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NEWS

CBC, foreign ministry both deny considering 'transfer' of international broadcaster as outlined in department memo

BY NEIL MOSS

Although a recently released document says that Canada's public broadcaster pitched a "re-imagining" of its fledgling international broadcasting service in 2023 and referenced its potential "transfer of operations" to Global Affairs Canada, both CBC and the foreign ministry deny considering the idea.

The Global Affairs Canada (GAC) briefing note was prepared for Foreign Affairs deputy minister David Morrison ahead of a meeting with then-CBC/Radio-Canada president Catherine Tait, and strategy, public

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NEWS

Canada's 'long-term vision' for border security should include input from people already doing the job: CBSA union president



Public Safety Minister David McGuinty, right, with Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly, says there was urgency to appoint a new 'fentanyl czar' to avoid renewing U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff threats. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

BY STUART BENSON

With three weeks remaining in the pause on United States President Donald Trump's tariff threats, the head of the union representing Canada's border agents says the federal and provincial governments can't keep throwing things at the issue in the hopes it will go away. But with new tariffs on steel and aluminum being im-

posed, Liberal strategists say the government may be wary of giving too much when nothing may ever be enough.

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NEWS

MP, Senate groups to convene during prorogation to talk Hill reno plans

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

Deadlines are coming up to finalize plans for the Centre Block project, and the MP and Senate groups tasked with overseeing Hill renovations are both set to flex their powers to convene during prorogation in order to weigh in and avoid delays.

"We do not want to be the cause of delays. It's a long enough project as it is," said CSG Senator Scott Tannas (Alberta), chair of the Senate Internal Economy Committee's Long-term Vision and Plan (LTVP) subcommittee.

Like their parent committees, the Senate subcommittee and corresponding MP working group, which is a subcommittee of the House Board of Internal Economy (BOIE), continue to exist—with their memberships intact—during

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NEWS

Retreat or show up: USAID chaos reveals crossroad for Canada's foreign-aid funding

BY NEIL MOSS

Foreign aid stakeholders and experts are urging Canada to fill the gaps being created by the United States halting global

financial support, but questions loom over whether Ottawa's commitment to international assistance is also tailing off.

The Trump administration has frozen the work of the United

States Agency for International Development (USAID) for 90 days, and has rescinded the lease on its headquarters. The White House was also set to place many of the agency's workers on

leave before a U.S. district judge placed an injunction on the order. USAID is responsible for managing a budget of US\$40-billion.

"We're talking about potentially losing years of progress

on issues that Canada has been a champion for," said Elise Legault, the ONE Campaign's Canada director, remarking that

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# Heard on the Hill



By Christina Leadlay

## Justice Minister Virani, Trade Minister Ng, Tory MP Shields join growing list of incumbents sitting out next election



Justice Minister Arif Virani, left, International Trade Minister Mary Ng, and Conservative MP Martin Shields have each announced that they won't run again in the next federal election. *The Hill Times* photographs by Cynthia Münster and Sam Garcia

Justice Minister **Arif Virani**, International Trade Minister **Mary Ng**, and Conservative MP **Martin Shields** each recently announced their names won't appear on their ridings' next respective federal ballots.

Ontario-based Virani and Ng issued their news on Feb. 10, while Alberta's Shields announced his decision on Feb. 7, each posting statements on X. Virani and Shields were first elected in 2015, while Ng earned her Markham-Thornhill seat in a 2017 byelection.

Virani thanked Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** for the "tremendous opportunities" he's been given during his time in the House, including his "dream job" as justice minister and attorney general, which Virani has been since July 2023.

"I will not be seeking re-election in 2025. I say this with a heavy heart, and after considerable soul searching for the past several weeks," said the lawyer, who thanked his family for their support. "After the next election, my fight for Canada will no longer take place from inside the House of Commons."

Ng's statement also said she came to her decision "after careful reflection," and expressed her gratitude to her colleagues, Trudeau, and constituents, highlighting her tenure as "Canada's longest-serving minister of international trade." Ng was first given responsibility for the portfolio in November 2019.

Meanwhile, in Shields' statement, the 76-year-old former mayor of Brooks, Alta., said "it is time for a new representative to serve the interests and the people of this riding," thanking his "incredible" teams in Ottawa and in the riding.

Shields—instantly recognizable in the House by his trademark curly tipped moustache—also thanked his Conservative colleagues, but didn't explicitly name party leader **Pierre Poilievre**: "This country has bright Conservative leaders and I look forward to watching their success in the years to come."

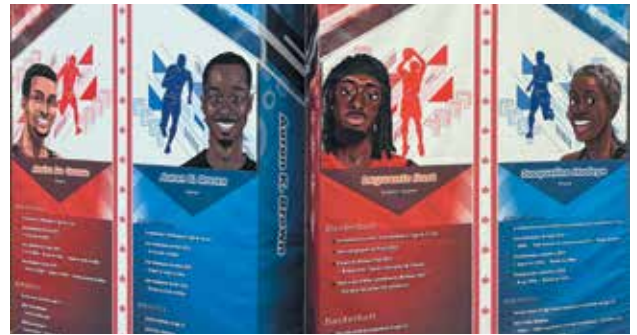
According to *Strathmore Now*, a new Conservative candidate for Shields' riding "has not been determined."

## Senate exhibit spotlights sport excellence

Speaking of the Senate, there's an exhibit on this month in the Senate foyer, and the public is invited to check it out.

Titled *Excellence in Sport*, the exhibit features profiles on eight Canadian medal-winning athletes of African descent: Quebec tennis player **Félix Auger-Aliassime**; Ontario track-and-field athletes **Andre De Grasse**, **Jacqueline Madogo**, and **Aaron Kingsley Brown**; basketball stars **Luguentz Dort** from Quebec and Nova Scotia's **Shay Colley**; Ontario rugby player **Charity Williams**; and track-and-field Paralympic athlete **Jesse Zesseu**, also from Ontario.

The exhibit also spotlights those "who have made history through their achievements and paved the way for those of today," according to the Feb. 5 press release.



The *Excellence in Sport* exhibit is on this month in the Senate foyer. Photograph by Dicheaemal Jean-Baptiste

Chef de Mission of Team Canada for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games **Bruny Surin**—himself a former Canadian Olympian—and the Senate's Black caucus are co-hosting the exhibit which is on until the end of February as part of Black History Month.

## Ex-U.S. envoy David Cohen feels our pain, loves The King Eddy

Less than three weeks since he left the post as America's ambassador to Canada, **David Cohen** aired his thoughts on Canada-United States relations.

"It is painful to have that friendship challenged in the way that it's been challenged," the self-proclaimed "partisan Democrat" told his Philadelphia buddy **Michael Smerconish** on the CNN journalist's SiriusXM radio show in what was Cohen's first post-ambassadorial interview on Feb. 5.

"The goals of **Donald Trump** around the border are impossible to argue with, but the tactic of attacking your friend and of creating this tension when it was possible to achieve these goals without the threats and the intimidation and the attempted bullying ... that is my objection," said Cohen near the end of his 20-minute interview.

Cohen's last day at the Embassy in Ottawa was on Jan. 18. He'd held the role since December 2021.



Former U.S. ambassador to Canada David Cohen, left, with journalist and podcast host Michael Smerconish on Feb. 5. Screenshot courtesy of YouTube

When Smerconish asked Cohen whether he was surprised by Trump's decision to delay the proposed tariffs on Canada, the political appointee replied, "Nothing surprised me," noting that Trump is "the ultimate deal-maker. He is incredibly transactional."

Smerconish kept the chat friendly, letting Cohen explain how "under appreciated" the bilateral trade relationship is to Americans, and underscoring how Canada was the first nation to aid the U.S. during 9/11, and the first to help fight the recent wildfires in California.

"So this friendship which you have heard referenced by Canadians in particular over the past week ... is not ephemeral. It is deep, it is our most significant and consequential friendship, and it is incredibly important to the United States as well as ... to Canada."

Of course the real news coming from the bromantic exchange is that Cohen's favourite restaurant in Ottawa is **The King Eddy**, conveniently located one block away from the U.S. Embassy in the ByWard Market.

"It's above a greasy spoon, but it has cheeseburgers and real cheese and chicken fingers and milkshakes, and it's just a great, comfortable location with an owner who turns out ends up being a big **Bobby Clarke** fan," laughed Cohen, referring to the now-retired Canadian hockey star who played his entire 15-year career with the Philadelphia Flyers.

## Liona Boyd latest musician to support Bill C-355

Canadian guitar legend **Liona Boyd** is adding her name to the list of celebrities—that already includes **Jann Arden**, **Serena Ryder**, **Sam Roberts**, and **Cher**—who are supporting **Bill C-355**, which seeks to ban the air shipment of live horses to Japan for slaughter.

"Although the prorogation of Parliament puts the bill at risk of dying on the order paper, lawmakers still have the power to act swiftly and spare the lives of countless horses," reads a Feb. 6 press release from Humane Society International/Canada.

"As a proud Canadian who loves horses and strongly opposes animal abuse, I cannot stand by while this bill stalls," said Boyd, who will be inducted as a member of Canada's Walk of Fame in Toronto this June.

"I am urging the Canadian government to put aside party politics and take immediate action to pass this bill to ensure the kind of suffering documented in this cruel and senseless transport is ended for good."

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The Hill Times

## A retired Mountie, an economist, and a farmer named to the Senate

Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** appointed three new senators late last week, reducing the number of vacancies in the 105-seat Red Chamber to seven.

The new independent Senators are **Baltej Dhillon** for British Columbia, **Martine Hébert** for Quebec, and **Todd Lewis** for Saskatchewan.

A retired career police officer, Dhillon made history in 1991 as the first Mountie to wear a turban.

An economist by training, Hébert is formerly senior vice-president for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and was Quebec's delegate to Chicago and later to New York City.

Fourth-generation farmer Lewis was most recently the Canadian Federation of Agriculture's first vice-president, and is a former president of the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan.



Baltej Dhillon, left, Martine Hébert, and Todd Lewis were appointed to the Senate on Feb. 7. Photographs courtesy of X and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture



The United Nations Security Council, pictured on Jan. 25. The keystone of the international system is under attack with countries sabotaging the barriers put in place to limit the spread of war, writes Gwynne Dyer. Photograph courtesy of United Nations/Evan Schneider

# Post-1945 order in flux as superpowers challenge borders

United States President Donald Trump demanding to take over Greenland, the Panama Canal, Canada, and the Gaza Strip is empire-building of the crudest sort.

Gwynne Dyer

Global Affairs



LONDON, U.K.—In classical civilizations, there was a continuing, unresolved debate about whether history moved forward or just went around in circles: was it linear, or was it cyclical? But that debate was largely settled once human beings learned about their deeper past. It's linear.

Once, every human being was a hunter-gatherer; now almost none of us are. Once, nobody lived in groups more than a couple of hundred strong because bigger groups just fissioned; now, most of us live in societies many millions strong. You don't have

to call it "progress," but history certainly has a direction. Which is not to say that it's purely linear.

Just as rivers always flow downstream but may contain many eddies and whirlpools, history can double back on itself. The history of war has already done that several times. There is reason to suspect that it may now be doing it again.

Before the rise of big civilizations, battles between the little human groups of pre-history were frequent, relatively low-intensity, but cumulatively very deadly. Everybody lived on the front line all the time, and early anthropologists estimated that 30 per cent of our male ancestors—and five per cent of females—were killed in war in every generation.

The advent of mass societies brought much bigger battles, but they were less frequent, and involved a much smaller proportion of the society. (The Roman army at its peak was just under half a million men; the Roman population at that time was around 50 million people.)

A lot of people got killed whenever pastoral peoples like the Mongols broke into the civilizations, but medieval warfare in Europe and its parallels in China and India stayed relatively small until the 1600s. Then Europe went crazy.

The Thirty Years War (1618-48) began mainly as a religious

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THE BEDROCK ON WHICH THE ENTIRE POST-1945 SYSTEM WAS BUILT IS THE INVIOABILITY OF BORDERS. NO CHANGES TO BORDERS AFTER THAT DATE WILL BE ACCEPTED BY THE REST OF THE WORLD IF THEY WERE CHANGED BY FORCE.”

civil war in the German-speaking lands, but it ended up as the "war of all against all," and an estimated eight million people died. That was about 12 per cent of Europe's population at that time, and it frightened the survivors into making new rules.

Starting in the mid-1600s, existing countries became "sovereign," and in the next century and a half, no major European state was carved up except Poland. Armies became small and professional, and war in Europe shrank back down to a marginal activity that scarcely impinged on the civilian sphere.

But then came the French revolution in 1789, and the Napoleonic wars that followed, with mass armies of volunteers, ideological conflict, and whole states being dismantled. Fast forward to the First World War, 11 million dead, and all the regimes on the losing side—plus several on the winning side—were driven from power.

Then the Second World War, 45 million people dead, and nuclear weapons by the end. Once again, all the regimes on the losing side were destroyed. Time for another go at taming the beast—and amazingly, this time it really seemed to work.

It has been 79 years since the last nuclear weapon was used in anger, and the death toll in wars has fallen from a million

a month in 1945 to fewer than 100,000 people a year in the early 2020s. But now it's going back up again—just a bit, maybe half a million in 2024—but the trend line is worrisome.

Much more worrisome is the fact that just in the past few years, all the institutional and legal barriers we put in place to prevent or limit the spread of war have been either sabotaged or abandoned. The keystone of the system—the United Nations—was crippled long ago by rival vetoes, but now the foundations are being dug up and cast aside.

The bedrock on which the entire post-1945 system was built is the inviolability of borders. No changes to borders after that date will be accepted by the rest of the world if they were changed by force. Indeed, even attempts to change a border by force—whatever the justification—are illegal. Only voluntary, negotiated, uncoerced changes are acceptable.

That rule has enjoyed almost universal support in principle because all the players understood that this is the only way to end the endless cycle of wars. Nobody is actually obliged to go and fight some other country to stop it from breaking that rule, but their conquests will never be accepted by the rest of the world. So they might as well not do it.

That is the rule which is now being ignored by the greatest power in the system. Russia can claim that the "old border" of the Soviet Union included Ukraine, and China can at least claim an ethnic link with Taiwan, but United States President Donald Trump demanding to take over Greenland, the Panama Canal, Canada, and the Gaza Strip is empire-building of the crudest sort.

If he gets away with that, it's back to the old ways again.

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

## NEWS



Green Party co-leader Jonathan Pedneault says there is very little to 'excite' Canadians looking for 'bold, resolutely progressive solutions' to the country's problems. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

# Greens can tap into global network as Canada finds itself with few friends amid U.S. threats, say co-leaders

The network and partnerships with Greens in the European Union and globally will be 'essential' in Canada's response to the threat posed by U.S. President Donald Trump, says Jonathan Pedneault.

BY STUART BENSON

The Green Party's leadership pair may still be a bit foggy on how they'll share their new joint workload, but Elizabeth May and Jonathan Pedneault are clear that the "global Green" advantage is essential when it comes to standing up to the American president and tackling the global "poly-crisis" of climate change and geopolitical instability.

Last week, the Green Party of Canada's membership overwhelmingly ratified an amendment to its constitution to officially recognize co-leadership following Pedneault's announcement on Jan. 27 that he would be returning to politics.

More than two years after the 2022 leadership race, party members voted from Jan. 27 to Feb. 3 on whether to ratify the motion originally approved during a special

general meeting last November, with 90.6 per cent of votes in favour of the motion. Of those who voted, nearly 90 per cent voted to confirm May (Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.) and Pedneault as co-leaders.

May and Pedneault ran on a co-leadership slate during the 2022 race to replace former leader Annamie Paul, who had stepped down in 2021. However, since the party's constitution had yet to be amended to allow a leadership duo, they had appeared on the ballot as individual candidates. After six ballots, May finished first out of six candidates with 4,666 votes, with Pedneault in third with 969 votes. He placed behind Anna Keenan in second, who also ran on a dual-slate with Chad Walcott, who placed fourth.

Pedneault was appointed deputy leader until the constitution could be amended. As that process continued to drag on, he announced last July that he would be stepping down, citing "personal reasons," but did not disclose further details. In his return press conference last month, he clarified that those reasons were health related.

"Last year, early in the year, I did receive some fairly difficult life-altering news about my health," Pedneault told reporters. "And even though I tried to keep going, at some point, it became very clear to me that I needed to take a bit of a step back and reflect about my place, not only in the world and politics."

Pedneault cited United States President Donald Trump's "despicable" re-election and the threat he posed to Canada as a major motivating factor in his decision to return.

"I simply couldn't stand on the sidelines anymore," Pedneault told reporters.

However, while the party's constitution has officially been amended to allow for co-leadership, May and Pedneault said they will still have to decide who will lead in the next election, particularly who will sign nomination papers and participate in the leadership debates.

Following the November 2022 leadership election, May told *The Hill Times* that her "druthers" would be having Pedneault take the lead, but the pair now says they will make that decision together.

In a joint interview with *The Hill Times* on Feb. 5, Pedneault and May said the decision would be "consensus-based" between the two of them, as well as being put before the membership for approval.

"That doesn't mean we won't be co-leaders during the writ period, but JP and I will take the lay of the land together before the election," May explained.

May said she expects the Greens to do "very well" in the next election, and confirmed that her goal remains increasing the federal caucus to 12 MPs—the minimum needed for official party status in the House.

"We're focused on winning the seats we are certain are winnable, and there are many of them," May said, adding that the party will be looking for "breakthroughs" in Quebec—where Pedneault says he plans to run—and expand its foothold in Ontario beyond MP Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, Ont.).

Previously, Pedneault made an unsuccessful run at the Notre-

Dame-de-Grâce-Westmount riding in June 2023, following Liberal MP Marc Garneau's resignation, but placed fourth behind the Conservative and NDP candidates in second and third, respectively, and the winner, Liberal MP Anna Gainey. Garneau, a former astronaut and cabinet minister, had represented the riding since 2008, and won his last three elections with more than 50 per cent of the vote.

Ahead of this year's election, the Green Party will continue to work on completing its full campaign platform, which it fleshed out at the party's "shadow cabinet" retreat on Jan 25-26, and expects to begin releasing individual planks "soon," Pedneault said.

"We've got some ideas that I think Canadians will be very excited about when it comes to inequality, housing, and, of course, how we are to respond to the climate emergency," Pedneault said, adding the party would be making a particular effort to ensure the issue isn't eclipsed in the next election.

Pedneault said that the current political landscape "offers very little to excite Canadians," given the possible choice between Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.), "who's been ranting the same thing for two years," and "two milquetoast Liberal-ish" leadership frontrunners in a former finance minister and a former central banker whom Pedneault said are already backtracking on several of their past commitments to things like the carbon tax.

"What's lacking right now is political parties and politicians with the courage to stand up to big business interests instead of recycling the same old political solutions that have taken us to the place we're in right now," Pedneault said. "I think Canadians will be looking for bold, resolutely progressive solutions to the problems we face as a nation right now, and I think Canadians will respond well to our solutions."

May said that the backtracking by Mark Carney and Liberal MP Chrystia Freeland (University Rosedale, Ont.) on support for the carbon tax demonstrates the

dearth of courage and leadership in Canadian politics.

"Canadians are sick of this sort of incrementalism, particularly around the climate crisis," May said, adding that alongside climate change, Canada needs focused leadership to recognize the multifaceted poly-crisis facing the entire planet.

"We've got the climate crisis, increasing geopolitical instability, and out-of-control conflict zones, and we need the clear-eyed leadership prepared to tell the truth about what we're facing," May said.

May noted that, unlike the other federal parties, hers benefits from the alliance of "global Greens," including politicians forming coalition governments in Australia, New Zealand, and Germany, where former leaders of the latter country's Green Party—Robert Habeck and Annalena Baerbock—joined Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government in 2022 as vice-chancellor and foreign minister respectively.

Pedneault said that network and partnerships with Greens in the European Union and globally will be "essential" in Canada's response to "the threat Trump poses to Canada and democracies worldwide."

"It is crucial that liberal democracies stand together in these extremely dark times, and Greens have the benefit of this strong network of people in the places where we need strong allies," Pedneault said, adding that the response from Canada's European allies to Trump's threats has been "underwhelming" at best.

The lack of more vocal defences of Canada by its allies in light of Trump's threats is a direct result of both Liberal and Conservative governments' lock-step alignment with the U.S. in place of a genuinely independent foreign policy, Pedneault said. It shouldn't surprise Canada that European countries wouldn't lift their head to challenge the U.S. when Canada has demonstrated it wouldn't do the same in reverse circumstances, he added.

"Our close alignment with the U.S., and abandoning any semblance of independence is now costing us friends," Pedneault said.

Closer to home, the federal Greens will also be keeping a close watch on the Feb. 27 provincial election in Ontario to support Green Leader Mike Schreiner and his slate of candidates. Still, Pedneault said he doesn't view that election as a test run for the federal party.

"We're standing very closely with [Schreiner] and the great team they've got there, but this is an Ontario election," Pedneault said. "Our platform will be our own, and it will respond first and foremost to the country's needs as a whole."

According to polling aggregator 338Canada, the Ontario Greens are polling slightly higher than their federal counterparts at six per cent, compared to four per cent nationally, with similar levels of support for the federal party in Quebec and Ontario. May's chances of winning her Vancouver Island seat are projected as a toss-up, with a slight edge over the second-place Conservatives.

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# MP, Senate groups to convene during prorogation to talk Hill reno plans

Spending on the Centre Block project, which includes construction of the new underground Parliament Welcome Centre, recently passed the billion-dollar mark.

Continued from page 1

adjournment, dissolution, and prorogation. As such, unlike every other Senate and House committee, they continue to be able to meet.

The Hill Times confirmed that neither the Senate Internal Economy Committee (CIBA) nor the BOIE themselves currently plan to meet during prorogation, but both sub-groups overseeing Hill renovations do.

Tannas said his subcommittee has scheduled a double hybrid meeting—lasting four hours, instead of two—on Feb. 26, with another on the books for April.

The group agreed to a schedule for outstanding decisions that require parliamentary approval and input with the department last fall, and “built a plan around it that runs all the way through till May,” he said.

“I think [PSPC] may have wondered if we were going to stick to the schedule, and we’ve told



Centre Block is currently surrounded by cranes, two of which sit on either side of the building to hoist materials in and out of its west and east courtyards. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

them that we’re going to continue to meet.”

In a March 2023 report, the auditor general flagged the need for timely decision-making by parliamentarians, noting such delays were “an ongoing concern for the department for the delivery of the program.”

Public Services and Procurement Canada’s (PSPC) stated schedule would see it finalize conceptual design plans for Centre Block and the Parliament Welcome Centre this fall, with landscape design development to be completed by this winter.

“We’re determined to keep on track. The auditor general highlighted this issue of the two Houses of Parliament, and the fact that PSPC has been very respectful of that—we don’t want to make that any more time consuming than it needs to be, and so there just wasn’t any question for us that we would keep going using the intersessional authority that we have,” said Tannas.

Conservative MP Chris D’Entremont (West Nova, N.S.), chair of the MP working group, confirmed “a couple of dates” have been floated, with plans to hold “at least one meeting, if not two, before we are supposedly supposed to return back on the 24<sup>th</sup> [of March].”

“We’re just trying to see if we can get a few things complete before such time that we probably will change. I mean, let’s not forget that we’re starting down going back into the House, but we’re also starting down a possible election that will cause more delay as it goes along. So if we get a few things done ahead of time then it’ll give the project and PSPC actually some time to move along and not worry too much about decisions of MPs until we get back,” he said.

D’Entremont said the “most pressing” outstanding decision for MPs currently relates to the seating plan—and corresponding furniture—for the House Chamber, which needs to be reworked in order to accommodate future Parliaments. The House currently has 338 members, but will have grown to 343 after the next general election, with another redistribution effort that is likely

to add more seats set to begin just as Centre Block is re-occupied in 2031-32.

When the House jumped from 308 to 338 MPs after the 2015 election, extra seats were squeezed in by installing fold-down seating, and turning the traditional two-seat groupings into five-seat groupings, in the Chamber’s back rows.

Other outstanding design-related decisions include plans for the roughly 50 high-heritage spaces—or “Pearson Special Rooms”—in Centre Block. In terms of landscaping, leftover

matters include the placement of statues around the Hill.

D’Entremont noted party caucuses were briefed on seating options before the winter break. “We’re doing our work. Some of it is not as straightforward, unfortunately, when you’re trying to deal with a bunch of different caucuses and a bunch of different people with different ideas, so we just need to get the consensus on some of those things.”

Once the working group reaches a single recommendation on House seating, it still needs to go to the BOIE for approval. While the board itself currently has no plans to meet during prorogation, D’Entremont noted the working group’s recommendations are generally adopted, and said the aim is to “give enough direction to PSPC that they can prepare for any eventuality.”

“Most of our directions have been accepted, so as long as we’re careful in the decisions we’re making and understanding the importance of getting it to BOIE for final approval, PSPC is good at sort of managing the expectation as time rolls on,” he said.

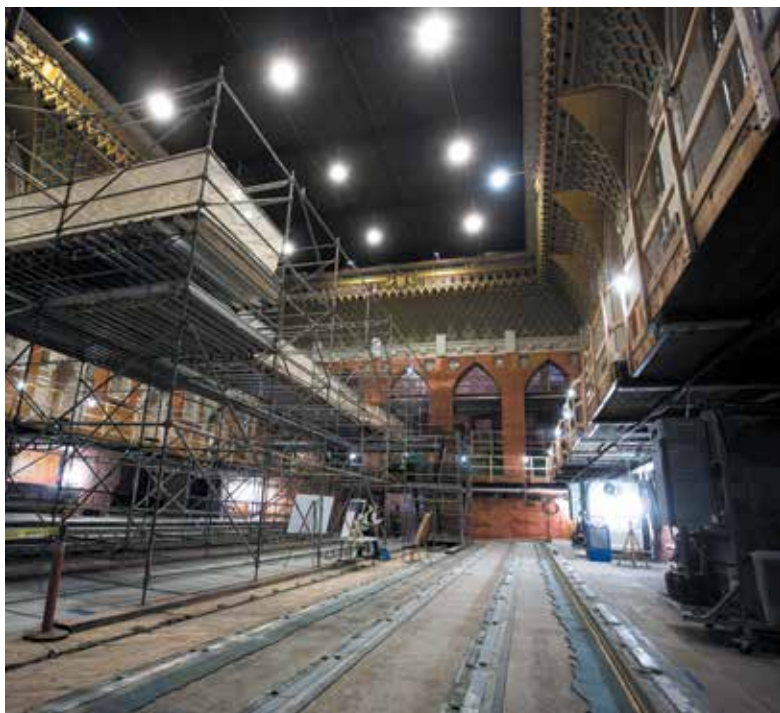
Asked about the potential impact of prorogation on project progress, Guillaume Bertrand, communications director to Public Services and Procurement Minister Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec, Que.), said, “We have confidence in the process, and we expect no delay due to the prorogation.”

In response to emailed questions, the department said, “PSPC continues to work closely with the Senate and House of Commons Administrations to advance decision-making for the Centre Block Rehabilitation project.”

## Project spending passes billion-dollar mark

PSPC’s latest quarterly progress report covering the last three months of 2024 was released in early January, and indicates almost \$1.1-billion has now been spent of the project’s overall

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The House of Commons Chamber as seen during a Nov. 14, 2024, media tour of Centre Block. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*



The Parliament Welcome Centre pit where two of three planned tower cranes have been installed as of January. *Photograph courtesy of Public Services and Procurement Canada*

## COMMENT

# Canada's winners and losers in the Trump tariff war

Those on the 'wrong side' of the debate have been vilified, while those promoting Canada are suddenly in vogue.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



OTTAWA—Hell hath no fury like a country scorned. Canada has risen up on its hind legs to send the United States a message: we are not happy with President Donald Trump and his attacks on our country. No, we are not the "51st state," we are not "spoiled," the U.S. is not "subsidizing" us, and we can deal with our own challenges without annexation, thank you.

From the booing at NHL games to criticism from elected officials, Canadians have collectively thrown off the mantle of "niceness." Not only are we giving preference to Canadian goods, but we are also boycotting American products.

The transformation from "America's little brother" to "true patriot love" has meant those on the "wrong side" of the debate have been vilified, while those promoting Canada are suddenly in vogue. It has meant significant shifts in public opinion, and changes in strategy. In short, there are winners and losers.

I always eschewed "racehorse politics" for substantive policy assessments; to me, it is the "steak" of politics that counts, not the sizzle. I also try to avoid strategically ranking political figures on their fortunes, for events can change the terrain quickly. As former United Kingdom prime minister Harold Wilson famously said, "A week is a long time in politics."

So, with a caveat that everything could change in the near future, here is an assessment of

who has gained and who has lost from the Trump Tariff Tantrums.

First of all, the winners:

• **Doug Ford:** While many Canadians—or Ontarians—have little time for the premier from Etobicoke, he has managed to gain respect on American television, reminding Fox News viewers "Ontario alone keeps the lights on for 1.5 million homes in New York, Michigan, and Minnesota." It is no wonder he called a "referendum election" where the only real ballot-box question is: "Who can take on Trump?"

• **Mark Carney:** The prospective next Liberal leader and prime minister is looking more like a shoo-in, not only because of endorsements from most of the current cabinet, but also because his presumed depth on the international scene makes him a formidable opponent to Trump over Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre.

• **Justin Trudeau:** The prime minister has actually looked like a head of government in the last few weeks, and despite his famous comment that the country has no "core identity," he even invoked Canadian history

to explain to Americans why we take our sovereignty seriously. He is looking like the leader he should have been the last decade.

And the losers:

• **Pierre Poilievre:** Looking like the teenager he told Jordan Peterson he remains, Poilievre can no longer rely on slogans like "Axe the Tax" to rile up his base. So the Conservatives are planning a narrative pivot to "Canada First," a pretty transparent admission they are losing the battle for who takes on Trump.

• **François Legault:** The Quebec premier's government recently introduced Bill 84, "An Act respecting national integration," effectively declaring Quebec a sovereign state. With Trump's declarations, he had to don the costume of "Captain Canada" in Quebec. While it hardly fits the old separatist, the irony is delightful.

• **Paul St-Pierre Plamondon:** The Parti Québécois leader and putative next premier backpedalled from his initial endorsement of Trump's attacks, relishing the future destruction of Canada. Except, oops—he read the polls indicating Quebecers want to remain Canadian, and is

now promoting diversified international trade.

• **Yves-François Blanchet:** He was already measuring the drapes at Stornoway, anticipating a Liberal wipe-out, and an *indépendantiste* Bloc Québécois official opposition. As Carney overtakes Blanchet in Quebec, the Bloc leader is now described as an "ally of Canada" in Quebec's French media.

• **Danielle Smith:** Funny how that meeting in Mar-a-Lago with Kevin O'Leary now looks pretty stupid? And how quickly the Alberta premier began draping herself in the flag?

Visiting American sports teams might be added to the list of losers, as they are going to hear the boobirds until Trump backs down. And while not very polite, booing the American anthem allows Canadians who will never get close to a bilateral Canada-U.S. negotiating table to express themselves. As they say, *Vox Populi, Vox Dei*.

I will be in Florida this week at an international conference trying to explain Canadian concerns about Trump. I will share their response with you next week.

*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 [pipton52@hotmail.com](mailto:pipton52@hotmail.com).*

*The Hill Times*

## Talking Trump's truth

Canadian leaders have begun finding creative solutions to solve a problem that does not exist.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—In his first few weeks back in the Oval Office, United States President Donald Trump has launched a torrent of executive orders in such rapid succession as to be almost impossible for opposition parties and the media to focus on a single topic.

Political strategists note this is a deliberate tactic known as "flooding the zone." Therefore, I will not get distracted by the chaff in the form of Trump's wild plans to annex Greenland, reclaim the Panama Canal, and—perhaps most bonkers of all—Trump's call for the U.S. to own the Gaza Strip, and turn it into the "Riviera of the Middle East."

Instead, I will focus only on those issues which directly affect

Canada and Canadians. From the time he won the election and prior to his actual inauguration, Trump repeatedly threatened to impose a 25-per-cent tariff on all Canadian and Mexican imports.

At first, Trump emphasized the financial necessity for the tariffs, claiming that the trade deficit between the U.S. and Canada amounts to a "subsidy" to the Canadian economy. In making his argument, Trump used his trademark exaggeration to claim that the current Canada-U.S.-Mexico (CUSMA) free trade agreement was perhaps "the worst trade deal in history."

For the record, that CUSMA was negotiated in 2018 by the first Trump administration to replace NAFTA. When he signed CUSMA, Trump boastfully proclaimed it was perhaps "the best trade agreement in history." But I digress.

As the tariff deadline loomed, Trump changed his tack and began demonizing Canada for not managing our shared border efficiently. Trump actually claimed that Canadian negligence at policing the border had resulted in the deaths of more than 300,000 American citizens through fentanyl overdoses. Sadly, Trump's statistic of 300,000 fentanyl-related deaths since the opioid crisis began in 2010 is accurate.

However, to blame Canada for the entire tragedy defies all logic.

Over the past 12 months, a total of roughly 19 kilograms of fentanyl was seized by authorities at the U.S.-Canada border. Comparatively, more than 9,000 kg of fentanyl was seized at the U.S.-Mexico border.

In their latest report, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency lists the three major illegal fentanyl importers into the United States as China, Mexico, and India in that descending order. Canada was not even on that list.

However, Trump is the president of the United States of America, and he has the powers to punish Canada. As such, Canadian leaders began finding creative solutions to solve a problem that does not exist.

With much fanfare and media hoopla, it was announced that the RCMP had acquired two Black Hawk helicopters, which will be used to better secure our border. These military-grade utility helicopters were freshly painted with the RCMP logo, and reporters filmed RCMP tactical teams loading into the back.

While this might make for good theatre, these Black Hawks are being leased from, and operated by, an Ottawa-based company. While these helicopters have the impressive standard



U.S. President Donald Trump's blaming of Canada for the entire drug-overdose tragedy in his country defies all logic, writes Scott Taylor. *White House photograph by Shealah Craighead*

range of 590 kilometres, it must be remembered that the Canada-U.S. border is 8,890 kilometres long. I also question the role of a tactical team in intercepting would-be migrants attempting to cross our border.

Mexico earned a 30-day tariff reprieve from Trump when they offered to send 10,000 soldiers to patrol their border. Given Canada's woefully understaffed Canadian Armed Forces, such a deployment was not an option. Instead, Canada agreed to deploy more drones, police officers, and highlighted the \$1.3-billion that was already added to the border budget.

This was enough of an effort to earn us the same 30-day tariff grace period which Trump afforded to Mexico.

To fully appease Trump, we further agreed to appoint a "fentanyl czar" before that 30-day window expires. Alberta Premier Danielle Smith had earlier proposed that Canada name a border

czar in the form of a recently retired general.

For those puzzled by the sudden proliferation of made-up sounding czar titles, you are not alone. The term "border czar" was coined by the Trump election team to demonize then-vice-president Kamala Harris.

Czars were, of course, Russian monarchs with absolute powers. The insinuation that Harris had such sweeping powers as a "czar" meant she could be blamed for any shortcoming related to the border.

Then Trump got elected, and I guess it sounded like a good idea. One of his first acts was to create his own border czar, and he named Tom Homan to the post. Now it would seem Canada will create our own czar (or two), all to fix a problem that does not exist.

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

*The Hill Times*

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# Editorial

Editorial

## Concerned about Canada? Then think outside the border

Canadians are rightfully caught up in the machinations of politics down south. Our once-amenable neighbour is currently being led by a president seemingly hell bent on destroying not only his country, but also those who have the temerity to be linked to the United States in some economic fashion.

On Feb. 10, U.S. President Donald Trump signed off on a new set of tariffs on steel and aluminum exports to his country. Set to come into effect on March 12, the executive order targeting foreign steel relies on Trump's 2018 "national security" argument to rip up the agreements made with countries during his first stint in the White House to secure exemptions from 25-per-cent tariffs.

But despite that justification, the real rationale is—as it usually is with Trump—tied to money.

"Increasing and persistently high import volumes from countries exempted from the duties or subject to other alternative agreements like quotas and tariff-rate quotas have captured the benefit of U.S. demand at the domestic industry's expense and transmitted harmful effects onto the domestic industry," the executive order reads. "As steel import market share has increased, the domestic industry's performance has been depressed, resulting in capacity utilization rates persistently lower than the 80 per cent target level highlighted in the Secretary's report."

However, there are other ways Canada is being affected by U.S. actions, and they may not appear as obvious.

Worse still, this country can't claim to be a wholly innocent bystander.

As *The Hill Times'* Neil Moss reports, Global Affairs Canada is assessing the impact in the wake of the Trump administration freezing the work of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for 90 days. USAID is responsible for managing a budget of US\$40-billion.

While Trump may crow about "national security" when trying to prop up domestic industries, it's actions like slashing the support to developing countries and those disproportionately affected by the climate crisis—that they have no real hand in exacerbating—that are a real threat to stability for the U.S., Canada, and everyone else.

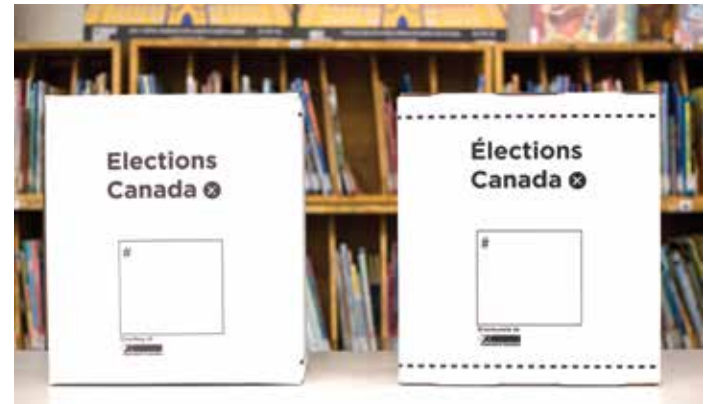
And while the American cuts are drastic, Canada's commitments are also shrinking, and in danger of being slashed further. Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has already pledged to "dramatically cut" foreign aid in an effort to boost defence spending if his party forms government.

Politicians and everyday Canadians are quick to criticize the Americans for actions like these, but it becomes hypocritical if we allow this country to follow down such a dark path.

There isn't much Canadians can do to effect change in the U.S. But if one is truly concerned about domestic security, the cost of living, health, immigration, housing, and the deterioration of our natural resources due to climate change, then international aid and development is an area that must continue to be supported and funded.

*The Hill Times*

Letters to the Editor



There could be an opening for progress on electoral reform as part of the Liberal leadership race, write Anita Nickerson and Réal Lavergne. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

## A way forward for Liberal leadership candidates on electoral reform: Fair Vote Canada

Re: "What about a 2026 election instead?" (*The Hill Times*, Jan. 29). Nelson Wiseman's argument that the federal election should be delayed until 2026 to bring in electoral reform correctly speaks to the profound disappointment of many Canadians over Justin Trudeau's broken promise on this score. However, Wiseman's idea of delaying the election for a year is unrealistic. The clock has probably run out for meaningful reform in this Parliament.

That said, there could be an opening for progress on electoral reform as part of the Liberal leadership race.

Of course, the economy, pocketbook issues such as housing, and how to deal with United States President Donald Trump will dominate the leadership race as priorities—and rightly so.

However, these priorities and a strong, fair, and resilient democracy go hand in hand. Countries with proportional representation are less polarized, and have been shown to produce better policy results on all fronts, including the economy.

A new prime minister who expresses an open mind on proportional representation would represent a clear and refreshing break from the past 10 years.

A thoughtful search for a path to compromise on electoral reform would be inspiring in its own right.

What would that look like? Here's a three-point recipe any serious candidate for the leadership should consider:

1. Express support for making our electoral system more proportional. This is the key to making progress on a multi-party consensus on electoral reform. It would also be popular with voters. A recent Ekos poll shows that 68 per cent of voters support proportional representation.

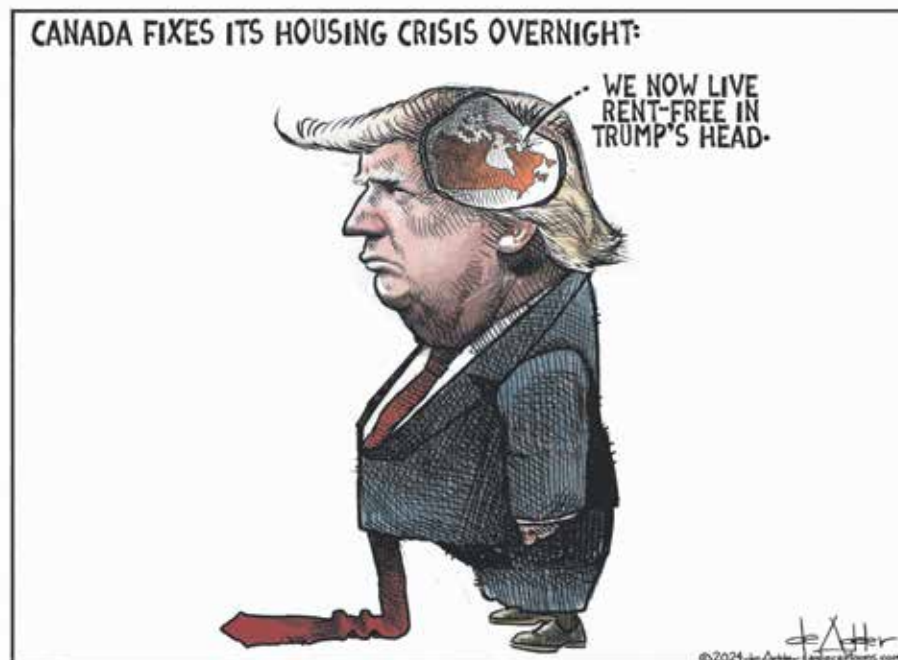
2. Commit to a non-partisan citizens' assembly on electoral reform to seek informed citizen input on what citizens themselves are looking for. This is something that Liberal members voted for and prioritized at their May 2023 policy convention.

3. Commit to including those ideas in the next election platform.

The above formula avoids any hint of overpromising. What it does is provide a credible way to re-open the conversation. Most countries achieved proportional representation by multi-party agreement. Canadians understand that important things worth doing for the country take time, hard work, and compromise. Electing a prime minister committed to building a stronger, more resilient, and more inclusive electoral system would be a good place to start.

**Anita Nickerson**  
 Executive director,  
 Fair Vote Canada  
 Kitchener, Ont.

**Réal Lavergne**  
 Former president,  
 Fair Vote Canada, and current  
 president of the National  
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## COMMENT

In Canada, U.S. President Donald Trump's flailing about in his new king-of-the-world act has sparked a political upheaval unlike anything seen in decades, writes Les Whittington. *White House photograph by Andrea Hanks*



# Carving a new future in the wake of Trump's betrayal

President Donald Trump's decision to turn on his northern neighbour has forced Canadians to take stock of their heritage, and thrown open the door to a much more constructive dialogue at the national level.

Les Whittington

Need to Know



**O**TTAWA—Despite a supposed pause in the standoff over across-the-board tariffs with the United States, Canada has once again found itself on the brink of a trade war over steel and aluminum initiated by President Donald Trump in his increasingly confrontational stance toward the Americans' northern neighbour.

Reshuffling the deck in his dealings with Canada and other countries in the usual impromptu fashion, Trump told reporters on Feb. 9 the way to the Super Bowl that he was about to impose 25-percent import taxes on all

steel and aluminum, including from Canada.

And, in an earlier pre-game interview, he appeared to sidetrack current negotiations with Canada and Mexico over his threatened across-the-board tariffs, telling the world for the first time that in his opinion the two countries have not done enough to address the irritants he sees in their relationships with the U.S. The Canada-U.S.-Mexico trade partnership is unsustainable and he is going to change it, Trump added.

That would have been news to the many Canadians trying to dissuade the U.S. from imposing sweeping tariffs on this country

during the putative 30-day hiatus in the impasse. But few would have been surprised when he casually confirmed that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was correct in saying the president is serious about annexing Canada. Trump did, however, put a new twist on his trolling of Canadians. Criticizing Ottawa's military spending record, he said Canadians should no longer count on the U.S. military to help defend their territory.

It's just the latest in the president's rambling, off-the-cuff demolition of anything and everything along the lines of responsible, accepted notions of statesmanship or the traditional

global leadership role aspired to by the U.S. In recent days, Trump has even managed with his half-baked, outrageous proposal on Gaza to unify the Europeans with Russia and China for the first time in recent memory as part of the global condemnation of the U.S. president's dark Middle East fantasy.

In Canada, Trump's flailing about in his new king-of-the-world act has sparked a political upheaval unlike anything seen in decades. Only a few weeks ago, Mark Carney's attempt to become Liberal leader and prime minister was universally seen as a fool's errand in the midst of a long-standing Conserva-

tive lead in the polls. But things are shifting faster than anyone would have expected. As a former central banker in Canada and the United Kingdom who has dealt with some of the biggest economic crises of the past two decades, Carney is getting a sizable upsurge in interest as a result of the current national emergency.

A new Nanos poll finds that 39.6 per cent of Canadians surveyed consider Carney as the most qualified leader to negotiate with Trump and his administration. That compares to 26 per cent of Canadians who say Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre would be best.

"Not only do they think [Carney] is more qualified, but he has a significant advantage over Pierre Poilievre," Nik Nanos told the *Globe and Mail*. "This is significant because our next election will probably be a referendum on who is best able to manage the relationship with Donald Trump."

Poilievre's homeboy resumé looks pretty thin in this context, and his refrain that Canada is "broken" sounds more hollow than ever—forcing the Conservatives to quickly overhaul their entire pre-election messaging.

Politically and otherwise, Canadians' attitudes have changed almost overnight—as is obvious in the upsurge in patriotic efforts by governments and consumers to boycott American products, cancel visits to American destinations, supercharge programs to diversify trade, and begin thinking seriously about major changes to the country's economic framework.

This is a far-reaching agenda by anyone's standards for a decentralized country like Canada. And in the end, it will come down to whether Canadians are going to pursue actual changes in the name of unity and strengthening the country's independence, or just talk about it. On this point, note that Alberta Premier Danielle Smith and Quebec Premier François Legault have refused to entertain cutting off much-needed energy imports to the U.S. in the tariff clash.

Looking ahead, the need to strip away the country's ridiculous interprovincial trade barriers, and unleash billions of dollars in economic efficiencies has never been more obvious. And it will be vital to increase military spending, and take advantage of economic and diplomatic alliances in Europe and Asia.

Whatever else happens, it's clear that Trump's decision to turn on his northern neighbour has forced Canadians to take stock of their heritage, and thrown open the door to a much more co-operative, constructive dialogue at the national level than we have been having in the populist wasteland of the past several years.

Canada obviously needs a leader with stature and experience to stand up to Trump, and deal with his out-of-control demands. As well, Canadians need a functioning Parliament and a set of choices about their future that goes beyond gratuitous nihilism and juvenile slogans.

*Les Whittington is a regular columnist for The Hill Times.*  
The Hill Times



Liberal leadership candidate Mark Carney is getting a sizable upsurge in interest as a result of the current national emergency, writes Les Whittington. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

## COMMENT

# Don't count your ballot-box questions before they've hatched

Despite the best efforts of political parties, aided by media narratives, one simple question doesn't influence the entirety of the electorate.

Tim Powers

Plain Speak



OTTAWA—There is no doubt United States President Donald Trump is dominating and shaping the current global political discourse. In Canada, his whiplash-inducing pronouncements have us spinning trying to figure out what is next.

The main Liberal leadership candidates Mark Carney and

Chrystia Freeland have crossed all their fingers and toes hoping that whenever a general election does come, who is best to deal with Trump will serve as the ballot question. Some polling done by Nanos Research last week for CTV found that Carney is—for now—preferred over Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre and Freeland to lead the charge against Trump.

That data and some other slight—but not insignificant—movement in other polls focused on party horse-race standings have given the Liberals a bit of hope. It is far too early to determine whether or not that is a misguided notion. But Liberals desperate for positive vibes will take what they can get.

Among some of the commentariat, it feels like a verdict has been rendered on what the next federal election ballot question will be, and it's the one Liberal candidates would like: who is best able to deal with the 47<sup>th</sup> U.S. president? That is far too premature of a posture.

What happens in mid-February may not be what is happening when the election finally happens. Also, despite the best efforts of



Liberal leadership candidate Chrystia Freeland has positioned herself as being the best foil for the U.S. president, but that may be too premature a posture, writes Tim Powers. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

political parties, aided by media narratives, one simple question doesn't influence the entirety of the electorate. There is no doubting Trump's omnipresence in our politics, nor that it will affect the way

people will assess our would-be leaders, but it alone is unlikely to divine the outcome of the election.

In modern Canadian political memory, only the 1988 free-trade election dealt wholeheartedly with our economic relationship with the U.S. But it was a Canadian prime minister, Brian Mulroney, asking Canadians to support a trade arrangement that respected our sovereignty, and promised to yield economic reward. It was a ballot choice about who was best able to defend us from a bellicose American leader threatening us with economic warfare, if that is in fact what is happening.

In the 2004 election, some political hay was made by the Liberals of then-new Conservative leader Stephen Harper's previous support of the Iraq war. Nonetheless, the Liberals held onto power with a minority, despite themselves and the baggage accumulated over a decade in power. It's important to remember that from Sept. 11, 2001, onwards, Canada's political discourse was full of debates about then-American president George

W. Bush and his foreign policy. Our involvement in the war in Afghanistan rightly garnered daily attention. But the 2004, 2006, and 2008 elections didn't see solitary ballot questions about those weighty matters.

Trump exists outside the political system we know, and has defied the conventions that traditionally apply. That could lend a challenge to conventions around Canadian elections, which often twist and turn around domestic priority issues. The desire for change—as is the case elsewhere—is also an important driver. Poilievre would like to keep that conventional approach, and keep cultivating the change sentiment that has coalesced around him and the Conservative Party to date. If he does that, he wins. However, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's resignation and Trump's belligerence towards Canada, Poilievre is not easily going to get the ballot question he wanted: a referendum on all things Trudeau.

It is just not clear what Canadians will be focusing on in the 2025 election regardless of what political parties would hope to dangle in front of them now.

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*

## OPINION

# The Trumpian tempest, and Canada's foreign policy reckoning

While Canada advocates peace and diplomacy, it remains entangled in western strategic interests, reinforcing the very power structures that drive instability.

Narendra Pachkhédé

Opinion



So, we have kicked the can down the road earning a 30-day reprieve on Canada-specific tariffs. Grocery stores and the airwaves resemble battlefields as the nationalist sentiment surges in Canada as result of United States President Donald Trump's threats.

However, this economic rift is part of a larger geopolitical upheaval, underscored by U.S.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio's acceptance of a multipolar world, and his push to align American humanitarian efforts with strategic interests, as acting administrator of USAID, pushing the agency closer to becoming an arm of U.S. foreign policy rather than an independent force for global development.

If unipolarity was a fleeting anomaly, then the foundation of America's grand strategy—dominance under the guise of benevolent leadership—is unravelling. Trump is no mere aberration in the fabric of geopolitics; he is its lightning rod. His rejection of the so-called rules-based international order reveals it for what it has always been: not a covenant of universal values but a system designed to maintain western dominance. How should Canada navigate this upheaval? We must confront hard truths, abandon illusions, and rethink our place in the world.

The dissonance in Canadian foreign policy lies in its conflation of two eras: the post-Second World War order, defined by collective security and containment; and its post-Cold War successor, a unipolar hegemony steeped in liberal triumphalism. Canada, long a vocal

defender of this liberal order, now faces a reckoning. We champion human rights, multilateralism, and diplomacy, yet our foreign policy tells a different story. The contradictions have never been starker.

While Canada advocates peace and diplomacy, it remains entangled in western strategic interests, reinforcing the very power structures that drive instability. Its role, once shaped by postwar multilateralism, has since aligned with a crumbling U.S.-led order, leaving Canada clinging to outdated assumptions. The Ukraine war and Gaza conflict expose this tension. Meanwhile, the unipolar era—built on the Washington Consensus and the promise of seamless globalization—was always unsustainable. Its success fuelled its downfall, triggering deindustrialization, inequality, and nationalist backlash, from Brexit to Trump to Canada's own trucker protests, all signalling a broader disillusionment with the neoliberal project. Meanwhile, Asian powers like China and India, along with Russia, are challenging the western-led framework through alternative institutions such as BRICS. The result

is a fractured global landscape where old alliances are fraying, and Canada can no longer afford to operate on autopilot.

This moment demands more than rhetorical commitments to multilateralism—it requires a fundamental reassessment of Canada's strategic direction. We can no longer rely on the assumption that Washington's interests align with our own. Pursuing a foreign policy independent of U.S. hegemony does not mean abandoning democratic values or traditional allies. Still, it does mean engaging with the world in a way that prioritizes Canadian interests rather than reflexively mirroring American priorities.

What remains of the liberal international order has proven woefully inadequate in addressing today's most significant challenges: climate change, systemic inequality, and the rise of authoritarianism and populism. At this crossroads, Canada must decide whether to continue tethering itself to a declining U.S.-led system or to chart a more independent, pragmatic path.

While chaotic, Trump's dismantling of the old order presents

an opportunity that requires bold leadership. Canada can pivot away from outdated foreign policy assumptions, and engage with the world on its terms, free from the constraints of U.S. priorities. This shift will not be easy. It will require bold leadership, a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, and a recognition that the institutions we once trusted are no longer fit for purpose. But the alternative—clinging to a crumbling order out of habit or fear—will leave Canada increasingly vulnerable to the forces reshaping the world.

For all its disruptions, the Trumpian tempest has exposed the fault lines in the global system. Canada now has a choice: remain a passive actor in a failing order or take the initiative to shape a future rooted in true multilateralism, not outdated loyalties. The question is whether we have the vision and will to seize it. In this storm, our compass must point to the horizons of possibility ahead.

Narendra Pachkhédé is a Commonwealth Fellow, an independent scholar, and writer. A trained journalist with expertise in connected histories and comparative anthropology, his work spans politics, foreign affairs, cinema, and culture across digital, print, and radio platforms. His work has been published in anthologies and on various other platforms, including NAKEDPUNCH.COM, The Wire, TimesHeadline, The Dawn, and The News on Sunday.

*The Hill Times*

# Rising costs, and the looming threat of tariffs disproportionately affecting Métis

The cost-of-living crisis has pushed many Métis households to the brink. With the looming threat of 25-per-cent tariffs, this situation will only worsen.

Victoria Pruden



Opinion

Across the country, Canadians are grappling with the rising costs of food, housing, and fuel. But in Métis communities, these challenges are hitting harder and pushing many to the brink. A recent report from Statistics Canada is alarming: nearly half (44 per cent) of Métis struggled to meet basic financial needs last year. The cost-of-living crisis has pushed many Métis households to

the brink. With the looming threat of 25-per-cent tariffs, this situation will only worsen.

The Métis Nation, as a founding partner in Confederation, played a key role in shaping Canada's economy. Our ancestors not only helped build Canada, but ensured the very survival of our economy during challenging times. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Métis entrepreneurship and ingenuity fuelled the fur trade—the economic engine that drove early Canadian development. Central to this effort was pemmican, a high-energy, long-lasting food made from dried bison meat, fat, and berries. This staple sustained fur traders on gruelling journeys, ensuring the flow of goods between trading posts and markets. Without Métis pemmican—in many cases made by our women—the fur trade, and by extension, the Canadian economy, would not have thrived.

The sad irony today is that the Métis Nation—which once drove Canada's economy and laid the groundwork for our collective prosperity—now faces disproportionate food insecurity. According to StatsCan, 59 per cent of Métis are unable to afford healthy and nutritious food. Rising costs of

essentials have placed immense strain on Métis households.

This economic strain also threatens traditional Métis ways of life. For many Métis communities, hunting, fishing, and trapping remain vital practices for sustenance and cultural preservation. Yet the rising cost of fuel, ammunition, and equipment has significantly limited access to these traditional practices, further exacerbating food insecurity.

Adding to this precarious situation is United States President Donald Trump's threat of sweeping tariffs on Canadian goods. These measures will drive up costs, disrupt supply chains, and disproportionately impact Métis entrepreneurs and businesses. Many Métis enterprises operate in agriculture, resource development, and other trade-sensitive sectors. Tariffs would deepen economic inequality, threatening employment and community stability while undermining Métis contributions to Canada's economy.

To address these challenges, all party leaders—including candidates vying to become leader of the Liberal Party—must prioritize lowering the cost of living in meaningful ways. Métis, First Nation, and Inuit leaders must be included at deci-

sion-making tables, particularly as Canada crafts its strategy for engaging with the U.S. As rights-bearing Indigenous Peoples under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, we are part of the constitutional fabric of Canada, and must be included in shaping policies that affect our rights, priorities, and interests. Our knowledge, perspectives, and contributions are invaluable to these discussions and to the future of Canada-U.S. relations.

The Government of Canada must take immediate action to address the disproportionate impacts of rising costs and looming tariffs on Métis communities. Targeted supports must be co-developed with Métis, First Nations, and Inuit leaders to ensure the Indigenous households most affected by inflation can meet their basic needs. It is equally important to equip Métis businesses with the resources and tools necessary to withstand trade disruptions and maintain economic stability in vulnerable sectors like agriculture and resource development.

Métis, First Nation, and Inuit leaders must be included in international trade negotiations to ensure our voices are heard and the unique vulnerabilities facing

our people are addressed. This inclusion would also allow Canada to benefit from the tremendous capabilities, valuable expertise, and resilience Métis communities bring to the table. Finally, expanding food security programs tailored to Métis communities, including investments in traditional harvesting practices that have also been disproportionately impacted by climate change would help alleviate food insecurity and preserve cultural traditions.

The Métis Nation has always been resilient. From shaping the fur trade to defending Canada's borders in the War of 1812 and fighting for our rightful recognition in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982, Métis leaders envisioned a Canada where all its people could thrive. Today, we need to ensure that vision isn't lost.

The Métis National Council is ready to work with all levels of government to create solutions that honour our contributions and safeguard our future. Together, we can confront these challenges head-on, ensuring a better Canada for all.

Victoria Pruden is the president of the Métis National Council.  
The Hill Times

# Madly off in all directions: making sense of Trump's war on allies

The U.S. is waking up to the fact that being a hegemonic power requires a lot of effort.

David Carment & Dani Belo



Opinion

For decades, the United States has used national emergencies as a pretext to impose economic and political costs on adversaries and allies. Today, however, economic coercion—along with a range of hybrid war-fighting techniques—are an increasingly important American tool for exerting power. In this latest round of coercive actions we see an unending leveraging of interlocking dependencies to advantage the U.S. against Canada, Mexico, and the European Union, as well as Taiwan, Panama, and Colombia.

This is because the U.S. is waking up to the fact

that being a hegemonic power requires a lot of effort. Costly warfighting, a defence budget nearing \$1-trillion, alliances that don't function well, and trade imbalances combine—in President Donald Trump's view—to disadvantage the U.S. as *primus inter pares*, or first among equals.

Trump is now seeking to recover these costs, even at the expense of global co-operation. Some believe this seismic shift is consistent with an American desire for greater military restraint, and economic self sufficiency. Others argue that American exceptionalism immunizes the country from retaliation. But Trump's transformed policy agenda is problematic, not just for Canada, but also other trading nations who are guided by reciprocity, mutual gains, and trust.

On the one hand, Trump's strategy aims to insulate the U.S. from the vagaries and uncertainty of a multipolar world, continuing a process of maximizing gains that has unfolded over the past 20 years. For example, over the last two decades America's share of G7 GDP has surged, reinforcing its economic dominance among allies while simul-

taneously losing a share of global GDP to the BRICS nations.

On the other hand, Trump's strategy does not guarantee a more stable or prosperous world. The president's plans for global security and diplomacy favour short-term gains over long-term stability, leaving allies and adversaries alike to navigate the fallout. His emphasis on economic nationalism and transactional diplomacy means that U.S. engagement abroad will likely be reduced to a narrow focus on resource extraction, counterterrorism, and rebuilding deterrence.

For example, Trump's vision of Middle East peace prioritizes aggressive economic and diplomatic pressure on Iran and its proxies, alongside unconditional backing of Israeli security policies and land claims. This strategy may embolden Israel's deterrence posture, but will also escalate hostilities with Hezbollah, Hamas, and other regional actors.

Trump's plan to end the war in Ukraine—while framed as a pragmatic move—gives precedence to disengagement over Ukrainian sovereignty, forcing European nations to shoulder not only the massive financial cost of rebuilding Ukraine, but also

the responsibility of managing relations with Russia.

Similarly Africa's conflicts—already sidelined in global policy discussions—will receive even less attention under his administration, exacerbating humanitarian crises and regional insecurity. With USAID dismantled, there will be a diplomatic vacuum; an opportunity for China and Russia to expand their influence through economic investments, military partnerships, and political interventions.

Is Canada prepared for this shift? In the midst of Trump's fast-moving agenda, Canada must recognize that its policy choices are growing more incoherent in a bifurcated strategic landscape, where economic coercion and geopolitical realignments require bold, independent decision-making. Ottawa's defence, diplomacy, and development policies are mirror images of U.S. policies of a previous presidency, and are perhaps incapable of adaptation. The reliance on military spending benchmarks—such as meeting NATO's two-per-cent GDP target—is a distraction from the deeper structural challenges Canada faces in navigating an increasingly fragmented global order.

Instead of resorting to retaliation, Canada must re-engage globally and forge new trade alliances, reducing its reliance on the U.S. Canada's leaders need to stop forming ineffective and divisive coalitions, and start doing real diplomacy by prioritizing negotiation, and the establishment of clear communication channels with rivals, adversaries, and allies to effectively manage our transition to a multipolar world.

David Carment is a fellow of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, and the Institute for Peace and Diplomacy. He has led the Country Indicators for Policy project, a risk assessment and forecasting tool focused on diaspora, fragile states, and grey zone conflict. He is the founding series editor of Canada and International Affairs, and served as editor of Canadian Foreign Policy Journal for 14 years. His most recent books include Democracy and Foreign Policy in an Era of Uncertainty, and The Handbook of Fragile States.

Dani Belo is an assistant professor of international relations at Webster University in St. Louis, Mo., and a fellow at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs in Ottawa. His research focuses on hybrid and grey-zone conflicts, transatlantic security, grand strategy, the evolution of NATO-Russia relations, ethnic conflicts, and the post-Soviet region.

The Hill Times

## OPINION

# Fighting back through defence innovation

We owe it to ourselves to have sovereign defence capabilities that meet our needs, and can help contribute to the security of our allies as well.

Charlotte Duval-Lantoine



Opinion



Defence Minister Bill Blair. As long as our governments continue to have low tolerance to mistakes and refuse to reward outside-the-box thinking, we will fall behind, writes Charlotte Duval-Lantoine. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Barely back in the Oval Office, United States President Donald Trump has mounted the pressure on NATO allies to spend well over two per cent of GDP on defence. Canada has yet to meet that minimum threshold—although discourse from our southern neighbour seems to have an effect. Defence Minister Bill Blair suggested in late January that getting to two per cent by 2027 is “achievable.”

In parallel, our allies and adversaries alike invest in emerging, advanced, and disruptive technologies. Ukraine constantly tests the use of commercial technology with “old school,” kinetic ones. Battle space innovation only highlights how far behind we are

not just in terms of spending, but also in terms of capabilities.

Stories of defence spending and defence procurement tell the same tale: rigid structures that create year-long delays, ballooning of costs, and risk aversion. Today, the Department of National Defence is behind on spending the money allocated in *Strong, Secure, Engaged*.

To get to two per cent, and get the technology the Canadian Armed Forces needs, we cannot do business as usual. It is high time we innovate. To get there, we ought to change our mindsets. The rules-based approach to procurement—one that imposes

competition for its own sake without flexibility in terms of requirements, and prevents more direct operator-industry partnership—is no longer fit for purpose. Canada is rife with startups offering nimble, dual-use technologies that do not get the support they need and deserve from the government. Competitions are too resource heavy for those small enterprises, and the few times they are awarded money and get the opportunity to test and refine their technology for operators, no procurement mechanisms exist for the CAF to obtain the technology it helped develop. This creates a system where ideas stagnate

and Canada loses out on critical capabilities.

As long as our governments continue to have low tolerance for mistakes and refuse to reward outside-the-box thinking, we will fall behind.

Fundamental changes are needed, but we are aware that they cannot all happen overnight. But to get started, the government should start rewarding risk taking, and increase its tolerance for mistakes. Instead of imposing stricter rules every time mistakes occur or unintended consequences arise, a principle-based approach to innovation—one that fosters free exchange of ideas, rapid response, and learning as challenges arise—needs to be adopted.

There is no need for extensive policy changes to get started; guidance for managers and informal changes to reward structures could be pursued. In parallel, the government has to examine—quickly—how to leverage the current tools it has in order to accelerate processes. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Blair, with the support of cabinet, could give guidance to the bureaucracy on how to implement investments. At the bureaucratic level, money and personnel are needed so that the various procurement agencies have the resources necessary to move swiftly and effectively.

The shift of mindset ought to come from the top down. Canadian industry is ready to support

defence and dual-use related investments, and has even called for the drafting and implementation of a Defence Industrial Strategy—a call DND has responded to with the creation of an assistant deputy minister (Industrial Strategy). Now the first question is: what should it look like? The second question should be: how can we effectively implement it? It will require a change in culture.

Canada is blossoming with startups offering new and innovative solutions. Canadian research and development in technologies such as artificial intelligence is world class. None of these attributes that could make Canada a reliable and innovative ally are effectively being leverage for the defence of our country.

Fostering Canadian innovation goes beyond patriotism, and recognizing the excellence of which the country is capable. It is also about ensuring our own defence, and protecting our economy. Considering the looming tariff threats, we can no longer lean as much as we do on the U.S. market for military equipment. We owe it to ourselves to have sovereign defence capabilities that meet our needs, and can help contribute to the security of our allies as well.

This will take political leadership that garners the strength of its society, and the might of its bureaucracy to achieve success. It is time to recognize that innovating for the defence of the country is investing in and innovating for the country and its citizens. If our leaders want to see Canadians thrive and be well defended, investing in defence is investing in that future.

*Charlotte Duval-Lantoine is the executive director of Triple Helix, a Mobilizing Insights in Defence and Security Collaborative Network, and the vice-president of Ottawa operations at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute.*  
*The Hill Times*

# Understanding the complex challenges faced by Canada's aging population

The National Institute on Ageing's annual survey should serve as a call to action to address inequalities for the most vulnerable populations.

Gabrielle Gallant & Alyssa Brierley



Opinion

The National Institute on Ageing's recently released *Perspectives on Growing Older* survey reveals critical insight for policymakers, particularly around major gaps in support systems for older adults, with findings that indicate that poverty among older adults in Canada could be twice as high as official numbers.

With findings drawn from a representative sample of nearly 6,000 Canadians, this year's report highlights ongoing challenges, and identifies actionable areas where targeted interventions and policy innovations can significantly improve quality of life.

This survey—the only one of its kind, intended to deepen our shared understanding of the perspectives and experiences of

Canadians as they age—should serve as a call to action, underscoring the need to address persistent barriers and inequalities for the most vulnerable populations.

As Canada's aging population grows, understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with this demographic shift becomes increasingly essential. Now in its third year, the survey provides an invaluable lens into the evolving realities of aging in Canada, offering fresh data about the social, financial, and health-related dimensions of older adults' lives.

The 2024 survey builds on the foundations of previous years, incorporating both recurring measures and new indicators like the Material Deprivation Index

to deepen our understanding of older adults' lived experiences. Official poverty rates in Canada are established using the Market Basket Measure and sit around six per cent for older adults. The NIA's research reveals that poverty rates among Canadian older adults could actually be twice as high.

The Material Deprivation Index reveals widespread poverty among older Canadians, with one in five living at a poverty-level standard of living. For those aged 65 and older, 14 per cent experience material deprivation, more than double the rate indicated by Canada's official poverty measures. The inability to afford basic essentials such as a \$500 emergency expense (20 per cent), or regular dental care (16 per

cent) underscores the financial precarity faced by many. Vulnerable groups—including women, renters, single-person households, and those with lower education levels—experience the highest levels of deprivation.

While financial well-being has improved for some older Canadians, significant challenges persist, highlighting disparities in financial stability, material deprivation, and retirement readiness.

More Canadians aged 50 years and older report that their income is “good enough” to allow savings—39 per cent in 2024, up from 33 per cent in 2023. However, one in four older adults continues to struggle with insufficient household income to meet their current or long-term needs. These

Continued on page 35



Internal Trade Minister Anita Anand. A national strategy must focus on building a more self-sufficient and diversified economy, starting with an integrated east-west trade corridor, write Jatin Nathwani and Ann Fitz-Gerald. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

# Beyond tariffs: securing Canada's economic sovereignty

We must urgently adopt a forward-looking approach that strengthens economic resilience, and reduces our vulnerability to U.S. policy volatility.

Jatin Nathwani & Ann Fitz-Gerald

Opinion



Canada will remain in the cross-chairs of the Trump administration, facing unpredictable and unyielding demands on a range of issues—an unwinnable game of political whack-a-mole. Tariffs may be the preferred weapon of the moment, but the underlying strategy is one of economic coercion. We are not dealing with a rational actor open to addressing legitimate concerns around border security, defence, climate policy, banking, or trade. Instead, Canada will face a steady stream of unilat-

eral, evidence-free assertions—often bordering on delusion—masquerading as policy. United States President Donald Trump's inability to distinguish between allies and adversaries will eventually hurt the U.S., but not before it inflicts serious damage on Canada's economy.

Retaliatory tariffs may offer some short-term leverage, but they are no substitute for a long-term strategy. Canada must urgently adopt a forward-looking approach that strengthens economic resilience, and reduces our vulnerability to U.S. policy volatility. A national strategy must focus on building a more self-sufficient and diversified economy, starting with an integrated east-west trade corridor—one that moves beyond the outdated model of simply expanding oil and gas pipelines.

This moment is more than just a trade dispute; it is a test of Canadian sovereignty and economic foresight. The response must be bold and transformative, positioning the country for the dual challenges of economic security and climate change. Future generations may look back at this crisis as the catalyst that forced Canada to chart a new course.

The strategy must be built on three pillars. First, the development of next-generation infrastructure that maximizes Canada's natural resource

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A STRONG,  
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wealth—critical minerals, hydro, nuclear, and renewables—ensuring national benefits. Second, a deep commitment to electrification across all sectors to harness our technological advantages in power generation, transmission, and artificial intelligence. Third, a sharp focus on talent development, enterprise, and innovation to create a more dynamic, self-reliant economy.

This effort must be matched by the elimination of internal trade barriers that prevent businesses from scaling up and competing globally. Federal and provincial governments must actively support market expansion while leveraging Canada's diplomatic and trade relationships to strengthen existing agreements and open new markets. While diversification away from the U.S. is a necessary short-term goal to reduce exposure to economic blackmail, infrastructure development must remain flexible to allow for improved relations in the future.

Energy security and national security must go hand in hand. Expanding electricity trade within Canada and with strategic partners can leverage our low-carbon advantage while contributing to continental emissions reductions. A major expansion of interprovincial electricity trade, supported by new transmission

interconnections, could create regional energy hubs that foster economic integration. Once the U.S. realizes its protectionist policies have made it an island of high-cost production, Canada should be well-positioned to re-engage as a critical energy supplier on its own terms.

Electrification and large-scale electricity trading must become central to Canada's national policy. Current regional markets remain constrained by limited transmission infrastructure, preventing electricity from being traded at the scale that pipelines allow for oil and gas. Yet, studies show that the equivalent energy of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion could be transmitted more efficiently through high-voltage direct current power lines. Globally, long-distance clean electricity transmission has proven both feasible and cost-effective.

Further, electrified freight transport—already well-established in Europe—should be incorporated into Canada's infrastructure planning. Co-locating high-voltage transmission lines along existing rail corridors would minimize land-use conflicts while laying the groundwork for future economic growth. Meanwhile, surging electricity demand from AI-driven data centres, electric vehicles, heat pumps, and industrial electrification underscores the need for expanded generation capacity. Canada's oil and gas expertise could be repurposed for geothermal energy development, accelerating the transition away from fossil fuel dependence.

Electricity generation is not just a commodity, but is also a high-value, manufactured good with immense potential to drive economic growth through interprovincial and international trade. Canada must position itself as a global leader in clean energy exports, using transmission infrastructure as the backbone of a modernized, competitive economy.

Investments in energy infrastructure and trade, viewed through the lens of national security, could also help reframe discussions around defence spending. A strong, integrated economy enhances Canada's strategic position and bargaining power in international relations. A clear, coherent national framework that links trade, energy security, and economic resilience will resonate with Canadians far more than reactive policy responses to external threats.

Canada must respond to this moment with quiet determination, rejecting unwarranted economic pressure while reinforcing its commitment to openness, pluralism, and pragmatic policy. This is an opportunity to demonstrate to the world that Canada is not merely a bystander in global affairs, but a country capable of shaping its own future. It is time to rise to the occasion.

*Jatin Nathwani is a professor of management science and engineering at the University of Waterloo, and a fellow at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, and Ann Fitz-Gerald is a professor of international security and the director of the Balsillie School of International Affairs.*  
*The Hill Times*

## NEWS

# Feds can do plenty during prorogation to take on Trump trade threats, say experts

Former Privy Council clerk Michael Wernick says opposition leaders calling for Parliament to resume need to ‘retract the threat to immediately stab the government in the chest and force a six-week election.’

BY SOPHALL DUCH

Experts say Canada can still negotiate with the United States in light of a potential trade crisis—even with Parliament’s prorogation.

“There’s lots of the cabinet can do in terms of communicating, making decisions, negotiating with the U.S. that doesn’t have to happen through Parliament. So I’m not really sure that the prorogation is impacting the way in which ministers would interact with [U.S. President Donald] Trump’s administration,” Lori Turnbull, a political scientist at Dalhousie University who worked as a policy adviser to the Privy Council Office from 2015 to 2017.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) prorogued Parliament until March 24, announcing the move the same day he laid out his plans to step down as prime minister after Liberal Party members choose a new leader on March 9.

Even with the governing Liberals caught up in a leadership race, Trudeau is insisting his government can handle Trump’s threats to put tariffs on Canadian goods,



Former Privy Council clerk Michael Wernick, pictured in 2019, says Canada has ‘a lot of economic shock absorbers’ in place to deal with the United States. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau holds a press conference on Feb. 1 to address Canada’s retaliatory response, which was put on pause after U.S. President Donald Trump agreed to a 30-day tariff reprieve on Feb. 3. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

and its potential devastating consequences on the economy.

Before the news of a 30-day pause on U.S. tariffs broke on Feb. 3, Trudeau faced questions over Parliament’s prorogation as he was announcing Canada’s plans for \$155-billion in targeted retaliatory tariffs.

“As you can see from our strong response package, as we spoke about with premiers this afternoon and have for many weeks, we have the tools to be able to support Canadians through this challenging time as it stands,” said Trudeau on Feb. 1.

Former clerk of the Privy Council Michael Wernick echoed Trudeau’s assessment that there are already “tools” in place for the government to respond to the potential Trump crisis during prorogation.

“We have a government, we have dozens of laws in place, and we have a number of tools at our disposal,” Wernick, the Jarislowsky Chair in Public Sector Management at the University of Ottawa, told *The Hill Times*.

“A lot of the economic shock absorbers are in place. The ability of the government to talk to the Americans, to talk to premiers, to talk to other Canadians is unfettered. So there’s quite a lot the government can do during this period when the legislature is offline,” added Wernick.

Wernick pointed to the snap provincial election in Ontario—called on Jan. 28, and to be held on Feb. 27—as an indication that a government can still respond to Trump during an election when the provincial legislature has been dissolved.

“There is a functional government in Ontario and they are capable of making decisions like delisting American product from the LCBO and so on,” said

Wernick. “Their legislature will be back online in about three weeks.”

Ontario has since paused its planned retaliatory measures in light of the 30-day tariff reprieve, including removing American alcohol from the LCBO, its provincially run liquor store.

## A missing tool

Public Safety Minister David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Ont.) said on Jan. 29 that one of his government’s key responses to Trump’s 25-per-cent tariffs—the \$1.3-billion border plan announced in December—would not be affected by prorogation. But he conceded that if more has to be done, then it will be dealt with in “due course.”

On Feb. 3, Trudeau made more border commitments, including a new “fentanyl czar” and \$200-million tied to a new intelligence directive on organized crime and fentanyl.

Passing new legislation and spending are among the tools not

in a prorogued government’s toolbox. While Trump seems mollified by Canada’s \$1.3-billion border plan for now, if the notoriously capricious U.S. president were to throw more curveball demands then Wernick said Parliament could be called back earlier to approve new spending.

“It depends how quickly you need to ramp up,” said Wernick. “I’m not sure that they can spend billions of dollars in a matter of six weeks. Anyway, the legislature will get back online on March 24 and can appropriate new spending.”

But some of the new commitments could require parliamentary approval to proceed.

“They’re going to create a fentanyl czar, that’s going to require some budgetary allotment. No one’s going to do that for free,” said Turnbull.

## The circling sharks

On top of passing new legislation, Wernick said “there’s a strong argument to have Par-



Then-public safety minister Dominic LeBlanc, now finance and intergovernmental affairs minister, announces his government’s \$1.3-billion border response to Trump’s tariff threats on Dec. 17, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

liament sitting “since it would also allow for Canada’s elected representatives to discuss “what to do and have parliamentary committees meeting and hearing from Canadians.”

But that “strong argument” collapses if that is all just a pretence to trigger a snap federal election.

“If the argument to bring Parliament back sooner is to deal with the situation, then you have to redirect, retract the threat to immediately stab the government in the chest and force a six-week election,” said Wernick.

Even though a Canada-U.S. trade war has been narrowly averted—for now, despite Trump signing off on new U.S. tariffs on aluminum and steel on Feb. 10—many are calling for the prime minister to reconvene Parliament to deal with the possible tariff crisis.

Both the Conservatives and the NDP are calling for Parliament to be recalled immediately to address Trump’s threats to Canada, but both parties’ leaders have also indicated that they would bring down the Liberal government via a non-confidence vote in Parliament at the first opportunity.

“Bring Parliament back,” said NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.) in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., on Jan. 30. “Let’s pass legislation that supports workers because we’re going to have an election in the spring. Nothing changes around that. We’re going to be voting down the government in March.”

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) has repeatedly said Canadians deserve an election, and on Feb. 5 tied that to the uncertainty with the United States.

“We need an ‘axe the tax election’ to elect a new common sense Conservative government that will secure our borders, stop the drugs, lock up the criminals, axe taxes, approve and green light massive resource projects, cut the bureaucracy, and bring home Canada’s promise.”

The Conservatives have also said they want Parliament recalled for the House to pass their proposed “Canada First Plan,” which includes green-lighting pipelines.

As for which would be the priority—a non-confidence motion or the Canada First Plan—Conservative MP Michael Barrett (Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Ont.) said the party has been “very clear that both things can be true.”

“We’re prepared today to see the introduction of debate, study, and pass legislation that does put Canada first,” Barrett told reporters on Feb. 7. “We could be doing that, and then when that issue has been put to rest, we can deal with the matters of confidence.”

But Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil-Chambly, Que.) has said he’s not buying the other leaders’ reasoning for a recalled Parliament.

Blanchet told reporters in Baie-Saint-Paul, Que., on Feb. 2, that recalling Parliament early would expose the House to a partisan circus. In French, he reminded reporters of Parliament’s

# HEALTH

THE HILL TIMES  
POLICY BRIEFING  
FEBRUARY 12, 2025

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## HEALTH Policy Briefing

# Minister Holland has made positive pharmacare first steps, but stumbled on Health Act letter's virtual care commission, say sector experts

The clock is 'loudly ticking' on a likely federal election in the spring, and it's important pharmacare deals are signed with the provinces and territories before that happens, says the Canadian Health Coalition's national director.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

Health Minister Mark Holland's time in the job has included a positive start in implementing national pharmacare, but he's also fallen short when it comes to leaving virtual care "untouched" in a recent highly anticipated guidance letter for interpreting the Canada Health Act, according to health sector experts.

"[Holland] completely ignored the virtual care problem, which is probably the bigger issue as we look to the future and new technology developing," said



Health Minister Mark Holland said the Liberal government's pharmacare plan is a 'transformational step towards improving health outcomes and health equity in Canada,' in an October 2024 Health Canada press release. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Steve Staples, national director of policy and advocacy for the Canadian Health Coalition. "There's a lot more work to be done in protecting patients from charges and protecting patients from the impacts of privatization of care."

Staples told *The Hill Times* that Holland (Ajax, Ont.) has done "pretty well" since assuming the role of health minister in July 2023, and graded him with

a B-plus. As an example, Staples said the minister has done a good job in Parliament defending the choice of a single-payer model for national universal pharmacare, which would help manage the costs of prescription drugs.

However, he added that the clock is also loudly ticking on a likely federal election in the spring, and emphasized the importance of pharmacare deals

being signed with subnational governments before that happens.

The federal government is currently negotiating with provinces and territories on bilateral agreements to cover the cost of contraceptives and diabetes medications for the first phase of a pharmacare program.

Holland said last October that striking pharmacare agreements would be "absolutely possible"

by the spring, although he added that it wouldn't be easy. However, on Jan. 30, Holland called on NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.), who has stated he plans to vote down the government in late March, to hold off doing so until the fixed election date in October to help ensure time for the pharmacare deals to be signed.

"I don't think we want to be playing politics with pharmacare, trying to leverage it to extend the life of a government," said Staples. "A lot of promises were made and some initial steps were made, but we've not seen the completion of pharmacare."

The Pharmacare Act, first introduced by Holland in the House on Feb. 29, 2024, received royal assent on Oct. 10, 2024.

"Everyone in Canada deserves access to the care they need, including to prescription medications. Our plan for universal access to contraception means reproductive freedom and choice and access to diabetes medication is a transformational step towards improving health outcomes and health equity in Canada. I thank all partners for their contributions to making this happen," Holland said in a Health Canada press release when the bill became law.

Staples said that hard work went into passing the legislation, and Canada should "not snatch defeat from the jaws of victory" by leaving pharmacare undone before an election.

"We understand the minister has been in discussions. We've been hearing that for a while, and we've raised concerns that we do want to see some agreements with some provinces as soon as possible," he said. "[Holland is] saying the right things, and we hope that there are discussions going on. I have no first-hand knowledge, but we can all read a calendar and we know that time is slipping away."

In terms of other important actions taken by the health minister, Staples pointed to the letter released by Holland on Jan. 10, which provided long-awaited guidance on the delivery of insured health-care services, in accordance with the Canada Health Act (CHA). The letter clarified that provinces and territories will be required to cover "medically necessary services" offered by other health professionals, including nurse practitioners. In order to give provincial and territorial governments time to review the administration of their health-care plans and make any necessary adjustments, the CHA Services Policy will come into effect on April 1, 2026.

"Patient charges for medically necessary services, whether provided by a physician or other health care professional providing physician-equivalent services, will be considered extra-billing and user charges under the CHA," says the letter.

Staples said he was pleased that the letter extended the concept of essential care to physician-equivalent services, but also criticized the letter for not



Health Minister Mark Holland holds a press conference at the Centretown Community Health Centre in Ottawa about the government's introduction of the Pharmacare Act on Feb. 29, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



The Canadian Health Coalition's Steve Staples says Minister Holland is 'saying the right things ... but we can all read a calendar, and we know that time is slipping away.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



# Canadian Partnership Against Cancer

Working together to reduce the heavy burden of cancer



**By Dr. Craig Earle**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Canadian Partnership  
Against Cancer

## Cancer costs lives. Cancer costs money.

The human and economic toll of this disease is staggering, but Canada has a plan: the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control (the Strategy).

Cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada: 1.5 million people in this country live with or beyond cancer. That's roughly equivalent to the entire population of Edmonton.

Two out of every five people will be diagnosed in their lifetime. And the total cost of cancer in Canada last year alone was \$37.7 billion, according to recent data from the Canadian Cancer Society.

What's worse, all these numbers could rise as our population grows and ages.

That's why the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC) was established in 2007, with all-party support, to spearhead Canada's plan to tackle this cancer challenge.

The Strategy is designed to ensure fewer people develop cancer, more people survive cancer, and everyone in Canada has access to high-quality cancer care, no matter who they are or where they live. It addresses the human cost of cancer, as well as the economic burden on the healthcare system, individuals, and Canada as a whole.

But we aren't doing it alone. We work closely with federal, provincial and territorial partners, First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, pan-Canadian health organizations, and other health system collaborators to put the Strategy into action.

**Together, we are making an impact.**

## Real benefits for real people

CPAC's investments and support have resulted in immediate and long-term impacts in the cancer system. Among recent examples:

- **Making strides to eliminate cervical cancer in Canada** – a target within reach if we take immediate action with a combination of HPV immunization and new screening techniques.



- **Putting Canada on track for earlier diagnosis** of as many as 2,500 new cases of lung cancer every year, thanks to new organized screening programs in all 10 provinces. These cases are people whose cancer may have previously gone undetected – and untreated – until it is too late.

*“This work couldn't have been done by anyone else but CPAC, which has such a huge and vital mandate for all cancer care in Canada.”*

*- Dr. Christian Finley, thoracic surgeon at St. Joseph's Healthcare in Hamilton, Lung Cancer Lead at the International Cancer Benchmarking Partnership, and Clinical Lead for Lung Cancer Screening for Ontario*

- **Launching a new online hub, Life after cancer:** Transforming the post-treatment experience, packed with tools and resources developed by partners across Canada to help with the physical, practical, mental and emotional challenges people face after cancer treatment.

**Establishing a cancer data strategy with the Canadian Cancer Society**, aligned with the federal health data strategy and interoperability roadmap, that will guide efforts to enhance the collection, integration and use of cancer data. This focused plan will ensure we have high-quality data to support better cancer care decisions and policy-making.

These are just a few of the many initiatives we are supporting and collaborating on with partners across the country. It's an indication of Canada's foresight and determination to drive excellence in cancer care through the shared vision of the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control.

**We're doing together what cannot be done alone. Learn more at:**

[www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca](http://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca)

As the steward of the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control, the Partnership works with Canada's cancer community to take action to ensure fewer people get cancer, more people survive cancer, and those living with the disease have a better quality of life and all people in Canada have equitable access to quality cancer care. The Partnership is funded by Health Canada.

## Palliative care and paramedics

Emergency health systems were not originally designed to meet the needs of patients requiring palliative and end-of-life care.

Today, through a joint initiative supported by CPAC and Healthcare Excellence Canada, 7500+ paramedics have been trained to provide high quality palliative care at home, which has been shown to save time, money and patient trips to the emergency department.

*“By implementing this initiative more widely, emergency departments would be less congested, and paramedics would spend more of their time directly caring for patients rather than being tied up waiting to transfer patients into hospital care.”*

*- Jean-Éric Tarride, McMaster Chair in Health Technology Management, McMaster University, and lead author of the economic evaluation of the paramedics and palliative care program*

## Smoking cessation

When a person quits smoking, their cancer treatment becomes more effective and economical, their quality of life improves, and their chance of survival increases by about 40%.

As a result of CPAC's smoking cessation initiative, 95 per cent of cancer care settings across the country are now offering support to help people quit smoking (compared to only 56 per cent in 2017).

*“CPAC provided an opportunity to bring leaders in cancer care and smoking cessation together. Strong clinical leadership, combined with evidence, has contributed to the cultural shift that is necessary to prioritize smoking cessation as an integral part of cancer care.”*

*- Shelley Hewitson, Regional Manager, Horizon Health Network, New Brunswick*



This article was produced through a financial contribution from Health Canada through the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. The views expressed represent those of the Partnership.

# HEALTH Policy Briefing

## Minister Holland has made positive pharmacare first steps, but stumbled on Health Act letter's virtual care commission, say sector experts

Continued from page 16

providing guidance in regard to virtual care.

Staples described virtual care as health-care services delivered over the Internet, telephone, or through various other electronic means. When it comes to virtual care, Staples said Canada has a patchwork of rules that's allowing companies to apply charges to patients for services provided virtually, even if they could be considered medically necessary.

"These things should be paid for by provincial health plans, not by private insurance, or not out of a person's pocket," said Staples.

In the letter, Holland said he would continue discussing virtual care at a future ministers' meeting. He also commended the provinces and territories for the "significant work undertaken to date to integrate virtual care services, delivered by physicians, into their health insurance plans," and encouraged all jurisdictions to continue down that path.

*The Hill Times* reached out to Holland to ask about important issues facing the health-care sector in Canada, and how the federal government is addressing these issues, but did not receive a response before deadline.

Ian Culbert, executive director of the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), described Holland as a "mover." He told *The Hill Times* that Holland "doesn't sit on stuff," and "he moves government as fast as government can move."

"He has continued the work started by his predecessor ... on the health workforce, which is absolutely essential, and these are all difficult and tricky issues. They're wicked problems—as we call them in public health—that don't have easy solutions," said Culbert. "I would say he has



Ian Culbert, executive director of the Canadian Public Health Association, says Health Minister Holland 'has worked to expand pharmacare, [and] the work to expand the dental program are crucial issues.' Photograph courtesy of Ian Culbert

worked to expand pharmacare, [and] the work to expand the dental program are crucial issues, and I think he has managed to continue to push those forward."

Culbert described the shortage of health human resources as among the most significant issues facing public health.

"We did a survey of public health professionals, and the potential burnout rate was just astronomical, post-pandemic, for that sector," he said. "You have senior public health officials who for two, three years, worked 24/7."

A study into burnout among the Canadian public health workforce, funded by the CPHA and published on Jan. 2, 2024, reported that, among physicians, the prevalence of burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic increased from 30 per cent in 2018 to a range of 68 to 86 per cent in 2021. In nurses, 75 per cent were found to have burnout. The study also showed that 49.1 per cent of participants from the

Canadian public health workforce reported COVID-19-related bullying, threats, or assaults mainly over mandates or lack of vaccine availability.

Culbert was an author for the study, along with health experts including David Edward-Ooi Poon, medical health officer of Northern Medical Services at the University of Saskatchewan; and Chris Verschoor, a scientist at Health Sciences North Research Institute in Ontario.

In a policy brief about strengthening public health systems in Canada, the CPHA called on the federal government to lead provincial and territorial governments in creating comprehensive and accountable public health systems in Canada.

"Public health is provincial and territorial responsibility ... but there are issues that are systemic across the country that could really use federal leadership, and that's really what we're asking [of] the federal government is to convene a body to start looking at this seriously, about what changes could be made," Culbert said.

Gregory Marchildon, Ontario Research Chair in Health Policy and System Design with the Institute of Health Policy, Management, and Evaluation at the University of Toronto, told *The Hill Times* that two of the major issues affecting health care in Canada are access to primary care and severe wait times.

"There is a huge problem in many of our emergency departments in the country, to the point that people [who] are seriously ill will wait hours, sometimes a day, to be served in the emergency department, and that's a threat to life. It is extremely serious," Marchildon said. "Every country is going through this right now,

in part because of the overhang from COVID. There were many things that were pushed to the side during the COVID pandemic emergency, and now we're having to deal with them. There is a shortage of health human resources, [and] certain specialties in terms of physicians and other health professionals."

In terms of Holland's strengths, Marchildon said the minister oversaw the first steps towards dental coverage in Canada.

The Canadian Dental Care Plan was launched in December 2023 with the goal of easing financial barriers for accessing oral health care for up to nine million uninsured Canadian residents with an annual family income of less than \$90,000.

"It's not universal, but at least it's a beginning, and hopefully it would be broadened out over time, although it's vulnerable. [With] an election of a new government, for example, this could be very much reversed," said Marchildon. "If the Liberals are re-elected ... I think that [Holland should] really put into high gear the more extensive—and possibly instead of targeted coverage for dental care—universal coverage for at least basic dental care."

When asked about pharmacare, Marchildon said that ensuring time to sign bilateral agreements could be a reason to hold off on calling an election. However, he added that the Liberals have already had years to finalize pharmacare.

"The agreements could have been signed a year ago, or two years ago, or even shortly after their election in 2015," he said. "It just seems to take an enormous amount of time to get anything concrete off the ground, and I don't know the reasons for that, but just seems inordinately long, and also they don't seem to get around to doing it until absolutely pushed politically to do it. So there doesn't seem to be any internal policy drive to do these things, which worries me a great deal."

*jcnockaert@hilltimes.com*  
*The Hill Times*

### Access to primary health care statistics



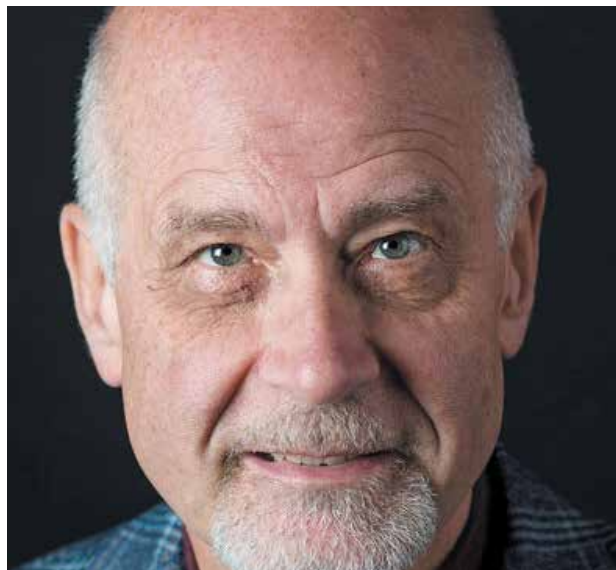
- Of Canadians without a regular primary-care provider, 39 per cent reported having at least one chronic condition, and 29 per cent took one or more prescription medications. Better access to primary health care can lead to better health outcomes, and to fewer emergency department visits and hospitalizations.
- In 2023, only 26 per cent of Canadians were able to get a same- or next-day appointment—a drop from 46 per cent in 2016—making them least likely among those surveyed to get such an appointment. Less than a quarter of Canadians found it easy to get care in the evenings, on weekends, and on holidays without going to the emergency department.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual care expanded rapidly across Canada, with health professionals offering care remotely via telephone or video. A third of Canadians (33 per cent) said that they accessed virtual care with their primary-care provider; women and individuals with higher education levels were more likely to use virtual care. Of those who used virtual care with their primary-care provider, most (80 per cent) reported being somewhat or very satisfied with their experience.
- The proportion of Canadians aged 18 and older reporting access to a primary-care provider has declined, from 93 per cent in 2016 to 86 per cent in 2023—the lowest proportion among the 10 countries surveyed. This means that an estimated four million Canadian adults did not have a primary-care provider in 2023.
- Lack of access to a primary-care provider has been shown to negatively affect the health of individuals and of the population as a whole. Not having a primary-care provider was more common among Canadians with lower levels of household income, younger adults (aged 18 to 34), and males.

—Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information. International survey shows Canada lags behind peer countries in access to primary health care. Released March 21, 2024 and accessed Feb. 9, 2025.

### Health-care spending info

- Health-care spending is expected to reach \$372-billion (\$9,054 per Canadian) in 2024, and account for 12.4 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product (GDP). Excluding the 2020 and 2021 pandemic period, this is the highest ratio ever reached.
- Higher growth in health-care spending may be sustained due in part to the recent rapid increase in population. Also, the overall economy may impact health-sector prices as new provider agreements are negotiated.
- In 2023, federal and provincial/territorial governments agreed to a new arrangement that will provide the provinces and territories with \$196.1-billion in additional health funding over a 10-year period.
- Hospital expenditures account for the largest portion of health-care spending, expected to represent 26 per cent of total health expenditures in 2024. Hospital spending is projected to grow at a rate of 6.1 per cent in 2024.
- Physician expenditures will account for 13 per cent of total health expenditures in 2024. Spending on physician services jumped by 8.7 per cent in 2022, and 7.5 per cent in 2023, in part due to catching up on demand from the pandemic. Physician spending is projected to increase by 4.4 per cent in 2024.

—Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information. National health expenditure trends, 2024 — Snapshot. Released on Nov. 7, 2024 and accessed Feb. 9, 2025.



Gregory Marchildon, Ontario Research Chair in Health Policy and System Design, says the Canadian Dental Care Plan is 'not universal, but at least it's a beginning, and hopefully it would be broadened out over time.' Photograph courtesy of Gregory Marchildon

# Access Delayed is Access Denied: Canada's Pharmacare Dilemma

By Dr. Bettina Hamelin

**A**s Canadians, we take pride in our healthcare system, but we also know it isn't perfect. We expect a system that ensures timely, equitable, and affordable access to the care and medicines we need. As the federal government pushes forward with its vision for Pharmacare, we must be clear-eyed about the risks and ensure that well-intentioned policy doesn't end up hurting the very people it's meant to help.

To get this right, we must build on what's already working, address real gaps in coverage, and avoid unintended consequences that could reduce access to innovative medicines. Because here's the reality: our healthcare system already struggles to bring new treatments to patients. Canadians wait an average of 3.5 years after a global drug launch before gaining access to new medicines—placing us dead last in the G7.

That's not good enough. A complex and lengthy bureaucratic approval process—one that moves at a snail's pace through multiple regulatory bodies, national price negotiations, and provincial agreements—forces patients to wait for treatments they need now. If we're serious about getting better health outcomes for Canadians, we need to accelerate access, not introduce more red tape and lower the quality of what we offer them.

The government must also recognize that Canada's dual public-private system is a strength, not a weakness. Today, 97% of Canadians are eligible for either public or employer-sponsored drug plans. Over 27 million Canadians have private drug coverage, giving them access to a wider range of medicines, including cutting-edge treatments for cancer, rare diseases, and chronic conditions. Private coverage also offers faster access to new treatments—often two to three times quicker than public plans. Yet under a single, one-size-fits-all Pharmacare plan, many of these same Canadians could lose access to the medicines they rely on, replaced with a limited list of older, lower-cost drugs. That's a step backward, not forward!

We cannot afford to let ideology replace pragmatism. Canadians want real solutions, not sweeping changes that create more problems than they solve. The government should be looking at

why private plans outperform public ones, rather than trying to dismantle them.

A better approach would be to enhance provincial drug programs for those in need, recognizing jurisdictional differences and ensuring that no Canadian falls through the cracks due to financial barriers. A smart Pharmacare solution should target real gaps—like ensuring vulnerable Canadians don't face high out-of-pocket costs, such as co-pays—not disrupt coverage that already works for millions of people. We should be making it easier, not harder, for Canadians to get the medicines they need when they need them.

And we can't ignore the role of innovation. Canada should be a leader in life sciences, bringing new treatments and clinical trials to patients faster. Right now, our policies already deter investment, making companies think twice about launching treatments or starting clinical trials here. We should be streamlining approvals, cutting unnecessary delays, and making Canada a place where pharmaceutical companies want to bring new breakthroughs—not where they face new barriers at every turn.

This is about people. It's about the cancer patient waiting for a revolutionary drug, the parent hoping for a life-changing treatment for their child, the worker who needs access to the latest advancements to treat their diabetes. A national drug program that prioritizes affordability over possibility and availability will leave Canadians with fewer choices, longer wait times, and worse disease outcomes. We must remember that access delayed is access denied.

Innovation isn't the enemy of affordability. In fact, it's the key to better health and long-term cost savings. New medicines help people live longer, healthier lives—keeping them out of hospitals and contributing to society. A Pharmacare plan that limits access to these innovations isn't just bad policy—it's bad for Canadians.

Canada must preserve what works, fix what doesn't, and make sure any new policy puts patients first. That's what Canadians expect, and it's what they deserve.



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# HEALTH Policy Briefing

## Solving the health-care workforce shortage

Canadians deserve to feel confident that their government is listening and improving their access to health care.

Liberal MP  
Yasir Naqvi

Opinion



We deeply cherish our public health-care system in Canada. While we have a lot to be proud of, we are facing significant challenges.

As the Member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre, Ont., I've heard from many constituents that they've experienced long wait times at walk-in clinics with their sick child. Others have been waiting months for an MRI appointment. Hospitals and clinics are experiencing staff shortages, and, as a result, many are

waiting to receive care. As a federal government, we are taking action on multiple fronts to build up our health-care workforce.

Our government is providing provinces and territories with nearly \$200-billion in funding for health-care services. This funding will mean that more health professionals like doctors and nurses will be working in our hospitals, and shorter wait times for medical procedures. We will continue to make these bold investments and work with our provincial and territorial partners to deliver real results for Canadians.

In addition to increased funding, our health-care workers deserve better work conditions. Listening to their expertise is a key part of the solution. That's why we launched the Nursing Retention Toolkit last year to support the training and well-being of nurses. This toolkit was developed by nurses, and was led by Canada's chief nursing officer, Leigh Chapman.

Retaining health professionals is absolutely crucial, but we also need to boost recruitment—particularly in rural and remote communities. Many Canadian students are deciding whether it's worth it to pursue a career

in health care. Following their dreams could mean a future of student loan debt, and heavier workloads due to staff shortages. Our government is tackling both of these issues by expanding the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program to health-care and social services professionals working in rural areas.

There are countless stories about talented doctors who immigrated to Canada only to be met with massive barriers, such as years upon years of waiting, and thousands of dollars out of pocket to get a valid licence. This is incredibly disheartening to many newcomers who often have families to support. In 2020, Statistics Canada reported that 47 per cent of newcomers educated internationally in health professions were either underemployed or unemployed. These are talented health-care professionals who could be working in Canadian hospitals and clinics.

Our government believes in giving newcomers a fair shot, which is why we have heavily invested in the Foreign Credential Recognition Program. This funding to provinces and territories and regulatory bodies helps newcomers in achieving a valid licence



Retaining health professionals is absolutely crucial, but we also need to boost recruitment, writes MP Yasir Naqvi. *Photograph courtesy of Pexels*

to practice in Canada. It includes mentoring and work placements in their profession to help them move towards accreditation.

The program is also providing funding to organizations to open spots in health-care facilities to train and mentor thousands of newcomers. Last year, \$86-million in funding was announced by our government to provide further training and work experience in Canada.

Of course, there is still more work to do. Internationally trained immigrants face significant administrative and financial barriers to joining Canada's health workforce. All levels of government and regulatory bodies have a role to play in alleviating this burden. I strongly believe that tapping into this pool of talent will significantly improve access to primary care in Canada.

Canada is well-placed to address these challenges head on. Helping young Canadians to become health professionals will yield significant results, as will supporting and retaining the existing health workforce. As a government, we will continue to work with all health partners and regulatory bodies to speed up credential recognition. Canadians deserve to feel confident that their government is listening, and improving their access to health care. We will continue working to deliver real progress on health care for communities across the country.

*Yasir Naqvi was first elected as the Member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre, Ont., in 2021. He has served as the parliamentary secretary to the minister of health since September 2024.*

*The Hill Times*

## Here are two major ways Canada can significantly increase its supply of family doctors

The federal government can enhance funding to the Medical Council of Canada to assess foreign doctors, and provinces can boost investment to increase their output of graduating physicians.

ISG Senator Stanley Kutcher, ISG Senator Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia, Ratna Omidvar & Kareem El-Assal

Opinion

Canada's health-care system is in crisis. About 6.5 million Canadians currently do not have a family doctor, and wait times to access many types of specialists are unacceptably long. Some international medical school gradu-

ates have graduated from foreign medical schools but have not completed residency training, and thus cannot practice medicine. Others are immigrant physicians who have completed their medical training, and have practiced medicine in their home country. This second group are commonly referred to as Internationally Trained Physicians (ITPs).

As shown in our recent report, these experienced ITPs have had their credentials verified, have passed necessary medical examinations, and simply lack the opportunity to meet the final requirement for licensure, which is either a residency or a Practice Ready Assessment. The big challenge that confronts ITPs is the lack of access to the final hurdle on the pathway to licensure. This is to either complete a residency training program—two or more years duration—or undergo a Practice Ready Assessment (PRA), which typically lasts about 12 weeks. Successful completion of a PRA allows ITPs to complete the final step of applying for and receiving a Canadian medical licence, and beginning to practice medicine.

ITPs can try to access licensure through completing residency training in Canada. However, the number of residency positions available to them is very

limited. This route to licensure for ITPs is unable to support the current demand for physicians. And, because of their professional expertise, many of them may not require a full and lengthy residency training program to be ready for licensure.

An alternative route to licensure for these mid-career physicians is the PRA, which is an assessment of an ITP's competencies. It is conducted at a specified assessment site, by a trained physician assessor often affiliated with a medical school. More provinces are now offering PRAs, but the number of available slots also remains limited.

Not only is the PRA approach less time-consuming than residency training, but it is also much less costly. However, despite these obvious advantages, sufficient PRA programs have not been developed and deployed by the provinces and territories. Indeed, only about 1,000 ITPs have graduated from a PRA since 2018. The Medical Council of Canada has developed a national framework for PRAs, which can be used by all provinces and territories to guide PRA programming in their jurisdictions.

Hence, we recommend the federal government and provinces/territories prioritize the development and deployment of PRAs, and work together to significantly

increase the number of PRA spots across Canada. Indeed, had the development of sufficient numbers of PRA programs been prioritized as a physician resource enhancement strategy 15 years ago when the looming physician shortage was already obvious, we would not likely be facing the physician shortages of today.

On the bright side, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia, with support from the Medical Council of Canada, has recently initiated a "best in class" centralized PRA program that could be a model for the entire country to emulate. It is necessary to act now, not only in Nova Scotia, but across all of Canada.

There are two major actions that the federal government and provinces/territories can take to move rapidly and effectively to address our physician shortages by focusing on ITPs who are already here, who meet Canadian medical standards, and who are ready to start serving Canadians.

First, the federal government can enhance funding to the Medical Council of Canada to support further work in developing the tools, assessor competency training, and evaluations needed to ensure national standards and trainers are available for the delivery of PRAs.

Second, the provinces can enhance their investment in PRA programs to increase their output of graduating physicians, thus immediately helping to ameliorate the shortage of physicians in independent medical practice.

Our report shows these simple and cost-effective measures would rapidly "open the door while maintaining the floor," providing large numbers of competent and safe physicians to be able to transition from their current purgatory status to independent medical practice in Canada.

Together, federal and provincial/territorial health ministers can work to solve the physician shortage in Canada in a cost-effective manner by enhancing the PRA route to licensure.

The question is: will they act? *Nova Scotia ISG Senator Stanley Kutcher is a Canadian psychiatrist and politician who was appointed to the Senate of Canada in 2018. Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia is a former family physician, and current Independent Senator. Ratna Omidvar is a former Independent Senator from Ontario. Kareem El-Assal is an immigration researcher, and founder of Section 95, a website that analyzes Canada's immigration system.*

*The Hill Times*

# CANADA CAN TAKE THE LEAD IN THE GLOBAL FIGHT AGAINST METHANE POLLUTION



**CABINET,  
LET'S GET THE JOB DONE!**  
It's time to pass the methane regulations



# HEALTH Policy Briefing



The situation is so bad, children are sometimes on waiting lists for years and age out of programs before they can access them, write Brittany Finlay and Jennifer D. Zwicker. *Unsplash photograph by Tina Floersch*

## Provinces and territories must work together to eliminate barriers for persons with disabilities: report

Fragmented disability policies impede people from accessing necessary programs and services, and lead to inequities.

Brittany Finlay & Jennifer Zwicker

Opinion



This year marks 15 years since Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Yet, the goal of living in a fully inclusive and accessible society remains elusive for Canadians with disabilities.

While there has been some progress—including the introduction of federal and provincial accessibility laws, and a new national disability benefit that's still to be rolled out—barriers

remain, putting the health and well-being of persons with disabilities and their families at risk.

It is time to break down the barriers, particularly at the provincial and territorial level where fragmented disability policies impede people from accessing necessary programs and services, and lead to inequities.

Our new publication, *Disability Policy in Canada: Provincial and Territorial Report*, prepared for Kids Brain Health Network, outlines and compares provincial and territorial disability policies—and sounds the alarm on the significant gaps and inequities that exist across the country.

Currently, provinces and territories develop their own disability policies in silos from each other. This means the type and level of non-federal supports available to Canadians with disabilities is contingent upon where they live.

A striking example of this is that not all jurisdictions provide income-support programs specifically designed for persons with disabilities. Even in those that do, the amount of support varies widely from province to province, with many failing to keep up with

the cost of living. For example, a single adult with a disability in Nova Scotia can receive up to \$986 per month through the Income Assistance program and Disability Supplement, whereas a single adult with a disability in Alberta with the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program can receive up to \$1,863 per month.

While all jurisdictions provide disability programs through their income tax systems, the type of tax-related programs, eligibility criteria, and maximum amounts available differ. For example, adults with a disability in Saskatchewan can claim \$10,405 on their income tax return for the disability amount, compared to an adult with a disability in Manitoba who can claim \$6,180, according to 2023 figures.

Gaps in accessibility legislation create further inequities. Some jurisdictions have yet to pass laws mandating targets for identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessing goods, services, buildings, and employment for persons with disabilities.

In provinces with accessibility laws, the results are mixed, with

some provinces failing to meet legislated targets and timelines, or enforce the law.

Included in the report are results from surveys and interviews of hundreds of parents and caregivers across Canada, who gave firsthand accounts of the barriers they face trying to access provincial and territorial disability programs.

One of the biggest challenges they cited was complex and lengthy application processes. Forms are often many pages long and demand detailed information requiring input from health-care professionals.

Completing the paperwork is not only time consuming, it can be overwhelming and emotionally draining, as persons with disabilities or their caregivers are repeatedly asked to provide the same information about the disability for each program for which they apply.

Some families struggle to even find out which disability programs exist in their jurisdiction and how to apply for them. In some cases, families only find out about specific programs from talking to other parents.

Once do they find a program, they are confronted with lengthy delays. Across Canada, parents and caregivers raised concerns about long waitlists; in Ontario alone, more than 60,000 children are on the waitlist for the province's autism program.

The situation is so bad that children are sometimes on waiting lists for years and age out of programs before they can access them, hindering their development, and putting families under emotional and financial strain to find alternatives.

Income cut-offs to qualify for disability programs that are too low or that fail to recognize the full costs of disability are another barrier. Families are often left scrambling to find additional dollars to obtain needed supports. In some cases, parents are forced to take second jobs.

In other situations, parents who are denied critical services or supports for their child with disabilities have no choice but to quit their job to care for their child.

Provincial and territorial governments need to urgently address these accessibility gaps, but they must do so in partnership—collaborating with each other to identify best practices, and then implementing them across the country to eliminate inequities.

Canadians with disabilities have waited too long for a fully accessible and inclusive society.

*Brittany Finlay is a senior research associate at the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary.*

*Jennifer D. Zwicker is director of health policy at the School of Public Policy, and an associate professor in the faculty of kinesiology at the University of Calgary.*

*The Hill Times*

Policy Briefing **HEALTH**

# The future of long-term care in Canada: a call for better care through health equity

Future agreements must require health equity plans with targets for delivering the diverse care needed in each jurisdiction.

Christine Sheppard & Jesse Rosenberg



Opinion

In a few weeks, Canada will have a new prime minister. Before long, we may see another leadership change. There will be many issues debated and policy ideas proposed. But the rising number of older adults, coupled with the ongoing challenges with the current quality of services offered by provinces should make long-term care a top priority.

More than 200,000 older adults and persons with a disability live in long-term care homes across Canada. While provinces and territories are responsible for managing long-term care, the current federal government has begun advancing long-term care services. The newly proposed national standards and bilateral agreements with provinces and territories are first steps. However, the next phase must go further to ensure that long-term care is equitable and responsive to all those who need it.

One pressing challenge in long-term care in Canada is the lack of comprehensive, standardized data. For example, a joint study by Wellesley Institute and the National Institute on Ageing found alarming gaps in data collection on race, language, culture, and gender and sexual diversity in the long-term care sector. We can't effectively address issues we don't understand. Where these data are available, the results are worrying. For instance, wait times for long-term care are growing, and research by Wellesley Institute has found they vary based on where people live, the language they speak, and whether they have specific cultural needs. Those seeking placement in a religious, ethnic, or cultural home faced particularly long waits.

If we are serious about improving long-term care to ensure that all residents can thrive, we must address these disparities. No one should have to suffer lengthy wait times when they need the services of long-term care. Nor should anyone have to live in a long-term care home where they cannot communicate with their caregivers, where their cultural needs are unmet, or where access depends on a "postal code lottery"—that is, when living in a better-served city means faster access to care.

Future Canada Health Transfer or other health-related bilateral agreements should address this. They must ensure every province and territory mandates, collects, and publicly reports sociodemographic data in long-term care, including on race, language, and gender and sexual diversity.



When residents in long-term care aren't thriving because their needs are not being met, it costs us all through higher health-care needs down the line, write Christine Sheppard and Jesse Rosenberg. *Unsplash photograph by Tim Kilby*

They must also ensure that the data is applied to make sure their systems are of the highest quality and equitably meet the needs of their populations.

Many new long-term care spaces will be needed across the country as our population ages. But what kinds of spaces should they be? What should those facilities look like, and what training will respond to the needs of residents? Without this data, we're just guessing. With the data, we can all better assess the performance of our provincial and territorial systems.

We need our systems to be more responsive, efficient, and effective. We cannot afford for long-term-care residents to be squeezed into a "one-size-fits-all" system. When residents in long-term care aren't thriving because their needs are not being met, it costs us all through higher health-care needs down the line. Future agreements must require health equity plans with targets for delivering the diverse care needed in each jurisdiction, and that track differential health and well-being outcomes for long-term care residents. These plans should be made public.

Improving long-term care is a challenge that is with us for the long term. However, future Canadian governments can do us all a favour by working with the provinces and territories to ensure that agreements for federal funding put in place the measurements and improvements we need to ensure long-term care will be there when we need it.

*Christine Sheppard is a researcher at Wellesley Institute whose work focuses on health equity, social inclusion, and well-being for older adults. She holds a master's in social work from the University of Toronto, and a PhD in health studies and gerontology from the University of Waterloo.*

*Jesse Rosenberg is director of policy at Wellesley Institute. He holds a juris doctor from Osgoode Hall, and has political and policy experience in the fields of health, labour, and justice, including with the Government of Ontario and the Ontario College of Trades.*

*The Hill Times*

# New Canada Health Act interpretation letter misses the mark on virtual care

Publicly funding medically necessary virtual care would improve access for all Canadians, not just those fortunate enough to have stable jobs with benefits.

Monika Dutt, Chaten Jessel & Bernard Ho



Opinion

In January, federal Health Minister Mark Holland finally released the long-awaited Canada Health Act Policy Interpretation Letter. Interpretation letters provide guidance to provinces and territories on understanding and applying the Canada Health Act (CHA). At a time when people are worried about the expansion of for-profit, privately paid health care, ensuring that the core premise of universal health care is both preserved and strengthened through the CHA is essential.

In the letter, Holland clarified that patients cannot be charged directly or through their employee benefit plans for medically necessary "physician equivalent" services if provided by other health professionals such as nurse practitioners or pharmacists.

Provincial and territorial governments have until April 2026 to put an end to unlawful billing practices, or face deductions from the Canada Health Transfer payments.

While this marks a victory for patients, the letter had a glaring omission: it left out virtual care. Preventing patients from being charged for virtual care that is medically necessary was part of the original intent of this letter. Virtual care can include phone calls, live video-conference, or text message, all options that people want and that can improve health. The decision to be silent on virtual care leaves the door open to charging patients, making it unaffordable or difficult to access for many. Ultimately, it allows some jurisdictions to continue to skirt the intent of the law.

This omission is no accident. Insurance companies, chambers of commerce, and large virtual care corporations successfully lobbied the federal government to leave virtual care out of the interpretation letter. These groups argue that including virtual care could jeopardize employee virtual care coverage. They have pressured governments at all levels to exclude employer-funded virtual care from public funding,

thereby ensuring that insurance companies will continue to profit from selling or administering plans that include this benefit.

Their claims are intentionally misleading. They state that 10 million Canadians would lose access to virtual care through workplace insurance unless exceptions are made. This is not true. Rather than funding virtual care through employee benefit plans, these services should become core health services, publicly funded through provincial and federal governments.

This would ensure that medically necessary virtual care is available to everyone—just like all other medically necessary care. Having publicly funded virtual care would also ensure that the other 31 million Canadians who lack workplace insurance could have access without paying out of pocket.

Publicly funding medically necessary virtual care would improve access for all Canadians, not just those fortunate enough to have stable jobs with benefits.

It would even benefit those with benefits as virtual care would be better connected to their other health care.

It is disappointing that the federal government appears to have prioritized the interests of health insurance companies and profit-driven virtual care corporations

over the health of Canadians. Private insurance companies already receive public subsidies from all taxpayers, including the millions of Canadians who don't have private insurance. Evidence from Canada and abroad makes it clear that private-pay health care does not solve systemic issues. Instead, it moves health-care professionals from the public system to private payment models. It also benefits

only those who can afford it, along with the corporations and physicians profiting from it. Health policy decisions must be driven by public need—not corporate profit.

Virtual care is here to stay—let's ensure it is accessible to everyone, not just the 25 per cent of Canadians lucky enough to have employee benefit plans.

After the recent health ministers' meeting in Halifax, Holland acknowledged that patients paying for virtual care is not in the "spirit" of the CHA. He needs to go beyond talking about the spirit of the Act and clearly state that patients must not pay out of pocket or through their employee benefit plans for medically necessary care, no matter how it is provided.

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*The Hill Times*



Health Minister Mark Holland's Jan. 10 letter ultimately allows some jurisdictions to continue to skirt the intent of the law, write Monika Dutt, Chaten Jessel, and Bernard Ho. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

## HEALTH Policy Briefing

# Canada should stand firm against the assault on the World Health Organization

Despite its imperfections, the WHO has delivered historic successes, which are only possible through the concerted efforts of all nations.

Roojin Habibi

Opinion



After leading the world through a global pandemic for more than three years, the World Health Organization is under fire again.

In an executive order signed on Jan. 20, the new U.S. administration under President Donald Trump has signalled its intention to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO), claiming that it is unduly influenced by China. These assertions, however, ignore a broader historical reality: much of the organization's early direction was shaped by the U.S. Today's criticisms reflect a wider struggle over the governance of global health, where geopolitical rivalries risk undermining an institution that remains indispensable to international health security.

Canada should stand firm against the assault on the WHO.

For more than 75 years, the WHO has been the primary co-ordinating body for global health. It tracks and addresses health



The U.S. withdrawal from the WHO will have severe consequences not only for global health, but also for Canada, writes Roojin Habibi. Photograph courtesy of Flickr/United States Mission Geneva

crises all over the world, offers cutting edge data and expertise in outbreak prevention and response, and serves as the global technical and political forum for health promotion.

Despite its imperfections, the WHO has delivered historic successes, most notably the eradication of smallpox, a disease that once killed millions of people annually. Such achievements are possible only through the concerted efforts of all nations. The WHO's ability to function effectively is contingent on broad international co-operation, and any significant withdrawal of support—especially from major

funders and global health heavyweights like the U.S.—threatens its capacity to fulfill its mandate.

The U.S. withdrawal from the WHO will have severe consequences not only for global health, but also for Canada.

The U.S. and Canada share the world's longest land border, stretching more than 8,000 kilometres. If the U.S. government distances itself from WHO-led initiatives, it willingly accepts the risk of health insecurity. However, given the interconnectedness of our two countries, any spike in disease outbreaks south of the border—including the ongoing highly pathogenic avian influ-

enza—could spill over, endangering the health of Canadians.

A U.S. departure would also have dire financial consequences for the WHO. The U.S. is the WHO's largest funder, and its exit would create a funding vacuum, jeopardizing essential programs such as vaccine distribution, disease surveillance, and emergency response operations. The erosion of the WHO's financial stability would disproportionately affect lower-income countries that rely on its technical assistance and support, exacerbating global health inequalities that countries—including Canada—have sought to address.

Given these risks, Canada must use all available diplomatic channels to encourage the U.S. to remain within the WHO. Diplomatic pressure and coalition-building with like-minded nations should be prioritized to underscore the importance of the organization, and continued U.S. participation in its activities.

Canada has long positioned itself as an advocate of the WHO, and now is the time to draw on that reputation.

While the U.S. has already issued its formal withdrawal notification, it faces an unusual legal obstacle: the conditions of withdrawal—set by Congress in 1948—prevent the country from fully disengaging from the WHO so long as it continues to withhold its 2024-2025 financial contributions. This creates an opportunity for Canada and its allies to engage with U.S. officials and advocate for re-engagement—or at minimum reduced engagement—rather than withdrawal.

This is not the first time the WHO has been accused of political bias.

In the WHO's early years, the Soviet Union and its allies claimed the organization was too influenced by western powers. In response, Canada's own Dr. Brock Chisholm, the WHO's first director-general, opted to keep Soviet nations in an inactive mode rather than severing ties completely. This approach allowed the USSR to maintain a relationship with the WHO while expressing its grievances, ultimately leading to its full re-engagement several years later.

The WHO today may benefit from a similar approach: allowing room for U.S. criticism and bravado while remaining open to its future return within the organization's framework.

In the meantime, it is imperative that Canada and other nations step up to fill the leadership vacuum.

While preventing full U.S. withdrawal from the WHO should be a priority, Canada must also do more to support it and broader global health efforts regardless of U.S. actions. This includes increasing financial contributions to compensate for potential funding gaps, actively participating in WHO-led initiatives, and using its influence to promote inclusive and effective governance within the organization.

Canada can also contribute rhetorically by reaffirming the WHO's role in global health. Words matter in diplomacy, and a strong endorsement from Canada could influence global discourse and counteract narratives that seek to undermine the organization's legitimacy.

A world without the WHO is ultimately a world that is far less secure. Canada must stand firm in its commitment to preserving and strengthening the organization, for its own public health security and for the well-being of the global community.

Roojin Habibi is an assistant professor at the faculty of law (common law section), and member of the Centre for Health Law, Policy, and Ethics at the University of Ottawa.

The Hill Times



U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Jan. 20 to withdraw his country from the World Health Organization. White House photograph by Shealah Craighead



# Policy Briefing HEALTH

## Beyond long-term care: Canada's missing link in seniors' care



When people have stable housing with the right supports, they live healthier, more independent lives, and stay out of crisis, write Heather McDonald and Jacob Gorenkoff. Photograph courtesy of Pexels

Not all seniors need long-term care, so the federal government must act now to fill this critical housing gap.

Heather McDonald  
& Jacob  
Gorenkoff

Opinion

Canada's long-term care crisis is here. Hospitals are overcrowded. Long-term-care homes are full. And tens of thousands

of people—mostly seniors—are caught in a system that wasn't built to support them.

Some remain in hospital beds because there's nowhere else for them to go. Others live in shelters or precarious housing, struggling with complex health needs. Many simply need a stable, affordable home with the right support to stay independent and out of crisis. But that housing doesn't exist at the scale we need.

We don't just need more long-term-care beds. We need specialized supportive housing—affordable homes with wraparound health-care and social services—to ensure people get the right care in the right place.

This isn't just a provincial issue. It is a national crisis that

is putting immense strain on our entire health-care system.

Hospitals are the most expensive and least effective way to house seniors who don't need acute care. Every day, patients designated as alternate level of care (ALC) occupy hospital beds at a cost of \$750 per person when supportive housing costs just \$225 per day. That's a savings of more than \$190,000 per person annually—money that could be reinvested into health care, infrastructure, or tax relief.

In 2022-2023, ALC hospitalizations accounted for 17 per cent of all acute-care bed-days in Canada. At any given time, 10 to 20 per cent of acute-care beds were filled with ALC patients who didn't need to be there. This backlog increases

emergency room wait times, delays surgeries, and strains the entire health-care system. It is a problem affecting hospitals in every province and territory, limiting capacity, and reducing efficiency.

The solution is clear: scaling up supportive housing can unlock billions of dollars in savings across Canada every year, while also preventing unnecessary hospitalizations and long-term care placements. But to make that happen, we need a national strategy that prioritizes housing as part of our health-care system—not just a housing issue.

Beyond cost, this is about ensuring older Canadians live with dignity. Seniors should not be forced into long-term-care homes they don't need, or left in hospitals simply because the right housing doesn't exist.

When people have stable housing with the right supports, they live healthier, more independent lives, and stay out of crisis. This is a fundamental quality-of-life issue, and the federal government must step up.

With an election on the horizon, Canada is on the verge of a political transition. The next government—almost certainly a Conservative one—will inherit a health-care system in crisis. Hospitals are beyond capacity, long-term-care homes are full, and seniors lack the housing and support they need. This demands leadership—and a targeted national strategy that delivers real results.

There is a clear path forward. Supportive housing is the fiscally responsible solution. It reduces hospital congestion, strengthens health care, and gives seniors a place to live—without wasteful spending or government expansion. Investing in supportive housing is not about increasing bureaucracy; it's about allocating resources more efficiently and cutting unnecessary health-care costs.

Canada needs a co-ordinated federal strategy to increase the supply of supportive housing. That means federal leadership that works with provinces, municipalities, and experienced housing providers to unlock new developments, integrate health and housing supports, and move people from hospital beds to homes. These are not abstract policy ideas—they are proven solutions already working in pockets across the country. What's missing is scale and political will.

The next government will be under immense pressure to deliver real solutions while managing spending responsibly. This is the moment to prove it. The right investments now will mean lower health-care costs, better outcomes for seniors, and a health-care system that works for Canadians.

A targeted national strategy—one that expands supportive housing—is not only the right approach, but the necessary one. It will help provinces manage demand, reduce inefficiencies, and ensure health-care dollars are spent where they deliver the most impact.

Canada's aging population is growing. The crisis is deepening. Without action, the cost—to both our economy and our most vulnerable citizens—will be catastrophic.

The time to invest in supportive housing as part of a national health-care strategy is now.

Heather McDonald is the CEO of LOFT Community Services, one of Ontario's largest supportive housing providers, specializing in housing and health-care solutions for seniors and adults with complex needs.

Jacob Gorenkoff is the founder and CEO of Homeward Public Affairs, a firm dedicated to advancing housing and health-care policy solutions across Canada.

The Hill Times

## It is time the feds make the long-awaited diabetes device fund a reality

The fund can help alleviate the financial burden weighing on those living with diabetes, and eliminate regional inequities in access.

Glenn  
Thibeault

Opinion



It has been almost a year since the federal government announced that it would establish a Diabetes Device Fund to make devices and supplies for managing diabetes more accessible.

Canadians with diabetes are still waiting.

It is time to end the wait. The fund has the potential to transform diabetes care in Canada, making it crucial that the federal government act now to set up the fund.

More than four million Canadians have been diagnosed with diabetes. Living with the chronic condition comes with significant health and financial challenges.

To prevent or delay serious health complications, people

with diabetes need timely access to proper medications, supplies, and devices—including continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) and insulin pumps—to help them manage the condition.

Yet, the costs to access diabetes management tools are substantial. The out-of-pocket costs for people with Type 1 diabetes can be as high as \$18,306 per year in certain parts of Canada. For those with Type 2 diabetes, the annual costs can be as high as \$10,014.

While provincial and territorial public health plans might fully or partially cover some devices and supplies, there are often eligibility restrictions and dollar caps.

Coverage also varies significantly from province to province, resulting in inequitable access across the country.

Those who live in jurisdictions without coverage or with limited coverage have to shoulder the costs themselves. While private health insurance can defray costs, for those without private coverage, devices can be unaffordable.

That is why the federal fund is vital. By providing funding to cover the costs of tools such as CGMs, insulin pumps, lancets, test strips, and blood glucose meters, the fund can help alleviate the financial burden weighing on those living with diabetes, and eliminate regional inequities in access.

Make no mistake. Diabetes management tools are not frivolous accessories. CGMs and insulin pumps have long been recognized as game-changing diabetes management tools.

By providing real-time glucose data and seamless insulin delivery, these devices empower people to manage their condition and help prevent complications like diabetic ketoacidosis, heart disease, and other chronic conditions.

Research has shown that people who regularly monitor their glucose levels and use insulin pumps or CGMs experience fewer hospitalizations and emergency

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## HEALTH Policy Briefing

# Robust federal leadership needed for health workforce data collection and planning



Regulatory bodies are uniquely positioned to provide critical workforce data, and with proper support they can play a pivotal role in addressing Canada's health-care provider shortages, write Sophia Myles and Elizabeth Wenghofer. *Pexels photograph by EVG Kowalievsk*

## Instead of pharmacare, Canadians need faster drug-approval timelines

Patients in Canada wait longer than most of our peer countries to access fewer medicines.

Liam MacDonald



Opinion

In October 2024, Ottawa's national pharmacare legislation received royal assent. The federal government promptly began negotiations with the provinces to provide public coverage for diabetes and contraceptive drugs on a first-dollar, single-payer basis under the plan's first phase. However, no agreements have yet been concluded, and with an election looming, the program's fate is unclear.

While filling the gaps in access to drugs is a laudable goal, national pharmacare is not. All provinces already have public drug plans for most people not covered by private plans, and through this public-private mix, some have already achieved universal coverage. Understandably then, many provinces aren't too keen on Ottawa's plan. Replacing existing provincial and private insurance would come at a massive cost to taxpayers, and would leave many with access to fewer drugs. Even the most expansive provincial public drug plan covers only about half of what is available on a typical private drug plan.

By focusing on a national pharmacare plan, the government is diverting attention away from a low-hanging fruit that already has buy-in from provinces: our notoriously long drug approval and reimbursement timelines.

It takes Health Canada about a year to grant approval to new drugs. It then takes an average of two years for these drugs to be available to patients on public drug plans. Internationally, our wait times for public drug reimbursement place us well below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development median of about 18 months, and last in the G7. However, even for those with private plans, wait times are longer than our international peers.

This makes Canada an unattractive place to develop and

We need an integrated national plan based on robust data that includes regulators working alongside provincial governments.

Sophia Myles & Elizabeth Wenghofer



Opinion

Health-care professional shortages currently top the list when reading media reports on Canadian health care. But the best way to tackle the shortages—which affect every part of the country—is mired in a data and planning crisis.

Health-care researchers have continuously sounded the alarm over Canada's lack of health and human resources planning, and the lack of accessible, consistent national data to enable evidence-based decision-making. How can we solve the problem if we don't have all the facts? Where should we spend our efforts and our dollars if we don't know where the logjams in the system are happening? How can we measure results if we don't know the impact of our efforts?

It would be akin to operating on a patient in the dark.

It's time the federal government brought robust leadership to

health workforce data collection and planning.

Some of the challenge lies in overlapping or disparate jurisdictions—a perpetual Canadian problem.

Health-care providers are licensed provincially, and provincial regulatory colleges—where they have been established—are responsible for regulating health professions in each province and territory. But these regulators are not responsible for or engaged in health resource planning.

Provincial governments—which have a vested interest in health resource planning—have recently directed regulators to alter their processes to try to make more health practitioners available in the system, such as fast-tracking credentials for out-of-province health providers, and finding new pathways to more quickly approve internationally trained providers to practice in Canada.

This is a good start, but it's not really a plan so much a last-ditch response to an already blooming crisis. Such measures alone won't solve the health-care workforce shortage.

We need an integrated national plan based on robust data that includes regulators working alongside provincial governments.

Regulators are a rich—and the only—source of registry data for all licensed practitioners in a jurisdiction, regardless of how they bill or where they work. All other data repositories in the country depend on these data.

The good news is, by provincial legislative mandate, these data are complete, verified, and longitudinal, which means they are valuable. They are available

in “real time” without the lags associated with many of the national-level data repositories, which often are not available—for a variety of very good reasons—until 18-plus months after the fact. With the current rate of change in health workforce policy initiatives, that time lag results in evaluations often too late to determine if policies are effective.

We also need more and other kinds of data.

A significant challenge lies in the current fragmentation of data across jurisdictions. Regulators often collect similar data elements, but with vastly different data structures or even interpretations. Standardization efforts are needed. There needs to be an effort to help data across jurisdictions “talk” to one another both within and across professions.

In partnership with the Canadian Institute for Health Information and other health workforce partners, the Canadian Health Workforce Network's Enhanced Health Workforce Minimum Data Standard for Planning Project, a federal investment in health workforce data and planning, is working to allow us to ensure we are comparing apples to apples across jurisdictions.

The federal government has already taken some steps in the right direction.

Health Workforce Canada has undertaken a federal initiative to, among other things, unify workforce data systems and improve forecasting capabilities. Recent federal funding is also facilitating the operation and expansion of Canada's national physician registry, and the Federation of Medical Regulatory Authorities of Canada to optimize physician

registration across the country in support of the previously mentioned provincially driven initiatives.

It is imperative that regulators play a key role, not just in medicine, but also across health professions.

Regulatory bodies are uniquely positioned to provide critical, real-time workforce data, and with proper support, standardization, and capacity building, they can play a pivotal role in addressing Canada's health-care provider shortages while fulfilling their mandate of public protection.

But success to bring regulators into the national data and planning solution requires federal leadership. The federal government should convene regulators, fund both data development and ongoing operations, champion data standardization efforts, and foster cross-jurisdictional collaboration.

It's time we created an integrated approach to health workforce planning and professional regulation that truly serves Canadians' health-care needs. Let's get all hands at the table.

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*Dr. Elizabeth Wenghofer is a full professor in the school of kinesiology and health sciences at Laurentian University, and in the human sciences division at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University.*

The Hill Times

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Policy Briefing **HEALTH**

# Canada's G7 presidency is a critical moment to tackle AMR

Often referred to as the 'silent pandemic,' antimicrobial resistance is a particularly concerning public health threat.

Alison Pozzobon

Opinion



During the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada quickly learned the value of agile, thoughtful policy, innovative access solutions, and an openness to collaborate. These are the ingredients that make for a robust domestic biomanufacturing and life sciences sector that can supply the vaccines and medicines we need, when we need them. In the wake of the pandemic scramble to procure medical countermeasures, governments across the country

rightfully took action to secure domestic biomanufacturing capacity, and forge new partnerships with industry to ensure Canada's health-care systems and the economy could weather the next inevitable health emergency.

While the provincial and federal governments should be commended for their efforts made in this regard since the pandemic, existing health security policy and current biomanufacturing capacity are unlikely to effectively shield Canada from the very serious geopolitical and public health threats on the horizon. There are a number of important reasons to grow and fortify the life sciences footprint in Canada that are worthy of discussion. However, with the 2025 G7 leader summit in Alberta approaching, let's look at just one: antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Often referred to as the "silent pandemic," antimicrobial resistance is a particularly concerning public health threat. It represents an area where Canada has an opportunity to not only ensure preparedness, but also emerge as a global leader. AMR occurs when pathogens evolve to withstand the effects of

antibiotics intended to eradicate them. As pathogens continue to grow stronger, infections that were once easily treatable with antibiotics can lead to hospitalization, severe illness, or even death. Additionally, the potential of resistant post-surgery infections may one day make routine medical procedures such as joint replacements and caesarean sections even riskier to perform.

Relative to other G7 and many European countries, Canada is falling further and further behind this fight against AMR as Canadians have access to only three of the 18 new antibiotics launched since 2010. Without action, the Council of Canadian Academies estimates that resistance rates could rise to 40 per cent by 2050, resulting in approximately 13,700 deaths annually, adding \$8-billion in health-care costs, and a \$21-billion hit to Canada's GDP.

The good news is that in 2023, the federal government announced the pan-Canadian AMR Action Plan, which included a commitment to develop a pull incentive program to bring new antibiotics to Canada. Regrettably, the government has not yet

allocated the necessary resources to implement the plan, and in order to have an effective program that makes a meaningful impact in addressing this looming public health crisis, it will be critical that it is properly and sustainably funded.

This June, Canada will host the G7 leaders' summit, a global forum where AMR is consistently a key agenda item. Since the launch of the AMR Action Plan nearly two years ago, Canada will be expected to report progress on its pull incentive program, aligning with the actions of our G7 counterparts. When addressing an issue with such widespread global significance on this international stage, it's crucial that we do more than announce a plan—we must ensure it's a bold, effective solution that drives change.

Rising rates of AMR will inevitably affect every Canadian at some point, but we must also recognize the disproportionate burden on certain priority populations. In rural and remote Indigenous communities where access to innovative medicines—including antibiotics—is vital, the capacity to combat AMR amid

other competing priorities may be limited, and hospital access may be scarce. It's the same in long-term-care settings where high infection rates combined with high antibiotic use can contribute to increasing resistance, posing a significant risk to vulnerable residents, staff, and local hospitals.

Canada stands at a critical juncture with public health policy, and the decisions made now will have long-term implications for domestic health security and economy. If we fail to make the necessary investments, the consequences will be difficult to recover from. As the G7 approaches, it is important to have a thoughtful, well-resourced, and sustainable Canadian announcement on AMR. This program must be grounded in these principles to ensure access to innovative AMR solutions for Canadians.

The rising resistance rates demand immediate action. Now is the time to prioritize this growing threat, and craft a strategic response that balances public health and economic needs, while offering a made-in-Canada solution with global impact.

Alison Pozzobon was appointed to the role of head of communications and community engagement for GSK in August 2011, with role expansion to vice-president, communications, government affairs, and market access in January 2025.

The Hill Times

# Driving Canadian innovation in cancer treatment: a win for patients and the economy

Canada can deliver groundbreaking therapies to patients more quickly, reduce health-care costs, and drive economic growth by fostering a robust domestic life sciences sector.

Ken Newport & John Bell

Opinion



Cancer remains one of this country's most urgent health challenges, affecting nearly half of Canadians during their lifetimes. With an aging and growing

population, the number of new cancer cases and related deaths is on the rise, straining individuals, families, and the nation's health-care system.

Beyond its devastating human toll, cancer imposes a significant financial burden on Canadian society. In 2024, the Canadian Cancer Society estimated the total economic impact of cancer at \$37-billion. Shockingly, patients and their families bear about 20 per cent of these costs—approximately \$7.5-billion out of pocket. This financial strain is only expected to grow, with costs projected to rise by 23 per cent over the next decade.

While Canada invests roughly \$500-million annually in cancer research, the allocation of these funds reveals a critical imbalance. About 70 per cent of this funding supports early-stage research, leaving a significant gap in translational research and clinical trials—two of the most expensive, yet essential, steps in transforming promising discoveries into life-saving

treatments. All too often, groundbreaking Canadian innovations are advanced to the clinical trial phase outside of our borders, depriving this country's patients of timely access to cutting-edge therapies, and limiting opportunities for domestic life sciences companies to bring these treatments to market.

Addressing this gap represents not just a challenge, but an extraordinary opportunity. Translational research bridges the critical divide between scientific discovery and clinical application, turning innovative ideas into effective treatments. By bolstering this phase of research, Canada can deliver groundbreaking therapies to patients more quickly, reduce health-care costs, and drive economic growth by fostering a robust domestic life sciences sector that capitalizes on Canadian ingenuity.

At BioCanRx, we focus on accelerating the development of Canadian cancer immunotherapies—innovative treatments that harness the body's immune

system to combat cancer and improve patient outcomes.

Our impact is clear. Through strategic investments in the immunotherapy network, BioCanRx has demonstrated the power of translational research to drive significant advancements. For instance, our support has been instrumental in the development and accessibility of made-in-Canada CAR T-cell therapy, a cutting-edge treatment that has already transformed lives across the country.

Another success story is Virica Biotech, a company that benefited from a timely BioCanRx investment to develop tools that decrease the cost of manufacturing vaccines and biotherapeutics. Virica's innovations have significantly enhanced the efficiency of biomanufacturing, an activity that is critical to Canada's ability to respond to the next pandemic and reduce the cost of producing life-saving therapeutics. This is a clear example of how "strategic" translational research funding

benefits both the health of Canadians and our economy.

By providing critical resources and expertise at a pivotal stage in the research pipeline, BioCanRx has ensured that Canadian discoveries benefit Canadian patients, while also positioning the country as a global leader in life sciences innovation.

The stakes are high, but the potential rewards are even higher. With increased support for translational research, we can ensure that Canada remains at the forefront of innovation in cancer treatment. This is not just a win for patients, who will gain access to life-saving therapies, but also for the Canadian economy, which stands to benefit from a stronger, more vibrant life sciences sector.

Investing in translational research is not just a scientific imperative—it is a moral and economic one. By bridging the gap between discovery and treatment, we can create a healthier, more prosperous future for all Canadians.

On the heels of world cancer day, it's time for policymakers, funders, and stakeholders to scale these efforts, securing Canada's position as a leader in cancer treatment innovation. By investing in the business of cancer treatment, we not only improve lives, but also lay the foundation for a healthier, more prosperous future for all Canadians.

Ken Newport is past board chair of BioCanRx, and Dr. John Bell is the scientific director of BioCanRx.

The Hill Times

## HEALTH Policy Briefing

# It is time the feds make the long-awaited diabetes device fund a reality

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room visits, making them important tools for helping to ease financial pressure on Canada's health-care system.

Stable glucose levels also translate to better sleep, increased energy, and a greater sense of personal agency—a stark contrast to the constant highs and lows people too often experience without these tools.

For people managing diabetes, these outcomes are not just health statistics, but life-changing realities.

The device fund symbolizes more than just financial support, though—it is an investment in the future of Canada's collective health and prosperity.

For those diagnosed with diabetes, access to reliable monitoring systems means fewer days lost to illness, improved mental health, and an overall better quality of life. It marks a shift towards proactive care rather than costly, reactive treatment.

The fund can promote patient-centred care by offering access to devices suited to individual needs; finding the right



People with diabetes need timely access to proper medications, supplies, and devices, writes Glenn Thibeault. *Pexels photograph by Bruno Tapia*

device often depends on a person's lifestyle and budget.

When the federal government announced the fund last February—at the same time it tabled

legislation to establish a national pharmacare plan covering diabetes and contraceptive medications—people living in Canada with diabetes cheered it as a way

to address the significant financial and health challenges they face.

They are now getting discouraged. The federal government has not indicated when it will set up

the fund, how much it will contribute to it, or what it will cover. Will it include only the basics, or will it also cover maintenance costs like replacement sensors, batteries, and other associated expenses?

The federal delay has also stalled efforts to get provinces and territories to reduce or eliminate coverage restrictions or caps, or to standardize their coverage as they wait to hear what Ottawa is doing.

We need to move towards a future where no one in Canada struggles to afford the tools they need to manage their chronic condition. The Diabetes Device Fund is an important step in this direction.

It is time for the federal government to allocate money for the fund and get it up and running.

Canadians with diabetes have already waited too long.

*Glenn Thibeault is the executive director of government affairs, advocacy, and policy for Diabetes Canada. He is also a former MP, national caucus chair, MPP and minister of energy in Ontario.*

*The Hill Times*

## Instead of pharmacare, Canadians need faster drug-approval timelines

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launch new drugs. Between 2018 and 2022, Health Canada received 208 new drug applications, compared to 335 received by the European Medicines Agency, and 386 received by the United States Food and Drug Administration. Of the drugs approved, only a

fraction will ever make it onto public drug plans.

Patients in Canada wait longer than most of our peer countries to access fewer medicines. We are missing out on improvements to health outcomes that innovative drugs can deliver. This has direct implications for patients and their families, but it also means that

we end up spending more money in the long run to treat illness.

Studies have shown that reduced access to new medicines can lead to higher health-care expenditures down the road.

To develop solutions, let's examine the problem. In Canada, the process by which new drugs are approved and eventually

reimbursed is governed by multiple organizations that can often act as "gatekeepers." Launching a new medicine in Canada first involves submitting data about its benefits, safety, and manufacturing quality to Health Canada. This takes about a year. Then, Canada's Drug Agency (CDA) conducts a health technology assessment, taking about nine months. After that, the price of a new drug is negotiated through the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance (pCPA), representing federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Even when a new drug has made it through all these steps, patients must wait until governments add it to the relevant benefit list. Average wait times here vary significantly between provinces, from 662 days

in Prince Edward Island to 44 days in Quebec.

Provincial governments need to work with Ottawa to improve the drug approval and public reimbursement process. To start, they should remove the several-month-long delay between the CDA and pCPA, and commit to listing new medicines on drug plans within 30 days of a completed pCPA negotiation.

There is momentum on improving access to new drugs, with the Council of the Federation highlighting this as a priority at their December 2024 meeting. Federally, Health Canada can work to speed up drug approvals, while pursuing mutual recognition efforts with international partners, such as Project Orbis for cancer treatments.

Instead of focusing its efforts on an expensive and counter-productive national pharmacare plan, Ottawa should work with provinces to improve drug approval and public reimbursement times. This is a low-cost measure to significantly improve access to medications. It will result in better health outcomes for patients and generate much-needed savings in other areas of our health-care systems, making Canada a more attractive place to develop and launch cutting-edge treatments.

*Liam MacDonald is director of policy and government relations at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.*

*The Hill Times*



Provincial governments need to work with Ottawa to improve the drug approval and public reimbursement process, writes Liam MacDonald. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

# Hearts and minds: premiers' mission won't change Trump's tack, but can still help Canada, say politicians

Economic measures like procurement bans and retaliatory tariffs can be used against the U.S., but a non-threatening approach would better resonate with Americans, says former Ontario deputy premier Dwight Duncan.



Ontario Premier Doug Ford, left, and New Brunswick Premier Susan Holt are among those heading to Washington this week for a diplomatic mission. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

BY IREM KOCA

With the clock ticking on the United States' Canada-specific tariff deadline, procurement bans and counter-tariffs may be key levers for Canadian premiers as they head to Washington, D.C., this week. However, politicians say a united "Team Canada" delivering a firm but co-operative message—one that underscores Canada's commitment to strong economic partnership—would be more effective in easing tensions.

U.S. President Donald Trump's looming threat to impose a 25-per-cent tariff on all Canadian goods, along with a 10-per-cent tariff on oil and gas, is temporarily on hold until early March. Federal and provincial governments are using this time to come up with strategies to prevent the tariffs, and reduce Canada's future reliance on the U.S. As part of those efforts, Canada's premiers will be in Washington from Feb. 11-13 for a diplomatic mission led by Council of the Federation chair Ontario Premier Doug Ford.

Canada is also staring down 25-per-cent tariffs on its aluminum and steel products as part of a broader set of tariffs Trump has threatened.

Dwight Duncan, a former Ontario Liberal deputy premier and finance minister, told *The Hill Times* that a united front from the premiers during their diplomatic outreach could reinforce Canada's message. And that message must be: "Canada wants to continue a relationship with the United States—a good trading relationship—and we don't wish to engage in a trade war, but if we have to, we will," said Duncan.

Duncan argued that some proposed economic measures like procurement bans and retaliatory tariffs can be used against the U.S., but a non-threatening approach would better resonate with Americans.

He said that, given the size of the U.S. economy relative to the

Canadian economy, none of these counter-measures would be felt by average Americans—not for a while, anyway.

## Premiers look to highlight mutual benefit of Canada-U.S. relationship, potential tariff harm

Several premiers have voiced their frustration over Trump's tariff and annexation threats, taking steps toward retaliatory measures before the tariffs that were first ordered on Feb. 1 were temporarily put on hold on Feb. 3. Ford vowed to ban American companies from bidding on provincial contracts, and pledged to terminate the province's \$100-million contract with Elon Musk's satellite company, Starlink. Following suit, British Columbia Premier David Eby directed his government to exclude U.S. suppliers from any new procurement agreements. All those measures are on pause as are the tariffs.

Duncan said premiers can find a receptive audience in the U.S. even if they don't appeal to Trump directly. A co-ordinated approach similar to the "Team Canada" strategy used during the NAFTA renegotiations between 2017 and 2020 could once again yield positive results, he added.

"I don't think they'll affect Trump's thinking. That's not who you're aiming for," Duncan said. "You're aiming for thoughtful Americans, including Trump supporters—Republican congressmen, senators, and senior unelected officials—to help reinforce the message. It's an exercise in communications."

Premiers will meet with key members of the Trump adminis-

tration, Congress, and business leaders, and will address shared issues such as jobs and the economy, energy, critical mineral supply chains, border security, and immigration, according to a news release. Some premiers will be back in Washington for the annual meeting of the National Governors Association on Feb. 20-22.

"In Ford's case, he's in an election, whether it's wearing a silly hat or canceling Starlink, which he then reversed ... that just makes the Americans laugh. Premier [Danielle] Smith of Alberta worries me, taking a position that seems kind of alienated from the Canadian position," Duncan said.

In a Feb. 10 press release, Smith's office said she "will support a Team Canada approach to engaging with U.S. lawmakers and industry, while highlighting how tariffs on Canadian and U.S. products harms Canadians, Americans, workers, businesses and industry on both sides of the border."

The Alberta premier will also "take the opportunity to reinforce how Alberta is contributing to Canada's enhanced efforts to secure our shared border, how we can collectively grow our economies, and the significant role Alberta energy plays in helping the U.S. create prosperity for its people and achieve energy dominance and security for the long term."

## Canada should focus on finding alternative suppliers, says former senior official

Julian Karaguesian, a McGill University lecturer and former Finance Canada official who previously served as finance counsellor at Canada's Embassy in Washington, said both the premiers and the federal government can push back against U.S. threats by using procurement as a key lever, as well as exploring imposing targeted counter-tariffs.

Karaguesian argued that in the days remaining before Trump's tariff deadline, the federal government should focus on identifying Canadian alternatives for major goods, services, and suppliers it purchases rather than "trying to appeal to every twist and turn in Trump's move," or spending time on naming a "fentanyl czar."

He said Canada should be prepared to enforce procurement bans, "because it won't cause national pain, but it will locally."

The Ontario government and its agencies spend \$30-billion on procurement annually, while Alberta and British Columbia each spend less than \$10-billion a year, according to publicly available data.

Karaguesian noted that, with most of Canada's economic activity concentrated within 200 kilometres of the U.S. border, many American companies—particularly those by the border—tap into Canadian procurement opportunities. However, he argued that even with billions of dollars in procurement from the provinces and the federal government combined, shutting off that tap would be felt primarily at the local level, and "hit the bottom line of U.S. companies," but "it wouldn't push the American economy into recession by any means."

Karaguesian likened Ford's now-reversed move to scrap Ontario's contract with Starlink to a "sanction." He said the idea is to "put pressure on the inner circle, so that they pressure the top dog to relent a bit," hinting at Musk's apparent sway over Trump.

Karaguesian argued that a "Buy Canadian" approach could be applied across all levels of government procurement, and that governments could immediately stop signing new contracts with U.S.-based firms, but some products might not have any Canadian alternatives such as certain plastic sheets used for making signs.

However, cancelling existing contracts could be more challenging and could cause more harm to Canada, according to Karaguesian. "Sovereign governments are big parties, and they have lawyers and resources. They could walk away from contracts. There just may be financial consequences, litigation. It could get messy very quickly," he explained.

One such example took place in 2018 when the Ford government cancelled 758 wind and solar energy contracts, which cost more than \$230-million, including the compensation to suppliers—some of which were international firms—for their losses.

## Procurement and counter-tariffs as threat retaliation

Through their diplomatic engagements in Washington, premiers can use their influence to actively impress upon American representatives that Canada is one of the largest markets out there for the U.S., Karaguesian said. He also argued that—if they chose to go that route—public procurement is pretty much the only stick premiers could wield.

"We can continue to impress upon [the Trump administration] this is an unwanted trade war, but we can respond. Premiers can exert that kind of influence," he said. Yet, Karaguesian stressed the need for a realistic approach, noting, "we can't delude ourselves

into thinking that we can counter-threat the United States with a recession," he added.

"We're a panda bear, and they're a grizzly bear. They've got a lot of the cards, but we have some cards. We can't cripple them, and we don't want to, but we can. We can fight back."

However, Christopher Sands, director of the Canada Institute at the Washington, D.C.-based Wilson Center, argued discussions around banning U.S. companies from Canadian procurement would be a "nice, symbolic gesture" for provinces that want to express their frustration with their southern neighbours. But such a pushback won't change Trump's ways.

"Provinces are important for procurement. They do quite a bit of purchasing because they control health care, public works, infrastructure, education, and other areas where potential U.S. vendors would participate," Sands said.

But he added: "Canada spent a long time fighting to try to get access to state procurement, and ultimately joined the [World Trade Organization] Procurement Agreement. Symbolically, going back to where we were prior to that moment is a real step backwards. It's not likely to change anyone's mind."

While the premiers "can't guarantee a result," their Washington trip can help with establishing political connections that will at least give Canada some tools, according to Sands.

"The problem with Trump tariffs combined with Canadian retaliation is it's a mutually assured destruction option. Twenty-five-per-cent tariffs will blow up supply chains; hugely increase costs of energy, automobiles, other consumer products for ordinary Americans; and Canadian retaliation will destroy Canada's reputation as a reliable supplier of goods, leave some Canadian companies looking to Europe, China, anywhere where they can sell their products and still make a living," he said.

Duncan said Trump's threats have triggered a discussion where people started taking the challenges in interprovincial trade barriers seriously, but that the 30-day pause for the tariffs is not enough time to overcome those barriers—which in his opinion have become worse over the years.

Karaguesian also highlighted interprovincial trade barriers as an area where Canada could improve its economic resilience, and suggested other options—even including building closer economic ties with China—should be explored.

"Even if we're able to resolve the tariff issues with Trump, it is going to be something else next year, even if we can resolve the tariff dispute. The premiers also have to start getting serious about removing the barriers, helping to identify other markets globally, and diversifying our trade," Duncan said. "We're in for four difficult years. Anybody that thinks this will be over next month, in my view, is mistaken."

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The Hill Times

## NEWS

# Canada's 'long-term vision' for border security should include input from people already doing the job: CBSA union president

CBSA training, knowledge, and expertise is underused in current border-security plans, says union head Mark Weber.

Continued from page 1

On Feb. 3, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) announced that the threatened 25-per-cent tariffs on Canadian products—and 10-per-cent tariffs on energy—would not go into effect, as Trump ordered, on Feb. 4, following commitments to expand on the federal government's previously announced \$1.3-billion border security plan.

Announced this past December, the plan includes \$667.5-million for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), \$355.4-million for the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), \$77.7-million for Health Canada, \$180-million over six years for the Communications Security Establishment, and \$20-million over five years for Public Safety Canada.

Based around five "pillars"—detecting and disrupting the fentanyl trade, introducing new tools for law enforcement, enhancing operational co-ordination, increasing information-sharing, and tightening the immigration and asylum system—the plan includes the purchase of Black Hawk helicopters, new technology, and personnel to patrol the border, and increased co-ordination with U.S. officials to stop the flow of illegal drugs and migrants. The CBSA will also be given funding to train new drug-sniffing dogs, and buy chemical detection equipment. A new aerial intelligence task force will be created for the RCMP to use those helicopters and newly purchased surveillance drones.

As part of the expanded agreement to delay the promised tariffs for another month, Canada committed to appointing a new "fentanyl czar," listing drug cartels as terrorists under the Criminal Code; creating a new Canada-U.S. joint strike force to combat organized crime, fentanyl, and money laundering; an accompanying intelligence directive supported by a \$200-million investment; and "round-the-clock surveillance" on the border by law enforcement



Then-public safety minister Dominic LeBlanc, pictured right with Immigration Minister Marc Miller, announced the federal government's \$1.3-billion border security plan on Dec. 17, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

and civilian forces with new and modernized equipment.

During a Feb. 6 press conference, Public Safety Minister David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Ont.) told reporters the government intends to appoint the so-called "fentanyl czar" well before the March 4 deadline, and during an interview with *The Hill Times* on Feb. 9, said the role could be filled as quickly as this week.

"That's my hope," McGuinty told *The Hill Times*. "We're working very hard to get this together. There's urgency to this and we know it."

On Feb. 11, the prime minister announced that the role had been given to Kevin Brosseau, a former RCMP officer who has served as Trudeau's deputy national security and intelligence adviser since last October.

In the past two months, several provinces have also proposed their own border-security measures, including Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, which have organized border patrols using combinations of provincial and municipal law enforcement, as well as conservation and wildlife officers.

Mark Weber, national president of the Customs and Immigration Union representing CBSA officers and personnel, told *The Hill Times* that, so far, the various federal and provincial responses are underutilizing the agency's expertise and resources.

"What we'd like at some point is for the people who do the work ... who do all the training, and have the intel, knowledge, and experience, to be part of the plan-

ning, but so far, we're not seeing that," Weber explained, adding that each of the provinces and the federal government "seem to be working in a silo."

"We're not being asked, oddly, since we're the ones who do the work," he said.

Much of the focus of the various measures and plans being proposed has been on halting the flow of drugs, weapons, and immigrants into the U.S., which Weber said the CBSA has neither the capacity nor the mandate to accomplish.

"A lot of this feels like just throwing things at the issue and hoping the tariffs go away," Weber said. "I don't think there's any overarching, long-term vision."



Customs and Immigration Union national president Mark Weber says the CBSA doesn't need a new mandate to expand its powers to the rest of the border, just more officers and equipment. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Weber added that the CBSA had met with McGuinty before last weekend, which had offered "some hope that we will see some positive change."

"It was really good to hear that he got it and had a lot of knowledge going into the job about the work, the border, and the authorities and roles of the different agencies," Weber said. "It's a good starting point, so I'm hoping there's going to be some kind of long-term plan about how we do a better job keeping things out of Canada."

To do that, the CBSA needs to be given more resources, including staff, equipment, and technology at ports of entry to get back to the work of keeping Canada's border safe, Weber said.

"We need to increase our focus on examining commercial and rail, and stop relying on this system of automation and self-declaration we've seen develop over the years," Weber said, noting that smugglers generally aren't in the habit of declaring that intent.

"If you want to focus on keeping the border safe, you've got to get back to that work, and we know how to do it," Weber said. "We're the people who do it every day, and we could go port by port, and truck by truck to tell you exactly what is needed, and that's the kind of detail we need to do the job well."

Additionally, Weber said that he shared with McGuinty that giving the CBSA the means to do its work along the entirety of the border instead of just ports of entry would make a significant impact, adding that it would not

require any changes to its current mandate.

The CBSA's mandate to protect the entire border—not just ports of entry—is already established within the Customs Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, Weber explained, adding that the responsibility was only relegated to the RCMP by a 1932 order in council.

"It doesn't require any kind of legislative change to our mandate, but it does require more personnel," Weber said. "It would require an investment, but right now, we're investing huge amounts of money into provincial police and different provincial combinations to do that work who don't have the full legal authority to do the job."

Alongside hiring more officers, Weber added that there is room for rearranging the agency's current "top-heavy" ratio of managers to officers, which he said can be as high as 2:1 at some ports of entry.

While Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's (Carleton, Ont.) six-point plan for the border includes expanding CBSA powers along the entire border, as well as hiring 2,000 new CBSA officers—which would replace the same number of "bureaucrats" Poilievre said he would fire—Weber said the "devil is in the details, and it's light on details."

On Feb. 5, Poilievre unveiled his plan for the border, which expanded on the three he proposed earlier in the week before the tariff reprieve. The plan includes immediately deploying the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to the border to begin helicopter patrols and surveillance, new surveillance towers and truck-mounted drone systems to spot illegal crossings, scanners at all major crossings, and increasing deportation tracking of those in Canada illegally.

"Those are talking points said at a podium, and I don't exactly know what that means," Weber said. "On the one hand, he's talking about hiring 2,000 more people at the border, but at the same time, he's talking about laying off 17,000 people annually from the federal public service. That's us; we are the public service."

Former Liberal staffer Ian Skipworth told *The Hill Times* that the government has seemingly made a conscious decision to avoid expanding the CBSA's powers in its discussions and current proposals, noting it would require a "vast range" of increases to the CBSA's operational, financial, and human resources.

Skipworth, now a consultant with Summa Strategies, added that both the Conservatives' proposals and the government's current measures would face sustainability issues, particularly if they need to be maintained for the next four years.

"To increase posture at the border and hit the 10,000-personnel goal ... the RCMP will most likely have to move resources from other locations across the country, given the RCMP's ongoing challenges with recruitment and staffing," Skipworth said.

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# CBC, foreign ministry both deny considering 'transfer' of international broadcaster as outlined in department memo

A CBC spokesperson says the briefing note prepared for a 2023 meeting with the Global Affairs Canada deputy minister is 'incorrect,' while GAC says it 'outlines CBC's objectives for the discussion.'

Continued from page 1

affairs, and government relations executive director Shaun Poulter on March 3, 2023. It was obtained by *The Hill Times* under the Access to Information Act after a 19-month wait.

The memo details CBC's proposal for a "reimagined international news service" with annual funding of \$20-million to \$30-million, which was attached as an annex to the memo.

Under the "objectives" section of the briefing note, it includes a comment to "discuss proposal for reimagining Canada's international broadcast service (currently Radio Canada International), including possible financial support from or transfer of operations to GAC."

In responses to *The Hill Times*, both CBC and GAC denied proposing a possible "transfer of operations."

"To be clear, CBC/Radio-Canada has never proposed shifting Radio Canada International (RCI) to Global Affairs. Canadians depend on trusted, independent sources of news and information, now more than ever. RCI, like all CBC/Radio-Canada services, operates independently of government," CBC/Radio-Canada spokesperson Leon Mar told *The Hill Times* in a Feb. 3 email.

RCI serves as Canada's international broadcaster, with the intent of bringing the country to a global audience. RCI has suffered successive budget cuts in recent years, including most recently having its staff slashed from 20 people to nine as it was transformed into an organization to translate CBC and Radio-Canada news articles to other languages for a domestic audience. The change was much criticized for skewing the international mandate.



CBC/Radio-Canada considered a reimagining of Radio Canada International in 2023 with annual funding of \$20-million to \$30-million, which isn't going ahead. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

GAC spokesperson Renelle Arsenault said the foreign ministry did not consider taking over operations of RCI.

"The briefing note referenced was prepared for a meeting requested by the CBC. The note outlines CBC's objectives for the discussion, and should be read accordingly. The meeting did not result in any follow up, as GAC was not considering a transfer of operations of RCI to GAC, nor is it in a position to fund RCI," Arsenault said in an email.

Listed in the briefing note as an objective for the meeting was to "convey GAC's initial degree of interest and possible level of resource commitment, to be further reviewed against departmental mandates including efforts to counter disinformation."

Mar said the objectives stated in the memo are not those of the CBC.

In a subsequent Feb. 7 phone interview with *The Hill Times*, Poulter said he "can't explain" how the memo has characterized the CBC's position, calling it "bonkers."

"There has never been any consideration, discussion, or anything of the government running RCI or leading RCI. That has never been a consideration or discussion," he said. "RCI is an important part of CBC/Radio-Canada, and like all of our platforms, its independence from government is the essence of its existence."

He said that neither the CBC nor GAC raised the issue of a "transfer of operations" during their meeting.

Arsenault said the topic of a possible "transfer of operations" was not raised by either GAC or CBC during the March 2023 meeting.

Asked why the suggestion was in the briefing note despite GAC and CBC asserting that neither was considering the idea, she said that it was "standard practice" for a memo to include "all possible topics that could be raised" in a meeting.

A GAC spokesperson didn't respond to a follow-up question about whether the topic of a "transfer of operations" was raised during the meeting.

"We made the case that a lot of public broadcasters around the world have their international service funded by their [foreign ministry] ... because so much of the work that public broadcasters do aligns with more global democratic objectives, but certainly we would never consider that RCI would be run by, led by, organized by a department of the government," Poulter said.

The GAC memo contains a note that—during a February 2023 meeting with GAC officials—Poulter "proposed that a Canadian international news service would be more appropriately led by GAC and not CBC/Radio-Canada."

Mar said the memo is "incorrect."

"There may have been some misunderstanding on the part of the GAC memo's author regarding a discussion point Mr. Poulter raised—namely, whether an international news service would be more appropriately funded by Global Affairs Canada, instead of Canadian Heritage," Mar said, remarking that the note also references other international broadcasters that are funded by respective ministries.

"There has never been any consideration or discussion of the government running RCI. That would be counter to the very principle under which RCI, and indeed CBC/Radio-Canada, exists: independence from government," he added.

Arsenault said that Poulter's February 2023 meeting with GAC officials "touched upon various countries whose foreign ministries have mandates for international broadcasting."

"Canada's does not," she said. "No proposals in this regard were made by CBC or Global Affairs Canada."

Poulter said that meeting involved a proposal to increase funding for RCI.

The CBC initially said that Poulter was unavailable for an interview, before he told *The Hill Times* that he "cannot speak to any meetings with the government." The public broadcaster made Poulter available after this newspaper asked the CBC to respond to GAC's comments that the briefing note "outlines CBC's objectives" for the meeting, which they disputed.

Poulter said CBC's pitch remains a proposal, but to his knowledge there hasn't been any movement since the last meeting in March 2023.

Funding RCI within CBC's existing budget to the extent that it had been pitched to GAC is not under consideration, he said.

"Part of the pitch was that with the current levels of funding that we have, we just didn't have the resources to expand RCI in this way," he said. "Subsequently, we have added additional foreign bureaus in Taipei and in Mumbai to try to expand our international coverage on our CBC/Radio-Canada platforms. But with respect to RCI, we don't have significant resources to do this kind of reimagining that we had proposed."

In December 2023, CBC/Radio-Canada announced that it would have to slash 10 per cent of its workforce as its coffers were short by \$125-million. The govern-

ment gave the public broadcaster an additional \$42-million in the 2024 budget as job losses totalled 141 and 205 vacant postings were removed. In August 2024, the Canadian Press reported that CBC distributed \$18.4-million in bonuses, including \$3.3-million for 45 executives.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) said were he prime minister that he would "defund" CBC, but has stopped short of demanding the public broadcaster's French-language services to cease.

## 'A reimagined international news service'

The proposal—which is marked "confidential"—mentions that the service would serve as a "complement to our existing suite of foreign news bureaus." The memo notes that CBC/Radio-Canada has bureaus in New York, City, Los Angeles, Paris, London, Jerusalem, and Washington, D.C. But those operations are "nearly entirely devoted to serving domestic audiences."

During the initial phase of the plan, there would be enhanced presence and coverage in the Indo-Pacific, as well as assembling a "rapid reaction" news team that would be deployed in "emergencies and civic turmoil."

A subsequent phase in the plan includes an increased presence and coverage in the Caribbean, as well as in North and Western Africa.

The GAC memo notes that the "proposal seeks to establish alignment with Canadian values and Canadian foreign policy objectives (promotion of democracy, human rights, gender equality, rule of law) and demonstrate that Canada's favourable image abroad can be leveraged to position Radio Canada International as a trusted, respected international news service when compared to other foreign players."

After changes were made to RCI in 2020, former RCI reporters and supporters pushed to protect the international mandate through the Broadcasting Act modernization, but ultimately a Senate amendment to do so failed.

As Bill C-11 was going through the Senate, Tait presented the proposal to Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.) in December 2022, according to the briefing note.

The 2021 mandate letter for then-Heritage minister Pablo Rodriguez includes an instruction of "strengthening Radio Canada International, so that it can continue to advocate for peace, democracy and universal values on the world stage."

Part of the process was an effort by GAC to address global disinformation. The memo notes that Joly had previously tasked CBC/Radio-Canada to "develop a strategy to counter disinformation," which "lies at the centre of the current proposal."

The briefing note states that while GAC is the government lead on cultural diplomacy, that mandate doesn't extend to "broader public diplomacy activities."

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## NEWS

# Retreat or show up: USAID chaos reveals crossroad for Canada's foreign-aid funding

Foreign aid cuts in the U.S. could provide 'fodder' for a Canadian government to go down a similar path, says international assistance expert Liam Swiss.

Continued from page 1

includes the fight against HIV and AIDS.

She said the uncertainty about the future of USAID is compounded by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's (Papineau, Que.) impending departure, and the upcoming general election.

"[That] means that a significant amount of Canada's global work is kind of stalled right now because of uncertainty around approvals and decision-making, so there's a bit of a perfect storm now," Legault said.

Canada has four co-funded projects with USAID, including three projects in Peru that have a combined budget of nearly \$40-million.

Asked about the status of ongoing projects with USAID, a Global Affairs Canada (GAC) spokesperson told *The Hill Times* that the Canadian government is "assessing the situation following changes to U.S. foreign aid."

"No further decisions have been made at this time, and we will have more to say as the situation evolves," the official said.

Legault said there was already a concern that Canada's baseline aid envelope had not been growing at a time of great need.



International Development Minister Ahmed Hussen and Global Affairs Canada are currently 'assessing the situation' following the USAID freeze. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

"We're facing another crisis right now with the most important donor in the world," she said. "We don't exactly know what will happen with the 90-day review, but clearly lots of problems are being spotted already."

The moves by the American government constitute a "massive crisis on the global stage" that Legault said creates an opportunity for Canada to "share our values on the world stage at this time."

"If countries like Canada don't show up or step up for countries in Africa, there are other countries that will come and fill the void," she said, citing the presence in the continent of China and Russia.

## Canada's uncertain foreign-aid trajectory

While some are looking at Canada to fill the void, future

spending plans suggest a possible retreat from foreign aid.

The GAC departmental plans for 2024-25 show declining spending commitments for "development, peace, and security programming," with \$5.6-billion in 2024-25, \$4.9-billion in 2025-26, and \$4.4-billion in 2026-27. That would represent a nearly \$2-billion decline in planned spending in 2026-27 from actual expenditures in 2022-23.

The 2022-23 report to Parliament on Canada's international assistance shows that 21 federal departments contributed to the country's global-aid envelope, with GAC being the largest contributor of 43 per cent of funding.

At the same time, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) has proposed to reduce foreign aid to fund other priorities.

He announced that he would "dramatically cut" foreign aid to pay for his recently unveiled Arctic plan as he argued that "much" of the assistance "goes to dictators, terrorists, and global bureaucracies."

That followed his commitment in 2024 to cut foreign aid to boost military spending, describing international assistance as "wasteful."

Legault said that Canada has a choice between two paths to take.

"We can kind of retreat from the global stage and follow that kind of tendency, or we can show up and step up and help build a world that is based on solidarity because, ultimately, it is in our interest as Canada, as well," she said.

Cooperation Canada chief executive officer Kate Higgins said in a statement that Canada has an "opportunity to step up and provide strategic international assistance where the needs are greatest, and the impacts will be most felt." She remarked that the U.S. pause is having "catastrophic consequences" across the globe.

NDP MP Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, Alta.), her party's foreign affairs and international development critic, wrote in a Feb. 3 post on Substack that she is "horrified" by the "attack on USAID and its staff."

"The consequences of this decision are global. People will die. Diseases will spread. Humanitarian crises will grow. People around the world, including Canadians, will be at risk as a result," she wrote.

## 'Hard-pressed' for Canada and allies to replace USAID bankroll: expert

Acadia University sociology professor Liam Swiss, an expert on foreign aid, said countries like Canada are going to be pressed to fill the void left by the USAID suspension.

He remarked that something similar happened "in a little bit of microcosm" during the first Trump administration when the Ameri-

can government froze funding for sexual and reproductive health, which led to Canada and some allied countries stepping up their work to make up some of the shortfall.

"I would hope that Canada would devote itself to trying to make up some of the shortfall, and still act as a champion in certain areas in global development and assistance, especially given that some of the areas that seem to be garnering a lot of attention from the Trump administration as somehow horrible examples of wasted money—like spending on LGBTQ rights or on gender equality—are things that Canada, I think, would hold more central to its recent contributions," Swiss said, but added that it remains to be seen if Canada and other allies can make up what could be lost without U.S. funding.

"If we actually see an outright elimination of USAID, and a massive shrinking of American ODA [official development assistance] consequently, then it would be very hard-pressed for donors like Canada to make up that shortfall," Swiss said.

He the domestic context for international assistance funding aggravates the situation.

"It's not clear in the current federal context that any party is going to be elected to government that would be willing to kind of stake their ground on that," he said, noting that it would be "very difficult" for the Liberals to run on the issue against the Conservatives.

He said that the Conservatives are likely to use the Trump cuts to foreign aid as "fodder" to justify it in Canada.

"I think it will be a convenient target for those who wish to scapegoat aid as an area of spending that is somehow run counter to their priorities," Swiss said, remarking that he has concerns individual contracts will be cherry-picked to muddle the broader effects of the changes.

He said that the situation creates a vacuum that can be exploited by the Chinese government for greater influence across sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

Independent Senator Peter Boehm (Ontario), a past deputy minister for international development, wrote in a Feb. 10 *Policy Magazine* op-ed that Canada has to have a "serious national policy conversation" about foreign aid, which should include GAC officials, academics, stakeholders, private sector influencers, and cross-party politicians.

"I would argue that our traditional policy and operational structures may not be strong enough to meet the disruptive challenge posed by the volte-face of the Trump administration," he wrote.

The former G7 sherpa said Canada's current G7 presidency will give Ottawa "some unaccustomed leverage" to lead a discussion with allies on the situation.

"There is a leadership opportunity throughout all this chaos to put our regenerated patriotism to the test. We should seize it," Boehm wrote.

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*The Hill Times*



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has pledged to 'dramatically cut' foreign aid to boost defence spending. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



# Feds can do plenty during prorogation to take on Trump trade threats, say experts

Continued from page 14

dysfunction over the last months when the House was mired in a filibuster.

The Bloc leader also took issue with the idea of recalling Parliament early to support the Liberals for a potential tariff bailout package.

"I believe that the intention would be to create a context in which the government would get one week—oh, two weeks. Oh, three weeks. And then they remain there longer than supposed to," said Blanchet on Jan. 28. "If the Liberals want things to become clear and want to help people, they should simply start the election sooner."

But given that Canada was on the brink of a trade war, the opposition parties' actual desire for a snap election might now be in doubt.

Turnbull said federal political parties "are looking at a very different electoral terrain than they were a few months ago."

"The NDP are kind of doing not so well and the Liberals are doing much better. The Conservatives have to pivot from the fact that they were assuming this



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has repeatedly called for Parliament's return, and for a federal election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

would be a carbon tax election on Justin Trudeau, and realize it's not going to be that. And so the rush to go to elections that was present in the Conservatives might not be there so much anymore, and it might not be there in the NDP either," said Turnbull.

As for Ford's calculation in calling an early election, Turnbull said the Ontario premier is "in a situation where he's way up in the polls. He's got a majority government. He knows that things would have to really move in a very

strange and unexpected direction for him to lose that."

## Accountability in times of a crises

One of the key principles of a working Parliament is government accountability.

"There's obviously a lack of parliamentary accountability. Committees aren't meeting, there's no legislation going through, there's no Question Period," said Turnbull.

But Turnbull said despite the lack of parliamentary oversight during prorogation, the government is still being held accountable during the current trade crisis.

"There's accountability for the government in the sense that this is all happening in a very public way. And the media are able to comment. The public is able to comment," added Turnbull.

Wernick said ministers and federal departments still have to answer to the law during prorogation, and that they will eventually have to face parliamentary scrutiny.

"They ultimately will have to be called before parliamentary committees and inquiries, just like after the pandemic. So there's nothing really changed about accountability," said Wernick.

What could derail that eventual parliamentary scrutiny of Canada's Trump response? A snap election.

"Parliamentary committees are not going to be meeting for the next four or five weeks, but they will be meeting unless we're immediately plunged into an election," said Wernick.

"There is a Parliament right now, it just isn't sitting. If you

force a non-confidence vote, then Parliament is dissolved and there is no Parliament until a new one's elected. So you would actually be weakening the accountability," added Wernick.

Trudeau did convene a Canada-U.S. Economic Summit in Toronto on Feb. 7, where members of the Council on Canada-U.S. Relations met with "business, civil society, and organized labour" to discuss ways to grow and make the Canadian economy more resilient in light of Trump's tariff threats.

Wernick said this summit "proves that there's a lot you can do without the legislature sitting." But the Conservatives aren't satisfied with being shut out.

"Now we agree with Justin Trudeau on one thing, and that's that there should be a meeting happening and that the prime minister should be there," said Barrett of the summit. "But that meeting should be here in Ottawa, and it should be right here in the House of Commons with the 338 Members of Parliament who were elected to address the issues that our nation is facing."

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# CBC, foreign ministry both deny considering 'transfer' of international broadcaster as outlined in department memo

Continued from page 31

"A dedicated team and strategy would be required to engage in public diplomacy effectively," the note states.

The 2022 report that the CBC/Radio-Canada proposal is based off was authored by Fran Unsworth, a former director of the BBC World Service and past director of news for the BBC, as well as Fred Martenson, a former head of strategy for the BBC World Service.

It notes that the funding for RCI is the lowest compared to allied international broadcasting services.

"Broadcasts in different languages, but has little impact on overseas audience," the report suggests. "Editorial focus is too domestic, largely providing translations of existing Radio-Canada material."

It suggests that the reimagined international news service could

support Canada's "soft power" foreign policy objectives.

"Canada needs a stronger voice in the world. This is in Canada's own interest, but it is also the right thing to do. CBC/Radio-Canada is well placed to provide that stronger voice," the report summarizes.

The document also states that resources in a more ambitious RCI model could be an asset for CBC/Radio-Canada's domestic operations.

"The staff based abroad could enrich international coverage for Canadians audiences, giving them a wider understanding of the rest of the world," it states.

The report notes that funding for the plan would likely fall to the foreign ministry, noting the reference to "defending the right of free of expression" in July's 2021 mandate letter.

It also suggested that with a budget of \$25-million, there could be 150 editorial staff. That

increases to 300 editorial staff with a \$50-million budget, and 600 editorial staff with a \$100-million purse.

## A financial orphan

Wojtek Gwiazda, who spent 35 years as an RCI broadcaster, said CBC's treatment of the international arm shows that it doesn't appreciate the work that it does.

"The administration of the CBC does not understand the importance," said Gwiazda, spokesperson of the RCI Action Committee, which seeks to protect the RCI's international mandate.

"The only time that they started really reacting was when they came up with their latest policy in 2020 that was basically going to destroy the whole international mandate of RCI, and suddenly they got pushback," he said.

As the CBC was pushing through changes to RCI in 2021,

a group of 32 Canadians urged the public broadcaster to reverse course, including former prime minister Joe Clark, author Naomi Klein, and actor Donald Sutherland.

Gwiazda told *The Hill Times* that he is not surprised that the CBC didn't want to fund their reimagining of RCI.

"The huge problem that RCI faces is we are appreciated by a lot of people, but we're an orphan financially," he said. "Nobody wants to pay for us."

Former high commissioner Gaston Barban, who served as a liaison for RCI during his time in the foreign ministry, said at question is the dilemma over who should be responsible for an international news service.

"If it's too closely nested with the foreign ministry then it could reek of a propaganda arm," he said. "And if it's too close to a domestic broadcaster then perhaps it's too focused domestically and less internation-

ally, and that doesn't necessarily follow the national interest as it would if it followed the leadership of the foreign ministry."

He echoed Gwiazda, remarking that the situation led RCI to become an orphan as it "withered away" over the last 30 to 40 years as "CBC was never serious about an international service."

Barban said GAC's own budget shortfalls meant that it didn't have any money to throw at an international news service.

"I really would want to see Global Affairs Canada take a stronger role in public diplomacy, and I think that in terms of public diplomacy, one aspect of it is how to reach foreign audiences," he said. "If you can reach foreign audiences in a way that's somewhat distanced from the foreign ministry like an independent broadcaster then you can be more effective in reaching international audiences."

With neither GAC nor the CBC committing to increased funding, what is lost is Canada's capacity to project its international image on the world, Barban said.

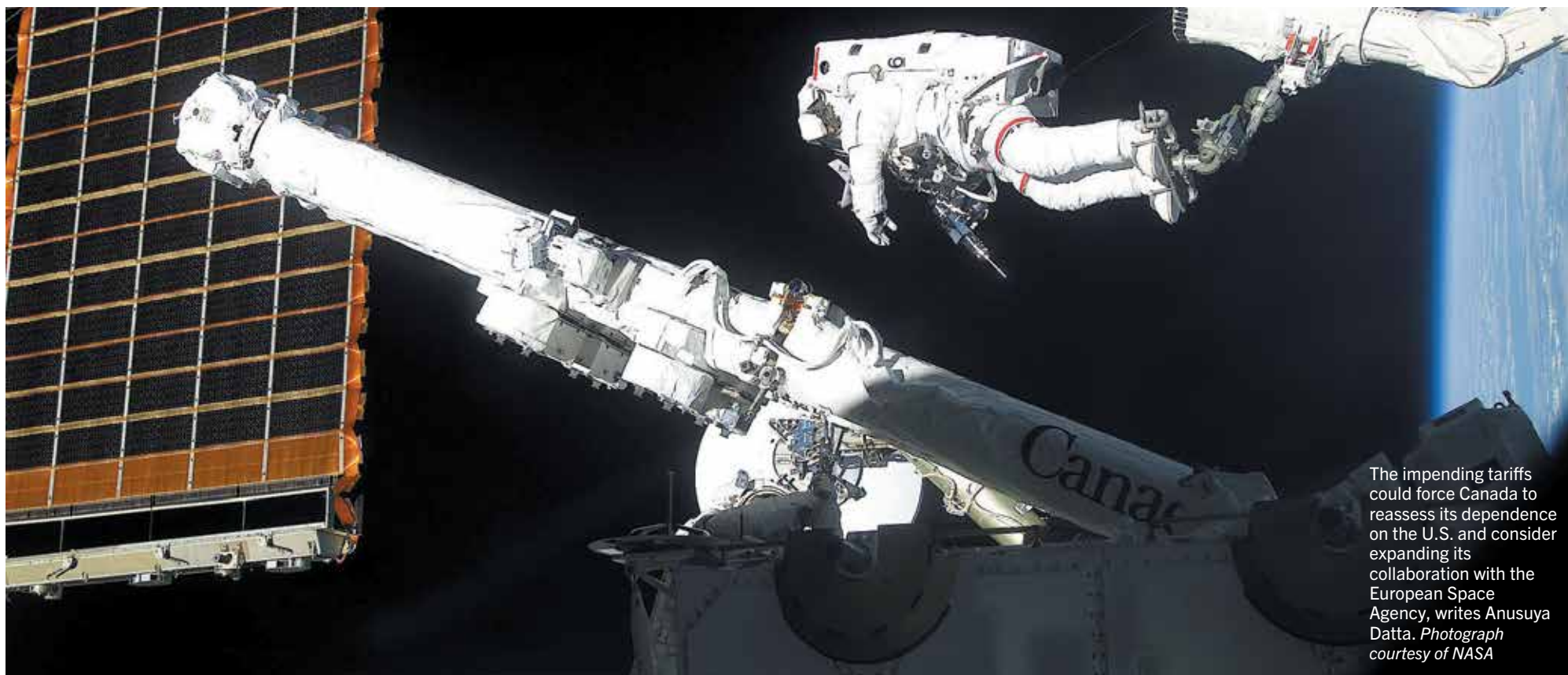
"It's not having—figuratively—boots on the ground," he said. "It will be another player in the international sphere, which is Canadian, which wouldn't be there anymore."

He said the less presence Canada has internationally, the harder it is for the country's diplomats to do their jobs.

"If RCI ends up in the ditch and is forgotten, we've just lost another tool from our toolkit to promote Canada internationally, and that's what hurts," Barban said.

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# OPINION



The impending tariffs could force Canada to reassess its dependence on the U.S. and consider expanding its collaboration with the European Space Agency, writes Anusuya Datta. Photograph courtesy of NASA

# U.S. tariffs could redefine Canada's role in the global space economy

The biggest risk of tariffs isn't just higher costs—it's the potential breakdown of access to critical space infrastructure.

Anusuya Datta



Opinion

For decades, Canada's space industry has operated in a comfortable rhythm developing world-class technology, partnering with NASA, and launching satellites on United States rockets. Given Canada's geographic proximity and deep trade ties with the U.S., this North American space partnership was both practical and mutually beneficial.

But that equation is shifting.

The looming U.S. tariffs threaten to disrupt Canada's access to critical satellite components, launch services, and Earth observation data. This has sparked a crucial question: should Canada broaden its space alliances?

One clear option is Europe. Since 1979, Canada has held

the unique status of being the only non-European co-operating member of the European Space Agency (ESA), giving it access to ESA programs, contracts, and research.

Despite this long-standing partnership, Canada's space sector has remained closely tied to the U.S., largely due to geography and shared trade realities. But the impending tariffs could force Canada to reassess this dependence and consider expanding its collaboration with ESA.

## Canada's unique space legacy

Though not a space heavyweight, Canada has carved out a unique legacy with a long history of building world-class space hardware. In 1960, the first Canadian technology reached space aboard a U.S. satellite, and by 1961, Canadian-built STEM antennas were used on U.S. crewed missions. In 1962, Canada became the third country to design and build its own satellite, Alouette I.

This continued with Canadarm, a key part of human spaceflight, now evolving into Canadarm 3, which will play a critical role in the Artemis program. Canada is also developing its lunar rover, and other robotics and exploration hardware.

Beyond robotics, MDA's RADARSAT series provides criti-

cal Arctic surveillance and disaster monitoring, while GHGSat satellites lead in global methane tracking, reinforcing Canada's position as a leader in space-based environmental monitoring.

## Why U.S. tariffs are forcing a shift

The biggest risk of tariffs isn't just higher costs—it's the potential breakdown of access to critical space infrastructure:

- **Satellite components:** Many Canadian satellites rely on U.S.-made sensors and avionics. Tariffs could force Canada to turn to European or domestic alternatives.

- **Launch services:** Most Canadian satellites are launched on American rockets; and Canada may need to secure more agreements with Arianespace.

- **Earth observation (EO) data:** Canada depends on U.S. agencies like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and private players for hi-res imagery. Restrictions could deepen Canada's involvement in ESA's Copernicus program.

## Europe could also be rethinking NASA ties

Canada isn't the only one feeling the impact of shifting U.S. trade policies. Europe is facing

its own share of tariff threats, and while ESA has long worked closely with NASA, there is growing momentum for more independent space initiatives.

In the past decade, ESA has significantly expanded its investment in EO, navigation system Galileo, and space exploration in a move toward being self-sufficient. Similarly, European commercial space firms are scaling up their capabilities, giving ESA more domestic options.

## Multi-polar space economy

The global space economy is no longer defined by U.S. leadership alone. China has emerged as the world's second-largest space economy, rivalling the U.S. in scale and ambition. Despite being shut out of U.S.-led programs, China has developed a parallel space ecosystem, including BeiDou, its own satellite navigation system. BeiDou has strengthened China's geopolitical influence and now extends across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

This shift extends beyond navigation. China's growing satellite capabilities, launch services, and lunar ambitions provide more choices for space partnerships.

Emerging players like India and Japan are also reshaping the landscape. India has developed an Indigenous space program, and

proven itself with cost-effective launch services, a growing EO satellite portfolio, and its NavIC regional navigation system. Japan continues to lead in robotics, asteroid exploration, and space-based AI.

If tariffs push Canada further into ESA-led projects, it would be another major signal that the space economy is no longer U.S.-centric.

## What Canada must do next

U.S. tariffs may have sparked this conversation, but the real story is bigger. The world is entering a new space era.

Canada is at a turning point, and must decide whether to remain tethered to a single dominant space power or embrace a broader role in shaping the new multi-polar space economy. The choice is clear:

- **Expand European collaborations:** Canada already benefits from ESA partnerships but must scale up its involvement.

- **Strengthen domestic space capabilities:** Increasing home-grown production reduces vulnerabilities to supply chain disruptions.

- **Position itself as a bridge between space powers:** Canada's unique ties to the U.S., Europe, Japan, and India make it a crucial link in fostering global collaboration.

The U.S. trade barriers may not be a setback at all—they may be the catalyst Canada needed to redefine its role in the evolving global space economy.

*Anusuya Datta is a seasoned geospatial writer and editor based in the Canadian Prairies, with more than a decade of experience covering space technology, geospatial innovation, and sustainability. She has written for prominent media such as SpaceNews, CBC, and AgriBusinessGlobal, and currently serves as consulting editor at GoGeomatics Canada.*

*The Hill Times*

# Canada must strengthen border security in face of Trump threats

Without adequate staffing, we risk creating bottlenecks that could further strain our economic relationships, and compromise our national security.

Sharon DeSousa & Mark Weber



Opinion

Like many across the country, we have been following the rapidly deteriorating relationship with the United States with growing concern. At the heart of the conflict is the threat of border security. Our two nations have proudly shared the longest undefended border in the world for generations—a strong and reliable partnership that is now being questioned by the Trump administration.

Canada's nearly 9,000 Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) law enforcement staff have always held up their end of the bargain; they are Canada's



Public Safety Minister David McGuinty, left. No automated system can match a border officer's ability to exercise critical judgment in complex situations. Machines cannot replace people, write Sharon DeSousa and Mark Weber. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

first line of defence, halting the trafficking of drugs, firearms, and stolen vehicles across our borders while making the trade that drives our economy possible.

Despite U.S. President Donald Trump's grand claims, it's more and more clear this trade dispute isn't about drugs and migrants flowing across the border to our southern friends.

Just 0.2 per cent of the fentanyl seized entering the U.S. comes across the Canadian border. To put that into perspective, of the 21,889 pounds of fentanyl seized last year by U.S. border authorities, only 43 pounds originated from Canada. That hardly sounds like Canada is the source of the problem—which the U.S.

Drug Enforcement Administration itself recognizes: Canada is not even listed as a source country in its 2024 National Drug Threat Assessment report.

Motivations for this rocky relationship aside, one thing is perfectly clear: Canada's border security is more important now than ever before.

Ironically, the Canadian government has failed to seize this opportunity to work directly with the very people tasked with protecting our borders. The government's proposed solution—enhanced border security through drones and helicopters—fundamentally misunderstands the nature of border protection. Make no mistake, technology plays

an important role, but it cannot replace the expertise and skill of trained professionals. No automated system can match a border officer's ability to exercise critical judgment in complex situations. Machines cannot replace people.

As our relationship with the U.S. enters turbulent waters, we need our border services operating at peak efficiency. The impending tariffs will inevitably increase processing times at our ports of entry. Without adequate staffing, we risk creating bottlenecks that could further strain our economic relationships and compromise our national security.

The solution begins with the federal government committing to sustainable, consistent fund-

ing for border operations. This is not just about maintaining current operations, but it's also about building capacity for the increased demands we now face.

Next, we must launch an aggressive recruitment campaign to reverse the Harper-era staffing cuts, and build additional training facilities to ensure CBSA has the capacity to fulfill its mandate in the face of these new border challenges. We need a holistic strategy that considers both the immediate staffing pressures, and the increased workload if new tariffs are put in place.

We also must recognize the risks border officers face every day by providing them with the same equitable retirement benefits as other law enforcement agencies across Canada. Not only will this allow frontline workers to retire with dignity, but it will serve as a strong recruitment tool.

It's time for the federal government to recognize the gravity of this moment.

Canada's economic prosperity depends on maintaining efficient and secure border operations. The combination of new tariffs and reduced border services funding creates unnecessary risks to both our security and economy.

This isn't the time for half-measures and harmful public service cuts. We need decisive action to strengthen our borders and our public service, not weaken them. The safety of our communities—and the strength of our economy—depend on it.

*Sharon DeSousa is the Public Service Alliance of Canada national president, and Mark Weber is the Customs and Immigration Union national president.*  
*The Hill Times*

## Understanding the complex challenges faced by Canada's aging population

Continued from page 12

challenges disproportionately affect individuals aged 50-64, those without workplace pensions, and those in poor health.

Financial preparation for retirement readiness remains a challenge for most older Canadians. Only 34 per cent feel financially ready to retire when they want, and 25 per cent have less than \$5,000 in savings. Rising living costs (70 per cent) and fear of depleting savings (48 per cent) are top concerns, with readiness significantly lower among those in poor health or with inadequate incomes. Unsurprisingly, those who own homes or benefit from workplace pensions are more likely to feel prepared for retirement.

Accessibility to health care and home care services remains a significant concern for many

older adults in Canada, with unmet needs often tied to financial concerns—again highlighting the role that financial security has in driving barriers to well-being for vulnerable populations. Affordability and eligibility issues are top barriers, while financial hardship, immigration status, and racialization are also contributing factors.

Despite consistent needs, only two-thirds of Canadians aged 50 and up report accessing the health-care services they require all or most of the time. In 2023, the NIA published a report that looked into access to health care for older adults, and it found that only 65 per cent of Canadians aged 50 and better have access to a regular primary care provider such as a family doctor or nurse practitioner—which means that nearly five million of the most vulnerable Canadians from a

health perspective are without reliable primary care.

Aging in place remains a priority for older Canadians, in spite of health and socioeconomic barriers. We see this in the vast majority of Canadians aged 50-plus who reported a desire to remain in their homes as they age, with hardly any respondents indicating a preference for long-term care homes. However, health concerns, limited support systems, and financial constraints often shape these preferences, with homeownership also impacting perspectives: more homeowners (89 per cent) than renters (64 per cent) prefer to age in place.

The 2024 NIA Survey underscores the complex and interconnected challenges faced by Canada's aging population. These findings serve as a call to action for policymakers, organizations, and stakeholders to prioritize evi-



As Canada's aging population grows, understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with this demographic shift becomes increasingly essential, write Gabrielle Gallant and Alyssa Brierley. *Photograph courtesy of Pexels*

dence-based strategies that address financial insecurity, and barriers to health-care access. By leveraging the insights from this survey, decision-makers can design and implement programs and services where older adults feel valued, included, supported, and better prepared to age with confidence.

*Gabrielle Gallant is a public policy professional with a passion*

*for advocacy, and serves as the director of policy at the National Institute on Ageing.*

*Alyssa Brierley is a lawyer and public policy professional with more than a decade of experience in public policy, law, and human rights advocacy, and serves as the executive director of the National Institute on Ageing.*

*The Hill Times*

# Hill Climbers



By Laura Ryckewaert

## New Minister Erskine-Smith lines up a fresh housing team

Most of former minister Sean Fraser's team have exited, with only three remaining among the 14 staffers confirmed so far in new Housing Minister Nathaniel Erskine-Smith's office.

New Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities Minister **Nathaniel Erskine-Smith** has lined up a largely fresh ministerial team to run his office, with many first-time cabinet staffers in the mix, including chief of staff **Andrew Goodridge**.

Goodridge has been working for Erskine-Smith as the MP for Beaches-East York, Ont., since he was first elected to the House of Commons in 2015.

A graduate of Queen's University, Goodridge worked as a data contractor with Paradigm Transportation Solutions Ltd. prior to being hired by Erskine-Smith, and, according to his LinkedIn profile, he also previously spent two years as a military interpreter at the Fort Henry National Historic Site in Kingston, Ont.

Of the 14 staffers so far confirmed in Erskine-Smith's office, only three worked for former housing minister **Sean Fraser**.

Among those three is **Kevin Collins**, who was most recently director of parliamentary affairs and issues management in the office under Fraser, and has been given the added title of deputy chief of staff to Erskine-Smith.

Collins was promoted to his director title this past October, and has been working on the housing file since the start of 2022 when he was hired as an issues adviser and parliamentary assistant to then-housing, diversity, and inclusion minister **Ahmed Hussen**. After Fraser was named housing, infrastructure, and communities minister in July 2023, Collins was made issues manager and senior parliamentary affairs adviser.

Collins is also a former legislative assistant to **Dominic LeBlanc** as then-Privy Council president



Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities Minister **Nathaniel Erskine-Smith** has brought a few staff from his MP office over to his new ministerial team. *The Hill Times* photograph by **Andrew Meade**



**Bryn de Chastelain** is director of operations and planning. *Photograph courtesy of X*

political science and economics from Saint Mary's University, as well as a master's degree in public policy from the Harvard Kennedy School. While at Harvard, de Chastelain was also a graduate teaching fellow in economics.

**Keagan McNeil** is in place as a senior operations and Ontario regional affairs adviser. She was most recently working for Ontario Liberal MP **Vance Badawey**, and her job history includes a 2023 summer internship with then-Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario minister **Filomena Tassi's** office.

According to her LinkedIn profile, McNeil graduated from Carleton University with a master's degree in political management last year, and also has a bachelor's degree in political science, with a minor in psychology, from



**Keagan McNeil** is senior operations and Ontario regional affairs adviser. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Brock University. **Justin Ménard** has been hired as Quebec regional affairs adviser. He's a former Liberal Summer Leadership Program intern in then-Quebec lieutenant **Pablo Rodriguez's** office, and is a member of the Quebec Liberal Party's Youth Commission.

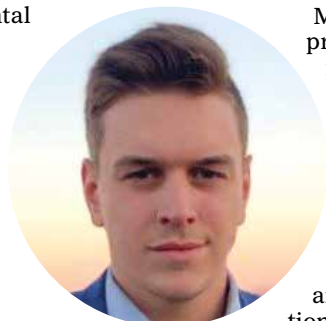


**Hadeel Aziz** covers the West and North desks for Minister Erskine-Smith. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Covering West and North regional affairs is **Hadeel Aziz**, who was previously an Ontario regional and outreach adviser to then-deputy prime minister and finance minister **Christia Freeland**.

Aziz had been working for Freeland since November 2022, starting as a special assistant for Ontario. She's an ex-assistant to now-Democratic Institutions Minister **Ruby Sahota** as the MP for

and intergovernmental affairs minister, and an ex-aide to New Brunswick Liberal MP **Wayne Long**. Beyond Parliament Hill, Collins has lent a hand to the New Brunswick Liberal Party and candidates during the 2018 and 2020 provincial elections. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science and public policy from the University of New Brunswick.



**Liam MacKinnon** is director of policy to Minister Erskine-Smith. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

While the members of Fraser's old policy team, including director **Kyle Fox** and deputy director for infrastructure policy **Matthew Paisley**, have left in the wake of the Dec. 20 cabinet shuffle that saw Erskine-Smith take over the role, the new minister has elevated an ex-Fraser staffer, **Liam MacKinnon**, to the role director of policy.

MacKinnon was previously a senior Quebec regional affairs adviser to Fraser since September 2023. A one-time assistant to former Liberal MP **Jean-Claude Poissant**, MacKinnon was hired to the Liberal research bureau as a special assistant for parliamentary affairs in early 2020. By October of that year, he moved over to then-digital government minister **Joyce Murray's** team as executive assistant. MacKinnon followed Murray to the fisheries and oceans portfolio after the 2021 election, becoming a special assistant for Quebec and New Brunswick regional affairs. He worked for her through to 2023.

MacKinnon has also previously interned in then-Liberal MP **Nick Whalen's** office, and did consecutive summer internships as a financial analyst with Deloitte Canada's infrastructure mergers and acquisitions advisory team in 2017 and 2018. He studied economics, with a minor in finance, at the University of Ottawa where he was active with the school's Young Liberals association.

So far working under MacKinnon are senior policy adviser **Dillon McGuire**, and policy adviser **Chris Knipe**.

McGuire comes from Public Services and Procurement Minister **Jean-Yves Duclos's** team where he'd been a senior Ontario regional affairs adviser since the fall of 2023. He's a former constituency assistant to Ontario Liberal MP **Bardish Chagger**, and has been working for Liberal ministers since 2020, starting as a special assistant for communications to then-employment minister **Carla Qualtrough**, who later promoted him to the role of regional affairs adviser for Ontario.

McGuire has since also been an operations and tour assistant to Hussen as

then-housing minister. He has a bachelor of business administration from Wilfrid Laurier University.

Knipe was until recently busy as a senior operations and Ontario regional affairs adviser to Justice Minister **Arif Virani**.



**Chris Knipe** is a policy adviser. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

A University of Toronto political science grad, Knipe worked in Erskine-Smith's Beaches-East York, Ont., constituency office between 2017 and 2018. From there, he became a parliamentary assistant to Virani as the MP for Parkdale-High Park, Ont., and after the 2021 election, joined then-housing minister Hussen's office as an Ontario regional adviser and assistant to the parliamentary secretary for diversity and inclusion. Knipe has since also been an Ontario regional adviser to LeBlanc as then-intergovernmental affairs, infrastructure, and communities minister.

**Bryn de Chastelain** is director of operations and planning to Erskine-Smith.

A Harvard graduate, de Chastelain spent the last year working as a consultant with McKinsey & Company in Toronto, and has previously interned with United Nations Peacekeeping. He has a bachelor's degree in



**Dillon McGuire** is a senior policy adviser. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

# Diplomatic Circles

By Neil Moss



## New Finnish envoy hopes to see Canada's EU trade pact fully online

New Ambassador Hanna-Leena Kortenieni says CETA is a 'standing speaking point' for Finland to its EU counterparts.

After seven years without the complete ratification of Canada's trade pact with the European Union, Finland's new top diplomat in Ottawa says she hopes that last hurdle can be cleared.

As Canada faces continued trade threats in its crucial north-south trading relationship with the United States, some have looked to its east-west links, including to Europe.

The Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) has been provisionally in force since September 2017, but 10 countries remain laggards in ratifying the pact.

New Finnish Ambassador to Canada **Hanna-Leena Kortenieni** said her country is a "poster girl" for the benefits of CETA.

Finland ratified the pact in 2018. Bilateral trade was \$2.4-billion in 2023, which represents an increase of 33.5 per cent since the agreement was provisionally applied, according to Global Affairs Canada.

Kortenieni said Finland is speaking with EU members who have yet to ratify CETA to trumpet its benefits.

"In many cases, we're actually the ones talking to the rest of EU members, [telling them] 'that there are so many benefits that you really ought to have a look at this and see what the benefits are, and work on the ratification,'" she told *The Hill Times* during a Feb. 5 interview at Finland's Metcalfe Street Embassy. "Unfortunately, there are still countries who have not."

She said the issue is a "standing speaking point" for Finland.

While CETA is largely in force, investment sections remain omitted. Canada's CETA chief negotiator **Steve Verheul** penned a December *Policy Magazine* op-ed with **Mark Camilleri**, special EU adviser to the Business Council of Canada, in which they argue that without full ratification there is uncertainty as it "is not unreasonable for businesses on either side of the Atlantic to question the value of investing more into Canada-EU trade if there is a risk that the agreement will not last."

The pair also argued that full ratification would give Canada increased leverage when negotiating with the U.S.

Asked if she is confident that CETA would be fully ratified, Kortenieni responded that she is hopeful it will be.

"In the world that we're living in right now, I think we really should be looking at likeminded partners like Canada," she said.

EU members have also faced the threat of tariffs from U.S. President **Donald Trump**.



Finnish Ambassador Hanna-Leena Kortenieni officially started her first head of mission posting on Jan. 15. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

"We, of course, think that the negotiating path is the way to go forward, and not to have trade wars or anything of sorts," Kortenieni said.

### Kortenieni to cheer on Finns in Montreal

The new Finnish envoy said an important part of her mandate is promotion of all things *Suomi*—from saunas to icebreakers, forestry management, and hockey.

Kortenieni will be in Montreal for the Four Nations Face-Off hockey tournament to cheer on Finland as they battle the U.S. on Feb. 13, and Sweden on Feb. 15. The Canada-Finland game will be on Feb. 17 in Boston.

"I have not passed a conversation without talking about hockey," she said.

Kortenieni's new posting is her first as ambassador. Previously, she was the director of the Finnish Foreign Ministry's North America unit. She has had two previous postings in the U.S. at Finland's Embassy in Washington, D.C., as well as its United Nations mission in New York City.

She presented her letter of credence to Governor General **Mary Simon** on Jan. 15.

In November, Finland concluded a deal with Canada and the U.S. to share expertise and strengthen each nation's icebreaking industries—Icebreaker Collaboration Effort, known colloquially as the ICE Pact.

"Trilaterally, we are working on the implementation," said Kortenieni, who was involved in the negotiations in her past post.

"I've been working on this file for quite some time, and there's a lot of hope and promise on the icebreaker collaboration with both countries," she said.

In 2023, Quebec's Davie Shipbuilding purchased the Helsinki Shipyard.

Kortenieni said that allies have been approached to gauge interest in buying icebreakers from the trilateral collective.

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## Canada's 'long-term vision' for border security should include input from people already doing the job: CBSA union president

Continued from page 30

"Investments in autonomous surveillance technology along the border seem like the most prudent investment the government can make to ensure that the border remains secure in the long term."

As for the suggestion of calling up the CAF to patrol the border, Skipworth noted that beyond the question of resources, he predicted the suggestion would not be received well by the Forces' leadership, given their long-standing concerns with its overuse in domestic capacities.

Liberal Strategist Geoff Turner, now vice-president of Bluesky Strategy Group, said that the suggestion could also offend citizens, who generally take pride in the non-militarized Canada-U.S. border.

"It's not just a point of pride; it's a fact of life for the continuing security and peace in our continental relationship," Turner said. "We ought to try our best not to go too far down a road where we accidentally or intentionally militarize our border, both for logistical reasons and for our culture and way of life."

However, Turner said he expects to see further "surges" of resources for agencies and police forces more appropriately equipped to secure the border, which he said will be sustainable so long as the issue remains a high priority for Canadians.

"The question will be how much tolerance the Canadian budget and the Canadian people have for several now urgent priorities that are more existential than they are strategic," Turner explained.

As for whether Canada's efforts will be enough, Turner senses that before the 30-day deadline is up, Trump will find a new reason to reignite the issue to get another "win."



Bluesky Strategy Group's Geoff Turner isn't convinced President Trump won't find a new reason to threaten tariffs no matter what Canada does in the next 30 days. *Photograph courtesy of Bluesky Strategy Group*



Crestview Strategy's Muhammad Ali says he believes Canada needs a more proactive plan to deal with Trump's tariff threats. *Photograph by Yaron Eini*

"We all hope that enough diplomacy and action can be taken in this interregnum period to get the target off our backs, but we have to be prepared, so this is a really important moment to get things right," Turner explained.

Muhammad Ali, a vice-president at Crestview Strategy, told *The Hill Times* that while Trump has focused on issues like fentanyl, crime, and illegal migration as his justifications for the tariffs, "the border is symbolic of all things" with which the president is occupied.

"As he has articulated—or poorly articulated—throughout his diatribes against Canada and Mexico, he talked about fentanyl and security, but he was very obsessed with the need for tariffs to generate revenue and economic security," Ali explained. "If it was truly just a border issue, there could have been collaboration, as opposed to the sledgehammer approach."

The challenge for Canada is that since no one—not even his inner circle—seems to know what Trump wants or will do, the response needs to be more proactive, not just reactive, Ali said.

"The discussion around diversification is really important for Canada right now, and we need to continue to press on reducing the internal barriers that magnify a threat by the Americans," Ali said. "There are multiple things that all governments can do that can help if we continue with this national message to have a more efficient economy, more efficient labour, and build deeper trading relationships with other countries while knowing we can never fully replace America."

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# HILL CLIMBERS

## New Minister Erskine-Smith lines up a fresh housing team

Continued from page 36

Brampton North, Ont., a former intern through the Parliamentary Internship Programme, and a former volunteer in Liberal MP **Omar Alghabra's** Mississauga Centre, Ont., constituency office, amongst other past experience. Aziz has a bachelor's degree in peace, conflict, and justice studies, and political science from the University of Toronto.

**Jesse Cressman-Dickinson** is now director of communications to Erskine-Smith. She was last director of communications and community engagement with Bruyère Health.

A former community development manager with Shopify in Ottawa, Cressman-Dickinson is also a past adviser for community relations and special projects to then-Ottawa city councillor **Tobi Nussbaum** (who was recently re-appointed as chief executive officer of the National Capital Commission), and former community manager at Impact Hub Ottawa. Her online CV also



Jesse Cressman-Dickinson is director of communications. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

notes a past stint working for then-British Columbia Liberal MP **Keith Martin**.

Staying on as press secretary is **Sofia Ouslis**, who was first hired as a communications adviser to then-minister Fraser in August 2024. She was promoted to press secretary this past October.

A former intern in the office of King, Ont., city councillor **Jordan Cescolini**, Ouslis worked as a research assistant while completing a bachelor's degree in political science and government at Western University.

**Camellia Wong** has been hired as a senior communications adviser. With a master's degree in urban design and spatial planning from the University of Toronto, Wong was last working as a research assistant with the university's School of Cities hub.

Wong is a former communications specialist with CP Planning, an ex-communications director with the non-profit



Camellia Wong is a senior communications adviser. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Future Majority, and has done past internships with Human Rights Watch and in an MP's constituency office. Her LinkedIn profile also notes a five-month-long run as a communications assistant with the Department of Justice. Along with her master's degree, Wong has a bachelor's degree in political science and government from Western.

Focused on the digital realm is adviser **Kristian Podlacha**, who comes from Erskine-Smith's MP office where he'd similarly overseen digital communications, including videography and helping to produce Erskine-Smith's *Uncommons* podcast. He's also a former creative director of Bow Echo Creative, through which he likewise helped produce digital content for Erskine-Smith, among other projects.



Tanveer Shahnawaz, right, with now-Housing Minister Nathaniel Erskine-Smith. Photograph courtesy of X

Finally, **Tanveer Shahnawaz** is now a special assistant to the housing minister. He comes from Erskine-Smith's Beaches-East York constituency team where he'd been working since 2016, most recently as office manager. Back when Erskine-Smith was set to not run for re-election (last year), Shahnawaz threw his hat in the ring to secure the Liberal nomination in the riding.

After being sworn in as minister on Dec. 20, Erskine-Smith confirmed he now intends to seek re-election.

With only three of Fraser's former 22-member team working for Erskine-Smith, there's a

sizeable list of staff exits from that old office, including Fraser's longtime aide **Savannah DeWolfe**, who was most recently chief of staff.

DeWolfe noted her departure in a January post on LinkedIn, writing, "Jobs in politics ain't for the faint-hearted!"

Reflecting on the people she's worked with, and the dif-

ferent projects she's worked on through her time on the Hill—including five years working in Fraser's MP office, and roughly a year-and-a-half as his ministerial chief of staff—DeWolfe wrote: "We have been so privileged to spend our days trying to do this—to make the country an even better place to call home for our neighbours, family, and friends."

"Sean—thank you for the opportunity of a lifetime. I think I speak on behalf of everyone tagged when I say that we could not have asked for a more rewarding professional experience, or a better friend/boss," she continued.

Former chief of staff Savannah DeWolfe has exited. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



"While their volatility might mean that jobs in politics aren't for the faint of heart, I can tell you that the people who do politics right ... are the ones with no shortage of heart," DeWolfe concluded.

Along with her aforementioned roles, DeWolfe is also a past director of operations and legal affairs, and later director of policy, to Fraser as then-immigration minister, and a former Atlantic regional affairs adviser and assistant to the parliamentary secretary—Fraser, at the time—to then-environment minister **Catherine McKenna**, among other past jobs.

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## NEWS

### MP, Senate groups to convene during prorogation to talk Hill reno plans

Continued from page 5

\$4.5- to \$5-billion budget—up \$103-million from the previous quarter.

Work on the Centre Block project is currently largely focused on three main areas: slab replacement and pile drilling work on the building's lowest level to install a support network and ready it for upcoming excavations underneath the building; roof replacement, and masonry work on the west and east walls; and the start of Parliament Welcome Centre construction.

Also ongoing on Centre Block's upper levels is installation of "temporary bracing to support the structural rebuild" to come in the building—a list that includes the installation of new stairwells and elevator banks.

The Hill Times has previously detailed the extensive preparatory work being done to ready the 100-year-old building for

excavations underneath that are required both to install a base-isolation seismic upgrade, and to connect Centre Block to the new underground Parliament Welcome Centre. That list includes installation of a network of steel piles, structural steel supports, and concrete beams, as well as replacement of the building's level 1 slab.

During a media tour of the site last November, about 85 per cent of the estimated 800 steel piles—or posts—that will be drilled into the basement level of Centre Block were said to have been installed. As of Dec. 31, that work was 89 per cent complete, according to PSPC's latest progress report.

Among the key milestones marked as achieved last fall is the installation of the temporary concrete shear walls that will help support Centre Block during excavations.

Excavation will involve the careful removal of an estimated 100,000 cubic metres of bedrock, and is

set to begin this spring, starting in Centre Block's west courtyard.

As has been previously reported, Centre Block's roof will be replaced, and the new sloped copper roof will extend roughly five metres—or about one floor level—higher in order to accommodate new mechanical systems to support the building's upper levels. Meanwhile, Centre Block's lower floors will be serviced by systems in the basement, which is where all mechanical systems previously existed. According to the department, the height difference will be "almost imperceptible" from street level.

To protect the building—and workers in turn—from the elements during roof replacement, the steel bones of a temporary enclosure have now been installed, alongside scaffolding.

"This will protect the building and facilitate construction access during the rebuild. Bracing will be installed to support the structure

as the old roof is removed and rebuilt. These preparations are underway, making way to start the roof rebuild in the west" this winter, explained PSPC in an email.

If you've spotted it from the street, rest assured that this new enclosure sits higher than the new roof will once complete.

Construction of the new Parliament Welcome Centre, which will serve as the public's main entrance to the Hill and as a hub for parliamentarians, is underway.

Two of three tower cranes set to be installed along the bottom of the roughly 23-metre-deep pit to lift materials in and out have now gone up—as of mid-November, and mid-January, respectively—with the third to be installed this spring. The "footings for walls and columns" for the new three-storey underground structure are "currently being poured on the western side" of the pit, said PSPC. "The cold

weather has not caused delays, as tarping and localized heating is utilized to ensure that consistent concrete pouring conditions are maintained."

Also marked as complete in the latest progress report is restoration of the 22 carillon bells that were shipped off to the Netherlands in 2022. Other components of the carillon that were similarly sent to the Netherlands, including the "keyboard and associated mechanical parts," are still undergoing work.

Those parts, along with the bells, are expected to return to Canada next year. But it will be a while yet before the Peace Tower carillon rings again. Thirty-one of its 53 bells were left in place and need to wait until renovation work on the tower itself is complete before they can be cleaned on site, "likely closer to the 2031 timeframe," according to the department.

Among the "key milestones" on the agenda for the coming months is completion of landscape design development and installation of the steel support posts, completing 50 per cent of slab replacement work, and beginning the roof rebuild.

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# Parliamentary Calendar

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](mailto:news@hilltimes.com) by Wednesday at noon before the Monday paper or by Friday at noon for the Wednesday paper.

## Trade wars? He knows a thing or two: former top negotiator Steve Verheul offers insight into uncertain times on Feb. 18



Canada's former chief trade negotiator Steve Verheul will deliver remarks on 'Trade Wars and Canada: Finding Solutions in Uncertain Times,' at a lunch event hosted by the C. D. Howe Institute in Toronto on Feb. 18. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

### WEDNESDAY, FEB. 12

**Canada's Premiers to Washington, D.C.**—Ontario Premier Doug Ford, as chair of the Council of the Federation, will lead a joint mission of Canada's premiers to Washington, D.C., to meet with key members of the new White House administration, Congress, and business leaders. Details: [canadaspremiers.ca](http://canadaspremiers.ca).

**Canada-U.S. Relations Conference**—The Canadian Global Affairs Institute hosts an invitation-only discussion on the breadth and status of the Canada-U.S. relationship under the new Trump administration with both Canadian and American experts. Topics will include trade and tariffs, border security, energy relations and security, and defence and national security collaboration. Wednesday, Feb. 12, at 9 a.m. in Ottawa. Details: [cgai.ca](http://cgai.ca).

**Panel: 'Helping Canadian Businesses Take Flight'**—The Economic Club of Canada hosts a panel discussion, "How the Nation's Largest Airline is Helping Canadian Businesses Take Flight" featuring Mark Nasr, executive vice-president of marketing and digital, Air Canada, and president of Aeroplan; Vandra Provato, chief marketing and digital officer, LCBO; Michiel Wielhouwer, president and country manager, VISA Canada; and Lizaveta Akhvedziani Carew, co-founder and CEO, Chexy. Wednesday, Feb. 12, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel. Details: [economicclub.ca](http://economicclub.ca).

**Conservative Leader to Attend Party Fundraiser**—Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre will attend a party fundraiser. Wednesday, Feb. 12, at 5:30 p.m. ET at a private residence in Toronto. Details: [conservative.ca/events](http://conservative.ca/events).

**Book Launch: Why Marriage Still Matters**—Cardus hosts the launch of a new book, *...Do? Why Marriage Still Matters*. Co-authors Andrea Mrozek and Peter Jon Mitchell explore the enduring value of marriage through the lens of social science. What makes marriage relevant in our modern world? Refreshments, book purchases and signing. Wednesday, Feb. 12, from 6-8 p.m. ET at Cardus, 45 Rideau St., 8th floor. Register: [cardus.ca](http://cardus.ca).

### THURSDAY, FEB. 13

**CGAI 2025 Energy Analyst Summit**—The Canadian Global Affairs Institute hosts the 2025 Energy Analyst Summit exploring the impact of Canada's burgeoning LNG industry on our position internationally. Participants include Japan's Ambassador

to Canada Kanji Yamanouchi; Serge Dupont, former deputy clerk of the Privy Council and deputy minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; and Erin O'Brien, assistant deputy minister, Fuels Sector, Natural Resources Canada, among others. Thursday, Feb. 13 at 7:30 a.m. at KPMG, 18th Floor, 150 Elgin St. Details: [cgai.ca](http://cgai.ca).

**Webinar: 'Impact of Political Disruption on Business'**—B.C.'s Association of Professional Economists hosts a webinar, "The Impact of Scarcity and Political Disruption on Canada's Business Climate." Greg Lyle, founder and president of Innovative Research Group, will share his firm's findings on the pressures facing governments and political parties, and offer insights on how different parties are likely to respond. Thursday, Feb. 13, at 1 p.m. ET happening online: [cabe.ca](http://cabe.ca).

**Conservative Leader to Attend Party Fundraiser**—Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre will attend a party fundraiser. Thursday, Feb. 13, at 5:30 p.m. ET at the Spirit of York Distillery Co., Toronto. Details: [conservative.ca/events](http://conservative.ca/events).

### FRIDAY, FEB. 14

**Book Launch: My Life in Politics**—Carleton University hosts the launch of *My Life in Politics*, a memoir by former Liberal cabinet minister Lloyd Axworthy. Friday, Feb. 14, at 11 a.m. ET at Carleton University, 608 Pigiavik, 1125 Colonel By Dr. Details: [events.carleton.ca](http://events.carleton.ca).

### TUESDAY, FEB. 18

**Lunch: 'Trade Wars and Canada'**—Canada's former chief trade negotiator Steve Verheul, who's now a principal at GT & Co., and a member of the prime minister's Council on Canada-U.S. Relations, will deliver remarks on "Trade Wars and Canada: Finding Solutions in Uncertain Times," a lunch event hosted by the C. D. Howe Institute. Tuesday, Feb. 18, at 12 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Suite 300. Details: [cdhowe.org](http://cdhowe.org).

### WEDNESDAY, FEB. 19

**'Twenty Years of Talk on Fiscal Federalism in Quebec'**—The Institute for Research on Public Policy hosts "From the Séguin Commission to the Committee on Constitutional Issues: 20 years of discussion on fiscal federalism in Quebec" exploring the evolution of issues surrounding fiscal federalism from a Quebec perspective, both in terms of the nature of the problem and potential solutions. Wednesday, Feb.

19, at 5 p.m. ET at IRPP offices, 1470 Peel St., Suite 200, Montreal. Details: [irpp.org](http://irpp.org).

### WEDNESDAY, FEB. 19—FRIDAY, FEB. 21

**First Nations Housing and Infrastructure Conference**—The Assembly of First Nations hosts "Mind the Gap: Advancing First Nations Housing, Infrastructure and Drinking Water," focusing on updates in urban, on-reserve, on-community, and northern First Nations housing, as well as asset management planning, water and wastewater management, and connectivity, and how they contribute to closing the First Nations infrastructure gap. Wednesday, Feb. 19, to Friday, Feb. 21, at the Westin Downtown Calgary. Details: [afn.ca](http://afn.ca).

### THURSDAY, FEB. 20

**Panel: 'The Future of Money and Decentralized Finance'**—The Canadian Club of Ottawa hosts a lunch event, "The Future of Money and Decentralized Finance: Trends, Opportunities, and Challenges for 2025." Panelists will explore how blockchain and decentralized solutions are transforming the financial landscape, and what does an effective regulatory framework look like. Thursday, Feb. 20, at 12 p.m. ET at the Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St. Details: [canadianclubottawa.ca](http://canadianclubottawa.ca).

**Webinar: 'A New Chapter for Canada-U.S. Economic Security'**—The C. D. Howe Institute hosts a webinar, "A New Chapter for Canada-U.S. Economic Security," featuring Laura Dawson, executive director of the Future Borders Coalition. Thursday, Feb. 20, at 12:30 p.m. happening online: [cdhowe.org](http://cdhowe.org).

### FRIDAY, FEB. 21

**'Parliament and the Media'**—The Canadian Study of Parliament Group hosts "Parliament and the Media." The relationship between Parliament and the media is evolving, as parliamentarians leverage social media and other direct communications tools. Friday, Feb. 21, at 9 a.m. ET in Room 425, 180 Wellington St. Details via Eventbrite.

### MONDAY, FEB. 24

**Panel: 'Affordability and Climate: Intertwined Challenges'**—The Institute for Research on Public Policy and the Affordability Action Council host a panel, "Affordability and Climate: Addressing Intertwined Challenges in Politics Today," featuring Tyler Meredith, former economic policy adviser

to the Liberal government; Kathleen Monk, former director of communications to then-NDP leader Jack Layton; and Karen Restoule, vice-president of Toronto-based Crestview Strategy and senior fellow at Macdonald-Laurier Institute. Monday, Feb. 24, at 5:30 p.m. at the Delta Hotel Ottawa, 101 Lyon St. N. Details: [irpp.org](http://irpp.org).

**Liberal Leadership Debate**—The Liberal Party of Canada will host a French-language leadership race debate in Montreal. Details to be announced.

### TUESDAY, FEB. 25

**Liberal Leadership Debate**—The Liberal Party of Canada will host an English-language leadership race debate in Montreal. Details to be announced.

### WEDNESDAY, FEB. 26

**NDP Leader Singh to Deliver Remarks**—NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh will deliver bilingual remarks titled "Stronger together: Building Canada's resilience in the face of a trade war with United States and today's unstable world," at a lunch event hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Wednesday, Feb. 26, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the DoubleTree by Hilton Montréal, 1255 Jeanne-Mance St. Details: [corim.qc.ca](http://corim.qc.ca).

**President of Shell Canada to Deliver Remarks**—Susannah Pierce, outgoing president and country chair of Shell Canada, will take part in a discussion, "Canadian Oil and Gas: How Do We Navigate The Moment?" hosted by the Canadian Club of Toronto. Wednesday, Feb. 26, at 11:45 a.m. ET. Details: [canadianclub.org](http://canadianclub.org).

**Webinar: 'From Carbon Cycle to Carbon Tax'**—The Royal Society of Canada hosts a webinar, "From The Carbon Cycle to the Carbon Tax." A panel of experts will explore our current measurement and monitoring capabilities globally and in urban centres, followed by discussion of how a progressive carbon tax as best positioned to encourage the necessary behaviour to meet our greenhouse gas emissions targets. Wednesday, Feb. 26, at 1 p.m. ET happening online. Register via Eventbrite.

### THURSDAY, FEB. 27

**Ontario Election**—Ontario voters will head to the polls to cast ballots in the snap provincial election on Thursday, Feb. 27.

**Carbon Removal Canada Conference**—Join Carbon Removal Canada

for its conference, "Policy to Progress: Carbon Removal Day," to discuss current solutions in action and how to create the conditions for scaling carbon removal technologies. Thursday, Feb. 27, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET, at the National Arts Centre. Details: [carbonremoval.ca/carbon-removal-day](http://carbonremoval.ca/carbon-removal-day).

**'Canada's Untapped Power'**—The Canadian Club of Toronto hosts "Canada's Untapped Power: Advancing Gender Equality for a Stronger Future," featuring Mitzie Hunter, president and CEO of the Canadian Women's Foundation; and Tanya van Biesen, president and CEO of VersaFi (formerly WCM). Thursday, Feb. 27, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, Toronto. Details: [canadianclub.org](http://canadianclub.org).

**Panel: 'Black Leaders in Public Affairs'**—Carleton University hosts a panel, "Voices of Impact: Black Leaders in Public Affairs," on the importance of elevating Black voices and leadership in public affairs—an area that shapes policies, governance, and decisions affecting us all. Participants include CPAC journalist Omayra Issa and Donnielle Roman, chief program officer, Ottawa Community Immigration Services Organization. Thursday, Feb. 27, at 5 p.m. ET in Room 4040, 1125 Colonel By Dr. Details: [events.carleton.ca](http://events.carleton.ca).

### FRIDAY, FEB. 28

**Press Gallery AGM**—The Parliamentary Press Gallery invites members to the annual general meeting. Refreshments will be provided. Nominations for the roles of president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary are open until Feb. 21. Friday, Feb. 28, at 12:30 p.m. ET in Room 325, Wellington Building, 180 Wellington St. Contact: [stephanie.gagne@parl.gc.ca](mailto:stephanie.gagne@parl.gc.ca).

### TUESDAY, MARCH 4

**Minister MacKinnon to Deliver Remarks**—Employment Minister and Government House Leader Steven MacKinnon will deliver remarks at a roundtable lunch hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Tuesday, March 4, at 12 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Suite 300, Toronto. Details: [cdhowe.org](http://cdhowe.org).

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