deputy chief of staff **Lesley Sherban**.

With Alomoto's exit, policy advisers **Bradley Boudreau** and **Jed Graham** are left working under Bodnar as the new director.

In other office news, **Ben Ebadi** has officially joined Vandal's ministerial team, having been hired as a special assistant for operations after completing a summer internship in the office. Prior to his 2024 summer internship, Ebadi was an assistant to Vandal as the MP for Saint Boniface-Saint Vital, Man. He's also a former 2023 summer intern in Vandal's ministerial shop, a past assistant to the late Liberal MP **Jim Carr**, and a 2022 summer intern with the Liberal research bureau.

Ebadi is the youngest of a trio of siblings who have worked for the Trudeau government. **Vida Ebadi** remains on the Hill as regional affairs adviser for the West and Prairies in Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**'s office, while **Diana Ebadi**, who'd most recently been press secretary to Blair as defence minister, left in July to study law at McGill University.

Nikki Hipkin is director of policy to Vandal, whose office is run by chief of staff **Kathy Kettler**.

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Riddhi Kachhela

Party Central

Cricket, advocacy, and Indian food on offer at Liberal MP Khalid's Hill event



Attendees snapped a group photo at a Sept. 25 reception following the cricket match. Justice Minister Arif Virani, Liberal MP Iqra Khalid, Conservative MP Jake Stewart and Bloc Québécois MP Andréanne Larouche were among VIPs spotted at the event. *The Hill Times* photograph by Riddhi Kachhela

The Canada-Commonwealth cricket match on Sept. 25 brought parties together to support the sport in a friendly game and evening reception.

Parliamentarians may be increasingly at odds with each other in the House, but MPs from the big four federal parties—the Liberals, Conservatives, the NDP, and Bloc Québécois—came together to support the game of jolly old cricket last week in Ottawa.

The second annual Canada-Commonwealth cricket match took place on Sept. 25 on Rideau Hall grounds between diplomats and Canadian parliamentarians despite the bad weather.

Party Central jumped into the fray after the fact for the evening reception, but was regaled about match highs and lows from the players. **Party Central** did not review match footage, but trusts the politicians not to inflate their prowess.

The game featured Justice Minister **Arif Virani** showcasing his stellar batting skills. Conservative MP **Jake Stewart**, meanwhile, applied his baseball expertise on the cricket pitch for the first time, and was thoroughly pleased with the game, he told **Party Central** during the reception in the Valour Building.

But Liberal MP **Iqra Khalid** was the star of the show as event organizer and vice-chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association with a passion for promoting the sport.

"It's the fastest growing sport in Canada right now, and we really need to be in the front of it," she said.

Khalid told **Party Central** that she is a big fan of the game, and the cause is very important to her.

"We want our players to do well. We want them to succeed and for this we need more infrastructure. So today we are here to raise awareness about why government should take a lead in making sure our players are world-class players."

For this year's game, Khalid said they tried a different approach: bringing to Ottawa a team of some 30 cricket players and advocates so they could meet parliamentarians throughout the day to present their case for more funding and support. And then share a friendly match.

Conservative MP **Garnett Genuis** made an appearance at the soirée and was seen relishing the Indian food on offer, which he said he loved.

NDP MP **Richard Cannings** came down to show his support for the sport, which he said he liked playing when visiting relatives in New Zealand.

Cannings showed **Party Central** a photo of his time in the Pacific island country, when he tried his hand at cricket on a makeshift pitch outside his relative's home.

Bloc MPs **Marie-Hélène Gaudreau** and **Andréanne Larouche** were spotted having a meal at the reception and mingling with other MPs.

Among the other dignitaries with whom **Party Central** shook hands was **Gline Clarke**, the High Commissioner for Barbados—a country that hosts and plays cricket tournaments internationally.

Liberal MP **Adam van Koeverden**, who is parliamentary secretary to Sports Minister Carla Qualtrough, was in attendance. During a speech, he spoke of the federal government's various initiatives to help grow the sport in Canada.

Cricket Canada, he said, was eligible for government funding meant for community level sports that was first introduced by the feds in 2021, and is still ongoing.

But advocates at the event told **Party Central** there is still a wide gap in the resources cricket gets compared to other games in Canada.

Farhan Khan, the general secretary of Cricket Canada, gave the example of his own five-year campaign to try and get the Toronto city council to put up lights for a cricket field.

"I go down the street at 9 p.m., the baseball field is completely lit even when no one is playing at the time," he said. "All we are asking is that we have the field, please put the lights on... but we are told they don't have the money. So it's really the question of priority."

The issue is more nuanced than funding, he explained, and said the lack of infrastructure has had a real impact on kids of immigrants, especially from South Asian countries.

"The kids who were playing [cricket] earlier, they come here and suddenly they have nowhere to play. And when they play it in parking lots and places like that, people complain that they disturb the neighbourhood," Khan added.

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The Hill Times



Liberal MP Iqra Khalid, right, organized the second annual Canada-Commonwealth cricket match, bringing together politicians across the spectrum to enjoy the game. Photograph courtesy of Instagram/Iqra Khalid



Conservative MP Garnett Genuis was seen at the reception.



Cricket player and advocate Farhan Khan shared concerns about underfunding for the sport.



The ambassador for Barbados Gline Clarke was spotted at the reception.



Conservative MPs Jake Stewart and Laila Goodridge.



Liberal MP Adam Van Koeverden, parliamentary secretary to the sports minister, gave a speech on government's funding plans to support cricket.



Bloc MPs Andréanne Larouche, left, and Marie-Hélène Gaudreau showed their support for cricket on Sept. 25.

The Hill Times photographs by Riddhi Kachhela

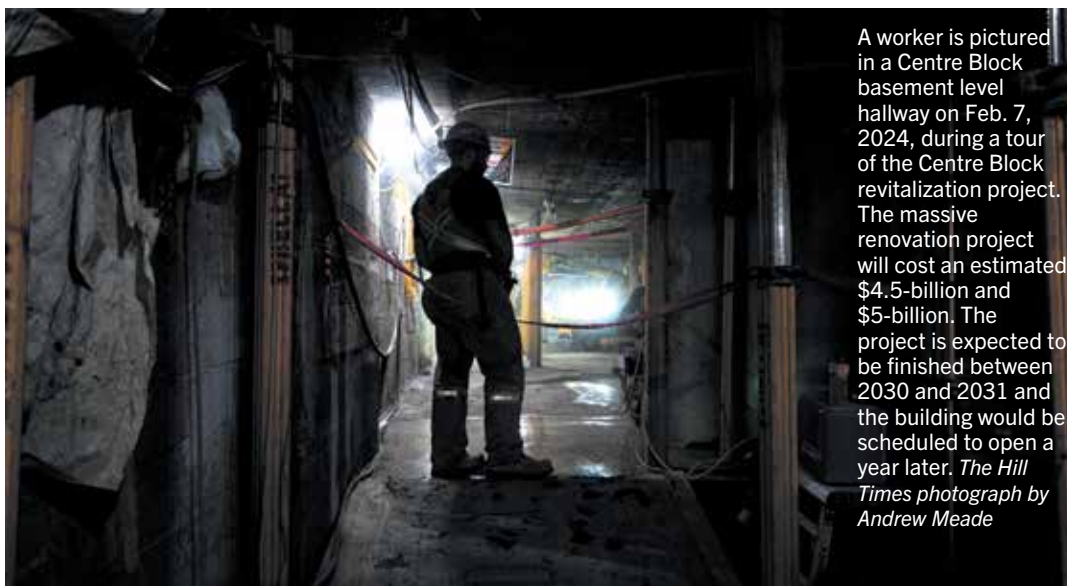


Liberal MP Iqra Khalid donned a Team Canada jersey at the match and reception.



NDP MP Richard Cannings talked about his interest in the game.

PSPC to lead deep dive into Centre Block's renovation, the largest most complex project to rehabilitate a heritage building ever in Canada on Oct. 7



A worker is pictured in a Centre Block basement level hallway on Feb. 7, 2024, during a tour of the Centre Block revitalization project. The massive renovation project will cost an estimated \$4.5-billion and \$5-billion. The project is expected to be finished between 2030 and 2031 and the building would be scheduled to open a year later. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

MONDAY, OCT. 7

House Sitting—The House is sitting until Oct. 11. 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.

ASEAN Summit—The ASEAN Summit will take place in Vientiane, Laos, from Sunday, Oct. 6, to Friday, Oct. 11.

Webinar: 'October 7, One Year Later'—The Macdonald-Laurier Institute hosts a webinar titled "October 7, One Year Later: The Promised Land Project" exploring a war-torn Middle East and reverberations in Canada featuring experts and academics from MLI's Promised Land Project. Monday, Oct. 7, at 10:30 a.m. ET happening online. Details via Eventbrite.

Presentation: 'Centre Block: Insights into Heritage Restoration'—Young Leaders in Infrastructure hosts "Centre Block: Insights into Heritage Restoration and Rehabilitation." Kate Westbury, PSPC's heritage lead for the Centre Block rehabilitation program, will take participants on a deep dive into the largest, most complex project to rehabilitate a heritage building ever in Canada. Monday, Oct. 7, at 5:30 p.m. ET at 45 O'Connor St., #1400. Details via Eventbrite.

MONDAY, OCT. 7—THURSDAY, OCT. 10

AFN's National Climate Gathering—The Assembly of First Nations hosts its third annual National Climate Gathering on the theme "Catalyzing First Nations Climate and Conservation Leadership for Transformative Change." Monday, Oct. 7, to Thursday, Oct. 10, at the Calgary Telus Convention Centre. Details online: afn.ca.

TUESDAY, OCT. 8

Bike Day on the Hill—Liberal MP Julie Dabrusin, ISG Senator Marty Deacon, and Vélo Canada Bikes host Bike Day on the Hill. Join parliamentarians,

local and national leaders, and fellow cyclists in a non-partisan celebration of everyday cycling in Canada. A reception will follow in Room 200, 144 Wellington St. Thursday, Oct. 8 at 5 p.m. ET on Parliament Hill. Details via Eventbrite.

Public and Private Health Care—The Canadian Medical Association recently led a year-long, cross-country listening tour with Canadians to hear their views on the balance of public and private health care. Learn more from CMA President, Dr. Joss Reimer, what they had to say at a reception. Tuesday, Oct. 8, 6-7:30 p.m. ET in the Wellington Building, Room #310, Parliament Hill.

Minister Gould to Join MP Naqvi at Rally—Ottawa Centre Liberal MP Yasir Naqvi hosts a nomination rally featuring special guest Government House Leader Karina Gould. Tuesday, Oct. 8, at 6:30 p.m. at a location to be announced. Details: event.liberal.ca.

Virtual Fireside Chat with Minister MacKinnon—Minister of Labour and Seniors Steven MacKinnon will take part in a virtual fireside chat hosted by the Senior Liberals' Commission. Hear more about the Liberal team's work on behalf of older Canadians. Tuesday, Oct. 8, at 7 p.m. ET happening online. Details: liberal.ca.

Lisa Moore to Discuss New Book—Library and Archives Canada, and the Ottawa International Writers Festival host award-winning author Lisa Moore who will discuss her latest book *Invisible Prisons: Jack Whalen's Tireless Fight for Justice*, the true story of a teenaged boy who endured abuse and solitary confinement at a reform school in Newfoundland. Tuesday, Oct. 8, at 7 p.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St. Details: writersfestival.org.

TUESDAY, OCT. 8—WEDNESDAY, OCT. 9

Couchiching Annual Conference on Diplomacy—The Canadian International Council and the Aga Khan Museum host the Couchiching Annual Conference on Diplomacy exploring themes such as cultural diplomacy, artificial intelligence,

the Arctic, the implications of the U.S. election on NATO, summit diplomacy, and the future of diplomacy. Tuesday, Oct. 8, to Wednesday, Oct. 9, at the Aga Khan Museum, 77 Wynford Dr., Toronto. Details: agakhanmuseum.org.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 9

Roundtable Lunch with U.S. Ambassador Cohen—U.S. Ambassador to Canada David Cohen will take part in a roundtable lunch event hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Wednesday, Oct. 9, at 12 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Toronto. Details: cdhowe.org.

Webinar: 'Health Research System Recovery'—The Royal Society of Canada hosts a webinar on "Health Research System Recovery," a discussion on the 12 recommendations presented by the RSC's Working Group on Health Research System Recovery, and how they can be implemented. Wednesday, Oct. 9, at 1 p.m. ET, happening online. Details: rsc-src.ca.

Carbon Removal Canada's Policy Report Launch—Treasury Board President and Transport Minister Anita Anand will take part in a fireside chat with Michael Bernstein, executive director of Clean Prosperity, part of the launch of Carbon Removal Canada's new policy report, *Procuring with Purpose: Canada's Opportunity to Shape the Carbon Removal Market*. Wednesday, Oct. 9, at 5 p.m. ET at the Ottawa Art Gallery, 50 Mackenzie King Bridge. Details via Eventbrite.

Writing Women Into History—The Other Hill hosts "Writing Women Into History" featuring Dianne Dodd, author of *Our 100 Years: The Canadian Federation of Women's History*. Wednesday, Oct. 9, at 5:30 p.m. ET at All Saints Event Space, 330 Laurier Ave. E. Details: theotherhill-lautrecoline.ca.

Annual Bill Graham Lecture and Dinner—Louise Blais will moderate a discussion featuring former Liberal prime minister Jean Chrétien and former Mexican president Ernesto Zedillo during the second annual Bill Graham Lecture on International Affairs. Wednesday, Oct. 9, at 6 p.m. ET at

Arcadian Court, 400 Bay St., Toronto. Details online: thecic.org.

Ukraine's Ambassador to Deliver Remarks—Yuliya Kovaliv, Ukraine's Ambassador to Canada, will deliver remarks on "Prospects for Ukraine: Ending the War and Afterwards," hosted by Carleton University and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. Wednesday, Oct. 9, at 7 p.m. ET at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, 82 Kent St. Details via Eventbrite.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 9—THURSDAY, OCT. 10

SMR Forum 2024—The Canadian Association of Small Modular Reactors hosts the inaugural "SMR Forum 2024: Pioneering Small Modular Reactors in Western Canada." Industry leaders, government officials, and experts from across Canada and the United States will explore the role of SMRs in advancing Canada's economic growth and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. Wednesday, Oct. 9, to Thursday, Oct. 10 at the JW Marriott, Edmonton ICE District. Details: smr-forum.ca.

THURSDAY, OCT. 10

Frank McKenna Awards 2024—The Public Policy Forum hosts the "Frank McKenna Awards 2024: An evening celebrating outstanding public policy leadership in Atlantic Canada." Honourees to be announced. Thursday, Oct. 10, at 5 p.m. AT at Pier 21, 1055 Marginal Rd., Halifax. Details online: ppforum.ca.

Champions of Mental Health Awards—The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health will honour seven Champions of Mental Health, including Conservative MP Matt Jeneroux, at an event on Parliament Hill as part of Mental Health Week. Details to follow: camimh.ca.

SUNDAY, OCT. 13

Senator Bellemare's Retirement—Today is Quebec PSG Senator Diane Bellemare's 75th birthday, which means her mandatory retirement from the Senate.

TUESDAY, OCT. 15

CGAI 2024 US Election Webinar—The Canadian Global Affairs Institute hosts a webinar, "Is Canada Prepared for the Next U.S. President?" featuring The German Marshall Fund's Bruce Stokes, former Canadian ambassadors to the U.S. David MacNaughton and Gary Doer, and former Canadian ambassador to the UN Louise Blais. Tuesday, Oct. 15, at 11 a.m. ET happening online: cgai.ca.

Webinar on Engaging Canada's Climate Audience—Carleton University hosts the first of a two-part webinar, "The Five Canadas: Discover New Ways to Engage Canada's Climate Audience." Dr. Louise Comeau and Dr. Erick Lachapelle will unpack the results of a large-scale national survey of more than 6,000 Canadians broken down into the "Five Canadas": progressive activists, civic nationals, centrist liberals, the disengaged middle, and fossil fuel conservatives. Tuesday, Oct. 15, at 12 p.m. ET happening online: events.carleton.ca.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 16—FRIDAY, OCT. 18

Toronto Global Forum—Treasury Board President and Transport Minister Anita Anand, Business Council of Canada president Goldy Hyder, EDC president and CEO Mairead Lavery, Belgian Ambassador Patrick Van Gheel, and Ontario cabinet ministers Vic Fideli and Peter Bethlenfalvy are among the speakers on deck at this year's Toronto Global Forum. Wednesday, Oct. 16, to Friday, Oct. 18, at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, Toronto. Details: torontoglobalforum.com.

AFN Special Chiefs Assembly—The Assembly of First Nations hosts the Special Chiefs Assembly on Long-Term Reform of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program. Wednesday, Oct. 16, to Friday, Oct. 18, at BMO Centre, 20 Round Up Way SE, Calgary. Details: afn.ca.

THURSDAY, OCT. 17

Fundraiser for MP Zahid—Liberal MP Salma Zahid hosts a fundraising event. Thursday, Oct. 17, at 6:30 p.m. ET at the Kennedy Convention Centre, 1199 Kennedy Rd., Scarborough, Ont. Details: liberal.ca.

Marc Garneau to Discuss His New Book—Former Liberal cabinet minister Marc Garneau will discuss his memoir, *A Most Extraordinary Ride: Space, Politics, and the Pursuit of a Canadian Dream*, hosted by the Ottawa International Writers' Festival. Thursday, Oct. 17, at 7 p.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St. Details: writersfestival.org.

SATURDAY, OCT. 19

B.C. Election—Voters in British Columbia head to the polls today for the provincial general election.

MONDAY, OCT. 21

New Brunswick Election—It's general election time in New Brunswick, with the province's residents voting for their next members of the Legislative Assembly.

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