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KERFUZZLE?

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THE HILL TIMES

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NEWS

'He's let it go too long': wait builds for a Poilievre visit south of the border

Whether as prime minister or as opposition leader, it's important for Pierre Poilievre to be familiar with the incoming Trump administration, says former diplomat Deanna Horton.

BY NEIL MOSS

It is time for Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre to

travel south of the border to build links with the incoming Trump administration and a new Congress, says the head of a Washington, D.C.-based think tank focused on the Canada-U.S. relationship.

It has become a quasi-tradition for opposition leaders to travel to the United States to build links that will become essential in governance.

"This is the time to come down and make some friends, and show that you have connections to friends," said Christopher Sands, director of the Canada Institute at the Wilson Center. "I'm a little surprised that he [Poilievre] hasn't come down before now."

"In a way, I think he's let it go too long. The sooner he's able to

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Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has yet to take the quasi-traditional trek of opposition leaders heading to Washington, D.C., to build links with the White House and Congress. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

NEWS

Brown's testimony on Tory race suggests need for fresh inquiry into alleged Indian government meddling: Sikh Coalition rep

BY STUART BENSON

Any input or intervention by the Indian government and its agents may not have changed the outcome of the 2022 Conservative leadership race, but new testimony from former candidate Patrick

Brown—and its absence from the recent Foreign Interference Commission—demonstrates the need for a new inquiry to understand the full scope of the problem, says the counsel for the Sikh Coalition.

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NEWS

Fresh tech incoming for MP riding offices

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

Constituency offices across Canada will soon be fitted out with new technology, following recent House Board of Internal Economy approval of a "lifecycle" update to be rolled out in phases post-election.

Approved on Nov. 28, the planned technology refresh will update four categories

of technology found in MP riding offices: network connectivity, computers, telephone services, and printing devices.

"These core technologies supporting constituency offices are outdated or near end-of-life stage, increasing the risk of system failures, security vulnerabilities,

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Christina Leadlay

Heard On The Hill

Côté marks her half-century on the Hill as Long Service Awards are doled out



Krissy Côté, centre, alongside her boss, Conservative MP Rob Morrison, left, and House Speaker Greg Fergus at the Nov. 19 Long Service Award event. Photograph courtesy of X

A fresh batch of Long Service Awards were doled out by the House of Commons during a ceremony at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building on Nov. 19, with 392 employees honoured.

The Long Service Awards are given to staff working for MPs, House officers, and caucus research bureaus to mark various five-year milestones, with this year's batch commemorating staff who have worked on the Hill for between five and 50 years.

Most of those honoured on Nov. 19—244 people, to be exact—were celebrating hitting the five-year mark, with 68 having reached 10 years of service, 38 at 15 years, 26 at 20 years, seven at 25 years, seven at 30 years, one at 35 years, and one staffer—**Krissy Côté**—at 50 years of service.

Côté, who has been working for B.C. Conservative MP **Rob Morrison** since 2019, first landed on the Hill in 1974.

An Ottawa native, she told **Heard on the Hill** she picked up an interest in politics early from her mother, and later developed a friendship with **Joseph Maingot**, who served as House law clerk from 1971 to 1982 and whose children she used to babysit, which both helped pave her path to the Hill.

Côté started as an assistant to then-Saskatchewan Progressive Conservative MP **Frank Hamilton**, for whom she worked for roughly 10 years in all. After he retired, she was hired by his riding successor, then-PC MP **Geoff Wilson**.

Wilson lost his seat in 1993 along with the vast majority of the Progressive Conservative caucus. Only two PC MPs were elected that year, but Côté was lucky to land a job with one of them: former B.C. MP **Jim Abbott**.

Following Abbott's retirement in 2011, she was scooped up by

his riding successor, **David Wilks**. She's since also worked for B.C. Conservative MP **Mel Arnold**.

"It's been a real honour and a privilege to work in Parliament for all these years," said Côté, adding she's been "very fortunate" to work for and with "very dedicated and hard-working" MPs and staff over the years.

Côté said she never imagined she'd last 50 years on the Hill, given the precarity that comes with working in politics—as the 1993 PC upending underlined in particular.

"What I like about working on the Hill is every day is going to be different because of the nature of the job. You know, when things come up in the world, or in Canada, or in your constituency, you have to deal with those everyday and have to stay on top of things, so it's never, ever boring, that's for sure," said Côté.

The Hill has changed considerably in the 50 years since she started. Côté recalled having to go downstairs in Centre Block to use the building's then lone photocopying machine, and using a typewriter rather than a computer.

"There was a ton of mail that came in in those early days—lots of mail, because [we were] obviously without email opportunities, etc.—so we would pick up probably two boxes of mail at least every day, maybe every couple of days," she said.

The House administration sends a catalogue of award options—divided by the various years of service categories—for staff to choose from.

This year, Côté said she opted for a silver necklace, having previously received a watch engraved with the House of Commons logo, as well as a mantel clock and gold ring (both similarly engraved).

—by *Laura Ryckewaert*

Queen's Gates facelift ongoing

There's a new obstruction on Parliament Hill—and no, it's not inside the House of Commons.

Hillites may have noticed a new enclosure was recently set up around the Queen's Gates, the formal entrance to Parliament Hill off Wellington Street.

The heritage wrought-iron gates themselves—which date to 1872 and were named in honour of then-reigning **Queen Victoria**—were removed for restoration in March 2024, and have since been shipped to Montreal via a flatbed truck where they're now "being expertly restored" by heritage experts from Dominion Restoration. It's expected they will be reinstalled next summer.

"The gates will be disassembled, stripped of old paint and rust, and repainted. Missing or damaged components will be fabricated to ensure the gates maintain their original craftsmanship," explained Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) in an email.



Caution tape surrounds the Queen's Gates on Aug. 3, 2022, after being rammed with a vehicle early that morning. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

But it's not just the gates themselves that require restoration, so too does the stonework that flanks them.

Last month, a sizeable enclosure was installed around the site in connection with work being done to the stone piers that make up the Queen's Gates. The piers need to be "repointed," a process that PSPC explained involves replacing the old mortar from the joints between the stones that make up the structure.

"Over time, weathering and decay cause voids in the joints between masonry units, usually in bricks and stone, allowing the undesirable entrance of water. Repointing helps maintain the structural integrity and appearance of finished masonry," said PSPC by email.

Work on the stone piers is expected to wrap up this winter, and the restoration of the gates overall is estimated to cost \$2.4-million.

—by *Laura Ryckewaert*

Smith, Hemmadi bid the gallery farewell



Murad Hemmadi, left, and Marie-Danielle Smith. *The Hill Times* photograph by Charelle Evelyn

Members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery gathered on Dec. 6 for their last communal meal of 2024 and to send off a pair of reporters who've moved on to the Big Smoke.

Marie-Danielle Smith and **Murad Hemmadi**, most recently of the Hill bureaus for the Canadian Press and *The Logic*, respectively, were the focus of the year's final "mugging."

Stepping up to the microphone to "eulogize" Smith with a recording of *Ave Maria*, *The National Post's* **Chris Nardi** mourned Smith's departure from the gallery. In the roughly 10 years Smith has spent on the Hill, she's reported for *The Ottawa Citizen*, *Embassy News* (a former sister publication to *The Hill*

Times), *The National Post*, and *Maclean's*. She has since taken on the post of Ontario bureau chief for the national wire service in Toronto.

"It turns out after complaining about Toronto editors for 10 years, I am now one of them. So be careful what you put into the universe," Smith told her now-former colleagues.

In a more-recent departure for Toronto, Hemmadi has moved to covering artificial intelligence for his publication after eight years on the Hill.

Reporter **David Reevely** provided Hemmadi's send-off, noting that his former bureau mate "did the work so that *The Logic* meant something in the ministers' offices."

Hemmadi called the press gallery "the best club I've ever been a part of," and noted that he "didn't grow up wanting to be a Parliament Hill reporter"—seeing how he didn't grow up in Canada—"but it's a privilege."

Ling leaves, Blanchfield returns

Speaking of departures, the CBC's **Philip Ling** is leaving the Hill bureau behind as he strikes out for Vancouver.

He will have his official send-off at The Métropolitain Brasserie on Dec. 16. In the email announcing his departure, the CBC's **Chris Carter** and **Michael Woods** broke down Ling's history, noting he "started working on the Hill in 2008 with Canwest News Service, then Global News. He then spent seven years with the CTV News Parliamentary Bureau before joining CBC in 2017, where he became a valued member of the bureau leadership team. We will all miss him dearly."

Festivities begin at 6 p.m.



Philip Ling, left, and Mike Blanchfield. Photographs courtesy of CBC and Mike Blanchfield

Over at *Politico Canada*, a familiar face is back on the job. **Mike Blanchfield** redonned his reporter hat earlier this month after hanging it up in 2022 when he left *The Canadian Press*, where he'd covered Parliament Hill and international affairs for 13 years. Prior to CP, Blanchfield spent 22 years with the *Ottawa Citizen*. He received the R. James Travers Foreign Corresponding Fellowship in 2013, using the \$25,000 prize to investigate the legacy of cluster bombs in Laos.

After leaving the daily reporting grind, Blanchfield joined public affairs firm Bluesky Strategy Group, before signing on as the director of energy and global affairs for the Public Policy Forum.

The Hill Times

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Comment

Waiting to exhale

While the government certainly has the right to try to extend its useful life until October 2025, Canadians might like to hit the reset button.

Tim Powers

Plain Speak



OTTAWA—I am not looking to be the guy who puts the lump of coal in the stocking. But, with some exceptions, it feels like we have all had some of the black stuff thrown into our baskets.

We don't need an election over the holidays—people need a break and time with their families—but the earlier in the new year an election happens, the better for all Canadians.

Parliament has effectively been a dysfunctional mess all fall. While there is lots of blame to go around, and many Canadians couldn't give a rat's ass about how it functions, the point is it needs to function more of the time than less of it. Whether we like it or not, it is the place that drives many of the programs and policies on which people rely. It shouldn't just be a play pen for parliamentary hijinks.

While you can argue the prime minister had a good week or two in response to U.S. president-elect Donald Trump, the visit to Trump's Florida compound, and post-meeting predictability, the government has looked lost for the other 50 or so weeks of the past year. GST holidays aren't going to fix what ails you or convince the public that the government is on the right course.

The government screams exhaustion, and appears to have no clear mission. Let

the prime minister see if he can raise his game for a campaign, and offer an approach for the next four years. This current lethargy is crippling.

With Trump being sworn in on Jan. 20, 2025, it would be nice to clear the decks here in Canada so that whomever wins can start with the Americans in a timely manner. An empowered prime minister with an election win in his pocket might briefly afford that leader some respect with Trump as he begins his second term.

Trump likes power. He likes others who have it, or have just acquired it. Waiting until October to determine our prime minister would not necessarily matter with any other U.S. president, but with this one it might. We don't need to kiss Trump's ass—or, yes, occasionally his ring—this go-round, but it is to our nation's advantage to even up the playing field.

Then there is the public. While we don't always get jazzed up about election calls, I think there is a sense of “can we just get on with it.” While the government certainly has the right to try to extend its useful life until October 2025, Canadians might like to hit the reset button. That doesn't necessarily mean they would select a new government—though legions of polls suggest they are so inclined—it means we'd move from talking about an election to actually having one so people can sort out who they'd like to lead the country now. The fresh air of the democratic process, and all that.

Us citizens might be well served to have our minds focused on the choices we could make as opposed to continuing to stew about our lots. The national exhale an election provides is a therapeutic tool that might be of value to us all.

Waiting until October, inflaming each other, and driving up agitation doesn't seem like a good thing for the wellness of the country. The election is going to be nasty enough as it is—let us just get on with it.

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

The Hill Times



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government screams exhaustion, and this current lethargy is crippling, writes Tim Powers. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Droning into oblivion



A Volatus Aerospace drone is pictured at the CANSEC trade show in Ottawa on June 1, 2022. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

New drone technology is dominating the modern battlefield, but Canada's procurement team is barely trying to play catch up.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—For anyone who has closely followed the conflict in Ukraine since Russia's invasion in February 2022, you will be aware of the fact that the face of modern warfare has drastically evolved.

The Russian armoured columns that were meant to overwhelm the Ukrainian defenders were turned into smouldering heaps of junk metal through NATO's provision to Ukraine of sophisticated anti-armour missile systems, like the Javelin.

However, it was after the war bogged down into a bloody stalemate that a new queen of the battlefield emerged. This would be the preponderance of first-person view (FPV) drones, which are being employed by both sides. The FPV drone is usually operated by a pilot using a headset that allows the user to gain the drone's perspective in real time. This allows combatants to either pinpoint targets for their artillery, or—in many cases—to engage the enemy directly with a warhead attached to the drone itself. These are known as “suicide” drones, but as these platforms are uninhabited, it is more of machine sacrificed by the operator who lives to fight another day.

At a cost of around \$500, sacrificing an FPV drone to destroy a multimillion-dollar armoured vehicle makes good battlefield economic sense. These FPV drones have also been successfully employed in the Middle East by both the Israel Defense Forces, and Hamas and Hezbollah fighters.

That is why I was astonished to read in a recent *Ottawa Citizen* article that the Canadian Armed Forces currently has no plans in place to purchase these low-cost, extremely efficient aerial vehicles.

When asked why the CAF would not be pursuing FPV technology at this time,

the official response to *The Citizen* stated: “At this time, the Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces does not have any current or planned procurements for First Person View drones for operational use. However, in *Our North, Strong and Free* [policy] we committed to exploring options for acquiring a suite of surveillance and strike drones as well as counter-drone capabilities, sometime in the future.”

Well, that's that then. For more than two-and-a-half years, FPV drones and their counter measures have dominated modern battlefields across the globe, but the Canadian military procurement team hopes to look into it “sometime in the future.”

As for more conventional uninhabited aerial vehicles, it would seem the CAF remains woefully inept when it comes to purchasing deals. According to documents obtained by the *Ottawa Citizen*, last March, the CAF took delivery of some 50 United States-built Teal 2 drones. These unmanned aerial vehicles weigh just 1.25 kilograms, have a range of five kilometres, and have a flight duration of 30 minutes. The Teal 2 drones can be used for limited surveillance and target acquisition.

So what separates these from the FPV drones being used in Ukraine and Gaza?

Well, to begin with, they cost a boat-load more. Canada says it paid \$4-million for the 50 Teal 2 drones, which would put the individual price tag at about \$80,000 per drone. Keen-eyed readers will note that commercial Teal 2 drones—complete with chargers and spare parts—retail for US\$16,000, or roughly C\$22,000.

When you factor in the potential for a volume discount on 50 units—or a Black Friday blowout discount—Canada paid nearly four times the list price for these drones.

When you focus on the larger drone fleet that Canada is in the process of acquiring, the margin for error is naturally larger. In December 2023, Canada announced that the CAF would be acquiring 11 of General Atomics' MQ-9B Reaper strike drones at a cost \$2.5-billion. The original delivery timeline was 2025, but that has now been bumped to 2028 as modifications will need to be made to allow the Canadian MQ-9Bs to operate in the Arctic. Surely the procurement officials thought of that before they signed a contract for \$2.5-billion?

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

The Hill Times

Syria gets another chance

The largely peaceful and non-violent nature of the Assad regime's collapse has created no conquering hero whose charisma overshadows all potential rivals.

Gwynne
Dyer

Global Affairs



LONDON, U.K.—First, take a moment to celebrate the fall of a regime of surpassing evil even by the demanding standards of the Middle East. Father and son, the Assad regime oppressed and abused the Syrian people for 53 years, and now it is gone in a week. Even the American-backed puppet regime in Afghanistan did not fall that fast.

The Russians, the Iranians, and Hezbollah in Lebanon supported Bashar al-Assad through the last 13 years of hot and cold civil war in Syria, but in the end they let him go. Hezbollah has been gutted by the Israelis, Moscow is too distracted by its war in Ukraine, and Iran is frightened of a joint attack by Israel and a Donald Trump-led United States.

Therefore, the big winners at this point seem to be Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the one hand, and the rebranded jihadis who have now taken control of Damascus and most of Syria's other big cities on the other. But it was Netanyahu's triumph over Hezbollah that indirectly helped the jihadis into power in Syria, and he may regret it.

The current name for the Islamist group that has just gained control of most of Syria's population is Hayat Tahrir-al Sham (HTS). That means "Organisation for the Liberation of the Levant," a neutral name for what now claims to be a broad nationalist front—but HTS's roots lie in al-Qaida and the murderous head-choppers of Islamic State.

"Once a jihadi, always a jihadi," some would say, and HTS remains classed as a terrorist organization by the United Nations, the U.S., Turkey, and Russia. U.S. officials have even called HTS "a vehicle to advance [al-Qaida's] position in the Syrian uprising."

However, it is possible that the leopard really has changed its spots. So far, in its victory march across Syria, HTS has lived up to its promise not to impose shariah law on Syria's many and diverse sects. Even the Christian, Druze, and Alawite minorities are being treated with respect—although for the Alawites, at least, that may not be convincing enough.

Alawites are no more than 10 per cent of Syria's population, and for most of the region's history they were an obscure agrarian minority. But the French recruited their colonial army in Syria largely from the Alawite community precisely because it was a marginal and powerless group—and when the French left, the Alawite soldiers took over the country.

For more than half a century, the Alawites dominated Syria and benefitted greatly



We could imagine a different future for Syria in which the half of the population who have become internal or external refugees return safely to their homes, writes Gwynne Dyer. Screenshot courtesy of BBC News

from the Assad clan's monopoly of power. They now fear that they will be held collectively responsible for the regime's crimes, and they will be strongly tempted to cut their own territory free from the ruins of the Syrian state.

They might actually achieve that if they move fast enough, particularly if they can get tacit Russian support for their separation from the rest. Their home territory includes almost all of Syria's Mediterranean coast, and is home to Russia's air and naval bases in the region—and so far, HTS's march south has not impinged on the core Alawite territory.

Further fragmentation of Syria is possible if the Kurds in the east and the Druze in the south—near the Israeli border—try to go their own way, but the Turks—erstwhile sponsors of HTS—will strive to prevent that. Which way the United States

will jump under new management remains to be seen.

And the biggest change, which western observers seem constrained from mentioning by some misplaced cultural sensitivity, is the collapse of Shia power and influence in the region. Iran is 95 per cent Shia, and Iraq at least 70 per cent Shia, but Lebanon and Syria had also become part of a larger Shia bloc although neither has a Shia majority. That is now at an end.

As for the question of the leopard's spots, it really is too soon to tell. Even if Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, the leader of HTS, is secretly the extremist that his early associations suggest, it would make good tactical sense for him to pretend moderation until his relatively small group has established a secure position at the heart of Syrian politics.

That moment may never even come. The Syrian political stage is suddenly crowded

with many other players with their own agendas, and the largely peaceful and non-violent nature of the Assad regime's collapse has created no conquering hero whose charisma overshadows all potential rivals.

We could imagine a different future for Syria in which the half of the population who have become internal or external refugees return safely to their homes, all but the worst of the criminals who served the Assad regime are pardoned and rehabilitated, and the country begins to rebuild a future worth having.

That may be a fantasy, but don't write the country off before it has a chance.

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

The Hill Times

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News

Confederation sit-in cranks security concerns as MPs debate balance of right to protest with parliamentary privilege

'Jews Say No to Genocide' protest organizer Rachel Small says disruption was a 'last resort' after a year of outreach.

BY STUART BENSON

Concerns over Hill security were heightened last week after a sit-in protest disrupted early-morning access to the Confederation Building as Jewish protesters and allies demanded an arms embargo on Israel. A Liberal MP says it may be time to implement a "bubble zone" around the precinct to keep parliamentarians and their staff safe.

Just after 8:30 a.m. on Dec. 3, roughly 100 hundred protesters from the self-described "Jews Say No to Genocide" coalition quietly walked through the front doors of the Confederation Building on Wellington Street demanding a ceasefire in Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza—which it describes as a genocide against the Palestinian people—and a two-way arms embargo.

In a press release sent out at the beginning of the demonstration, the coalition said it intended to block MPs and their staff from "business as usual" indefinitely. It said it would allow people to enter once their demands had been heard. The coalition added it was prepared to remain until Canada ends "its active participation in Israel's genocide," and Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.) offers a "concrete response."

The Ottawa Police Service (OPS) and Parliamentary Protective Service (PPS) were on hand facilitating the movement of parliamentarians, staff, and stakeholders with business inside the building through a side accessibility entrance. By 10 a.m., the protesters had been removed from the building, and they continued to chant and sing outside of its doors. The police and PPS detained 14 of the protesters, who were later released with "trespass to property" notices but without official charges.

In the days following the protest, parliamentarians from across party lines have been grappling with the implications of the disruption—whether supportive of the organizers' demands or



A group of Jewish Canadians and allies protested inside the Confederation Building on Dec. 3 to call for a two-way arms embargo with Israel, and an end to Canada's complicity in a 'genocide' against Palestinians. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

not—and how best to balance the right to protest with the right of parliamentarians, staffers, and all visitors to Parliament Hill to be safe.

Liberal MP Pam Damoff (Oakville North-Burlington, Ont.) said the ease with which the demonstrators took over the lobby of the Confederation Building should "concern us all."

While her offices are not in the building, she said she was "shocked" by the images she saw on social media. She said that her staff have felt increasingly fearful and intimidated, particularly following the assault on Liberal MP Marco Mendicino (Eglinton-Lawrence, Ont.) last June when he was spat on as he entered a precinct building on Sparks Street.

According to data from the Privy Council Office, Mendicino—the former public safety minister who held the post during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ensuing "Freedom Convoy" protests on Parliament Hill—has received and reported the third-highest number of threats against ministers after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.), and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.).

In May, House Sergeant-at-Arms Patrick McDonnell told the Procedure and House Affairs Committee that harassment of MPs has increased almost 800 per cent in the last five years. In 2019, the sergeant-at-arms had eight open files regarding threats against parliamentarians; in 2023,

there were 530 files, McDonnell said.

Damoff suggested that the protest further demonstrates the need for a "bubble zone" or something similar surrounding the precinct to keep everyone safe on the Hill.

"Both MPs and our staff have the right to feel safe in their work environments," Damoff said. "No one—whether they're elected officials or staff or people that work on Parliament Hill—should feel unsafe in their workplace."

NDP MP Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan-Malahat-Langford, B.C.), his party's public safety critic, praised the PPS for reacting "the best they could," given the circumstances.

"So much of security on the Hill is reactive to what might [or has] happened," MacGregor said. "[PPS] can plan their best, but you never know what's going to happen."

Given the increasingly aggressive nature of protests occurring in and around Parliament Hill this fall, there have been "noticeable improvements," MacGregor said. These include the increased presence of OPS officers patrolling along Wellington Street, and PPS requiring visitors to present a Hill pass before being allowed onto the grounds near the West Block.

"It's a fine line because we want to protect people's fundamental democratic rights to protest, but they need to be able to do so in a way that is safe," MacGregor said. "Not only for them, but

also for people who work on the Hill."

Speaking with reporters ahead of Question Period on Dec. 4, Green Leader Elizabeth May (Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.) said she spoke with the protest organizers following the disruption to express her concern that PPS had not been given prior notice, as is the usual practice for demonstrations on the Hill.

"We need to talk to security officers here on Parliament Hill in advance," May said, adding that she believes more parliamentarians would have joined the demonstration if they had known there were safe, unobstructed routes for others to access the building.

"Civil society voices need to be heard, and the right to civil disobedience needs to be respected, but we could work better in advance to avoid the shutdown of various passageways that everybody uses," May said. "A lot of our constituents and stakeholder groups were backed up forever trying to get through security ... I think it's avoidable with advanced planning."

Conservative says protest violated parliamentary privilege

On Dec. 6, Conservative deputy leader Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, Ont.) raised a point of privilege regarding the protest, arguing that even the temporary disruption constituted a violation of parliamentarians' right "to en-

ter this place, do their work, enter their offices, and feel safe." In her speech, Lantsman provided several examples of previous rulings related to the impeding of MPs' "unfettered access" to the precinct, including a 2017 ruling that found a 74-second delay to the arrival of a shuttle bus had been deemed a *prima facie* breach of privilege.

Lantsman also accused members of the NDP caucus of being culpable in the breach of privilege, arguing that their participation in the protest "rises to contempt" of Parliament.

"It is also—I believe—part of a broader pattern of unhinged behaviour on the part of New Democrat MPs," Lantsman said in the House. "This is also a continuation of the very tactics that we have seen on our streets from unhinged mobs that think that their petty grievances allow them to target Jewish neighbourhoods, firebomb Jewish schools, obstruct synagogues, and wreak havoc on our Canadian values."

Lantsman referred to several New Democrats, including MPs Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, Alta.), Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, Alta.), Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, Ont.), and Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, Man.), who were photographed while they stopped by during the protests to lend their support.

In a social media post posing with a T-shirt emblazoned with "Jews say stop arming Israel," which she now displays from her office window inside the building, Gazan said she was "happy to see" the coalition "telling politicians in Ottawa they will not support genocide."

On Dec. 9, Green and McPherson rose in the House to provide their perspectives on the protest, and refute the allegations of their "complicity" in organizing it.

Green said that he was first alerted to the protest by the PPS advisory that all members received on their phones just after the demonstration began, and only came upon it on his way to the Wellington Building across the street. However, he said that because he viewed the protest as a form of picket line, he did not cross it to enter the Confederation Building.

"I was there to observe what was happening by these citizens, these Jewish people of conscience who wanted to end the genocide and call for the arms embargo," Green said. "I heard what I would describe as a beautiful expression of Judaism: the blowing of the shofar, the recitation of the Torah, and Jewish songs ... in solidarity with basic notions of justice and peace."

Additionally, he said the suggestion the protest was organized by members of his caucus "not only denigrates the spirit of our parliamentary privilege," but also denies the agency of the "progressive Jews against genocide who took it upon themselves ... to be present in the lobby."

"The accusations that somehow we organized this protest to intentionally disrupt or obstruct

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... is completely fabricated and misleading," Green said, adding that Lantsman's comparison of the protest to "mobs that target Jewish neighbourhoods" was shameful and, in itself, "a form of antisemitism."

McPherson, whose office is inside the building, said she did not experience any violation of her privilege and was able to access her office "without problem."

She said she first learned of the demonstration through the PPS alert, and only stopped to listen to the protesters as she was entering and exiting the building.

It is part of an MP's job to listen to and understand Canadians, McPherson said, noting that what she heard was people saying "not in our name."

"Whether or not a parliamentarian agrees with this argument, or whether or not they're uncomfortable ... is irrelevant to the principle or the question of privilege. For my part, I believe it is important to hear from Canadians," she said.

Protest organizers defend escalation tactics as 'last resort'

In an interview with *The Hill Times*, Rachel Small, a spokesperson for the protest organizers, said their specific goal was to "interrupt the daily business of Parliament," but added that the decision had been made "as a last resort."

"We've done literally every other thing we can possibly think of over the past 13 months," Small said. "But if you want to interrupt the business of Parliament, you have to catch people by surprise."

Over the past year, Small said the coalition—composed of members of Independent Jewish Voices and World Beyond War Canada—has been building its movement within the Jewish community, and with people across Canada who are "beyond fed up with the way that not only Israel but the Canadian government is trying to position that what they're doing is in support of us."

Small said coalition members have been "reaching out constantly for the past year" to the government and parliamentarians, and noted that those efforts have yielded some positive results. However, the action they have seen from the Canadian government, including the freezing of new export permits and the suspension of around 30 existing permits to Israel, still falls short of the complete weapons embargo they are demanding.

"Joly has made very strong statements to say that Canadian weapons cannot be used in Gaza, which we appreciate, but she hasn't actually followed through and made that the case," Small said.

Additionally, Small said that 47 MPs—including 22 New Democrats, both Greens, and 23 Liberals—have officially signed on to the coalition's demand for an arms embargo. A complete list of MPs who have signed on to the demand letter can be viewed at armsembargonow.ca.

Small said that given those efforts over the past year, she doesn't believe any parliamentarian can say they were surprised by the protesters' demands. However, if anyone has a more effective and less disruptive way for the coalition to achieve that goal, "we're all ears," she said.

While Small said the demonstration was about showing that the protesters were willing to take a "strong stand, even potentially at personal risk," she took issue with some of the language used to describe the protest as an "occupation," or that they "stormed" the Confederation Building.

"I got a little laugh because we just walked in," Small said. "We just opened the door, walked inside, sat down, and started singing the Jewish songs we've known since childhood."

Small said she would be surprised if the protest didn't spur some change to the



Conservative deputy leader Melissa Lantsman says the protests violated the privilege of parliamentarians. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

security procedure at the Confederation Building. But she said those concerns are the same "tired criticisms of every social movement in history."

"We're demanding that Canada stop arming a genocide, and from my perspective,

if you cannot achieve that through all of the polite means that we have been doing for over a year, it warrants escalating," Small explained. "If some MPs were upset that we didn't follow the rules and sat down inside a building without alerting security ahead

of time, I would ask them to think about the real issues of injustice and outrage here, because I don't think it's 100 Jewish people sitting in the Confederation Building."

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The Hill Times



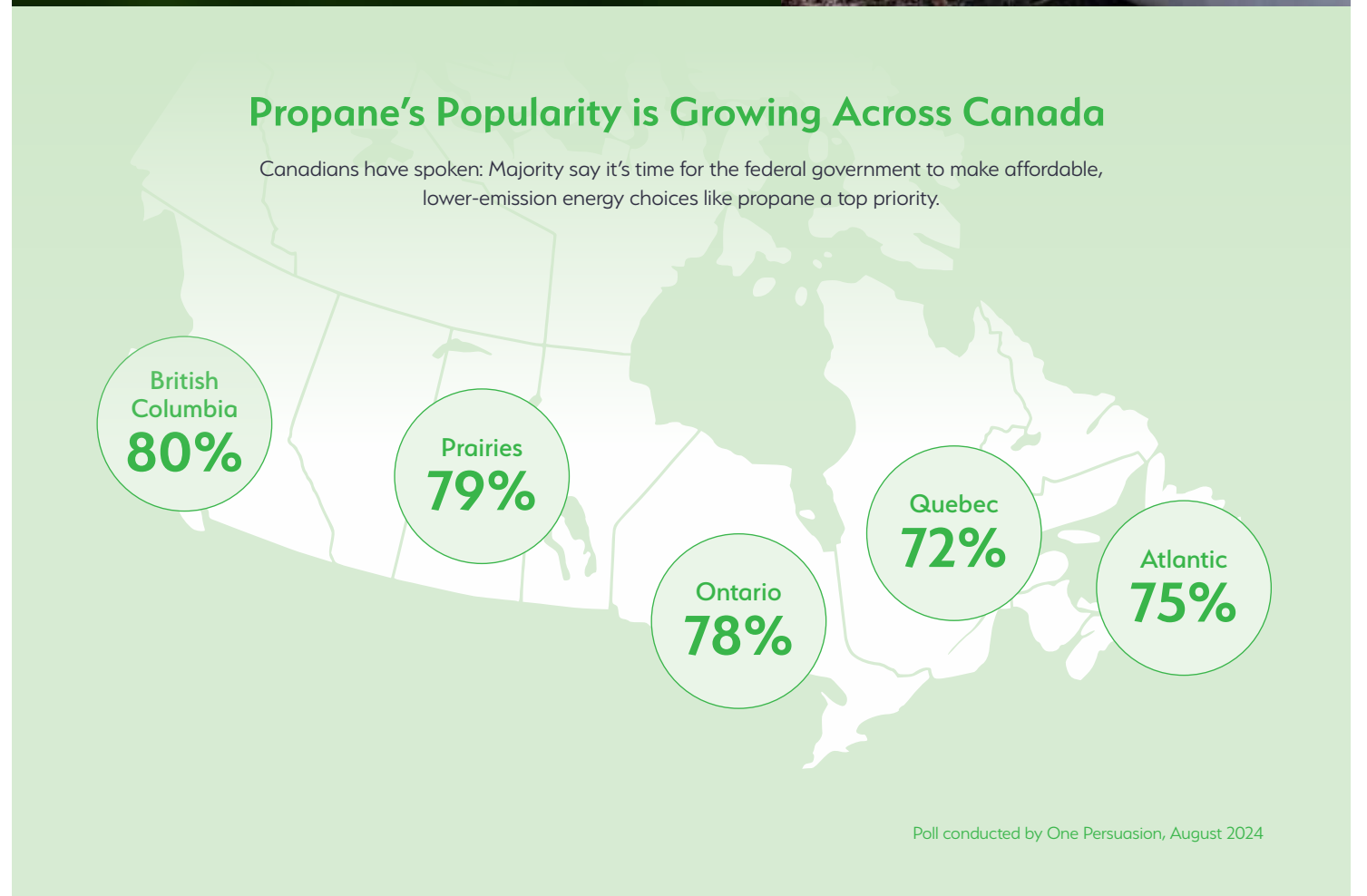
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Editorial

Parliamentary dysfunction a flimsy cover for delays

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland finally put an end to one element of speculation surrounding the still-unseen fall economic statement on Dec. 9 when she announced that the document would be tabled on Dec. 16.

Of course, questions still abound, such as: what is in this thing that could be so bad that the Liberals would try to bury it on the penultimate day of the House sitting before the Christmas break?

Sure, there could be legitimate reasons for the delay that's put this tabling on the brink of becoming a "winter" economic statement. Perhaps the government was always planning on waiting to see what the fallout from the Nov. 5 United States presidential election would be. Maybe the potential for a returning Donald Trump administration meant they knew around the cabinet table and in the finance minister's office that new spending for MAGA-appealing projects would be required, and they wanted to get their ducks in a row. Maybe the postal strike has impeded the government's ability to get crucial documents ferried about the country. Perhaps the controversial plan to send working Canadians \$250 cheques was a major part of the document, but now that it's been culled from the legislation that included the two-month GST holiday, the

whole statement had be re-chiseled into a granite slab.

But, since the feds won't actually give a good reason for the delay, Canadians are left to wonder and take them at their word when they foist the blame on the Conservatives' privilege debate that has stalled all government business since September.

"The reality is, business of the House is being filibustered," said Freeland on Dec. 3 in response to a reporter's question about the delayed tabling of both the fall statement and the annual public accounts. "That has real consequences in terms of the government's ability to do the work that we need to do for Canadians."

As *The Hill Times'* Ian Campbell recently reported: "Freeland did not explain exactly how the filibuster was impeding the government's ability to table the documents." Especially salient, given that "documents can be tabled by a minister at any time in a sitting without the unanimous consent of the House," as confirmed by a House spokesperson.

The prevailing thought may be that the timing of these documents—and what they actually say—doesn't matter to the average Canadian, but don't insult their intelligence when it comes to the political shenanigans behind it. It's a bad look.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

Trump is blaming Canada for a U.S.-created drug problem, says Toronto reader

Re: "Don't expect any breaks from Tariff Man," (*The Hill Times*, Dec. 4, p. 5).

The United States' fentanyl problem is president-elect Donald Trump's to fix, not Canada's; we only make a minuscule contribution to their fentanyl budget. Trump blames Canada for a domestic drug problem that the U.S. government has created. It is unproductive to play the victim and scapegoat others for domestic failures. One must look at the root causes of drug abuse, and take steps to address them. Unbridled capitalism has left many workers unemployed while wealthy businessmen—Trump's friends—have off-shored jobs to China and other countries, and become fantastically wealthy. The goal of large tariffs is to repatriate U.S. jobs, but this will take many years to accomplish. In the meantime, prices will rise, which will drive inflation, and challenge the most vulnerable.

Even if this new "war on drugs" were successful, restricting access to fentanyl

will simply raise the price, causing more harm to those afflicted, driving many more to crime to satisfy their need, and overloading an already stressed prison system. And Trump is now planning to institute large tariffs on imported goods, with the burden falling on the poor and middle class while he hands over the money to the rich through tax breaks.

The picture is grim: scarce and low-paying jobs, and government policies that funnel more of the nation's wealth into the hands of the rich, limiting economic growth. It is the middle class that buys most of the products of industry, and the U.S. fiscal policies have them against the wall financially, unable to participate.

The net result? Poor pay and few jobs. Depressed people on drugs. Inadequate social support. Crime. Social unrest. It is time to stop the finger-pointing, and address the real issue.

Tom McElroy
 Toronto, Ont.

Canada's labs need to go under a microscope: B.C. letter writer

This week, Canada will import yet more monkeys from Asia with the clear intent to cause them harm. While technology has evolved to the point that animal experimentation is no longer the gold standard among researchers elsewhere, Canada remains fixed on outdated approaches that are an actual impediment to progress.

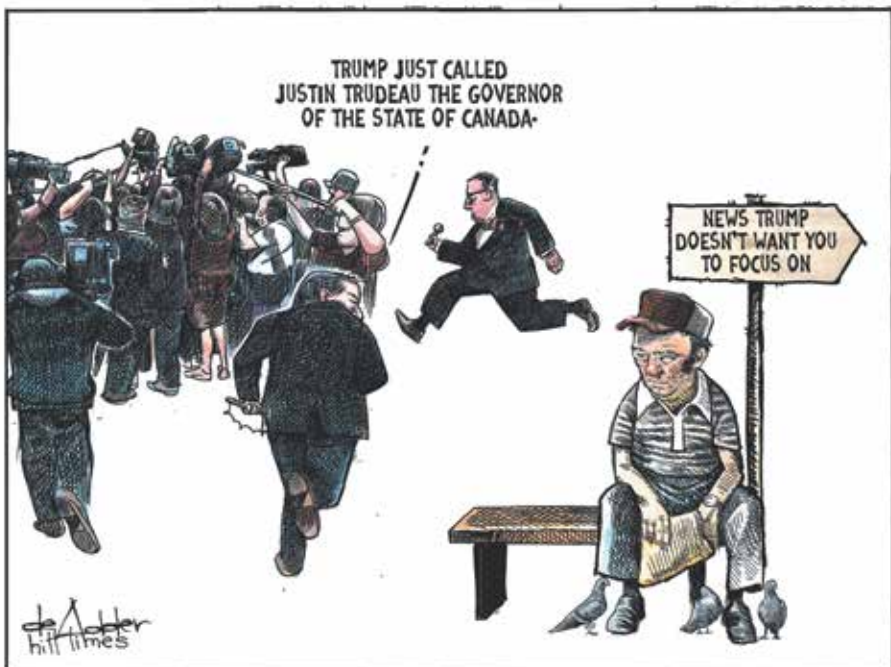
By refusing funding to the development and implementation of cutting-edge approaches, our government and funding agencies are in violation of our commitment to the Three Rs: the reduction, refinement, and replacement of animal use in research.

The United States has banned the shipment of monkeys from Cambodia

destined for its labs. Their Food and Drug Administration has dropped the mandate that animals be used in the drug development and testing process. The European Union has directed its members to abolish animal experimentation within a reasonable timeframe. Most NATO countries use sophisticated simulators in military trauma training rather than the blowtorching of piglets. Not Canada.

To say that Canada is sitting on its hands doing nothing would be a blessing compared to the immense harm its research community is causing to the animals, the environment, and to our own human health.

Anne M. Birthistle
 North Vancouver, B.C.



Canada remains fixed on outdated approaches to animal testing that are an actual impediment to progress, writes Anne Birthistle. *Unsplash photograph by Patrick Beznoska*

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With one tweet, Trump has scrambled Canada's political agenda

If nothing else, it has given Prime Minister Justin Trudeau a national mission that resonates with most Canadians.

Les Whittington

Need to Know



OTTAWA—Whatever Donald Trump's end game, the United States president-elect has—with one tweet and a serving of meatloaf—injecting a dose of acute uncertainty into Canada's political, economic, and diplomatic affairs.

At least for the moment, the impending crisis in U.S.-Canada relations has shaken up a political picture that had for many

months seemed permanently hard-wired. If nothing else, it has given Prime Minister Justin Trudeau a national mission that resonates with most Canadians. He and his senior aides have been able to emerge from the political doghouse claiming that they can leverage their experience in the trade-war trenches with Trump in his first term to make the best of the situation now.

And, drawing on what he heard over a meatloaf dinner with the president-elect at Mar-a-Lago, Trudeau is moving to quickly address U.S. concerns about the Canada-U.S. border. More details are likely to emerge next week with Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's fiscal update, which this newspaper reported will include funding of \$1-billion for border reforms. And the Trudeau government has also shifted into high gear to maximize Team Canada's anti-tariff campaign in the U.S.

As this has developed, an angrier-than-ever Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has found

himself in the unusual position of having a sideline seat in the national manoeuvring over how to protect Canada's economy. And the need for action on trade issues could in time also create political blowback over Poilievre's paralyzing of the Commons.

As for the premiers, they seem as a group to have been forced to largely set aside their antagonism toward the prime minister to fall in behind a unified Team Canada approach. Ontario Premier Doug Ford, whose attitude exudes a definite view of Trudeau as a lame duck, is leading the way in the campaign to sway Americans' minds.

The Ontario government is spending tens of millions of dollars on an extensive ad blitz intended to wake Americans up to the fact that Trump's planned tariff on Canadian imports would cause damage for both countries.

All this has arguably given Trudeau a new lease on his political life, although he of course has nothing to lose at this point. But that doesn't apply to

the federal Liberal Party as a whole, for whom the stakes in this confrontation with Trump are high indeed. Should the Team Canada diplomatic foray led by Trudeau fail to head off a devastating trade war with the U.S., it could basically wipe out the already-slipping Liberal brand for years to come.

And unfortunately, despite the upbeat talk about Canada's close, positive ties with influential leaders in almost every area of American life, there's nothing yet pointing to a possible pass for Canada on the trade front.

In fact, to the extent that you can deduce anything from the president-elect's ramblings, the signs are not good. Any lingering doubts about Trump's strange belief in U.S. import levies as the pre-eminent American diplomatic and economic tool were put to rest in a major agenda-setting interview on Dec. 8. Discussing the subject on NBC's *Meet The Press*, the president-elect delivered a paean to tariffs that was truly something to behold.

"I've stopped wars with tariffs," Trump declared without saying which ones. He suggested improbably that proposed tariffs against China will force changes in that country's relations with the U.S., presumably on trade and the shipment of fentanyl precursor chemicals to American drug traffickers.

As an example of the power of tariffs, he recounted how Trudeau had called him right after the president-elect aired his plan on

Nov. 25 to hammer Canada with 25-per-cent tariffs: "In fact, he flew into Mar-a-Lago within about 15 seconds after the call."

Discussing the context of those talks, Trump characterized Canada's trade surplus with the U.S. as some kind of financial aid. Why are we "subsidizing Canada to the tune of over \$100-billion a year?" he asked, as usual overstating the size of our trade surplus with the Americans, and neglecting to mention that one-third of Canada's exports to his country are much-valued energy products.

"Tariffs are going to make our country rich," he went on to tell the interviewer. He brushed aside the reality that tariffs will ignite inflation for American consumers. Also, import levies are going to "make our country safe," and pay off the U.S.'s huge government debt, Trump told NBC.

The latter comment is crucial for Canada, as it confirms Trump is serious about putting a tariffs-for-income-tax-cuts trade-off at the centre of his economic agenda. This is the key to understanding the unsettling news Trudeau was reportedly handed at Mar-a-Lago. That is, that all of his government's efforts to improve border security could amount to nothing in the short term because Ottawa has very little chance of convincing Trump to deviate from his overall tariff strategy, and give Canada some kind of exemption.

Les Whittington is a regular columnist for The Hill Times.

The Hill Times

Opinion

The River-class frigates cannot be the 'be-all, end-all' of Canada's sea domain

An overreliance will lead to logistical constraints that will significantly diminish the Navy's combat power and combat-readiness.

Andrew Erskine

Opinion



With work continuing on Canada's next generation of naval battleships—the River-class frigate—the Royal Canadian Navy is set to acquire 15 state-of-the-art ships in one of the largest



Defence Minister Bill Blair. Ottawa must find the right fleet composition and capacity so the Navy can make more tactically informed decisions about its operations, writes Andrew Erskine. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

military modernization ventures by the Canadian Armed Forces.

With impressive firepower, combat systems, and surveillance

and digital platforms that will seamlessly pair with allied forces,

the River-class frigate is Ottawa's best effort in replacing the outdated Iroquois class and Kingston class in one swing.

Procured primarily for antisubmarine and air defence warfare, the new frigates will also be a multi-rolled platform capable of conducting surface, subsurface, and information warfare simultaneously with auxiliary roles in escorting vessels, convoys, or carrier battle groups in either patrol conditions or full-scale combat operations.

Costing a total of between \$56-billion and \$84-billion, one would be hard-pressed not to see the River-class as the "be-all, end-all" asset of the CAF's sea domain. Indeed, perhaps Ottawa believes that a smaller fleet equipped with streamlined, software-defined technologies and advanced weapon systems in one platform is adequate to defend Canada,

Continued on page 19

Comment

Global health is threatened with RFK Jr. at the helm of the U.S. file

Every bit of ground gained by the anti-vaccine movement is the death knell for children here and abroad.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



KAMOURASKA, QUE.—In July of 1997, I was working as an information officer with the Children's Vaccine Initiative at the World Health Organization. The CVI, as it was known, was the 1990 creation of five United Nations organizations and the World Bank, but its driving force came from WHO and UNICEF. Eventually, infighting within the UN led to the demise of the CVI, and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) took its place, led and funded by Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates.

CVI initially faltered when it set out to develop a “magic bullet”—a vaccine incorporating the “basic six” vaccines, known as MMR and DTP (measles, mumps, rubella; and diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis) into one oral vaccine dose, which proved to be scientifically impossible.

As CVI struggled to maintain credibility, I was asked to develop its new communications and advocacy strategy. The strategy, called “Investing in the Future,” had three thrusts: one, ensure the use of the “basic six” vaccines was much higher in the developing world; two, undertake research for the new and emerging diseases AIDS, Ebola, and hepatitis C; and three, that “immunization must be defended from misinformed attacks.”

While there had been an incipient anti-vaccine movement in the United States, the first substantial attack came from an unexpected source: an article in the British medical journal *The Lancet* in February of 1998. The article was authored by British doctor Andrew Wakefield who claimed to have found a link between the MMR vaccine, colitis, and autism.

Although the article was retracted 12 years later, the damage had been done: the anti-vaccine movement became a global deadweight on immunization. Around the time of the *Lancet* piece, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. joined in. Kennedy was known as an environmentalist in the 1980s and 1990s, but drifted away when he discovered the anti-vaccine movement.

His advocacy against vaccines has been consistent and dangerous. He has

used the Kennedy name and his celebrity to encourage Americans to stop vaccinating their children, over and over again. In 2019, he travelled to Samoa and spread misinformation about the measles vaccine. Soon after, 83 people died of the disease. His anti-vaccine message became part of his failed campaign for president, and when he endorsed now president-elect Donald Trump, he was promised the office of secretary of health and human services.

The anti-vaccine movement goes back to Edward Jenner's discovery of the smallpox vaccine in 1796. It persevered in Canada, although in the post-Second World War years it was presumed children would be vaccinated. When the polio epidemic hit Canada in the 1950s, children like me received the vaccine at school.

The fight against polio has been nothing sort of miraculous. In parts of the world where it still exists, wars have stopped for immunization, and closed-off regions have opened up. In November, a temporary truce allowed half a million children in Gaza to be vaccinated against the disease. Smallpox was eradicated globally in 1977, and polio in the Americas in 1994. All thanks to vaccines.

However, attitudes began to change about vaccines as anti-vaxxers took the stage during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a survey by the Angus Reid Institute, “In the wake of that unparalleled event, the debate over childhood vaccination appears to have taken on a new intensity.” Between 2019 and today, support for childhood vaccination dropped from 70 per cent to less than half, with a third saying vaccination should be the parents' decision.

When I was working on vaccines at CVI in the 1990s, there were eight million children dying annually from vaccine-preventable diseases. Today, those numbers have been cut in half, but according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, more than 14.5 million children under the age of one in developing countries did not receive basic vaccines in 2023.

It's obvious more—not less—immunization is needed, but every bit of ground gained by the anti-vaccine movement is the death knell for children here and abroad. Just this week, Trump promised that Kennedy, as secretary of health, “will investigate supposed links between autism and childhood vaccines.” The huge cultural influence of the U.S.—driven by the vacuous and amoral scion of the Kennedys—could reduce immunization, and threaten the lives of millions of children.

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

The Hill Times

Opinion

Big Three ‘competition’ not what it seems



CRTC chairperson and CEO Vicky Eatrises. It's time for the CRTC to follow the government's lead and close the resale loophole, write Paul Andersen and Ian Stevens. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Intervention is needed when competition falters, and monopolies become entrenched.

Paul Andersen & Ian Stevens

Opinion



Last month, Canadians received a hopeful sign for the future of their internet and wireless services—and their wallets.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) is considering closing a regulatory loophole that allows the Big Three telecom providers—Telus, Bell, and Rogers—to access each other's networks as well as those of regional and local operators. Closing this loophole would prevent these large companies from entrenching their dominance—a win for consumers at a crucial moment for competition in Canada's telecommunications sector.

The fight for a more-competitive internet market has been ongoing for nearly a decade. In August, the CRTC made a landmark ruling, finally ordering Bell and Telus to provide access to their networks. However, the CRTC also allowed those large incumbents to enter the resale market.

At first glance, some may wonder: what's the harm? Isn't more competition—even among the Big Three—ultimately good for consumers?

The reality is that this competition is illusory and short-lived. The Big Three will exploit the loophole and offer bundled internet and wireless services with attractive

discounts for a time, squeezing smaller, independent providers that offer lower prices, innovative packages, and personalized service out of the market.

Once this brief flurry of “competition” passes, the Big Three will revert to form: ending discounts, raising prices, and continuing with their usual customer service practices.

If it stands, the CRTC ruling will also discourage the Big Three from making investments to expand and improve their networks, especially in underserved rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. Telus and Bell have already stated they will shift to a growth model focused on resale if the decision remains unchanged.

Why build only to help a competitor? This is bad news for Canadians no matter where you live. The Big Three offering “more competition” by using regulated access to others' networks has the unintended consequence of hurting or eliminating independent operators that are providing real alternatives across the country.

Intervention is needed when competition falters, and monopolies become entrenched. It's time for the CRTC to follow the government's lead and close this loophole.

The future of Canada's digital economy is at stake. Canadians deserve more than short-term price cuts—they deserve real competition in the telecom market with more options, better service, and fair pricing.

The Big Three may offer the illusion of choice, but don't let them fool you. Only independent networks operators can bring Canadians the real choice they deserve.

Paul Andersen is president of EGATE Networks, and chair of the Competitive Network Operators of Canada (CNOC). Ian Stevens is president of Execulink Telecom and vice-chair of CNOC.

The Hill Times

Human Rights Day can be a moment for corporate accountability

Canada should take advantage of the CORE review, and imminent talks on a global binding treaty on business and human rights.

Shane Moffatt

Opinion



Human Rights Day on Dec. 10 comes at a critical moment for corporate accountability in Canada. With the right political will, there are immediate opportunities to prevent people around the world from being harmed by companies based right here.

A federal review of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE), and imminent talks on a global binding treaty on business and human rights are key moments for the government to show its commitment to human rights, and start solving the global problem of corporate impunity.

Most people would be surprised to learn that companies bringing goods into Canada are not legally required to prevent human rights abuse or environmental destruction during their production. The same goes for Canadian companies operating overseas. Aside from ineffective voluntary guidelines, we don't have laws requiring them to respect the rights of local communities, workers, or Indigenous Peoples. These are our global neighbours, extended families, and, in many cases, literally our brothers and sisters.

As a consequence, Canadian companies operating abroad or importing products are associated with widespread and egregious human rights abuses, including forced labour, serious environmental damage, and even killings. Whether it's through the clothes on our backs, the food on our plates, or the metal in our phones, this issue touches all of us daily.

That's why the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability has been calling for CORE to have the powers it needs to investigate complaints by affected people, and compel corporations and their representatives to testify. Sometimes referred to as "Canada's corporate watchdog," the government initially promised these powers, but has since kept CORE as a toothless tiger. As a result, impacted communities risk wasting their time if they file a complaint.

Right now, Global Affairs Canada is conducting a five-year review of CORE's effectiveness. In a submission last month, we argued for these powers, and pointed out that all provincial ombudspersons are



International Trade Minister Mary Ng will be under pressure to play a constructive role in upcoming talks on a business and human rights treaty taking place in Geneva from Dec. 16-20, writes Shane Moffatt. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

able to compel witness testimony and the production of documents under oath. The previous CORE ombudsperson Sheri Meyerhoffer apparently agrees with us. Furthermore, CORE's mandate only covers a very small number of industries—garments, gas, oil, and mining—despite the government creating an expectation of a much more comprehensive scope. It shouldn't matter what sector a company is

involved in—they have no business violating people's human rights.

Trade Minister Mary Ng, who is responsible for CORE, has a long way to go to fulfil her mandate to "ensure that Canadian businesses operating abroad do not contribute to human rights abuses." Fixing CORE would be a step in the right direction.

Ng will also be under pressure to play a constructive role in upcoming talks on a

business and human rights treaty taking place in Geneva from Dec. 16-20. This year marks the 10-year anniversary of discussions towards a legally binding treaty. If enacted, such a treaty would require all state parties to prevent companies based in their jurisdictions from being involved in human rights abuse anywhere in the world.

To date, talks have proceeded slowly, and not secured adequate support from countries like Canada in the Global North. Canada has a particular responsibility to support this process given the significant number of extractive industries headquartered in this country, and extensive global supply chains connected to enormous loss of biodiversity and harm to local communities.

Our network has just written to the trade minister urging the government to ensure formal treaty negotiations finally move forward, and to commit to urgent domestic measures: fixing CORE, and passing new legislation to stop Canadian corporations from committing all forms of human rights abuse overseas in the first place. The government's failure to enact mandatory human rights and environmental due-diligence legislation remains a major source of frustration for human rights, faith, labour, and environmental groups across the country.

At the end of the day, multinational corporations are devastating people and the planet through a vast network of interconnected industrial and extractive activities worldwide. Frontline communities and workers are too often bearing the brunt. In large part, this is due to a lack of accountability for corporations based in Canada and the Global North. This is driving social inequalities, and an ecological crisis affecting us all.

Instead of being part of the problem, the government now has an opportunity to be part of the solution by supporting a global treaty, and strengthening CORE so communities can have access to justice and meaningful remedies when Canadian corporations cause them harm. It's the least they can do.

Shane Moffatt is the director of the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability, which advocates for law reform to end human rights abuses in companies' operations around the world.

The Hill Times



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Opinion

Canada must champion peace and human rights in the Philippines

Supporting peace talks is not merely a strategic choice; it is a moral imperative.

Jess Agustin & Rachel Warden

Opinion



This year marks the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Canada and the Philippines. It's an opportune moment for Canada to reaffirm its commitment to peace, human rights, and justice by supporting the resumption of peace talks between the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

Recently, Canadian organizations—including KAIROS and the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP-Canada)—urged Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to take this critical step. Their appeal underscores a pressing need for

Canada to prioritize peacebuilding over militarization—particularly as concerns grow about Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, which heavily emphasizes defence and military engagement. This strategy risks implicating Canada in systemic human rights abuses, as detailed in a recent ICHRP-Canada briefing paper.

In testimony before the House Standing Committee on National Defence on Nov. 7, ICHRP-Canada emphasized that the Indo-Pacific Strategy risks undermining the country's reputation as a global defender of human rights.

"Human rights must be a precondition for trade and security co-operation with the Philippines," we stated, warning that anything less risks damaging Canada's credibility.

The decades-long conflict between the GRP and NDFP is rooted in profound social and economic inequities. In 1992, the Hague Joint Declaration provided a foundation for peace negotiations, focusing on human rights, international humanitarian law, and systemic reforms. While the peace process made progress, talks were abruptly halted in 2017 under then-president Rodrigo Duterte. His administration abandoned prior agreements,

intensified counterinsurgency campaigns, and institutionalized "red-tagging," labelling activists, journalists, and human rights defenders as terrorists.

These repressive policies persist under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Militarized counterinsurgency has led to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and targeted attacks on civil society. Filipino human rights defenders and church leaders—partners of Canadian churches and KAIROS—are among those most at risk.

According to Karapatan, a Philippine human rights alliance, between July 2022 and June 2024, there were 105 extrajudicial killings, 145 illegal arrests, 44,065 bombings, and 755 political prisoners.

The Philippine Anti-Terrorism Act has been weaponized to stifle dissent, causing widespread violations. In her testimony to the National Defence Committee, Karapatan's secretary general Cristina Palabay warned that Canada's increasing defence collaboration with the Philippines—including Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA) negotiations—could make Canada complicit in these abuses. Palabay cautioned that Canadian

troops could become entangled in counterinsurgency operations, and linked to frequent Philippine military-related abuses.

Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy—launched in 2022—commits \$2.3-billion to enhance regional engagement, prioritizing defence partnerships, naval deployments, and security capacity-building. While these measures aim to bolster Canada's presence in the region, they mark a troubling shift away from the country's historical role as a peacekeeper and humanitarian actor. Instead, they align Canada with militarized policies that undermine its commitments to human rights and democracy.

Canada's foreign policy must align with the "Voices at Risk" guidelines, which emphasize protecting human rights defenders and advancing women's participation in peace processes. Economic and military interests cannot take precedence over human dignity and peace. Supporting the resumption of GRP-NDFP peace talks—reaffirmed by both parties in October 2023—is a crucial step.

We, along with other civil society organizations, Canadian churches, and human rights advocates call on Canada to align

its actions with its stated values, and demand that the Philippine government address ongoing human rights violations. Canada must ensure its financial, programmatic, and technical support adheres to international human rights standards. Additionally, it must suspend negotiations on the SOVFA and halt the Memorandum of Understanding on Enhanced Defence Co-operation until conditions improve.

These calls are grounded in deep ties with our partners in the Philippines. They remind us of decades of violence, displacement, and repression endured by Filipinos. Supporting peace talks is not merely a strategic choice; it is a moral imperative.

As Canada and the Philippines celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations, this milestone presents a critical choice. A foreign policy rooted in militarization risks perpetuating human rights violations and undermining Canada's credibility as a global defender of democracy and human dignity. Championing peace and justice strengthens bilateral ties and affirms Canadian values. Canada must seize this moment to prioritize human rights and peace. Anything less risks eroding decades of goodwill—a backward step in Canada's relationship with the Philippines.

Jess Agustin is the campaign committee lead of International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines Canada. Rachel Warden is the partnerships manager at KAIROS Canada.

The Hill Times

Buy Canadian, for Canadians

Reducing interprovincial trade barriers is a necessary step in guarding against threats to Canadians' economic and social prosperity.

Burgess Langshaw Power & Eric Hubberstey

Opinion



In political science, crises are often treated as turning points—what we call "critical junctures." Following November's United States presidential election, it appears as if we are sitting at one of these critical junctures. President-elect Donald Trump has announced he will pursue a blanket 25 per cent tariff on Canadian goods and services. As our largest trading partner, this would have

wide-reaching effects across Canadian industry and society. Gross domestic product contractions, job losses, and productivity decreases would follow.

Political parties—at both federal and provincial levels—have done little to reassure Canadians that they are ready to respond to current and future economic challenges. While it is tempting to "fight fire with fire" as promised by several prominent leaders, one need only look at how well that strategy has worked between the U.S. and China, which are on relatively equal economic footing. The question is: what real and meaningful action can Canada take to protect and enhance our economy that is within our power, won't risk offending our allies, or draw Canada into endless legal dispute at the World Trade Organization?

Federal and provincial governments should work together to reduce barriers to interprovincial trade. Trade between provinces in Canada is hampered by what are called "non-tariff barriers to trade" (NTBs). These can be broken down into two categories: geographic, and non-geographic barriers. While geographic

barriers are more difficult to overcome—especially in Canada—non-geographic NTBs are self-imposed. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) found that "88 per cent of small businesses in Canada believe that eliminating trade barriers should be a top priority for Canadian governments."

A 2019 International Monetary Fund (IMF) working paper found that manufactured goods, agriculture and food, retail goods, and business services were the most affected by interprovincial NTBs. These costs range from seven per cent in petroleum and chemicals to more than 90 per cent in utilities. While Canada has been making progress since the late 1990s in certain sectors, trade barriers increased by about three per cent from 1997 to 2015; from 55 per cent to now close to 60 per cent when combining both geographic and non-geographic trade barriers. We know that interprovincial trade barriers inhibit GDP growth, and make products more expensive, but will overcoming these barriers lead to cheaper goods for Canadians? The research suggests the answer is a resounding "yes."

According to the same 2019 IMF study, a hypothetical elimination of all non-geographic NTBs within Canada would lead to around four per cent GDP growth across the country, with the largest gains being in less-wealthy provinces. For example, Prince Edward Island could experience a 16 per cent growth in real GDP per-capita because of liberalized internal trade. Not only does this benefit working Canadians, but it would also decrease inequality in Canada. A 2021 report by Deloitte found that the average Canadian would see wage growth of around five per cent, equating to an additional \$2,100 in real spending power by removing interprovincial NTBs. Further, the report suggests government revenues would rise by as much as six per cent for the federal government—an additional \$2-billion per year. A 2016 Senate report argued that interprovincial trade costs the Canadian economy up to \$130-billion per year. The fact that interprovincial trade barriers continue to exist and exacerbate the flow of trade between provinces is a relic of the past, and does little but drive-up prices for Canadians and hamper Canadian businesses.

Canada sits at a critical juncture: global conflict is increasing, and changes to the underlying nature of the international order are further increasing Canada's economic precarity. The issue of reducing interprovincial trade barriers is not just about increasing economic and social prosperity for Canadians, but is also a necessary step in guarding against threats to it. Creating a stronger internal economy will guard against some international shocks, as well as making us more resilient against geopolitical events. The CFIB suggests that reducing barriers to interprovincial trade could add \$200-billion in GDP per year, or \$5,100 per person. These measures don't require international negotiation, but only willingness to act by Canadian provincial and federal leaders, and so could be quickly and effectively enacted, which is important in an era of geopolitical turmoil and economic uncertainty.

Burgess Langshaw Power is a PhD candidate in global governance at the Balsillie School of International Affairs at the University of Waterloo. Eric Hubberstey is a PhD Candidate in global governance at the Balsillie School of International Affairs studying the European Union, and multilevel regional governance.

The Hill Times

Opposition MPs kept in dark as Canada concludes trade pact with Indonesia

The Bloc Québécois says it won't support any ISDS provisions that may be in the Canada-Indonesia pact, but won't make a decision on the deal until the text is released.

BY NEIL MOSS

As Canada concludes a trade pact with Indonesia, opposition MPs are raising concerns over a lack of transparency since the agreement is yet to be made public, while Canada's meat industry is celebrating market gains.

International Trade Minister Mary Ng (Markham-Thornhill, Ont.) announced that Canada and Indonesia had completed negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) during a trade mission to Indonesia earlier this month. That followed an announcement on the margins of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit last month by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto that negotiations were substantively concluded.

The text of the Canada-Indonesia CEPA has yet to be released. Typically, after a trade agreement is finalized, it goes through a legal scrub as government lawyers pore over the agreed-upon text.

Conservative MP Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, Ont.), his party's international trade critic, said he hasn't received any formal or informal briefings regarding the details of what has been agreed to.

"The situation around the Canada-Indonesia CEPA is murky at best, with very little transparency regarding the specific terms of the agreement," he said in an email. "This lack of clarity is concerning, particularly given the potential implications for Canadian industries and our trade relationships."

Bloc Québécois international trade critic Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot, Que.) echoed Williams in saying that no formal or informal briefings were given.

"Once again, we don't know anything, as we've known so little



International Trade Minister Mary Ng announced the conclusion of negotiations with Indonesia during her trade mission to the southeast Asian nation earlier this month. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

during the negotiations," he told *The Hill Times*.

Global Affairs Canada (GAC) offered few details as negotiations progressed, forcing many trade watchers to rely on information being released from the Indonesian side.

In early November, an Indonesian trade official was quoted in that country's press saying that the two sides had completed the texts on all negotiating issues, and that the deal would be announced as being substantively concluded at APEC, and would be signed during Canada's trade mission to Indonesia in December.

Asked about the report at the time, GAC would neither confirm nor refute it, remarking that negotiations were "progressing."

Following the announcement by the two leaders that the pact was substantively concluded, GAC released a brief description of "negotiated outcomes," with scant details provided.

Will Parliament implement the next pact?

Ng's office said the next steps for the agreement will be legislative implementation.

As the negotiation of trade deals is under the remit of the executive, MPs can only vote on an implementation bill to make any necessary changes to domestic laws to comply with the agreed-upon pact. Voting not to fully pass an implementation bill has the effect of voting against the entire deal.

The government must table a trade deal 21 sitting days before it can introduce an implementation bill for its ratification. It must also

table an economic impact assessment for the new deal.

The previous Liberal-Conservative free trade consensus was shattered during the legislative process for the implementation of the Modernized Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement, as the Conservatives voted against the pact due to the inclusion of language regarding promoting carbon pricing.

The brief information released in the "negotiated outcomes" for the Indonesia CEPA does not explicitly state language on carbon pricing will be included, but notes that the deal's "comprehensive environment provisions aim to level the playing field by ensuring Parties do not lower their levels of environmental protection to attract trade or investment."

The "negotiated outcomes" do note that an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) system will be included, which has traditionally been opposed by the Bloc and the NDP. The controversial system allows for companies to sue countries through arbitration—and not domestic courts—if changes in domestic law affect their investments.

"We are strongly against it," Savard-Tremblay said of ISDS provisions, remarking that little has been revealed of what will be included within the environmental chapter.

"We won't judge until we see the whole agreement," he said, noting that there is little opportunity for MPs to amend the deal as they vote only on the bill that puts it into place, and not the deal itself.

Savard-Tremblay said he expects that the legislative changes required to incorporate a Cana-

da-Indonesia ISDS system would be included in the implementation bill.

"I'm surely going to vote against the investor-state dispute settlement itself in the bill," he said. "But we don't know what we are going to do about the whole bill."

He said he would like to have Ng to appear in front of the House Trade Committee to explain what was agreed to.

Savard-Tremblay said the committee cannot repeat past mistakes from its study of the Canada-United Kingdom transitional trade deal, which was done without being given a copy of the agreed-upon text.

"We cannot pronounce something on something that we don't have," he said. "We know that we can't take the government's promises as they are."

Meat exporters celebrate gains

Canadian Cattle Association (CCA) president Nathan Phinney said he is confident that the forthcoming implementation legislation will pass.

"Regardless if there's an election down the road between now and then, we'll be fully supporting the Conservatives, the Liberals, or the NDP, or whichever party may get into [power to] ensure legislation gets passed on this," he said.

He said his association is "very pleased" with how the negotiators approached the deal, including addressing concerns regarding pacts that don't adhere to science and rules-based trade.

While the CCA has yet to see the text of the agreement, Phin-

ney cited the memorandum of understanding (MOU) to establish a bilateral dialogue on sanitary and phytosanitary issues as a positive. The MOU was announced on Dec. 4, and signed during Ng's recent visit.

Phinney said he would like to see legislation passed "very quickly," but noted that the MOU is a "very important piece" for continuing work.

"It allows the relationship in the background to start being made and make the contacts and try to line logistics up knowing full well that it's going to come in place," he said.

Beef exporters have raised concerns in the past over Canada signing trade deals with countries that enact non-tariff barriers that don't recognize Canada's food safety regime, including how exporters process carcasses and use hormones in beef.

"The thing that really got us excited is an open and fair trade deal with a population of 280 million people," said Phinney, who was in Indonesia earlier this month during Canada's trade mission to the country.

Trade analyst Stuart Trew, a senior researcher at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, said legislative implementation of the deal is not an open-and-shut case.

"I think it's still very unclear if this deal can pass," he said, highlighting the timing of the next federal election, and whether the Conservatives find provisions that they would oppose as potential factors.

"They're looking for a reason to bring the government down. I think carbon is an important consideration with any mention of carbon trading," he said. "Maybe they'd up the ante if there's any mention of some kind of environmental clause in there that would have any effect on Canada's potential investments."

Trew said the incoming administration of U.S. president-elect Donald Trump could also be a factor, including how the pact will manage rules of origin, and if it will allow Chinese parts and products to enter Canada duty free through Indonesia.

"Canada has shown it wants to be in step with Trump on all these issues," he said. "Does Trump end up getting in the way?"

Trew said he is "extremely disappointed" that an ISDS provision was included in the deal, adding that there are also questions on a labour chapter and what has been achieved.

He said the typical labour chapter that Canada includes in its trade deals wouldn't be "up to snuff" given Indonesia's history of labour right violations, unless the Canadian government was committed to holding the Indonesian government to account.

"We suspect the worst. We suspect that Canada has taken a step back on labour rights in order to get a deal. We suspect they've done the same on the environment in order to get a deal," Trew said.

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News

Brown's testimony on Tory race suggests need for fresh inquiry into alleged Indian government meddling: Sikh Coalition rep

The Brampton mayor's remarks demonstrate the need to 'get to the bottom of what's going on,' says Liberal MP Pam Damoff.

Continued from page 1

Following reporting by Radio-Canada alleging agents of the Indian government interfered in Brampton, Ont., Mayor Brown's campaign during the leadership race, the House Public Safety and National Security committee voted to summon him to testify.

Despite turning down previous invitations to do so, and a belief that the public inquiry would be a more "appropriate venue for a detailed and impartial examination of these concerns," Brown acquiesced to the latest summons while maintaining his objections and the view that he had "no new evidence to contribute."

During his opening statement and proceeding testimony on Dec. 5, Brown repeatedly stated his belief that "foreign intervention" had not altered the outcome of the leadership race, and specifically pushed back on the suggestion by Liberal committee members that he was made to sign a non-disclosure agreement after his removal from the campaign.

"If you look back at past leadership races and the number of memberships sold to be successful, with this leadership race, there was a level ... that was incomprehensible compared to any other time in modern history," Brown told the committee. "I think that's what dictated the results, not foreign intervention."

According to internal party data released near the deadline for membership sales, Brown's campaign sold 62,000 memberships compared to the 312,000 sold by ultimate winner Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.).

Brown was ultimately expelled from the leadership race in July 2022 following allegations that he broke electoral financing laws in selling party memberships, and using a third-party company to pay campaign staff salaries.

After reviewing those allegations, the Commissioner of Canada Elections concluded that while potential "minor" breaches of the Elections Act existed, it was not



Liberal MP Jennifer O'Connell says all Canadians should be 'outraged' by Patrick Brown's testimony of meddling by a foreign government, 'regardless of the outcome.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

in the public interest to pursue the issue further.

However, Brown conceded that "there's always going to be a level of foreign intervention in every political party," and that it was "fair to say that the Government of India states their opinion."

Brown explained that he had taken several positions that India's government "wasn't a fan of," including his support of that country's farmers' protest and his attendance at a vigil for Deep Sidhu, a Sikh activist who participated in those protests. But he said he doesn't believe "any commentary offered by the Indian government affected the result" of the leadership race.

Brown, who previously served as the leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives, also said that it was "not new" for the Indian government to express its positions with him, noting that following the Ontario legislature's recognition of the 1984 Sikh genocide in 2020, he heard directly from the consul general and the Canada India Foundation to express their displeasure.

However, while Brown said he was not contacted directly, nor does he believe his campaign staffers were contacted by "agents of the Indian government" during the leadership race, his then-campaign co-chair, Conservative MP Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, Alta.) did receive a phone call from the consul general demanding that Brown stop using the term "Sikh nation."

Brown raised that instance as he attempted to push back on Radio-Canada's reporting, which alleged representatives of the Indian consulate pressured Rempel

Garner to withdraw her support for Brown during the race.

In a written statement provided to Radio-Canada, Rempel Garner has denied those allegations, writing that she left the campaign "of her own volition."

"In no instance was I coerced in any manner, by anyone, at any time," Rempel Garner wrote. "I am an experienced parliamentarian, seasoned communicator, and former cabinet minister who has proven more than capable of developing senior grade positions entirely based on my own read of a situation ... to suggest that I'm not is ridiculous."

Brown said he believes the conference call referenced in the Radio-Canada story is where Rempel Garner raised the consul general's concerns about his language. He said this call took place well before her ultimate decision to leave his campaign.

Brown said that when he spoke with Rempel Garner when she did decide to leave, "she was very clear" that the reason behind her departure was to explore her own run for the leadership of Alberta's United Conservative Party, which she ultimately decided against.

"At no time when we talked about her departing the campaign did she ever say it was because of pressure from the consul general," Brown told the committee.

Sean Schnell, Rempel Garner's chief of staff, did not respond directly to questions from *The Hill Times* regarding why she forwarded the message from the Indian consul general, or if she had received or shared any other similar messages from a diplomatic official.

"MP Garner has been very clear she was not, and never has

been, coerced by any official of any foreign government in any matter," Schnell wrote. "Any claims suggesting that any of her actions during her time with Mr. Brown's campaign are attributable in any way to coercion from foreign agents are false and defamatory."

Under questioning from Conservative MPs, Brown reiterated his belief that he did not have "any personal evidence to add, nothing new that's [not] already public domain."

However, the Liberal committee members disagreed, pouncing on the newly revealed details of Rempel Garner's communications between the Indian consul general and the campaign.

When asked by Liberal MP Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering-Uxbridge, Ont.) whether those communications with his campaign co-chair were an "appropriate action for a foreign government," Brown conceded that Indian consuls general "have been more robust in their opinions than some of us would be comfortable with."

Speaking with *The Hill Times* during a break in the Dec. 5 meeting, O'Connell called Brown's testimony "shocking," and said that it deserved more seriousness than Conservative committee members gave it.

While much of the Conservatives' questioning of Brown focused on the criminal and public safety aspect of Indian foreign interference, they also repeatedly asked Brown to confirm his belief that the outcome of the leadership race was unaffected and that the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference would be a more appropriate venue to investigate the allegations.

Despite those confirmations, Brown also confirmed that the inquiry had not contacted him for his testimony.

O'Connell said that based on Brown's testimony—which touched on the messages to Rempel Garner and texts to voters from Indian agents, the withdrawal of invitations to community events at the consul general's request, and the seeming regularity of similar instances in the past—gave a "strong impression" that the Indian government was targeting the Conservative leadership race.

"At a certain point, do we just accept that foreign governments are trying to impact Canadian elections, or should we be outraged by that regardless of the outcome?" O'Connell asked.

Speaking with reporters following Brown's testimony, Liberal MP Pam Damoff (Oakville North-Burlington, Ont.), the parliamentary secretary of consular affairs to the foreign minister, said she is concerned by how unremarkable Brown seemed to view the interactions with the Indian government.

One example the committee heard was that the Indian consul general would send text messages to Brown's supporters and campaign surrogates asking, "did you see what your friend did," and for an explanation, including in the wake of the Sidhu vigil.

"I think what we heard today was enough to be concerning, and we need more information," Damoff said, adding that the testimony wasn't enough to form a conclusion, but demonstrated the need to "get to the bottom of what's going on."

"I think Canadians want to know that our democratic system ... whether it's a leadership race or ... the election itself is free from foreign interference," Damoff said. "People should not feel pressured to make decisions or intimidated by any foreign government."

In an interview with *The Hill Times* on Dec. 6, Prabjot Singh, who served as counsel for the Sikh Coalition at the public inquiry, said Brown's testimony at the committee and his lack of summons to the inquiry demonstrate the latter's restrictively narrow examination of foreign interference by the Indian government.

Singh said the coalition had called for and would have supported Brown's participation in the inquiry. However, due to its terms of reference specifically focusing on the 2019 and 2021 federal elections, much of his potential testimony and evidence fell outside that scope.

"In terms of the fact-finding part of the commission, the 2022 Conservative leadership race and all of India's violence, the targeting of political activists and the community in general, all of that falls out of the scope of the commission," Singh explained.

Singh said the coalition believes a separate inquiry is needed to fully understand the "depth and breadth" of India's foreign interference activity in Canada.

"From our perspective, to have an effective non-partisan mechanism to get to the bottom of this, and understand what India has been up to, a separate inquiry is required to combat this threat," Singh said.

Singh added that Brown's testimony not only offered a glimpse at how "pervasive and elusive" the Indian government's interference has become, but it also demonstrated how "commonplace and casual" it is for those who experience it.

"You see this pressure being applied to politicians at all levels and members of the community—whether it's directly through the consulate or proxy groups—to push back and marginalize Sikhs from political life," Singh continued. "I think that should be incredibly alarming to everybody."

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News

Fresh tech incoming for MP riding offices

Members of Parliament from across the country will be getting new phones, printers, computers, and network connection devices for their riding offices post-election.

Continued from page 1

and operational disruptions,” said chief information officer Benoit Dicaire, noting that the disposal of these “legacy devices” will be done in a way that “mitigates cybersecurity risks and complies with environmental standards.”

Network connectivity—also known as the Constituency Connectivity Service (CCS)—provides MPs with “secure, encrypted internet communication channels to the Parliamentary Precinct network, intranet, and internet using business-grade internet services,” explained the House administration by email in response to follow-up questions from *The Hill Times*.

Current CCS equipment dates back to 2016-17, and “faces a vendor-imposed end-of-life date, necessitating an equipment refresh for all constituency offices,” reads a slide from the presentation to the board.

MPs get up to five House-managed desktop or laptop computers for their constituency offices. The existing “fleet” dates to 2019 and



The BOIE has extended a pilot project testing new phone service management approaches, but has signalled the House-managed option being tested will become the default post-election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

is incompatible with Windows 11, which will be the Microsoft-required operating system as of Oct. 14, 2025, according to the House. “The refresh will also support growing demand for mobile solutions like laptops,” noted the presentation.

Existing Centrex phones will be replaced by voice over internet protocol—or VoIP—phones, which were already transitioned in for MP offices on the Hill between 2016 and 2019.

The rollout of these new phones will coincide with a post-election transition for MP telephony services.

Last spring, the House launched a pilot project to test two different approaches to managing VoIP phone services—one managed by the House, and the

other managed by MPs individually—in which 32 MPs are currently taking part.

On Dec. 5, the BOIE agreed to extend that pilot until the start of the next federal election campaign to get a fuller picture, with officials noting particularly positive feedback received to date from the 18 MPs who chose to test the House-managed solution.

But post-election, the House-managed option will become the “default” system offered to MPs, who can opt to go the self-managed route if they so wish, putting them in charge of arranging services with telecommunications providers in their region.

Dicaire noted some testing the MP-managed option have “encountered challenges in reaching their service provider,” and that offices have indicated that shifting services has been a “very involved process on their part.”

“Members consulted indicated a strong desire to have the House-managed telecommunications service, and benefit from the functional and user experience improvements,” said Dicaire.

Along with VoIP offering new options for MPs—including enabling voicemail messages to be converted into email, and allowing calls to main office lines to be forwarded to cellphones—House officials noted Centrex “will be unavailable for installation at new constituency offices,” and that there’s “insufficient desk phone hardware to sustain the legacy service.”

Dicaire said there’s been positive feedback from MPs taking part in the pilot regarding the portability of the new phone sys-

tem, and that the new option for “voicemail-to-email management is reported as a significant benefit for inbound constituency case management.”

In July, the House entered into a new contract with Ricoh Canada to replace the printing devices “deployed” in MP offices in 2019. The new “multifunction devices” will offer the option to e-fax documents, in addition to printing, scanning, copying, and traditional faxing. The contract—which came into effect on July 1—runs until June 30, 2029, at a total cost of roughly \$12.5-million.

It’s expected to take up to 24 months to ship out and hook up these new devices following the next election, and the transition will be done in phases, with a central administration team to be

set up to supervise and serve as pointpeople for MPs through the process, noted House chief financial officer Paul St George.

Phase 1 will focus on computers and phone services for newly elected MPs who choose to occupy existing constituency offices, followed by printers and CCS equipment “as scheduling permits.” The second phase will focus on newly elected MPs who set up new constituency offices, and returning MPs required to move offices as a result of boundary changes.

“All remaining technology replacement would be targeted in Phase 3,” said St George. “The deployment strategy will remain flexible to address unique scenarios, and address Members’ concerns should we need to accelerate or slow down the deployment to a particular constituency office.”

The House anticipates costs tied to this tech refresh will either be absorbed by existing budgets or offset, but committed to return to the BOIE for approval if it becomes “necessary to request funding for the one-time costs” through future supplementary estimates.

Temporary funding to cover implementation costs—tied to “temporary salaries and support, maintenance and repair, and equipment”—will total \$4.97-million in 2024-25, and be charged to and absorbed by the existing central House budget. Further “one-time costs” will total almost \$8.7-million in 2025-26—of which \$1.6-million will be absorbed by the administration’s budget and the rest by the central budget—and \$3.2-million in 2026-27, again split between the administration and central budgets.

A further \$898,625 will be required in 2027-28 and subsequent years to cover “licensing, maintenance, and repair” costs related to the phone service transition, but the House expects those permanent costs will be offset by savings resulting from phasing out “telephony legacy services.”

“Cost distribution per fiscal year could change based on the availability of Members for deployment activities and the actual date of the election,” noted the House in an email.

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Chief information officer Benoit Dicaire appeared before the Board of Internal Economy on Nov. 28 and Dec. 5 to discuss technology and phone services changes. *Screenshot courtesy of ParIVu*



Conservative MP Ryan Williams leaves a caucus meeting in Oct. 5, 2021. MPs testing new VoIP phone service options have flagged the ability to direct office calls to cellphones as a positive benefit. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

‘He’s let it go too long’: wait builds for a Poilievre visit south of the border

Whether as prime minister or as opposition leader, it’s important for Pierre Poilievre to be familiar with the incoming Trump administration, says former diplomat Deanna Horton.

Continued from page 1

make the first connection, the better,” he said.

In the lead up to the 2015 election, both now-Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and then-NDP leader Thomas Mulcair paid a visit to the American capital in 2013. Amid the NAFTA renegotiations, then-Conservative leader Andrew Scheer (Regina-Qu’Appelle, Sask.) took a trip to Washington in 2018, a year ahead of the 2019 election.

As an opposition leader, Brian Mulroney—who went on to develop the closest relationship a Canadian prime minister has had with an American president to date—made a similar trip when he met with then-U.S. secretary of state George Shultz. While Mulroney was in Washington, then-Canadian ambassador Allan Gottlieb hosted a dinner in his honour that was attended by three cabinet secretaries, White House officials, and members of Congress, which included future U.S. vice-president Dick Cheney.

Sands said those in Washington aren’t looking for Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) to bring a complicated message, but to come to deliver a speech pledging to have good relations as a future prime minister.

As Trudeau has called for a greater buy-in from opposition leaders for a “Team Canada” effort, Poilievre has appeared unwilling to jump on board.

“One of the things we have seen throughout our history is that, when Canada is threatened, when it is challenged with a crisis, and when people want ill of Canadians, Canadians pull together across partisan stripes, across backgrounds, and across the country to stand up for our neighbours and to stand up for Canadians,” Trudeau told the House Chamber on Dec. 4. “This basic Canadian attribute seems



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, and U.S. president-elect Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago. Photograph courtesy of X/@JustinTrudeau

unavailable to the leader of the opposition who cannot help playing politics with Canadians’ well-being.”

After Trudeau’s Nov. 29 visit to Mar-a-Lago in Florida to meet with U.S. president-elect Donald Trump following Trump’s threats to place 25 per cent tariffs on all imports from Canada if Ottawa doesn’t confront crossings of undocumented immigrants and illegal drugs at the Canada-U.S. border, Poilievre said nothing was accomplished.

“Normally, when a prime minister goes to the United States to meet a president, they are looking to make gains. What gains did we hear from Mr. Trudeau? None, he’s just trying to limit losses,” Poilievre told reporters on Dec. 1.

Poilievre’s office did not respond to *The Hill Times’* questions about any potential plans for the Tory leader to travel to Washington.

A question of who can better handle Trump

Sands said the Mar-a-Lago trip was a strength for Trudeau, and showed that he can manage the relationship, which Sands remarked is still a question mark for Poilievre until he travels south of the border.

“The Trudeau government—and particularly his inner circle—has worked overtime trying to find ways to show that they can still make this work. The more that happens, the more he makes the case that actually he can handle Trump,” he said. Then, “the focus will go on to Poilievre.”

Trudeau’s visit has forced Poilievre to show Canadians that he can establish a good relationship with the U.S., argued Sands.

A recent Nanos poll suggests that Trudeau is gaining ground on Poilievre on the question of who Canadians think can best handle Trump. In January, 39 per cent of those surveyed said Poilievre could best handle Trump, compared to 28 per cent for Trudeau. A poll published earlier this month, which was in the field following the Mar-a-Lago meeting, suggests that among those polled, 36 per cent think Poilievre can best handle the incoming president, compared to 34 per cent who said Trudeau could handle him better.

Sands said Poilievre has two fitting times in which he can go down to Washington early in the new year: either to meet with the new Congress when it takes

session on Jan. 3, or to attend Trump’s inauguration on Jan. 20.

He said in reaching out to Trump to suggest a meeting, Trudeau demonstrated that Canadian leaders should be taking the initiative.

“If you want to come, just take the initiative, reach out, and you’ll be well received,” said Sands.

Sands said now is the time that ties should be established, as in the weeks to come, a meeting with members of the new Trump administration will be increasingly difficult to reserve.

“It’ll get harder and harder to get his time when he’s got the day job,” said Sands. “Right now, he’s waiting for his time, so he’s much more reachable, I think, which is the primary reason now is a good time to make those connections.”

In the absence of a visit by Poilievre to Washington, the Conservative leader is close to others

who have developed links inside the Beltway.

Sands cited Conservative MP Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, Sask.), who serves as adviser to Poilievre on Canada-U.S. relations and has deep connections on Capitol Hill, as well as former Conservative foreign affairs minister John Baird, who served as co-chair during Poilievre’s leadership race.

Conservative MP Jamil Jivani (Durham, Ont.) has a strong relationship with U.S. vice-president-elect J.D. Vance—the pair were close friends while at Yale Law School. Jivani recently had dinner with Vance, as well as United Kingdom Conservative Leader Kemi Badenoch, in Arlington, Va.

“There’s a lot of people [Poilievre] can work with to get briefings, but it’s about seeing and being seen coming, and giving a few general remarks, and establishing that you’re going to have a good relationship,” Sands said.

Could a Poilievre visit be a political liability?

Former Canadian diplomat Deanna Horton, who had multiple postings in the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., said she hopes that Poilievre and his staff are already making connections south of the border.

“Whether it’s public or he actually goes there, it’s a different story,” she said. “No matter what happens with the election, Canada will still be dealing with the Trump administration for the next four years.”

Whether as prime minister or as opposition leader, it is important for Poilievre to be familiar with the incoming Trump administration, said Horton.

She said it makes sense for any opposition leader to be familiar with the president-elect and his team.

Carleton University international affairs professor Fen Hampson, who authored *Master of Persuasion* on Mulroney’s foreign policy legacy, said visiting Washington has an added complication for Poilievre given Trump’s unpopularity in Canada.

“Reagan wasn’t loved in Canada, but he also wasn’t despised. The negativity towards Trump is a lot greater,” he said. “I don’t think Poilievre is going to do anything that is going to be viewed negatively by Canadians.”

Hampson said Mulroney took a lot of heat domestically for building a close relationship with then-U.S. presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

“Canadians weren’t necessarily jumping up and down cheering because there was a strong anti-Americanism at the time,” he said. “I think we’ve gone from anti-Americanism to anti-Trump.”

He said that means a visit to Washington won’t help Poilievre domestically.

“It will be a liability,” he said. “When you are running for election, you [don’t] want to be seen as too chummy with the guy who is making some very serious threats.”

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Conservative MP Randy Hoback, who serves as Poilievre’s Canada-U.S. relations adviser, has deep links on Capitol Hill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

News

Rise of Bluesky may create progressive 'echo chamber,' say observers as more MPs join

'If you don't allow yourself to be exposed to opposing viewpoints, that can actually increase polarization,' says former Conservative staffer Jennifer Laewetz.

BY IAN CAMPBELL

A growing number of Liberal and NDP MPs are setting up accounts on the social media platform Bluesky, but some observers warn that progressives risk placing themselves in an echo chamber—or ceding a much larger user base to their opponents—if they abandon the rival posting site, X.

A *Hill Times* survey found that of the 336 sitting MPs, at least 78 appear to have set up accounts to date on the upstart Bluesky, which has a similar interface to X (formerly Twitter). This includes 38 Liberals, 21 New Democrats, 10 Bloc Québécois members, six Conservatives, one Green, and two Independents. While the Liberals have the largest total number of MPs on the platform, the 21 New Democrats out of the party's 25 MPs represent the largest share of any caucus on Bluesky.

The move comes amid a larger shift of primarily progressive-leaning organizations and public figures joining Bluesky—and in some cases also leaving X—in the wake of the United States presidential election on Nov. 5. That's included some prominent media organizations like *The Guardian*, which announced its departure on Nov. 13, saying the decision was taken on the grounds that "X is a toxic media platform and that its owner, Elon Musk, has been able to use its influence to shape political discourse."

Bluesky is now estimated to have nearly 24 million users—up from an estimated 15 million users in early November—still far short of the roughly 611 million users X was estimated to have as of April 2024, though some of those accounts have closed as part of the recent shift.

NDP MP Taylor Bachrach (Skeena-Bulkley Valley, B.C.) said he was motivated to form an account after the Nov. 5 election—making his first Bluesky post on Nov. 10—because of reports that Musk had "manipulated the algorithm for partisan political ends."

"I don't want to be any part of a communications platform that is profoundly anti-democratic," said Bachrach.



Clockwise from top left: Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, Green Leader Elizabeth May, NDP MP Taylor Bachrach, Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly, and Conservative MP Pierre Paul-Hus are among the at least 78 MPs who have joined the upstart social media platform Bluesky. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

Musk has become an increasingly controversial figure since his July 13 endorsement of now-president-elect Donald Trump. An Australian study said its analysis suggests there was "algorithmic bias" on X indicated by "a structural engagement shift" around the time of Musk's endorsement, "suggesting platform-level changes" to X's algorithms.

However, there have been questions about the study's reliability.

Aengus Bridgman, director of McGill University's Media Ecosystem Observatory, said the study uses "a very small sample size of a narrow set of Republican and Democrat accounts" to make "a fairly large claim."

He said a "much more likely" explanation is that once Musk endorsed Trump, Musk's posts had "an enormous distorting influence on the algorithmic presentation of content on that platform."

"His change in behaviour—and the signal that sends Trump supporters to come to the platform—is a far more likely explanation, in my view, than an explicit algorithmic tweak based on ideology," said Bridgman. "So not some explicit thumb-on-the-scale thing."

Bridgman said this means the matter falls into a larger conversation about the issue of social media algorithms amplifying extreme views to foster more engagement, a concern researchers have been raising for years.

'A much different tone': Bachrach

Bachrach said he has been pleased with the different tone on Bluesky.

"People are incredibly civil," said Bachrach. "I do think there's

a happy medium where you have engaged and enthusiastic conversation without the toxicity and hate that we've seen on X."

Bachrach has continued to make a few posts on X since joining Bluesky, but said he plans to eventually exit the platform.

"Obviously it's proving a bit more of a process than quitting cold turkey," said Bachrach, but "my intention is to leave it altogether over the next bit."

However, with the trend driven largely by progressive voices, some have raised concerns about a lack of contrasting opinions on Bluesky.

Jennifer Laewetz, a former Conservative staffer who is now the CEO of Paskwâw Harbour Strategies, is among those on Canada's right who have tried out the new platform.

When she saw many progressive-leaning users who she follows "basically saying farewell on X," she decided to check it out.

"As somebody that likes to converse with multiple different perspectives ... I was like, well, I'll hop over to this other app and see," said Laewetz. "I think it's really important to not get stuck in silos or echo chambers."

But once there, Laewetz found herself tagged in a list created by a user collecting conservative accounts to block.

"They tagged me in this thread saying, 'This is another person you should block because she worked for a Conservative MP,'" explained Laewetz, adding that it was a user who at that time still followed her on X. "And I'm like, 'seriously? That's enough for you to be like, I'm not conversing with this person because they worked for an MP from a different side of the aisle?'"

The block list also suggested figures such as conservative-leaning

columnist Matt Gurney, and former Conservative staffer Jamie Ellerton.

Laewetz said she understands some left X because of the negative behaviour they encountered on the platform, but turning to another platform to "shield yourself from opinions that are different than yours—I think that's just as problematic."

"If you don't allow yourself to be exposed to opposing viewpoints, that can actually increase polarization," said Laewetz.

She said people from across the spectrum "all contribute very heavily to the division we see in this country."

Laewetz added that conservatives, too, should be wary of falling into echo chambers, especially if a large-scale departure of progressive voices from X leads to those perspectives being less represented on that platform.

It's risky to 'politically cede' X: Bridgman

Bridgman said there is also a strategic consideration for progressive politicians who may be tempted to leave X.

"To politically cede that territory completely is problematic," said Bridgman. "It is not likely that Bluesky will be able to—by the next Canadian election, or even in the next few years—have the same volume and mix of political and entertainment content that drives engagement and attention on X. You're trying to rebuild something that has taken years to develop and mature."

Andrew Perez, a Liberal political commentator and founder of Perez Strategies, said Bluesky has "potential," but it's "premature to really know where this is going to go."

It means that—at least for now—it's not wise to abandon X, said Perez.

"I may migrate to Bluesky, but I certainly won't close my X account unless X over the coming months or years completely goes down a rabbit hole and ceases to exist," he said.

He said if Bluesky does gain enough followers to be influential, it will be part of the overall trend of greater media fragmentation, which will be a factor in the next election.

"Parties that are drowning in fundraising money—like the Conservatives—are going to have an advantage," said Perez.

He said those resources will allow the party to carry out ad buys across a wide range of platforms, and hire the staff and expertise to tailor content for those campaigns.

Fragmentation can 'distort' policy outcomes

While Bluesky has a much smaller number of users than X, both pale in comparison to the number of users on many other social media apps, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok—with older users preferring Facebook, and younger users preferring Instagram and TikTok.

Despite that, Twitter/X has long been seen as punching above its weight in terms of influence. That's because it has tended to draw a disproportionate number of users from fields like politics, media, and academia who hold greater influence over public policy.

It's a group that Oksana Kishchuk, director of strategy and insights at Abacus Data, said was already to some degree a silo in its own right even before it began fragmenting across X and Bluesky.

Kishchuk said it's important for all Canadians to expose themselves to diverse perspectives, but "the consequences can be bigger if this is a group that's making policy decisions."

It could also lead them to "being a little bit more partisan or narrow in terms of their public-facing content," said Kishchuk, which could leave the general public with the perception that "maybe these two sides are more divided than they actually are."

She said that may not resonate with voters because Abacus' polling continues to find that a majority of Canadians see themselves as being in the centre of the political spectrum.

Bridgman said an increasingly fragmented media ecosystem could mean "the desires and needs of the Canadian people are less well represented in public policy."

"The entire basis of democracy is this idea that it provides the most responsive public policy apparatus to the needs of the people, and sort of the basis of democratic legitimacy is—among other things—that responsiveness," he said.

"One of the things that echo chambers, disinformation, a high degree of online polarization do is they distort that channeling of public attitudes and opinions, which then makes democracies produce very poor outcomes for their citizens," he said.

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Canadians deserve long-term energy solutions, not short-term fixes

This winter, the government needs to remove taxes on lower-emission home energy sources like propane.

Shannon Watt

Opinion



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau holds a press conference with the Liberal Atlantic caucus to make an announcement about removing the carbon price on home heating oil on Oct. 26, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

A two-month tax holiday on non-essentials like game consoles and snack foods is a short-sighted attempt to solve Canada's affordability crisis. What Canadians need is a long-term, practical approach to reducing basic living costs. This winter, the government needs to remove taxes on lower-emission home energy sources like propane. Canadians shouldn't have to choose between buying groceries, fuelling their vehicles, or heating their homes, especially when the government can provide a meaningful solution.

A new national poll commissioned by the Canadian Propane Association (CPA) on behalf of its 400 members reveals most Canadians want the federal government to support reliable, affordable, and lower-emission alternative energy choices like propane. Conducted in August

2024, the survey underscores rising concerns over energy affordability, and a growing demand for practical alternatives. This is especially true for more rural and remote communities where access to the natural gas pipeline and electricity grid is limited or nonexistent.

This isn't a new issue. Energy poverty—where households can't afford basic energy needs—affects nearly one in five Canadians, according to McGill University. For rural, Indigenous, and remote communities—where access to the natural gas grid or reliable electricity is often out of reach—the stakes are even higher.

The federal government's own data shows the challenges of energy poverty. A report by Statistics Canada found that affordable energy choices are not avail-

able equally to all Canadians. Areas of Canada that are off the natural gas grid suffer more from energy poverty. The 2021 Census showed that "822,000 households in Canada (5.6%) were energy poor, and this was more prevalent in the Atlantic provinces (ranging from 10.7% to 13.7%)." It is reasonable to assume that all areas of the country that are beyond the natural gas grid—like Atlantic Canada—suffer from energy poverty.

We need a government that recognizes the unique resources and needs of all Canadians, regardless of where they live. Balancing reliability, affordability, and lower-emission goals equitably is key to ensuring a successful energy strategy for our country.

The federal government's ambitious plan to electrify home heating by 2035, paired with car-

bon taxes on conventional fuels, ignores the harsh realities faced by these non-urban communities. Last fall, to address energy affordability, Ottawa exempted heating oil users from paying the carbon tax, but propane—cleaner, more affordable, and widely used beyond the gas grid—was left out. This omission created a stark divide, pitting neighbours against neighbours, unfairly penalizing those who rely on propane for essential energy needs. This policy not only discourages the adoption of cleaner energy alternatives, but it also places an unnecessary burden on those who can least afford it.

The CPA poll highlights that Canadians from all walks of life—whether they live in urban or rural areas, earn high or low incomes, or lean left or right politically—recognize propane

as a cost-effective, lower-emission alternative to other heating fuels like heating oil and diesel. Propane powers homes, schools, businesses, transportation, and critical services in rural and remote areas where alternatives are unavailable or prohibitively expensive or unreliable due to the cold Canadian climate. It's more than a backup plan—it's a lifeline.

Yet the government continues to punish those who rely on traditional energy sources—except heavy-emitting heating oil—with a carbon tax that will progressively increase over the next five years.

Heating our homes is not a choice. Canada needs a comprehensive energy strategy that includes all forms of low-emission energy to ensure that every Canadian can access affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy. The goal of public policy should always be for Canadians to be treated equally, regardless of where they live or the type of energy they rely on.

The government's current policies are failing to do this. By exempting heating oil from carbon taxes while penalizing propane, Ottawa is creating inequities that deepen the affordability crisis for rural and remote communities.

Canadians deserve better. It's time to stop relying on quick-fix solutions like short-term tax holidays for non-essentials and focus on long-term, practical solutions that address the root causes of Canada's affordability crisis. By treating propane and all energy sources equitably, the government can start building a resilient, affordable energy future for all Canadians, regardless of where they live.

Shannon Watt is the president and CEO of the Canadian Propane Association.

The Hill Times

The River-class frigates cannot be the 'be-all, end-all' of Canada's sea domain

Continued from page 9

and be a bulwark force to support allies and deter adversaries.

If Ottawa intends to overly rely on the River-class frigate, then there will be devastating consequences for the military's sea domain.

First, a multi-role and technologically complex vessel—especially in limited numbers without support from a robust sea domain that can boost lethality and survivability—will lead to logistical constraints that will significantly diminish the Navy's combat power and combat-readiness in expanding maritime areas in the Pacific, Arctic, Atlantic, and European waters.

Second, the high associated cost and long delivery time of each frigate will undoubtedly lead to more risk-averse behaviour, which may result in a hesitation

to deploy the ships in home and international waters—if conflicts arise—due to the fear of losing or replacing these vessels.

Alternatively, if a real-time combat scenario emerges, a peer-level adversary could eliminate the RCN's combat power if it were successful in destroying or even disrupting the operationality of the frigate, ultimately making Canada's Navy a worthwhile target due to a perception of it being the weakest link in an alliance.

To achieve a competent level of combat power, Ottawa must realize that more ships are better than fewer, and immediately begin a naval review to rebalance the numerical advantage of its sea domain. Although Canada has added the Harry DeWolf class of Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships and two Protecteur-class Joint Support Ships—as well as announc-

ing the prospect of purchasing 12 conventionally powered submarines—more needs to be done at the strategic level.

For starters, Ottawa must find the right fleet composition and capacity to enable the RCN to make more tactically informed decisions regarding its naval operations. Given Canada's maritime defence challenges—specifically its vast coastline—with its military obligations across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, the Navy will need a fleet composition that can employ a sea-control and sea-denial posture.

By combining the means to defend logistical lines and enhance forward operations in contested littoral areas and sea lines simultaneously with scalable reconnaissance strikes that deny operations, the RCN will have a bimodal fleet that can competently deter adversaries, tactically

assist allies, and strategically conduct war.

Unfortunately, to attain this level of capacity, the Navy needs more platforms. Recognizing budgetary constraints, Ottawa should look at procuring advanced, smaller, and cheaper assets. Although unmanned surface and uncrewed undersea vessels can offer some assistance—especially if they are incorporated into marine littoral regiments, and equipped with loitering surface munitions—the technology is still nascent.

As such, attention must shift towards replacing the Kingston class with modern corvettes. Offering affordable and scalable platforms, corvettes are the perfect complement to Canada's newest frigates as they possess the offensive capabilities to speedily and lethally threaten an adversary in littoral and coastal operations—missions the new

frigates will be conducting in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and North America.

Although discussions are being had for a Canada-built corvette, Ottawa does not have the time nor resources to test out new designs. Instead, the RCN should look into acquiring the Norwegian Skjold or Swedish Visby corvettes as both have showcased fast manoeuvring abilities, and lethal combat capabilities that can complement the bimodal fleet Canada needs to implement a sea-control and sea-denial posture.

Although the sea domain is just one aspect of creating a more lethal and capable maritime force—which Canada desperately needs—a balanced Navy will provide the Armed Forces with greater combat-capacity to truly become a modernized force.

Andrew Erskine is a research fellow at the Institute for Peace & Diplomacy, a researcher with the Consortium of Indo-Pacific Researchers, and a 2025 Arctic Frontier Emerging Leader.

The Hill Times



Stuart Benson
Party Central

A Christmas house party at Lornado, and jingle-bell rocking the Rainbow Bistro

U.S. Ambassador David Cohen hosted his final Christmas party at his official residence, and The 20th Century Boys returned for their annual concert to support the Ottawa Cancer Foundation on Dec. 5.

With only a handful of days left before Parliament wraps up for the winter break, the Hill holiday parties are heating up with a **Party Central** double-feature Yuletide house party at Lornado on Dec. 5, followed by The 20th Century Boys jingle-bell rocking at the Rainbow Bistro.

With a heavy layer of snow arriving in the city last week, the official residence of United States Ambassador to Canada **David Cohen** in Rockcliffe Park was about as picturesque a venue as you could ask for to kick off the holiday party season.

Having opted to walk up the long driveway from the property's front gate, **Party Central** arrived at the front door just as National Defence Minister **Bill Blair** and his wife **Susanne** were being dropped off, which—given the temperature—is the decision this reporter wishes he had made.

Greeting arrivals at the door, Cohen took his time welcoming each guest who had braved the cold for what was ostensibly also his farewell party. Cohen will be bidding adieu to his assignment in Canada once president-elect **Donald Trump** is inaugurated on Jan. 20, 2025.

If you can judge a man by the company he keeps, Cohen's party was undoubtedly an overwhelmingly positive endorsement of his impact during his tenure in Ottawa.

Waiting in the receiving line or mingling throughout the residence, **Party Central** also spotted Mental Health and Addictions Minister **Ya'ara Saks**; Liberal MPs **Rob Oliphant** and **John McKay**; Conservative MPs **Pierre Paul-Hus** and **Stephanie Kusie**; NDP MP **Heather McPherson**; Bloc Québécois Leader **Yves-François Blanchet**, and MP **Stéphane Bergeron**; PMO senior adviser **Jason Easton**; deputy minister of Foreign Affairs **David Morrison**; Israeli Ambassador **Ido Moed**; Spanish Ambassador **Alfredo Serrano**; Icelandic Ambassador **Hlynur Gudjonsson**; former Ottawa mayor **Jim Watson**; former Army commander and Liberal MP **Andrew Leslie**; former chief of the defence staff **Wayne Eyre**; Bank of Canada Governor **Tiff Macklem**; former AFN chief **Perry Bellegarde**; CPAC CEO **Christa Dickenson**; CTV's **Vassy Kapelos** and **Mike Le Couteur**; *Toronto Star*'s **Tonda MacCharles**; *The Globe and Mail*'s **Marieke Walsh**; *Politico*'s **Nick Taylor-Vaisey**, **Mickey Djuric**, and **Mike**

Blanchfield; 338Canada's **Philippe J. Fournier**; and **David 'Herle Burly' Herle**.

It wasn't just the warm memories that were responsible for drawing such a large crowd—Cohen's Christmas parties are regularly a highlight of the season, with this year's shindig no exception.

While **Party Central** could spend hours in the East Wing sitting room examining the collection of challenge coins, assorted medals, and historical knickknacks, the multiple open bars featuring top-shelf liquor and assorted appetizers—including mini hot dogs in blankets, fried chicken skewers, roast-beef sliders carvery, and a pasta station—kept the good times and attendee circulation flowing.

After a rigorous journalistic investigation of all the above, and as the party began to wind down, **Party Central** caught another Uber downtown to watch The 20th Century Boys' annual Christmas concert at the Rainbow Bistro.

Arriving just after 8:30 p.m., as The Boys were warming up with their usual opener—*Get Ready* by The Temptations—the dance floor, and the rest of the bar space, was already packed with fans.

While that made a close examination of the attendees more difficult, **Party Central** did manage to spot Herle arriving a few minutes later, as well as Liberal MP **Judy Sgro**; Canadian Association of Broadcasters president **Kevin Desjardins**; Chicken Farmers of Canada's **Lauren Kennedy**; and a late reinforcement of revellers from the Government Relations Institute Of Canada holiday party over at The Lieutenant's Pump, including KAN Strategies' **Greg MacEachern** and Earncliffe Strategies' **Mary Anne Carter**.

While the band's usual setlist—featuring covers of The Rolling Stones, The Band, **Amy Winehouse**, **Van Morrison**, and **Tim McGraw**—kept the bar bouncing well past midnight, the evening was tinged with an unmistakable air of sadness following the recent passing of former bandmate **Peter Linkletter**, who died suddenly on Sept 30 at the age of 57.

By day, Linkletter was a dedicated public servant, but by night, he returned to his first calling: live music. And while he had traded in his early career touring North America for more local gigs with the federal government, he remained a "dear friend, bandmate, and community leader" on whichever stage he was on, whether he was raising money for local charities with The 20th Century Boys or chairing the board of the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation following his own successful fight with cancer.

In tribute to Linkletter, giving him one last hit in the fight against the disease, the concert this year was also in support of the Ottawa Cancer Foundation. If you missed the concert, you can still donate at ottawa-cancer.ca/donation/.

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U.S. Ambassador David Cohen, centre, hosts Compass Rose Group's **Andrea Sarkic**, left; **Sally Harris**, Conservative Party caucus manager; Conservative MP **Stephanie Kusie**; and her husband **James Kusie**, Imperial Oil's vice-president of public and government affairs, at Lornado on Dec. 5.



The Globe and Mail's **Marieke Walsh**, left, and Cohen.



Mental Health Minister **Ya'ara Saks**, left, and Cohen.



Rosemary Macklem, left, Bank of Canada governor **Tiff Macklem**, and **David Herle**.



Cohen, left, and NDP MP **Heather McPherson**.



Saks, left; CPAC's **Christa Dickenson**, **Nicole Arams**, and **Catherine Christie-Lull**; and CBC's **Jennifer Chevalier**.



National Defence Minister **Bill Blair**, left, his wife **Susanne**, with **Jennifer Eyre** and her husband **Wayne Eyre**, former chief of the defence staff.



National Gallery of Canada's **Serge Belet**, left, Navigator's **Chris Hall**, and Pfizer's **Steven Hogue**.

The Hill Times photographs by Stuart Benson



The 20th Century Boys' **Dave Fraser** on guitar, left; **Richard Mahoney** and **Peter Van Dusen**, lead guitar and vocals; **Jonathan Cook**, keyboard; **Donovan Allen**, drums; **Kelly Craig**, bass guitar; **Paul Adjelejan**, trombone; **Mike Martin**, baritone saxophone; and **Chris Gerdei** on trumpet perform a sold-out Christmas charity concert on Dec. 5 at the Rainbow Bistro.



Van Dusen gets a little country.



Mahoney, left, and **Van Dusen**.



Neil Moss

Diplomatic Circles

Israel wants Hassan Diab to serve prison sentence in France but vows to stay out of any extradition request

‘We would like Hassan Diab to be extradited to France to serve his sentence, but we don’t interfere in that,’ says Israeli Ambassador Iddo Moed.



Israeli Ambassador to Canada Iddo Moed says any extradition request is a bilateral issue between Canada and France. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

As Israel puts the spotlight on **Hassan Diab**, it says it is not interfering in any potential French extradition request, but acknowledges it wants to see the Carleton University academic extradited to serve a prison sentence.

Renewed attention has pushed Diab’s case back in the news more than 18 months after a French court found him guilty for involvement in the 1980 bombing of the Rue Copernic synagogue in Paris, which killed four people and injured 46 others. Diab has long maintained his innocence, and his lawyers say he is the victim of mistaken identity as he was in Lebanon at the time of the attack.

Diab was previously extradited to France in 2014 before his case fell apart after he was jailed—including in solitary confinement—for three years. A new trial was later ordered when Diab was back in Ottawa, which led to a guilty verdict and a life sentence for Diab.

“The extradition is a bilateral issue between Canada and France. We don’t want to interfere in that,” Ambassador **Iddo Moed** told *The Hill Times* during a Dec. 3 interview at the Israeli Embassy in Ottawa. “It’s a long-standing issue. We follow it. Of course, we would like Hassan Diab to be extradited to France to serve his sentence, but we don’t interfere in that in any way, shape, or form.”

Diab’s supporters have called for Canada to publicly declare that Diab’s extradition will not proceed, regardless of whether it has been requested by France, as previously reported by *The Hill Times*.

Dalhousie University law professor **Robert Currie**, an expert in extradition law who has been supportive of Diab in his case, said Diab’s prosecution in France did not meet fair trial standards and was a “kangaroo court.”

Moed said there has been no communication between Israel and Canada or Israel and France on the issue of an extradition request.

Canada has remained silent about whether France has requested Diab’s extradition, citing that such requests are “confidential state-to-state communications.” France has also not confirmed if it has requested Diab’s extradition.

Government representative in the Senate **Marc Gold** told the Red Chamber two months after the French guilty verdict was

delivered that France had yet to send an extradition request.

Moed said he is also unsure if a request has been made.

“I’ve tried to sort this exactly out, just to find out where things stand,” he said. “I understand that there is a process going on of the request, but I’m not sure where it stands.”

He said Israel doesn’t have any opinion about the process, but remarked that the hope is Diab will serve his sentence in France.

The Israeli ambassador acknowledged that would mean Diab would have to be extradited.

John Packer, director of the University of Ottawa’s Human Rights Research and Education Centre, called Israel’s wish to see Diab extradited “substantially unconvincing” as it dismisses legal proceedings at the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice against Israel and Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu**.

“Diab has been through a substantially and evidently flawed prosecution and severe deprivation of liberty ... where eventually, the French system itself concluded there was no case and he was returned to Canada. To insist that, nonetheless, he should again be subjected to extradition smacks as further injustice,” Packer said.

Moed dismissed comparing the two cases as “flawed” and “wrong,” describing it as “whataboutism.” He said one case has been proven in a court in France versus “lawfare” driven by international courts with “political agendas” through “flawed processes.”

Moed said he is highlighting the situation—including in an op-ed that appeared in *The National Post* last month—because it is “entirely wrong” that someone who is a convicted terrorist is teaching at a Canadian university, remarking that in the very least, he must be regarded as a “controversial person.”

“In that sense, he cannot be in a capacity to teach students and talk to them as if he is entirely innocent,” Moed said, remarking that he raised the case as part of a broader concern over antisemitism in Canada and on university campuses. “My focus is on the public domain here and in Canada, and what’s happening here.”

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Canada Korean Society marks 40th anniversary

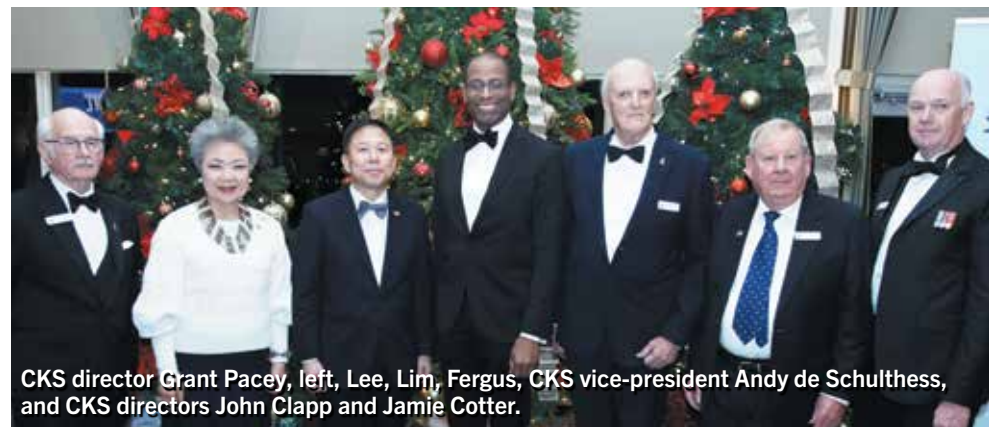
The Hill Times photographs by Sam Garcia



House Speaker Greg Fergus, left, Canada Korea Society president Young-Hae Lee, and Korean Ambassador Woongsoon Lim at the CKS annual general meeting and gala dinner at the Ottawa Hunt & Golf Club on Nov. 27.



Lim raises a toast.



CKS director Grant Pacey, left, Lee, Lim, Fergus, CKS vice-president Andy de Schulthess, and CKS directors John Clapp and Jamie Cotter.



Lee, left, Conservative Senator Yonah Martin, PSG Senator Arrina Gerba, CSG Senator Rebecca Patterson, Lim, and de Schulthess.



Lee, left, and de Schulthess present Fergus with a plaque to thank him for his keynote speech.

Algeria celebrates national day



Algerian Ambassador Nouredine Sidi Abed, left, and Egyptian Ambassador Ahmed Hafez at the Algerian national day party at the Château Laurier on Nov. 4.



International Development Minister Ahmed Hussen, left, Sidi Abed, and his wife Hayat Sidi Abed.



Guests dined on vegetable couscous and lamb.



Kazakhstan Ambassador Dauletbek Kussainov, left, Ambassador Sidi Abed, Hayat Sidi Abed, and Aigerim Bekenova, wife of the Kazakh ambassador.



Sandra McCardell, associate deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, left, delivers remarks as Sidi Abed looks on.



Laura Ryckewaert
Hill Climbers

MacKinnon scoops up Tassi staffer to fill parliamentary affairs team

With Chelsea Kusnick's exit, FedDev Ontario Minister Filomena Tassi has promoted a new director of communications.

Labour and Seniors Minister **Steven MacKinnon** has added a new face to his parliamentary affairs team: **Chelsea Kusnick**, who until recently was director of communications to Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario Minister **Filomena Tassi**.

Kusnick officially joined MacKinnon's team on Nov. 25, stepping into the title of senior adviser for parliamentary affairs. She'd been leading communications in Tassi's office since October 2022, and before then had spent a little more than two-and-a-half years working for the federal public services and procurement minister, starting in March 2020 as assistant to the parliamentary secretary to then-minister **Anita Anand**. Kusnick was made issues manager there after Tassi took over the public services portfolio. She followed Tassi to the FedDev Ontario office shortly after the minister was shuffled at the end of August 2022.



Chelsea Kusnick has joined the labour and seniors minister's office. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

On the Hill, Kusnick also previously worked as an assistant to then-Newfoundland and Labrador MP **Nick Whalen** from 2014 to 2020.

Further changes are in the works for MacKinnon's parliamentary affairs team, with director **Damien O'Brien** set to bid the minister's office farewell come the end of the House sitting this year.

A Hill staffer since 2017, O'Brien spent his first year, roughly, as director of

strategy research in the Liberal research bureau (LRB). From there, he became a senior adviser for stakeholder relations to then-natural resources minister **Amarjeet Sohi**. After **Seamus O'Regan** took over the natural resources portfolio in 2020, O'Brien stayed on, becoming director of parliamentary affairs—a title he carried with him when he followed O'Regan to the labour portfolio after the 2021 federal election.



Damien O'Brien will leave Minister MacKinnon's office at the end of this sitting. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

O'Regan was given the added role of seniors minister in July 2023.

O'Brien previously spent years working at Queen's Park, including as an aide in the offices of then-Ontario transport minister **Bob Chiarelli**, then-community and social services minister **Ted McMeekin**, and then-Liberal MPP **Mitzie Hunter**. Prior to joining the LRB, he'd most recently been a senior public affairs consultant with Edelman.

In another director-level change, MacKinnon recently bade farewell to his director of policy and labour relations,



Veterans Affairs Minister **Ginette Petitpas Taylor** took charge of the employment, workforce development, and official languages portfolio on Nov. 20. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade



Labour and Seniors Minister **Steven MacKinnon**, left, speaks with reporters before a Liberal caucus meeting in the West Block on Dec. 4 accompanied by press secretary **Matthieu Perrotin**. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade



Lhori Webster is now director of policy to the employment minister. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Lhori Webster, who has gone on to lead the policy team in the employment, workforce development, and official languages minister's office now headed by Veterans Affairs Minister **Ginette Petitpas Taylor**.

Petitpas Taylor took over the portfolio as of Nov. 20 upon **Randy Boissonnault's** exit from cabinet amid controversy over both his former business' dealings and his past statements regarding his non-Indigenous identity.

Webster changed offices prior to the change in ministers.

The employment team had been without a policy director since **Nadia Kadri's** exit to become a senior policy and legal affairs adviser to Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister **Chrystia Freeland** earlier this fall.

A former junior policy analyst with both Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada, Webster joined the LRB as a research intern through the summer of 2018, and by January 2019, she'd landed a full-time job as a special assistant for research in the caucus support office.

After about a year with the LRB, Webster became a policy adviser to then-health minister **Patty Hajdu**, for whom she worked for two years in all. She next joined Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau's** office as a policy adviser in 2022, ultimately working there for almost a year and a half before leaving to become director of policy to O'Regan

as then-labour minister. Webster was promoted to policy and labour relations director at the beginning of this year.

Stay tuned for a more fulsome update on the current status of the employment team.

With Webster's exit from MacKinnon's team, senior policy adviser **Noémie Fiset-Tremblay** is now acting director of policy. Also currently working on policy in the labour and seniors minister's office are senior policy adviser **Crystina Dundas**, and policy advisers **Nicholas Mackiewicz** and **Caroline Belbin**.

Paul Moen is chief of staff to MacKinnon.

Meanwhile, in Tassi's office in the wake of Kusnick's exit, press secretary **Edward Hutchinson** has been promoted to take over as director of communications.



Edward Hutchinson is now director of communications to Minister Tassi. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Hutchinson has overall been working for Tassi since 2017, starting as an intern in her constituency office as the MP for Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas, Ont. In 2021, he moved over to her team as then-public services minister as a special assistant for communications. Hutchinson was promoted to press secretary in 2022 after following Tassi to the FedDev Ontario portfolio.

As reported by **Hill Climbers**, Tassi also recently bade farewell to executive assistant **Muntaha Ahmed**, who is now Ontario regional affairs adviser to National Defence Minister **Bill Blair**. Climbers understand she has yet to be replaced on Tassi's team, but keep reading for further updates.

Along with Hutchinson, also currently focused on communications in Tassi's office is digital communications adviser **Sara Kasum**.

Jessie Pierre is acting chief of staff to Tassi. lryckewaert@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Parliamentary Calendar

Minister Joly digs into feds' new Arctic policy for Montreal audience on Dec. 13



Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly will deliver remarks on Canada's new Arctic foreign policy to the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations on Friday, Dec. 13. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 11

House Sitting—The House is sitting every weekday until Dec. 17, and is scheduled to adjourn on that day for the Christmas holidays and break. It's scheduled to return on Monday, Jan. 27, 2025, and will sit for 25 weeks over the year. It will sit Jan. 27-Feb. 14; Feb. 24-28; March 17-21; March 31-April 11; April 28-June 20 (not sitting May 19, and is scheduled to sit late nights from June 9-June 20); Sept. 15-Sept. 26; Oct. 1-Oct. 10; Oct. 20-Nov. 7; Nov. 17-Dec. 12.

Chief of Defence Staff to Speak in Toronto—Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Jennie Carignan will deliver remarks at a lunch event hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Wednesday, Dec. 11, at 12 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Suite 300, Toronto. Details: cdhowe.org.

Chief of Defence Staff to Speak in Ottawa—Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Jennie Carignan will deliver remarks on "The New Geostrategic Environment: Challenges and Opportunities for Canada," hosted by the Canadian International Council. A Q&A session will follow. Wednesday, Dec. 11, at 6 p.m. ET at KPMG, 150 Elgin St., #Suite 1800. Details via Eventbrite.

THURSDAY, DEC. 12

OECD Secretary-General to Deliver Remarks—Mathias Cormann, secretary-general of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, will deliver remarks in English and French at the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Thursday, Dec. 12, at 11:30 a.m. ET at Le Westin Montréal, 270 Saint-Antoine St. W. Details: corim.qc.ca.

OEA Award of Distinction—Former Bank of Canada deputy governor Carolyn Wilkins will receive the Ottawa Economic Association's Award of Distinction. Thursday, Dec. 12, at 6:30 p.m. at the Rideau Club, 99 Bank St., 15th floor. Details: cabe.ca.

FRIDAY, DEC. 13

Minister Joly to Deliver Remarks—Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly will deliver remarks in French on "Working with the new American administration: Canada's new Arctic foreign policy" to the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Friday, Dec. 13, 1 p.m. ET, at Centre Sheraton Montréal, 1201 René-Lévesque Blvd. W. Details online: corim.qc.ca.

MONDAY, DEC. 16

Bank of Canada Governor to Deliver Remarks—Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem will deliver his annual address to the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. Monday, Dec. 16, at 11:30 a.m. PT at the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver, 900 W. Georgia St. Details: boardoftrade.com.

TUESDAY, DEC. 17

Premiers Furey and Smith to Talk Energy—Alberta Premier Danielle Smith, and Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Andrew Furey will take part in a hybrid event, "Canada's Energy, Resource, and Climate, A National Discussion," as part of the Fall Energy Series hosted by the Empire Club of Canada. Tuesday, Dec. 17, at 11:30 a.m. ET. Details: empireclubofcanada.com.

SUNDAY, DEC. 22

Liberal MP Ali to Attend Fundraiser—Liberal MP Shafqat Ali will attend a party fundraiser and volunteer appreciation event which will also celebrate Ali's nomination. Sunday, Dec. 22, from 6-9 p.m. at the Capital Banquet Centre,

6435 Dixie Rd., Mississauga, Ont. Details: events.liberal.ca.

MONDAY, JAN. 20, 2025

Donald Trump Gets Sworn In—Donald Trump will be sworn in as president of the United States on Monday, Jan. 20, 2025.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 22, 2025

Fireside Chat with Carol Off—World Press Freedom Canada is hosting a fireside chat with CBC journalist and author Carol Off about her new book, *At a Loss for Words: Conversation in an Age of Rage*. Join us for a discussion and Q&A about one of the most important press freedom issues today. Wednesday, Jan. 22, 5:30-7:30 p.m. ET, at the Rideau Club, 99 Bank St., 15th Floor. To register, visit worldpressfreedomcanada.ca.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 29—THURSDAY, JAN. 30, 2025

Crown Corporate Governance Conference—Ethics Commissioner Konrad von Finckenstein is among the speakers at a two-day conference on "Crown Corporate Governance" hosted by the Canadian Institute. Wednesday, Jan.

29, 2025, to Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, at the Hilton Garden Inn, downtown Ottawa. Details: canadianinstitute.com.

FRIDAY, JAN. 31, 2025

Foreign Interference Commission Reports—The Foreign Interference Commission's final report has been granted an extension, and will be released no later than Friday, Jan. 31, 2025. Details: foreigninterferencecommission.ca.

TUESDAY, FEB. 11, 2025

Boosting Competitiveness & Productivity in Food and Beverage Manufacturing—Food and Beverage Canada hosts its annual policy breakfast at the Rogers Centre Ottawa to kickoff Canadian Ag Day. Join us for a panel discussion on the critical needs of this essential industry to thrive, compete, and lead both domestically and globally. Confirmed speakers include former chief trade negotiator Steve Verheul, and Canadian Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Candace Laing. Full agenda to follow. Tuesday, Feb. 11, at 7:30 a.m. ET. Contact admin@fbc-abc.com for more details.

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

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