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# THE HILL TIMES

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**NEWS**



As Prime Minister Mark Carney, right, prioritizes the international file, Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand faces a department with emptier coffers. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

## Feds' plan to slash foreign ministry budget by 20 per cent 'ill-timed and short-sighted': observers

BY NEIL MOSS

Prime Minister Mark Carney has made reshaping Canada's place in the world a signature priority, but the federal government plans to cut the budget of the diplomats charged with implementing that vision by \$1.83-billion, according to government documents.

In the next fiscal year, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) aims to spend \$7.22-billion, according to its recently tabled 2026-27 departmental plans. That would be a reduction of 20 per cent based on the forecast spending of \$9.05-billion set out in the plans for 2025-26. According to the most recently tabled supplementary estimates, the department had been earmarked a proposed

\$9.55-billion in funds for this fiscal year.

Last November's federal budget had signalled a cut of \$560-million in 2026-27, which would rise to \$747-million in 2027-28, and \$1.1-billion in 2028-29 and 2029-30. There was also a \$2.7-billion cut announced to Canada's international funding over four years.

The \$7.22-billion in projected spending for 2026-27 is the same amount set out in the upcoming fiscal year's main estimates. It could be increased through supplementary estimates and in the next federal budget.

GAC's departmental plans noted that Canada needs "fiscal

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**NEWS**

Carney's first year defined by 'polished' appeal, but 'new-government shine' won't last forever, say pollsters

BY STUART BENSON

Over the past year, Canada's 45th prime minister has fundamentally upended federal and international politics, partisan coalitions, the Liberal Party, and even the mood and atmosphere on Parliament Hill, particularly amongst the parliamentarians and staffers who remember the

Continued on page 12

**NEWS**

## Canada deployed 30 consular specialists to countries bordering Iran: official

BY NEIL MOSS

Canada's foreign ministry has deployed its rapid reaction consular team along the Iranian border but won't enter the besieged country, according to a senior official.

Thirty members from the Standing Rapid Deployment Team (SRDT) have been sent to countries that border Iran, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan, as well as to Jordan, Israel, and Egypt.

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**NEWS**

## Rules to work: committee study on role of non-affiliated Senators finds no rule changes necessary

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

Members of the Upper Chamber's Rules Committee say there's a will to better empower non-affiliated Senators to participate in proceedings, but one such Senator says the fact the committee's proposals include no actual changes to rules leaves her with little faith that the "substantive

equality" of Senators who choose to sit independent from recognized groups will be improved.

"What I see with this report is a carefully worded, genteel permission to Senators to perpetuate the status quo. It's done in a benign manner, and it is a step forward in that some of the principles around fairness have

Continued on page 16

**NEWS**

## Carney starts the 'churn clock,' with half of the bureaucracy's top civil servants in new roles

BY MARLO GLASS

Less than a year in their respective roles, Prime Minister Mark Carney and Privy Council Clerk Michael Sabia have "put their joint stamp" on the federal bureaucracy, essentially re-making its leadership ranks with more than 50 per cent of top public servants in new roles since last June.

Data provided by the Privy Council Office (PCO) shows 55 per cent of 52 senior posts are new under the prime minister, with Carney (Nepean, Ont.) and Sabia making major moves in recent months to what the PCO considers the "deputy minister community." The December 2025 and March 2026 shuffles tapped

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# Heard on the Hill



By Christina Leadlay

## Take a gander: Senate displays new royal art



Nicholas Thompson's sketch of King Charles and Queen Camilla as they entered the Senate for the 2025 Throne Speech, left, and a bronze maquette by Ruth Abernethy of then-Queen Elizabeth II will soon both be on display in the Senate of Canada Building. Photographs courtesy of the Senate of Canada

Monarchists take note: the Senate of Canada Building will soon be home to two new displays of art depicting the late **Queen Elizabeth II**, and her son, **King Charles III**.

Already on display since Jan. 29 is a maquette—a small, bronze statue—depicting the late Queen seated on the monarch's throne in the Senate Chamber in Centre Block, which was inspired by her 1977 Speech from Throne in Canada. The maquette is a miniaturized version of a monument erected outside Queen's Park in

2023, and, according to a Senate write up, is “the second model in a limited series of up to six.”

The maquette was donated to the Chamber by Ontario PSG Senator **Peter Harder** last year in “memory of Harder's late wife and in honour of King Charles III's historic opening of Parliament in May 2025.”

Designed by **Ruth Abernethy** in 2016, the maquette was cast in 2017. It now sits near the entrance to the Senate Chamber's public galleries.

Set to also be displayed later this month in the main hall of

the Senate building—across from the portraits of French kings (which themselves came to the Senate courtesy of former senator **Serge Joyal**)—is a sketchbook with drawings by artist **Nicholas Thompson** of the **King and Queen Camilla** from the May 2025 Speech from the Throne.

The entire sketchbook will be displayed until September, and *The Hill Times* understands it will be opened to one page at a time, with four pages of sketches in the book overall.

—by *Laura Ryckewaert*

## APTN's Tom Fennario receives 2026 Travers Fellowship

APTN News' senior video journalist **Tom Fennario** is the recipient of this year's **R. James Travers** Foreign Corresponding Fellowship, Carleton University announced on March 16.

Fennario will receive \$25,000 to bring to life his story pitch of an “in-depth look at how First Nations in Canada could play a larger role in mitigating severe wildfires,” according to the press release. He will travel to Australia; Oregon, U.S.; and Bolivia to learn more about Indigenous practices in those regions.

“Tom notes that Indigenous people in Canada are disproportionately affected by wildfires, and his research suggests multiple benefits



APTN senior video journalist Tom Fennario. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

could result from offering Indigenous people an integral role in mitigating those fires,” said **Susan Harada**, co-chair of the Travers Fellowship Steering Committee. “This is happening in other countries and Tom Fennario believes Canada can learn from their approaches.”

Harada and former PMO staffer **Patrick Travers** made the announcement on March 16. The fellowship is named in honour of Travers' late father, James, who was an award-winning journalist for various Canadian outlets before his death in 2011.

Montreal-based Fennario has been with APTN in various roles since 2019.

## Globe and Mail's Bob Fife to receive CJF's lifetime achievement award

The Canadian Journalism Federation is recognizing **Bob Fife**'s lifetime of achievement in his field.

*The Globe and Mail*'s Ottawa bureau chief is being saluted for his “decades-long career exemplifying the highest standards of political reporting, public-interest journalism and newsroom leadership in both print and broadcast,” reads a March 11 press release.

The 71-year-old journalist, whose CV includes stints as parliamentary bureau chief for CTV and the *National Post*, is a mentor to “scores of younger reporters, encouraging all of them to pursue public-service journalism and to hold decision-makers

to account,” and keeps writing exclusive news stories, which *Globe* editor-in-chief **David Walmsley** describes as “brave, independent journalism.”

Fife said last week he is “deeply touched” by the honour, which he will officially receive at the CJF's award ceremony in June at the Fairmont Royal York in Toronto.

Fife has won many previous laurels, including honours from the Canadian Association of Journalists, several National Newspaper Awards, and having twice received the Parliamentary Press Gallery's Charles Lynch Award.

## Quebec MPs react to push to get Don Cherry into the Order of Canada



Conservative MP **Andrew Lawton**, left, has started a petition to nominate **Don Cherry** for the Order of Canada. *The Hill Times* photograph by *Andrew Meade* and courtesy of *Wikimedia Commons*

The Conservative Party's move to get former CBC hockey commentator **Don Cherry** nominated for the Order of Canada has left a sour taste with some MPs from Quebec.

Rookie Conservative MP **Andrew Lawton** launched a petition on his party website on March 5, titled “Appoint Don Cherry to the Order of Canada.”

The petition cites the 92-year-old's “significant contributions to Canadian sport and culture as a hockey player, coach, and long-time broadcaster,” and his support for grassroots hockey, veterans and service members. It also cites Cherry's “candid and unapologetic style, [which] reflects a spirit of authenticity and independence that resonated with millions of Canadians.”

For more than 40 years, Cherry hosted a segment called *Coach's Corner* on CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada* until he was fired in 2019 following comments he made about immigrants.

Conservative Leader **Pierre Poilievre**, Deputy Leader **Melissa Lantsman**, MPs **Jacob Mantle**, **Jamil Jivani**, and **Billy Morin** are among the CPC caucus members supporting Lawton's petition.

Quebec Conservative MP **Richard Martel** tempered his support, saying it's not his decision: “Whether you liked Don Cherry or not, back then, every hockey fan glued their TV to *Coach's Corner* on Saturday nights. It will be up to the committee to decide if he deserves the Order of Canada based on his achievements in the field of sport,” he wrote on X in French on March 13.

Meanwhile, his colleagues from Quebec **Luc Berthold** and **Pierre Paul-Hus** clearly chose the “non” side of the Cherry debate.

Berthold wrote he would be “extremely disappointed” should Cherry receive Canada's highest honour ahead of “many Quebecers who have accomplished extraordinary things,” he posted in French on X on March 13. “Giving the Order of Canada to Don Cherry would irreparably discredit all those who have received it.”

“With all due respect, nominating Don Cherry for the Order of Canada is a bad idea,” posted four-term MP Paul-Hus on X on March 12. “Cherry made unacceptable remarks about the Quebec nation and francophones. I do not support this nomination for the Order of Canada.”

Bloc Québécois MP **Mario Simard** joined Berthold and Paul-Hus' sentiments last week. “If they had nominated his suits, that would have been one thing, but the man himself has been known for making francophobic comments his entire life,” he said in French in the House on March 13, referencing Cherry's trademark high-collared dress shirts and boldly patterned double-breasted suits.

Simard noted Cherry's past negative comments about women in sports journalism and Indigenous Peoples.

“Canada is free to honour whomever it wants, but I am sure it can find someone who has not insulted just about everyone who is not a white, English-speaking Canadian man,” he said.

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*The Hill Times*



Bloc MP **Mario Simard**, left, and Conservative MPs **Luc Berthold**, centre, and **Pierre Paul-Hus** say they don't support nominating Cherry to Canada's highest honour. *The Hill Times* photographs by *Sam Garcia* and *Andrew Meade*

# Our plan to protect Ontario is speeding up approvals for mines

As Canada stares down economic uncertainty, we're ready with a plan to protect Ontario. We're building mines to unlock the critical minerals the world needs.

That's how we protect Ontario.



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## NEWS

# Volkswagen rebuffs 'speculation' that it will support German-Norwegian bid for Canadian submarine contract

The German automaker 'focuses on what makes sense for us,' says a Volkswagen Group spokesperson, which Canadian industry leaders say is unsurprising given the 'high stakes' of the negotiations.

BY IREM KOCA

German automaker Volkswagen says it's not involved in Germany and Norway's joint bid to win Canada's multibillion-dollar submarine contract despite the federal government's efforts to tie the procurement to automotive investments.

Volkswagen CEO Oliver Blume reportedly said the company will not play a role during his March 10 remarks at Volkswagen Group's Annual Media Conference in Wolfsburg, Germany.

Nicolai Laude, a spokesperson for Volkswagen Group, confirmed Volkswagen's position to *The Hill Times* in a March 13 email, but did not provide any further comments.

"We are not related or couple our activities to any other business deals. Volkswagen focuses on what makes sense for us," she said, adding the company has "established a really good and constructive collaboration" with Canada.

When asked further questions, she said "[w]e do not comment on reports, speculation, or specific details regarding this matter."

The federal government has been weighing its options between Germany's ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS)—jointly bid with Norway—and South Korea's Hanwha Ocean Co., Ltd., to build 12 new subma-

rines. Both companies submitted their proposals to the federal government on March 2. A decision on the contract is expected this summer.

Stefan Ettwig, a spokesperson for TKMS, told *The Hill Times* in an email that the company is "very confident" about the job-creation opportunities in its proposal.

"The industrial impact goes beyond submarines," Ettwig said, adding that the TKMS bid reflects close government-to-government collaboration, and is intended to support deeper economic and strategic alignment between Canada and Europe.

The company did not respond to further questions, citing that the "proposal remains confidential" during this phase of the process, and many of the details cannot be shared publicly prior to the government's review.

The Navy has stated both vessels—which will replace the aging Victoria-class submarines—are technically viable, while the federal government has said the competition would come down to which supplier offers Canada broader economic and industrial benefits in an effort to generate jobs and investments in the country.

## Feds push for automotive investment tied to the submarine contract

Industry Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.) has repeatedly said the government wants to see investment in the auto sector attached to the submarine contract, which is touted as one of the largest procurement deals in the country's history.

"I can't comment [on] what's going on, but I'll be clear: we want a car plant," Joly said on March 5.

*The Globe and Mail* has previously reported that the government asked South Korea and Germany to make their respective auto industries take part in their submarine bids to secure a deal with Canada. German Economic Affairs Minister Katherina Reiche told *The Globe* the Canadian auto sector strategy is "very attractive" for her country, but underlined

the German auto industry's interest is independent of the joint bid with Norway. "You can see it as related to a certain deal; I wouldn't do so," she said.

Gabrielle Landry, a spokesperson for Joly, told *The Hill Times* in a March 13 statement that, as the submarine procurement process is underway, the minister's office is unable to comment on discussions that may have taken place with industry partners.

Landry said Joly's priorities remain focused on the positive economic impact that international partnerships bring.

"That includes attracting new car companies to establish a manufacturing footprint in Canada. The minister recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Germany regarding Canada's automotive industry and is implementing the automotive strategy she announced earlier this year with the prime minister."

Glenn Copeland, CEO of Hanwha Canada, told *The Hill Times* in an email that, since January, the two countries have been working together in those areas.

"In particular, Hanwha and Hyundai are exploring the possibility of working with Canada on the development of a robust hydrogen fuel production and infrastructure system for vehicles," Copeland said.

In late January, Canada and South Korea signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance partnership between the two countries to strengthen the automotive supply chain and boost co-operation on critical mineral supply, clean energy transition, and energy security.

Hyundai Canada did not respond to *The Hill Times*' request for comment.

David Adams, president and CEO of Global Automakers of Canada, told *The Hill Times* that "while you can't blame the minister for trying to leverage a sub deal into a new Canadian auto plant, that notion was somewhat unrealistic to begin with."

Adams said this is especially the case with the uncertainty around access to the American



Industry Minister Mélanie Joly has repeatedly said the federal government wants to see further industrial benefits in the form of auto investment in Canada tied to the submarine contract. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

market, which receives about 85 per cent of all production from any of the five original equipment manufacturers.

"Canada is too small to support a modern efficient plant, which would need a volume of about 250,000 to make it viable," he said.

## 'These are high-stakes negotiations,' says Volpe

Flavio Volpe, president of the Automotive Parts' Manufacturing Association, told *The Hill Times* in a March 13 interview that it would be "strange" if Volkswagen publicly talked about being part of the submarine deal and that it intended to invest.

He said the company's response "articulates reality" as the company—like any other—is not officially part of the submarine deal.

"These are high-stakes negotiations. These are unconventional asks, unconventional spending by the federal government. And so I think we're going to see more public dancing by all interested parties," Volpe said, but added that he remains hopeful the government successfully leverages an automotive investment with the submarines.

"It is merely a suggestion between trading partners that if we're going to spend billions for industrial benefit to the German economy and the German manufacturing economy, then we expect Germany to help organize German investments," Volpe said, highlighting that there are also two other major German automakers—BMW and Mercedes—which are already heavily invested in manufacturing, sales, and service in North America.

Volpe argued that the government's push to use this defence procurement to attract auto investment is a creative way to get industrial regional benefits.

"If we could fill some of the hole that the Americans have created with world-renowned German or Korean automakers, we would actually be delivering tangible benefits to industrial Canada for the prime minister's 'Buy Canada' posture. We have to try new things because we're up against new challenges," Volpe said.

He explained that an automotive plant is a \$2-billion invest-

ment that assembles \$10-billion worth of cars every year, which, at that level, buys \$3-billion to \$4-billion worth of parts, tools, and raw materials in a year, directly employs 2,500 to 5,000 people, and creates upwards of 10,000 to 15,000 indirect jobs.

According to Copeland, Hanwha's proposal for the submarine deal includes an industrial package that would create upwards of 25,000 jobs per year and significant economic growth; accelerate Canada's domestic defence capabilities; and enhance co-operation, partnership, and supply chains between Canada and South Korea.

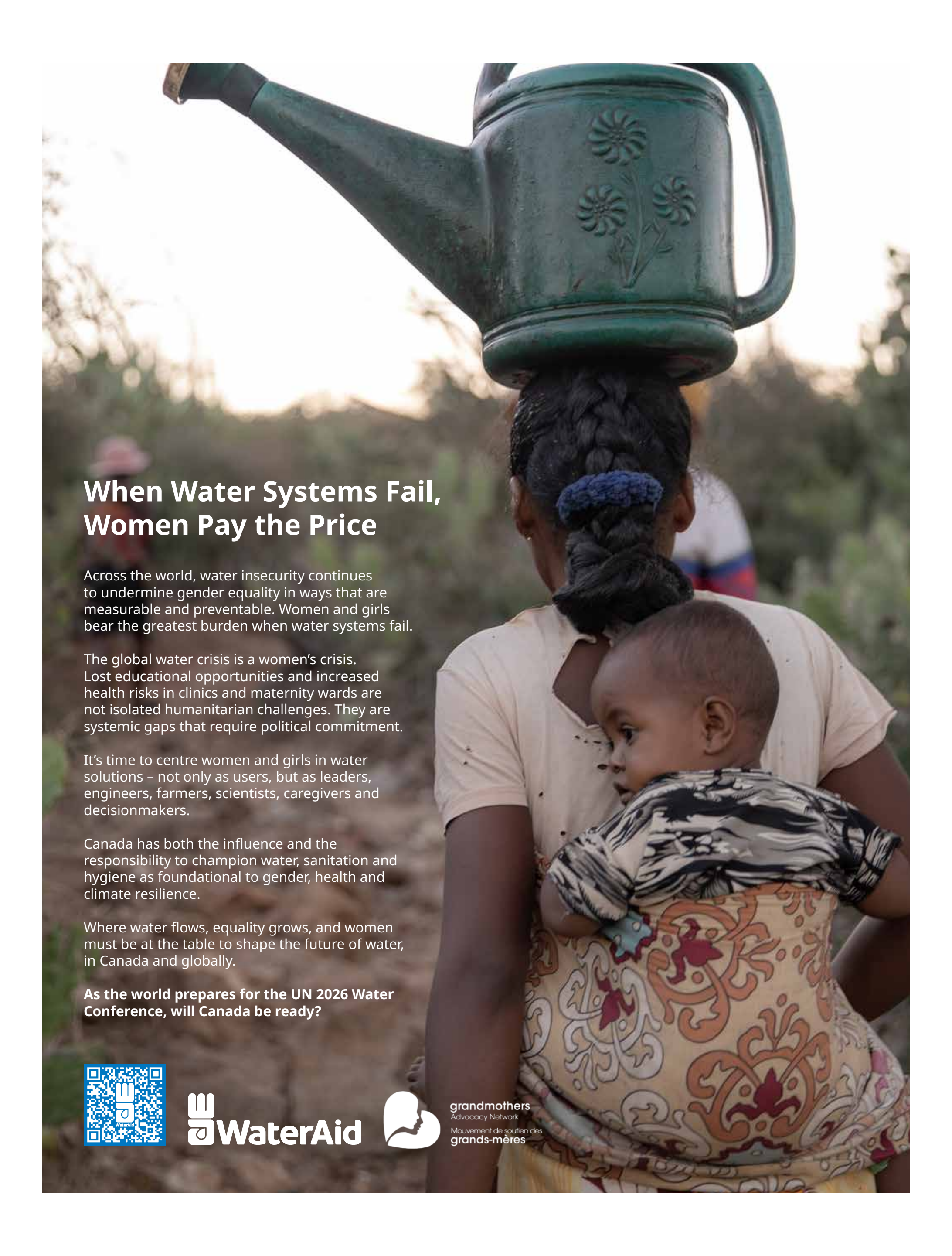
The proposal also includes trade and investment in the tens of billions of dollars across a range of strategic sectors, including energy, steel, critical minerals, space, satellite communications, automotive, shipbuilding, training, sustainment, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, AI, high-technology, and infrastructure.

TKMS's 212CD is a medium-sized—roughly 73 metres, 2,800 tonnes—diesel-electric, quiet submarine. It is built with hydrogen fuel-cell air-independent propulsion technology that allows it to stay submerged for long periods without surfacing. It is pitched as being suited for under-ice, high-latitude operations. The German-Norwegian design is in production, but it is building on the 212A subs used by the German and Italian navies.

Hanwha's KSS-III is larger—about 89 metres long, and 3,600 tonnes—and its design is in service. It combines fuel-cell air-independent propulsion with lithium-ion batteries to extend underwater endurance. It is built to launch heavyweight torpedoes and cruise missiles, and to carry out surveillance and special-forces missions.

The German company has said if a contract were to be awarded this year, it could deliver the first submarine well in advance of 2035, while the Korean firm has said it could deliver the first submarine by 2032, and four more by 2035 while the Victoria-class submarines will remain operational into the mid- to late-2030s.

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The Hill Times

A woman with a large green metal water container balanced on her head and a baby on her back. The woman has her hair in a long braid with a blue hair tie. The baby is wearing a patterned shirt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a bright sky.

## When Water Systems Fail, Women Pay the Price

Across the world, water insecurity continues to undermine gender equality in ways that are measurable and preventable. Women and girls bear the greatest burden when water systems fail.

The global water crisis is a women's crisis. Lost educational opportunities and increased health risks in clinics and maternity wards are not isolated humanitarian challenges. They are systemic gaps that require political commitment.

It's time to centre women and girls in water solutions – not only as users, but as leaders, engineers, farmers, scientists, caregivers and decisionmakers.

Canada has both the influence and the responsibility to champion water, sanitation and hygiene as foundational to gender, health and climate resilience.

Where water flows, equality grows, and women must be at the table to shape the future of water, in Canada and globally.

**As the world prepares for the UN 2026 Water Conference, will Canada be ready?**



grandmothers  
Advocacy Network  
Mouvement de soutien des  
grands-mères

## COMMENT

# Can Canada play a role in defending the Middle East?

Our understrength combat units are facing a massive challenge to simply rotate trained troops through the now-permanent commitment to NATO's northern flank.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—We are now well into the third week of United States President Donald Trump's special military operation against Iran, which the Americans have undertaken in conjunction with Israel.

What is clear, thus far, is that the comically named Operation Epic Fury is not going to be the whirlwind success that Trump initially promised to deliver.

What remains unclear is what exactly Trump's Epic Fury ultimately hopes to achieve. The initial claim was that the president felt the Iranians were not negotiating in good faith to obtain a new nuclear arms treaty with the U.S. Based on Trump's "feelings," Operation Epic Fury was launched to eliminate the possibility of an Iranian first-strike nuclear attack on U.S. bases in the Middle East.

It is firmly established that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard does not possess a delivery system capable of carrying a nuclear warhead to the distant continental U.S.

As for the Iranian nuclear program, just the previous summer, Trump had claimed to have "obliterated" that entire capability in the series of airstrikes dubbed Operation Midnight Hammer.

U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth told the media that this current military intervention was not about "regime change" before adding, "but the regime sure changed." This was in reference to the Day 1 missile strikes that had killed Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Just days later, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, Ali's son, was sworn in as the new Supreme Leader. Iran's initial military response was to launch a barrage of drones and missiles against Israel and the U.S.-allied Arab Gulf States within the limited range of their weaponry.

The U.S. and Israeli military were using sophisticated Patriot missiles to intercept relatively crude Iranian drones.

However, as that proved to be largely futile, the Iranians switched tactics and have threatened all international shipping in the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz.

Nearly 20 per cent of the global oil and gas supply transits this narrow waterway, which connects the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea. As such, the worldwide price of oil spiked, and this resulted in exponentially higher prices at gas pumps across North America.

Now, if the U.S. position on their intervention in Iran seems vaguely incoherent,



To think that additional personnel could be deployed to the Middle East in sufficient numbers to deter potential Iranian aggression is nonsense, writes Scott Taylor. *DND photograph by Cpl. Blaine Sewell*

the same can be said for Canada's reaction to the attacks. At first, Prime Minister Mark Carney appeared to support Operation Epic Fury, if only as an appeasement tactic in advance of the upcoming Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement negotiations.

While paying lip service to morally supporting Trump's campaign, Carney firmly rejected the notion of providing military support to the operation.

Canada's Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Jennie Carignan took a slightly bolder stand. At a recent defence conference in Ottawa, Carignan made headlines when she told reporters that "Canada could be called on to help defend Gulf states." In a room full of senior military brass and defence academics, the response from everyone within earshot should have been an incredulous gasp of "with what?"

The Iranian retaliation attacks against the U.S.-allied Gulf states have been mostly drone strikes. The Canadian Armed Forces currently possess only one Very Low Level Air Defence System, and it was only recently deployed operationally with Canada's forward-based NATO battle group in Latvia.

We have absolutely zero ability to protect the Gulf states from Iranian drone strikes.

As for protecting oil tankers and merchant ships transiting the contested Strait of Hormuz, the Royal Canadian Navy would be unwise to deploy a warship into that 50-kilometre-wide waterway to deal with Iranian sea-skimming missiles and suicide fast boats.

The Canadian Army's woefully understrength combat units are facing a massive challenge to simply rotate trained troops through the now-permanent commitment to NATO's northern flank as part of Operation Reassurance. To think that additional personnel could be deployed to the Middle East in sufficient numbers to deter potential Iranian aggression is nonsense.

So, the good news is that Canada will not be engaging in another "forever" war in the Middle East at the behest of the U.S. president.

The bad news is that we simply couldn't participate even if the cause was truly just.

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

*The Hill Times*

# Mounting chaos, risks in Trump's Middle East military adventure

For Canadians, this latest lesson in the saga is a confirmation that the U.S. president has no limits, and is capable of anything.

Les Whittington

Need to Know



OTTAWA—Having plunged the United States into an uncontrollable Middle East conflict, President Donald Trump has demanded that the allies he usually disparages send warships to bail out his badly planned, globally damaging attack on Iran.

This invitation to a possible Third World War was aimed at countries around the world, in particular NATO members. The alliance will face a "very bad" future unless it takes part in the U.S.-Israeli military action by agreeing to police the Strait of Hormuz, the president threatened.

Most leaders of NATO countries—none of whom were consulted before Trump went to war on Feb. 28—were doing their best to initially say "no" as vaguely as possible.

But on March 16, Trump went further, striking out at unnamed leaders of long-term U.S. allies that have been reluctant to join up: "For 40 years, we're protecting you, and you don't want to get involved in something that is very minor, very few shots going to be taken ... But they said, 'We'd rather not get involved.'"

"When I've been a big critic of all of the protecting of countries, because I know that we'll protect them, and if ever needed, if we ever needed help, they won't be there for us," Trump told the media in the latest twist in the nearly three-week-old conflict.

While few would gainsay the value of eliminating Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons or regret the demise of the fascist theocracy in Tehran, Trump appears to have badly miscalculated the course of the assault he launched with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In their usual bully-boy fashion, Trump and his war-mongering cabinet secretaries seem sort of surprised and insulted that Iran would fight back with whatever it had at hand, including missile attacks on U.S. allies in the region and shutting down the Strait of Hormuz.

It all makes you wonder about Trump, who has developed his hold on the American people by selling himself as the world's greatest deal-maker. In fact, he seems to be easily led by leaders who know how to play to his ego, or who personify the all-powerful autocratic model he seems to idolize.

Think of Trump applauding President Vladimir Putin as the Russian war criminal arrived in Alaska last summer for what turned out to be a meaningless summit meeting with the U.S. president. If there is anyone who believes Putin hasn't run

circles around Trump over Ukraine, I have yet to encounter them.

Trump has also oozed on about his "great" relationship with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un, but this supposed rapport has failed to keep Kim from expanding his country's nuclear weapons capabilities or drawing closer to Russia.

With Chinese leader Xi Jinping, Trump speaks of a great relationship and has praised the Communist party's decision to allow Xi to be a lifetime president. But Xi hasn't hesitated from tough retaliatory moves against the U.S., and has fought Trump to a standstill in the bruising trade war the U.S. leader initiated in his first term.

In this case, it seems obvious based on U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's comments that Trump was nudged into the war by Netanyahu, who has his own ideas about razing Iran and degrading Hezbollah in Lebanon.

In the wider scope, Trump's reliance on his own instincts—as opposed to using planning or data to address major issues—repeatedly results in chaos and disarray. The president's ridiculous inability to come to grips with the reality of COVID, for instance, probably cost him the 2020 election. His infliction of tariffs on the world—something universally seen as absurd by economists—was quashed by U.S. Supreme Court justices who appeared to have failed to find any reasonable way to evade the irrefutable illegality of the import taxes—a decision leaving Trump's government \$160-billion in hock.

Not to mention his highly popular promises to keep the U.S. out of military adventures and curb inflation—both of which he has in practice honoured in the breach, most spectacularly with the Iran involvement.

The man the White House once called "the President of Peace" has in his second term developed a proclivity for deploying the powerful U.S. military for what can be depicted as strategic American wins. Since being re-inaugurated, Trump ordered armed action by U.S. forces in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Yemen, Somalia, and Venezuela.

And the current Iran conflict has set off an inflationary shock, with oil prices rising to about \$100-a-barrel from \$70, that will be felt by people in the U.S. and around the world, with the potential to sharply weaken global growth.

The only things Trump is really good at, it seems, are selling himself to celebrity-stunned voters, and helping the wealthy get a lot more wealthy.

For Canadians, this latest lesson in the Trump saga is a confirmation that the president indeed has no limits and is capable of anything. Among other things, it underscores the urgency of Prime Minister Mark Carney's efforts to rebuild an independent military, and strengthen Canada's alliances in the Arctic and Europe at a time when traditional transatlantic security ties continue to be stretched to the breaking point.

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

*The Hill Times*

## COMMENT

# Voters back Carney's globe-trotting mandate. Can it survive a domestic reality check?

Failure to effectively thread the needle between the international agenda and challenges here at home could see the same downward spiral that originally set the stage for Mark Carney's political rise.

Josie Sabatino

Beyond the Headlines



Prime Minister Mark Carney kicks off his second year from a position of strength, but the ultimate test remains whether his success on the global stage will outweigh the immediate concerns at home, writes Josie Sabatino. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

macro-level policy announcements aimed at securing Canada's future through a diversified trade and economic agenda. However, the economy is blinking red in the face of dismal job numbers, and acute pocketbook challenges are hitting household budgets hard. Failure to effectively thread the needle between the international agenda and challenges here at home could see the same downward spiral that originally set the stage for Carney's political rise.

With floor crossers in tow from both the left and right, the Carney government is within spitting distance of a majority government. Barring a disastrous return in the upcoming April bye-elections, the Liberals are poised to gain the upper hand in the House of Commons. This control extends to committees, which will allow the government to move legislation faster while thwarting problematic motions raised by opposition parties.

Carney kicks off his second year from a position of strength, with a clear mandate and the tools to successfully implement it. However, the ultimate test remains whether his success on the global stage continues to outweigh the immediate cost-of-living concerns here at home.

*Josie Sabatino is a vice-president at Summa Strategies. Prior to joining Summa, Sabatino spent nearly a decade as a Conservative political staffer, providing communications and issues management advice to Members of Parliament and the leader of the official opposition.*

*The Hill Times*

OTTAWA—Prime Minister Mark Carney enters his second year making one thing very clear for his detractors: underestimate him at your own risk. He entered the arena early last year with no formal political experience to speak of, and yet he has handily cleared every milestone in his path. Not only did he dispel the robotic banker trope, Carney has proven that he is as comfortable glad-handing in the local pub during a hockey game as he is commanding the stage at Davos.

Central to Carney's policy agenda over the last 12 months has been undoing Justin Trudeau-era policies acting as an anchor on the Canadian economy. By

pivoting on the consumer carbon tax, repealing electric vehicle mandates, and doing away with the digital services tax, the prime minister has shown that pragmatic logic so far has prevailed over ideological advocacy. In terms of his forward-facing policy agenda, trade tensions with the United States have laid the groundwork for most of Carney's movements over the course of the last year. Since last March, Carney has traversed the globe, spending one out of every five days since taking office out of the country.

From Indonesia to Qatar, press releases and photo ops have signalled that it is a new era for trade and investment as Canada

attempts to deliver more than talking points on the need to forge new alliances. And while many of the memoranda of understanding and strategic partnerships will take months—if not years—to bear fruit, the polls show the Carney government's efforts are starting to pay off in ways not typically seen for a government exiting the honeymoon phase.

Though Carney shares few traits with his predecessor, he has commanded the Canada-U.S. file in the public consciousness much like former then-prime minister Trudeau once dominated the federal COVID-19 response. The latter took to the doorstep of his cottage to do a daily update during the first wave of the pan-

demic, announcing everything from border restrictions to workforce supports, and supply chain procurements.

During a time of widespread global anxiety that kept Canadians at home and the doors of businesses shuttered, Trudeau became the face of the issue. The early days were spent providing reassurances that "better days are ahead." Later, his policies on vaccine mandates would turn into a lightning rod that would be the tip of the spear as Canadians watched the pandemic recede, only to see affordability challenges creep in.

There is a lesson here for Carney as he looks to make his mark during his second year in office. The current moment dictates

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# Editorial

## Editorial

# It took a hit, but the NDP needs to keep on ticking

As March rolls along, the New Democrats inch closer to their end-of-month national convention, which will culminate with the election of a new party leader.

In the 10-and-a-half months since former leader Jagmeet Singh stepped down, and in the weeks of the party's flagging election campaign that preceded that shift, the NDP has been in search of a rudder.

Last week, that search seemed as though it had gotten a bit more difficult after Lori Idlout, twice elected as the NDP MP for Nunavut, joined the governing party benches. With Idlout becoming the fourth person to cross the floor to the Liberals since November, and the Grits' polling numbers at levels unheard of for a fourth-term government, it would be easy to write off those in opposition as having too high a cliff to scale.

But for all of the rhetoric that typically follows in the wake of a floor-crossing—usually words like “betrayal” and “back-room deals”—there was something that a member of the most-recently spurned caucus said that rang objectively true.

Canada needs to back the NDP now “more than any other time in our history,” British Columbia MP Gord Johns said on March 11. “Canadians are about to learn that, real quick.”

Despite the fact that Canada has been officiated by a back-and-forth parade of liberal and conservative governments (regardless of their official names over the years), it would be inaccurate to say that this country operates as a two-party system.

When factoring in the context of Nunavut's political scene, which

isn't a traditionally partisan territory, Idlout's defection doesn't explicitly say anything about the ongoing leadership race and the future of the NDP.

However, the implicit optics are bad that one of the few remaining members of the New Democrat caucus didn't think it ultimately worth her while to stay and fight from the orange side.

Alberta MP Heather McPherson, activist and filmmaker Avi Lewis, union leader Rob Ashton, B.C. city councillor Tanille Johnston, and farmer and environmentalist Tony McQuail are all hoping it's their name that will be called when the leadership race wraps up in Winnipeg on March 29.

Whomever it is will have to hit the ground running. Can they rally the remaining caucus into an effective opposition that pulls in support from outside of the House of Commons? Prime Minister Mark Carney has demonstrated that he is going to work to fulfill his agenda by any means necessary—and the public is responding.

But he's not infallible, and there are needs that he's not meeting, especially on the everyday affordability front. There are things Canadians may start to take for granted that wouldn't exist without the NDP, like the most recent gains in childcare and dental care.

With the conversation so focused on issues like major geopolitical threats and massive infrastructure projects, now is the time for the NDP to work out to how to credibly contribute in a way that resonates, and not get shunted off to the fringe while the so-called “adults” are talking.

*The Hill Times*

## Letters to the Editor

# Canada should be promoting peace, says letter writer

The Conservatives are calling for a parliamentary debate before any sort of Canadian military deployment to the ongoing war in Iran after Prime Minister Mark Carney said Canada could get involved if allies asked it for help. This statement makes no sense, and it is immoral.

NATO Article 5 states that an attack against one member “shall be considered an attack against them all.” NATO member states only have an obligation to take any action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force.

With Iran, there is a nation member, the United States, that is the attacker. NATO nations certainly have no obligation to be part of a violation of international law to attack a neutral nation. They have a moral duty to refuse to be part of this illegal act.

In the past, NATO nations came together under the Dayton Accord, the agreement for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, signed on Nov. 21, 1995, in Dayton, Ohio.

NATO awarded medals to participating troops who were deployed in this peace-making mission.

The Canadian government said it stood by the decision not to call for a de-escalation in hostilities when it initially threw Canada's support behind the attack on Iran by the U.S. and Israel.

The government should be stopping this sabre-rattling; the threat of military force with the implication that action might be taken, which represents opposite approaches in diplomacy and conflict resolution. It should maintain Canada's reputation as an olive-branch nation, which usually refers to an offer of peace, or an attempt to end a conflict.

Instead of stating it would participate in the conflict, the Canadian government should be promoting a peace initiative, such as the one that ended the former Yugoslavia conflicts with the participation of NATO nations.

**Roger Cyr**  
 Victoria, B.C.

# Stand up for women and children, says Vancouver reader

With International Women's Day in the rear view, and the ongoing Commission on the Status of Women in New York until March 20, Canada once again has an opportunity to show real leadership in protecting the health and futures of women and children.

As an Asian female youth, I know how easily women and children can be marginalized when resources are limited. Too often, they are treated as expendable on the global stage. They are not. A person's gender or age should never determine whether they live or die. Yet, for the first time this century, global child deaths are projected to rise, increasing by more than 200,000 to an estimated 4.8 million, reversing 25 years of progress. This alarming shift follows a 26.9-per-cent drop in global health funding in 2025. These are not just statistics; they represent millions of children whose futures are being cut short.

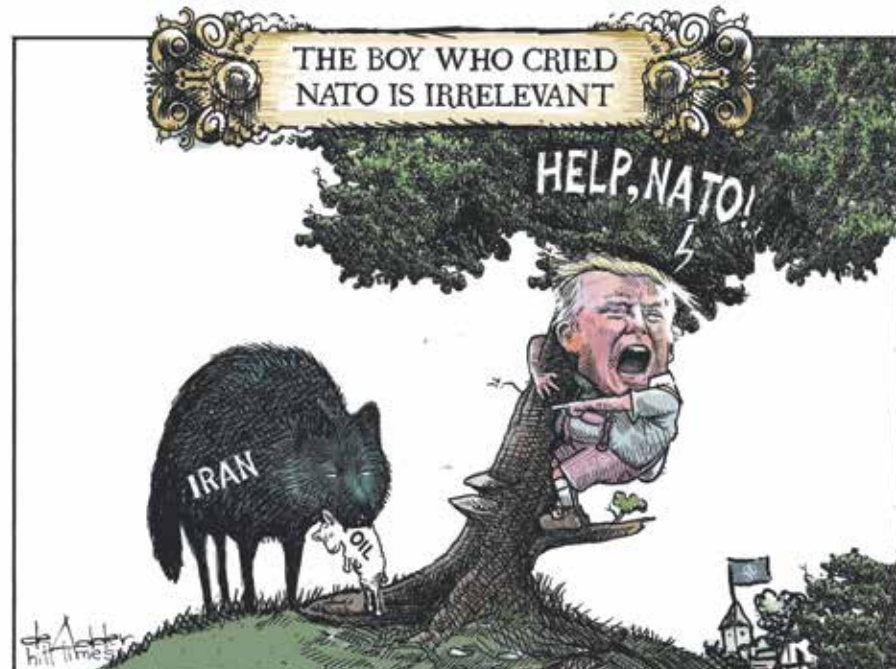
Canada has the ability, and the responsibility, to help stop this reversal. As a young person myself, it is impossible to ignore how unfair it is that

preventable deaths continue while countries like ours have the resources to act.

That is why Canada must continue its long-standing support for the Global Financing Facility (GFF) by making an early pledge of \$340-million over the next five years at the World Bank-International Monetary Fund Spring Meetings in April. Canada's leadership matters. When Canada commits to global health initiatives, other countries pay attention and often follow. As a member of the G7, Canada has both influence and responsibility. A strong and early pledge would help encourage other major economies to step up, mobilizing more funding to protect women and children worldwide.

Investments like the GFF strengthen maternal health-care systems, address gender inequality, and ensure women and children can access life-saving care. Canada should not hesitate to stand up for those whose lives depend on it.

**Bernice Ko**  
 Vancouver, B.C.



## COMMENT

# Illiteracy undermines opportunities in the knowledge economy

For a democracy like Canada to function effectively, all citizens must be well-informed, which means they shouldn't be denied the tools to learning and opportunity.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



An investment in a national literacy plan would go a long way to helping any Canadian who fails to meet the demands of a knowledge economy, writes Andrew Caddell. *Pexels photograph by Kampus Production*

a technical manual to operate a machine. The latter issue affects productivity and accidents on the job: if workers can't comprehend how a machine works, they can endanger themselves and others.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Canada ranks a pitiful 10<sup>th</sup> of 31 countries in adult literacy skills. However, when literacy improves, GDP and productivity increases. Increasing literacy skills in Canada by one per cent would produce a three-per-cent increase in GDP, or \$54-billion annually. The additional tax revenue on this increase would cover the costs necessary to achieve these gains.

Despite the cutbacks of the Harper years, there has been some recent federal government investment in literacy. Mélanie Valcin, who heads United for Literacy, is calling for a comprehensive Canadian literacy strategy as part of the National Literacy Alliance.

Provincial governments who jealously guard their jurisdiction in education might balk at such an initiative, but Valcin argues there is still a clear role for federal leadership, as we have seen with initiatives such as child-care, dental care, and school food programs.

"Literacy is not a side issue. It is the foundation of economic growth, social equity, and equal access to opportunity," she said. "Countries such as Finland, Ireland, and Australia have implemented national literacy strategies to strengthen skills and economic resilience. We must do the same."

Sometimes the question is: where to start? If a person can't read well enough to operate a computer, they can't learn on it, so literacy programs tend to rely on small classes. And while television and radio offer access to information, the inability to read material without filters can prevent the development of critical thinking skills.

For a democracy like Canada to function effectively, all citizens must be well-informed, which means they shouldn't be denied the tools to learning and opportunity. An investment in a national literacy plan would go a long way to helping any Canadian who fails to meet the demands of a knowledge economy, and it could offer significant returns.

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 former town councillor in Kamouraska, Que. He can be reached at [pipson52@hotmail.com](mailto:pipson52@hotmail.com).

*The Hill Times*

# Everyone is paying the cost for Trump's ego

The return on investment of this obscene spending is garbage, and without objectives and a robust strategy for this conflict, the results may be sub-optimal for both Israeli and American pursuits.

Erica Ifill

Bad+Bitchy



CALGARY—The Iran war is a military escapade of epic proportions, and it's not getting any better. This war began as the brainchild of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who convinced United States President Donald Trump that he would be the only president to bring down the Islamic Republic, betting on Trump's metastasized ego to complete the task. It worked.

Buoyed by the "success" of his military escapade in Venezuela, where the U.S. military captured/kidnapped President Nicolás Maduro and replaced him with puppet leadership, Trump was feeling himself. On Feb. 28, he launched Operation Epic Fury, with air strikes killing Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The expectation was that victory was nigh, only for the inconvenient truth of a more-resilient enemy to emerge; the regime did not fall. The entire world is now engulfed in the consequences of an ill-conceived, haphazardly implemented war for the benefit of Israel's bloodthirsty hegemonic expansion in the region, and U.S. President Donald Trump's imperialist narcissism.

While the prowess and power of the U.S. military is unmatched, it has not won a conflict since the Second World War; Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Afghanistan, and Iraq were all wars America lost with its superior military. It is also the most expensive, and therefore the return on investment is questionable.

The U.S. has "estimated the cost of the war against Iran had exceeded \$11.3-billion in the first six days alone," as reported by *The New York Times*. The Pentagon is expected to request another US\$50-billion. Much of the money is spent on ammunition, which has revealed questions about America's war-time industrial capacity. As estimated by the Foreign Policy Research Institute, in the first four days, "the U.S.-led coalition expended approximately 5,197 munitions across 35 types," which "represents a significant industrial burden for replacing some munitions that cannot be replenished in four days, four weeks, or even four months." Despite Trump's statements to the contrary, America does not have the manufacturing capability to keep up with the weaponry it needs to keep pace with

the operation, nor does it have the rare earth minerals to produce modern defence munitions or technology, such as Tomahawk cruise missiles. China dominates global production.

Now we know why the country can't afford universal health care.

Iran, on the other hand, uses cheaper drones, less-advanced technology, and is still holding their own. As reported by *USA Today*, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Dan Caine, "told reporters on March 10 that Iran's ballistic missile attacks 'continue to trend downward 90 per cent,' and its one-way attack drones have 'decreased 83 per cent' since the beginning of the war." That would be a good statistic on its own; however, asymmetric costs could hamper tactics in the future. The idea was to start the war with an aggressive air campaign, overwhelm the enemy, and destroy the regime. Not surprisingly, this did not happen, and there was no plan for a sustained Iranian resistance. *The Times of Israel* reported that the U.S. "struck more than 3,000 targets during the first week of the Iran war."

The return on investment of this obscene spending is garbage, and without objectives and a robust strategy for this conflict, the

results may be sub-optimal for both Israeli and American pursuits; the ROI is a harder Iranian regime. Khamenei was replaced by his son, Mojtaba Khamenei.

"His selection could be a sign that more hardline factions in Iran's establishment retain power, and could indicate that the government has little desire to agree to a deal or negotiations in the short term," explained *Al Jazeera*. To recap: Trump and his cronies spent billions of dollars in a

week to produce a worse government than was there before.

Now, the Americans are sending in ground troops. The desperation for control of this conflict is palpable.

The U.S. operates many bases in the Middle East, located in countries such as Qatar, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates, all of which are in the direct line of Iranian drones and missiles. There are approximately 40,000 to 50,000 personnel across all bases in the region. Iran has made it clear that those sites will be vulnerable to target. And target it has. American and Israeli military actions have left these countries militarily naked with zero protection.

In defending themselves from Iranian missiles, the Gulf states must deploy interceptors that cost a king's ransom. *Al Jazeera* reported that Kuwait has spent between US\$800-million and US\$1.5-billion; Qatar spent US\$600-million to \$900-million; and the UAE has forked over between US\$1.3-billion and \$2.6-billion. "Every interceptor fired represents resources that cannot be replaced overnight, raising fears that defence stockpiles could be rapidly depleted." Conversely, in launching these attacks, Iran has only spent US\$194-million to \$391-million, thereby making the financial burden of launching the attacks cheaper than defending against them. This is not sustainable for anyone, and neither is this war.

Erica Ifill is host of the *Bad+Bitchy* podcast.

*The Hill Times*



The entire world is now engulfed in the consequences of an ill-conceived, haphazardly implemented war for the benefit of Israel's bloodthirsty hegemonic expansion in the region, and U.S. President Donald Trump's imperialist narcissism, writes Erica Ifill. *White House photograph by Daniel Torok*

# OPINION



NDA's exacerbate an existing power imbalance by requiring silence from the vulnerable, who are having to learn how to fight back, writes Julie Macfarlane. *Pexels photograph by cottonbro studio*

## It's time for Canada to get off the fence with NDAs

Canada remains unwilling to change despite growing visible public anger over the manipulation and obfuscation people experience with non-disclosure agreements.

Julie Macfarlane



Opinion

At Can't Buy My Silence, the advocacy organization campaigning for restrictions on non-disclosure agreements to cover up wrongdoing, we have received many, many messages from people who are being pressured to sign these agreements, which are now default in settlements for workplace and civil or human rights claims regarding sexual misconduct and discrimination.

Public awareness of these clauses has grown exponentially in the four years since our campaign began. Back then, we heard from people only after they had signed, and often months later when they finally felt emotionally

ready to read through what they signed. They had routinely been told that these clauses would "bring closure."

As anyone who has signed one will tell you (you can review our 140-plus testimonies online), closure is the opposite of what a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) brings. Instead, it remains a dark shadow cast over the original incident and its "resolution," which they can never speak of—typically often even to family, friends, or even a therapist without a specially negotiated exception, for which the victim remains responsible and lives in fear of an inadvertent breach.

Despite growing visible public anger over the manipulation and obfuscation Canadians experience with NDAs, and rapid legislative change around the world to protect victims, Canada remains unwilling to change.

Senate Bill S-232 is proceeding slowly, still short of a vote. The only province to have passed legislation remains Prince Edward Island, which took this decisive step in 2021. The objections to legislation remain mired in out-of-date and inaccurate claims about the dire consequences of giving victims the right to speak about their experiences.

As 35 American states, England and Wales, Ireland, and the Australian state of Victoria move forward—in the United States, at a dizzying rate—with legislation, Canadian politicians remain on the fence. Research post-legislation shows clearly and consistently that settlement

rates do not go down without NDAs, and neither do monetary settlements (perhaps the public servants who are complaining about Senator Marilou McPhe-dran's Bill S-232 should inform themselves). Filings, however, increase (for obvious reasons). Moreover, several studies, including our own research data, show the disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable in our community, including women, racialized minorities, members of the LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous communities, junior employees and those at the end of their working life, people with disabilities, etc. Unsurprising, given that NDAs exacerbate an existing power imbalance by requiring silence from the vulnerable, who are having to learn how to fight back.

Meanwhile, the Uniform Law Conference of Canada (ULCC), which has been meeting for almost four years on this issue, is still trying to come up with a model bill. The sad part is that they are working with four-year-old models which are now clearly outdated. Even if the ULCC does finally produce a model bill this August, it will be the "conditions approach," which was how some of the earliest legislation was framed.

The "conditions approach" allowed NDAs to continue to be signed if they met certain conditions. In 2023, this approach seemed like the best that could be done, while some continued to assert that NDAs were "good for victims." In the last four years I have never spoken with an NDA signer who would agree. The "complainant's preference" condition responds to the claim that restricting NDAs takes "choices" or agency away from victims. As the hundreds and hundreds of NDA signers we have heard from will tell you, they were not offered an alternative: a confidentiality clause that protects them alone, without requiring them to protect the perpetrator or responsible organization in exchange. In short, the conditions approach has not offered the best protection for victims against NDAs.

Instead of the "conditions approach," the dominant model of lawmaking now is the "straightforward ban" approach. It is far simpler and clearer: you cannot

use an NDA in any case of sexual misconduct or discrimination. No exceptions. No potential for victims to be persuaded it is their "preference" in the absence of other information. The criticism of this condition in particular has led to several jurisdictions that had originally adopted this approach now to replace that legislation with a straightforward ban. Better for victims, better for government.

It is long past time for Canada to get off the fence. How good do we feel that our political awareness of the toxicity of NDAs now falls well behind Utah, Texas, Missouri, Georgia, Alabama ... the list goes on.

When the response at the highest levels of political decision-making remains "getting rid of NDAs (retroactively) will lead to false allegations against politicians," we know we are in trouble. The "false allegations" claim is a trope widely disproved by police reporting figures, among others. And this hasn't happened in any of these other jurisdictions where legislation has been retroactive—or at the University of Prince Edward Island, which went further than their legislation to release all previous signers.

What happened? There were no "revenge posts" online. As Shannon MacDonald, the chair of the Board of Governors of UPEI, puts it: "When we still used NDAs, there was anger among signers who were the victims of bad behaviour. There were flare-ups and a high level of frustration. NDAs created anger among victims, and in many ways seemed counterproductive. Now, it is quite the opposite." In the words of UPEI president Wendy Rodgers: "This is about ensuring we are not reproducing situations that resulted or contributed to any kind of wrongdoing or harm. ... [I]t is important for victims to be able to speak out about misconduct of many types to prevent others going down the same path with the same individual and to inform the development of future policies."

Please step up, Canada. We want to be proud of you.

Dr. Julie Macfarlane C.M., is the director of *Can't Buy My Silence Canada*.

*The Hill Times*

## Canada's electricity buildout needs Indigenous leadership

Modernizing Canada's electricity system to meet the demands of our collective future must become a turning point for economic reconciliation.

Kwatuuma Cole Sayers & Blake Shaffer



Opinion

Canada is talking about doubling its electricity system. But what's often lost in that conversation is the sheer physical scale of what that means. "Doubling the grid" may sound abstract, but in reality, it means multiple, massive, decades-long construction projects spanning some 160,000 kilometres of forest, river, and mountain. These projects will not be built in nameless places. They will be built across Indigenous homelands. Every new transmission line in Canada will cross Indigenous territories.

What does this necessary nation-building enterprise mean for Nations? It should mark a turning point in how Indigenous leadership shapes Canada's electricity future. As we flip the switch on next-generation electricity infrastructure, we must also flip the script on the role Nations play in building it—from consulted communities and rightsholders to project proponents and leaders.

Too often, the process follows a familiar pattern. A commercial proponent identifies a major development opportunity and then determines which Indigenous Nations may be impacted. Sometimes it is five, 10, or 25 Nations. Consultation begins, often Nation by Nation, but many key decisions have already been made: the route, the timeline, and the benefits on offer. Nations are then placed in the position of responding, negotiating, and seeking to influence projects largely designed by others. Sometimes Nations are viewed as obstacles to overcome, sometimes as collaborators and equity partners.

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# OPINION

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Ownership stakes generate long-term, predictable revenue, create jobs, build capacity, and reflect recognition of Nations' rights and title. But Nations holding passive equity in projects conceived, structured, and largely governed by others is not an endpoint. It is a transition point.

To achieve true economic reconciliation, Nations must be behind the wheel of projects from inception. That means defining the project vision, selecting partners, shaping governance, negotiating with regulators, and deciding how risk and return are shared. Capital is mobilized in service of Nations' priorities, not the other way around.

Interprovincial transmission infrastructure, in particular, requires this shift for three key reasons. First, for the implementation of free, prior, and informed consent as required by Canadian law. Second, the need to address inadequate grid infrastructure that constrains economic development for Indigenous Nations. And third, overcoming the traditional hurdles to interprovincial co-operation around electricity planning.

In 2021, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act became



As we flip the switch on next-generation electricity infrastructure, we must also flip the script on the role Nations play in building it, write Kwatuuma Cole Sayers and Blake Shaffer. Photograph courtesy of Pixabay

law in Canada, enshrining the legal imperative for free, prior, and informed consent for infrastructure projects that affect Indigenous territories. Implementation has been uneven, and lack of clarity around what this means in practice has contributed to court battles and project delays.

Given the scale of interprovincial transmission projects, construction of a single line could impact and require the consent of dozens of Nations.

Indigenous project leadership does not guarantee unanimous agreement among all involved. However, it centres the conversation between Nations and focuses it on self-determination. This creates a stronger foundation for building authentic consent and shared decision-making, and it ultimately makes projects more likely to get built.

Grounding transmission conversations in community priorities is also critical because

many Indigenous Nations still face unreliable, outdated, or non-existent grid infrastructure. This restricts Nations' ability to develop economic opportunities in their territories, adopt new technologies, or participate in larger-scale renewable generation.

Finally, Indigenous leadership may be key to unlocking stalemates that have long plagued interprovincial transmission. Nations can work across provin-

cial borders in ways provincial governments often struggle to, advancing collaborative electricity planning across regions. With political and geographic relationships that long predate Confederation, Indigenous Nations are well positioned to convene partners, work with regulators and governments, and align behind projects that benefit communities across landscapes for generations.

Modernizing Canada's electricity system to meet the demands of our collective future must become a turning point for economic reconciliation. These decisions are not only about building infrastructure, but also about how Nations exercise their inherent rights to plan for their homelands and communities. As Canada builds the next generation of electricity infrastructure, Indigenous Nations must be leaders in shaping it. That will define the legacy of this moment in Canada's evolution.

*Kwatuuma Cole Sayers is a member of the Hupačasath Nation, former head of Clean Energy BC, and executive director of the newly launched Indigenous Power Coalition. Blake Shaffer is an associate professor at the University of Calgary specializing in electricity markets.*

*The Hill Times*

## Next exit: Dream job

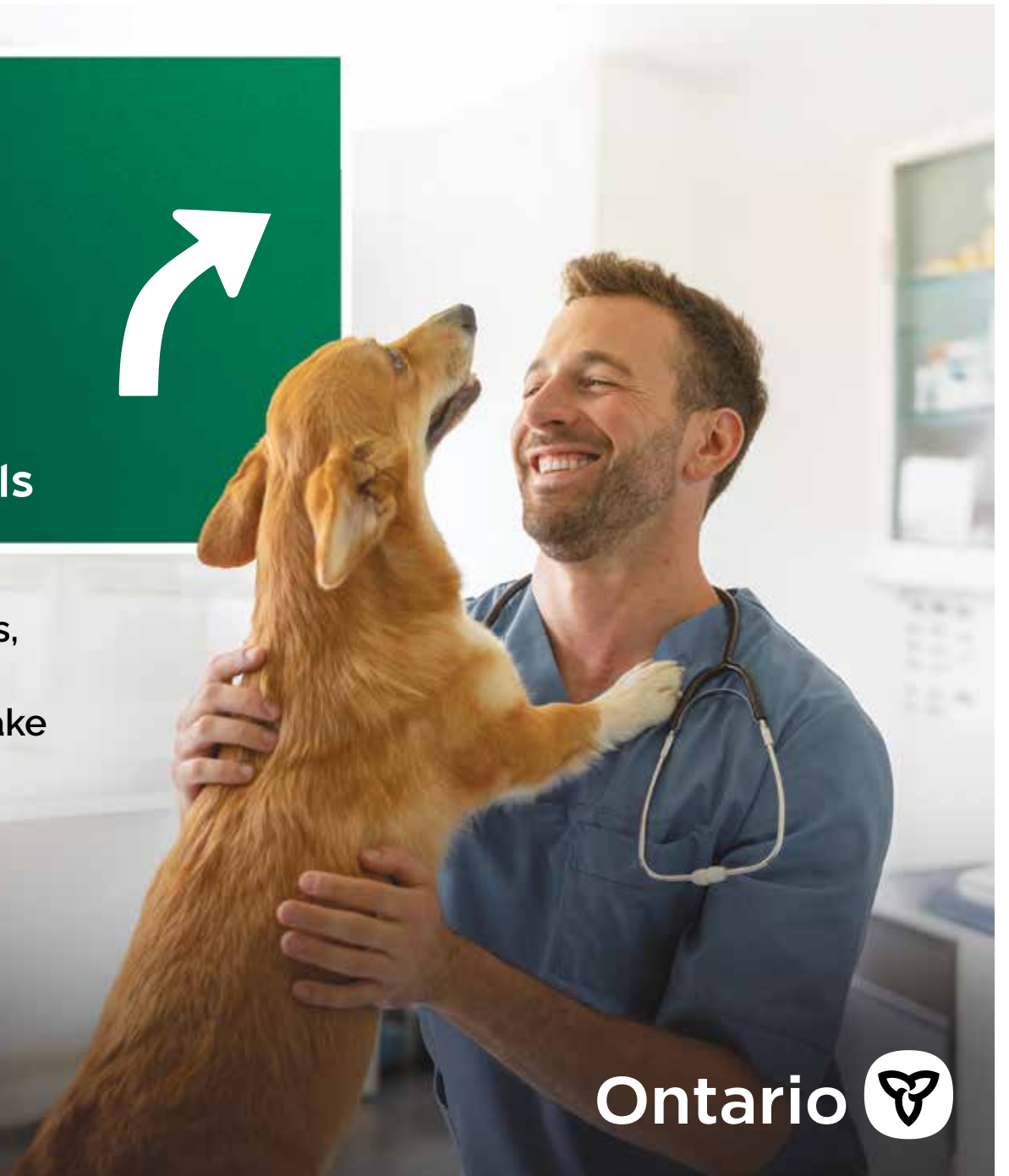
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# NEWS

# NEWS

## Carney's first year defined by 'polished' appeal, but 'new-government shine' won't last forever, say pollsters

Liberals say there's been a '180-degree' shift in discipline, tone, and policy led by the prime minister, but there are warnings against overconfidence as affordability concerns persist.

Continued from page 1

doom and gloom of 2024 amongst the Liberal caucus.

For many Liberals, the story of Prime Minister Mark Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) first year in office doesn't begin with his swearing in on March 14, 2025, or even his overwhelming victory at the Liberal leadership race five days prior, but rather with then-prime minister Justin Trudeau's long fall of 2024.

"It was hell," said a senior ministerial staffer, who spoke with *The Hill Times* on a not-for-attribution basis to comment freely.

Several staffers who spoke with *The Hill Times* echoed similar sentiments, recalling their colleagues and bosses growing increasingly dejected, isolated, and anti-social as the Liberal Party's political fortunes grew worse, seemingly every day.

"There was no harmony; nobody wanted to talk to each other," one staffer said. "It was really lonely."

A year and a half later, "the vibes have shifted 180 degrees" as the atmosphere, camaraderie, polling, and even policy have fundamentally changed.

When asked what the biggest change has been under Carney's time in office, staffers and parliamentarians alike shared the same satirical, sartorial answer.

"Everyone wears black shoes now," joked one senior Prime Minister's Office staffer.

However, while that sentiment was generally shared in jest, for many, it was emblematic of the overall "polished" professionalism that Carney has brought to his leadership and expectations.

"Ministers are making the effort to be on time for things, and [Question Period prep] starts at 1:30 p.m.," one staffer told *The Hill Times*. "If you're not on time, it shows."

"There's this get-up-and-go feeling every single day because that tone starts from the top," said a Liberal MP describing Carney's "banker's work ethos" as a "refreshing return to fiscal responsibility" compared to Trudeau's government.

"There's a fundamental difference between the last administration and ours, from tone to messaging and policy," the MP told *The Hill Times*.

Several other Liberals had similar diagnoses of the difference between the Carney and Trudeau governments.

"We're not distracted by the shiny objects," said one staffer for Canada-United States Trade Minister Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, N.B.). "This is a government that has a set of goals it wants to achieve, and it's going to stop basically at nothing to achieve those goals."

"Trudeau's government had a lot of bright ideas, some worked, but many did not, and a lot of that was just because they put their hands in too many cookie jars," the staffer added, noting that LeBlanc's office had become the "junk drawer" for many issues the Trudeau government didn't want to deal with but couldn't get rid of.

Still, there are warnings against overconfidence, despite polls



Prime Minister Mark Carney was sworn into office on March 14, 2025, and has since brought a fundamental shift to Canadian and Liberal politics, say party members and observers. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

showing a double-digit lead and a party on the precipice of a majority government.

"We can't do what we want to do if Canadians are facing extreme cost-of-living pressures," said one staffer. "We are where we are in the polls, but that's not going to last; no government is here forever."

### Carney's first year marked by cross-partisan appeal, say pollsters

While some Liberals expressed unease with Carney's rapid shift away from Trudeau-era policies—particularly on environmental priorities and Indigenous reconcil-

iation in favour of nation-building projects—pollsters say that rupture has been central to his government's success.

"It's pretty rare for a government that's been in power for 10 or 11 years to see its poll numbers go up and have four floor-crossers want to join them," said Dan Arnold, chief strategy officer for Pollara Strategic Insights, adding that Carney's ability to convince voters his mandate represents a genuine reset is historically unusual for a party entering its fourth term.

"I think Carney has been able to shed all the baggage that came with nine years of Liberals in

power," Arnold said, adding that much of that shift is as stylistic as it is political.

"Carney looks and sounds differently, he talks differently, and voters were looking for change," Arnold said. "He looks like change."

Pollara's March 10 survey suggests that perception has taken hold among a majority of Canadians, Arnold said, noting that 61 per cent of respondents said Carney's government has brought change, and 40 per cent said it feels like a first term rather than the Liberals' fourth.

However, as Carney heads into his sophomore year with "the

usual chaos and uncertainty that surrounds [U.S. President Donald] Trump," Arnold cautioned against complacency on the day-to-day domestic issues.

"Across the board, people like Carney's approach more, but when we ask whether things have gotten better or worse in the last year, on more issues than not, people feel things have gotten worse," Arnold said, pointing to the 55 per cent who said that Canada-U.S. trade relations and the cost of living have gotten worse since Carney became prime minister.

"Carney's not wearing that right now, but the new-government shine eventually wears off. Once he starts

to wear some of the problems facing people in their day-to-day lives, that's when the challenges will start to set in."

Abacus Data CEO David Coletto told *The Hill Times* that while Carney had initially benefitted from the public's lack of prior perceptions, "the more they've learned about him and gotten to know him, the more they've liked him."

Coletto added that the public—including former Liberal voters and many who didn't vote for the party—is "feeling pretty good about him being in that job, and the efforts that he's made to try to deal with a world that they feel has gone haywire."

"This feels more like the public reaction a year into a new government than the continuation of one that had been in power for almost 10 years," Coletto said, comparing it to the "first-year shine" enjoyed by then-prime ministers Stephen Harper and Trudeau.

"Carney is asking for Canadians' patience while doing big things, but he needs to continue to explain his thinking. Uncertainty and instability are the new normal, and while supporters are deferring to him, that only takes you so far. Reassurance is in high demand right now."

For Nik Nanos, chief data scientist for Nanos Research, the defining feature of Carney's first year in office has been his success in extending his appeal beyond the Liberal Party.

"What's clear is that Carney is attracting support from people that haven't voted Liberal in more than a decade," Nanos said. "If we're talking about a honeymoon, this wasn't a Liberal honeymoon, it was Carney's."

Pointing to his firm's most recent polling, Carney's preferred-prime-minister rating of 56 per cent is 12 points higher than the Liberals' national polling at 44 per cent. Meanwhile, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's (Battle River-Crowfoot, Alta.) personal numbers trail his party's by 10 points.

"That means there are people voting for opposition parties who think Carney is the best person to lead Canada," Nanos said, "and one third of Conservatives who don't think their leader is."

Part of Carney's advantage comes from a relentless "campaign-style" communications strategy, echoing a page from "Trump's playbook," in order to dominate the news cycle and crowd out his opposition rivals, Nanos said.

"Carney is perpetually in motion," Nanos said, pointing to the more than 26 foreign trips the prime minister has undertaken in his first year in office, and the slew of agreements and announcements that have accompanied each day of his travel itinerary.

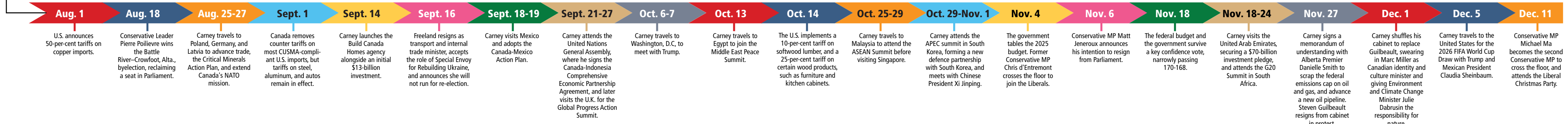
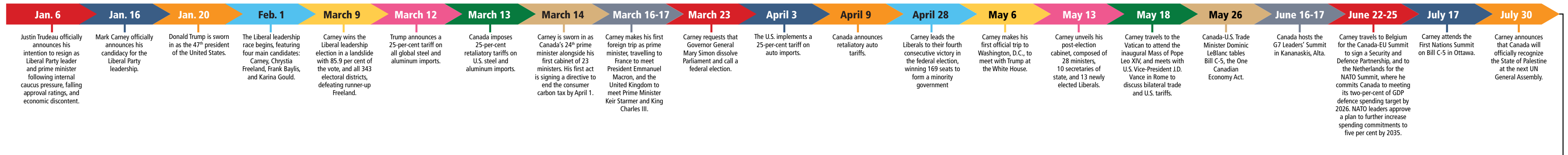
At the same time, Nanos said the prime minister's political fortunes remain closely tied to Trump and the geopolitical landscape, and that his first real test of his second year is already rapidly approaching.

"Carney's political destiny is tied to Trump in the short term, and he's currently in a bit of the sweet spot because the heavy free trade negotiations haven't started yet," Nanos said. "When those trade discussions start in earnest, that will be the real test."

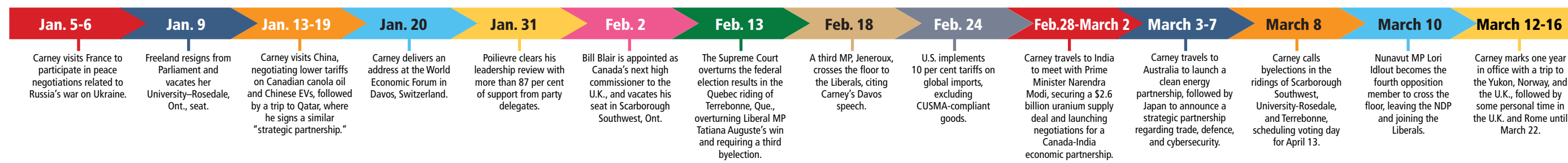
"For all the goodwill that Carney has enjoyed the last year, he still has to deliver," Nanos continued. "The big question is how long Canadians will be patient." *sbenson@hilltimes.com*  
*The Hill Times*

### A timeline of Prime Minister Mark Carney's first year

#### 2025



#### 2026



Newly elected Liberal Leader Mark Carney addresses party members after receiving more than 85 per cent support, and winning all 343 ridings on March 9, 2025. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

## NEWS

# Feds' plan to slash foreign ministry budget by 20 per cent 'ill-timed and short-sighted': observers

The latest departmental plans for Global Affairs Canada report a projected budget of \$7.22-billion in 2026-27, down from its forecasted budget of \$9.05-billion for 2025-26.

Continued from page 1

space" to meet "today's significant geopolitical demands," citing defence expenditures, major projects, and "other generational investments."

Former diplomat Roy Norton, who has served as Canada's chief of protocol, said the budget cuts threaten to enfeeble work on Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) priorities.

"These across-the-board, quasi-uniform cuts don't necessarily take into account what ... are declared government priorities," said Norton, who twice served as Canada's consul general in Chicago and Detroit.

"It seems to me there's a huge disconnect between ambition and equipment," he said. "Equipment being what it is we're equipping ourselves with to deliver on the prime minister's plans."

"The government's setting itself up—I fear—for the inability to deliver, and for the incitement of cynicism about talk not being followed by action," he said.

Carney has pushed for diversifying Canada's trade, with a target of increasing non-U.S. exports by 50 per cent.

"This is labour-intensive work in terms of the follow up," Norton said. "The diplomacy necessary to move things from verbalization to actualization is pretty labour intensive."

"Can that be achieved consonant with cuts of this magnitude? I'm skeptical," he said.

## GAC plans to cut more than 1,200 jobs

The plans noted that GAC would achieve the reductions through "refocusing Canada's international presence in the areas of advocacy and diplomacy," as well as "implementing targeted reforms across the trade and investment portfolio"; "aligning development, peace, and security programming with current strategic priorities"; and "finding efficiencies across Canada's mission network through a range of measures and cost-saving strategies."



Foreign affairs deputy minister David Morrison, pictured, is set to leave the department to become Prime Minister Mark Carney's senior diplomatic and international affairs adviser on March 23. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Former Canadian diplomat Roy Norton says there is a 'disconnect' between the prime minister's international ambition and the funding for the department that will implement it. *The Hill Times* file photograph



GAC faces a different future than the one proposed by then-foreign affairs minister Mélanie Joly in 2023 during a reform initiative. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The document signals a greater use of artificial intelligence (AI), including for assignment management, as well as translation and policy analysis. That includes advancing a renewed digital strategy to "help identify the appropriate use of AI tools and resources, and where further support or guidance is needed, with a view of making GAC and missions abroad more efficient."

Norton said that there are "probably" AI-related efficiencies to be pursued in the administration of the department, but remarked that counting on the technology to deliver significantly over the next three years is "optimistic."

The plans anticipate that spending will further decrease in 2027-28 to \$6.96-billion and \$6.55-billion in 2028-29.

By 2028-29, the department is expected to have cut 1,240 jobs. There were 13,185 full-time equivalents in 2024-25, which is

forecast to have jumped to 13,293 in 2025-26. The plans show an aim to reduce those positions to 12,647 in 2026-27, 12,199 in 2027-28, and 11,760 in 2028-29. That would shrink the department to its pre-COVID levels of employment.

At the same time, Carney pledged to send more Canadian diplomats abroad as part of the Liberal election platform in 2025.

University of Ottawa professor Roland Paris, director of the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, cautioned against the current plan.

"Mark Carney has prioritized deepening and expanding Canada's economic and security relationships around the world, in some cases with challenging partners. That strategy places a premium on effective and sustained diplomacy, which makes the planned cuts to Canada's foreign ministry seem both ill-timed and short-sighted," he said in an email.

"While his government is making important and necessary investments in defence, Canada will need far more than military tools to navigate the more complex world the prime minister himself has described," said Paris, who served as senior foreign policy adviser in then-prime minister Justin Trudeau's office.

The department's plan doesn't provide much detail about what specific areas will see the deepest cuts. Five core priorities of the department—international advocacy and diplomacy; trade and investment; development, peace, and security programming; help for Canadians abroad; and support for Canada's presence abroad—have been reduced to two broad ones: "advancing Canada's interests and addressing global challenges" and "assisting Canadians abroad and supporting Canada's overseas presence."

The plans project \$5.27-billion for the former, and \$1.52-billion for the latter in 2026-27.

## Cuts show Carney's view of foreign service: Rowswell

Former Canadian diplomat Ben Rowswell, now a consultant at Catalyze4, said that the projected cuts demonstrate how Carney feels about the foreign service.

"You have a prime minister coming to office who has more experience in international affairs than any in recent memory, and all signs are that he has really little time for Global Affairs Canada," Rowswell said.

He noted that the views that Carney espoused during his Jan. 20 Davos speech show his feeling about the department.

"When he says things like, 'We accept the world as it is,' Global Affairs Canada's mandate is to make the world better—not to accept it how it is," Rowswell said.

He said that Carney's support for the U.S. war in Iran is a reflection that he isn't taking advice from GAC.

"I doubt anyone in Global Affairs would have advised him to support such a reckless military action by the United States," he said.

But Rowswell said that the basis of building an alliance of middle powers does require a foreign ministry that is prepared to "think big" and "take big risks."

Rowswell said that there is a complaint that GAC has gotten too large, which has made it more risk averse due to the increased levels of approvals needed.

"It's become a large and quite slow-moving organization," he said. "It's a department in which it's very difficult to get big things done quickly, and, of course, this government is about getting big things done quickly."

He said that structure—combined with its institutional risk aversion—reduces its value to Carney's agenda.

Rowswell said that the cuts show the foreign ministry is at a different place than when then-foreign minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.) embarked on a transformation reform of the department in 2023.

He said that the department's work abroad needs to be prioritized over the work at headquarters.

"If we continue to cut the high-value activities of the department in favour of the lower-value activities—what happens in Ottawa—it shouldn't come as a surprise that we have a prime minister that starts to question the value of the department," he said.

He said when cuts happen, it has usually led to posts abroad being reduced, remarking that a foreign job costs around three times more than a post at headquarters.

"There have been repeated decisions to reduce our presence in the places in the world where international history is happening, and I think the chickens may be coming home to roost," said Rowswell, citing Canada's decision to shutter embassies in dangerous areas.

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## NEWS

# Rules to work: committee study on role of non-affiliated Senators finds no rule changes necessary

Non-affiliated Senator Marilou McPhedran says while the report is a small step forward in recognizing challenges faced, she's not optimistic about the 'minimalist' changes proposed.

Continued from page 1

been articulated more clearly, but the fact that there was not a single recommendation for a single [rule] change ... that's language to Senators that this is nice, but we don't have to do anything about it," non-affiliated Senator Marilou McPhedran (Manitoba) told *The Hill Times* in a recent interview.

The Senate Rules, Procedure, and Rights of Parliament Committee kicked off its study on the role of non-affiliated Senators in June 2024 on the heels of a package of rule reforms aimed at ensuring better equality among the different recognized groups that exist in today's modernized Senate. Its resulting report produced a set of best-practice recommendations.

The committee held eight meetings, hearing from 12 witnesses, before the 44<sup>th</sup> Parliament was prorogued at the start of 2025. Last fall, it agreed to carry over its work, with one further meeting held to hear from the new government representative, Senator Pierre Moreau (The Laurentides, Que.). The resulting report was tabled on Feb. 24.

The study focused on circumstances faced by Senators who remain non-affiliated, as opposed to Senators like Moreau who are non-affiliated as a result of the unique positions they hold, or newly appointed Senators who start out as non-affiliated.

There were five such Senators when the study began, but today there are two—McPhedran, and former Conservative Senator Patrick Brazeau (Repentigny, Que.)—with the other three having since joined Senate groups (one of whom is now retired).

McPhedran and, previously, now-Conservative Senator Mary Jane McCallum (Manitoba) had for years been particularly outspoken in raising concerns about what they saw as the unequal treatment and ability for non-affiliated Senators to participate in Chamber proceedings, describing themselves as "second-class" par-



The Senate Rules, Procedure, and Rights of Parliament Committee has tabled a set of best-practice recommendations that includes development of a formalized practice for communicating with non-affiliated Senators, but suggests no rule changes regarding their participation in proceedings. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

liamentarians forced to "beg for scraps" and walk "on eggshells" in dealings with recognized groups in order to participate in committees or debates.

McCallum, who was not available for an interview, joined the Conservative caucus last June.

McPhedran, McCallum, and Brazeau all testified as part of the study, and highlighted a range of challenges faced by non-affiliated Senators, who they said rely on the benevolence of recognized groups to have a seat on committees, or to be assured speaking time to make statements and tributes, or ask questions in the Chamber.

They also raised difficulties in receiving up-to-date, detailed information on the Senate's agenda—including upcoming motions and votes—as a result of not having representation at daily scroll meetings (at which the day's agenda is negotiated), and expressed the view that public bills sponsored by non-affiliated Senators advance more slowly. Other witnesses also noted that non-affiliated Senators lack access to the same level of human and financial resources given to recognized groups, which are allocated additional budgets.

The report's observations, however, note, among other things, that some of these frustrations are shared by affiliated Senators, given general time constraints.

"While all Senators have the same formal rights—including the ability to introduce public bills and participate in Question Period—individual expectations about the pace of legislative progress or opportunity to speak may not always align with the current realities of Senate practices," reads the report.

The report identified a number of areas with room for improvement, in particular when it comes to ensuring non-affiliated Senators have timely information about business of the day. "Many of the challenges identified by non-affiliated Senators stem from

communication practices rather than gaps in the Rules," it reads.

It concludes with six bullet points laying out "best practices," including one that highlights the Senate's ability to make future, specific procedural changes through a sessional order (which would stand until the end of the respective parliamentary session). Along with underscoring "the value of mentorship," and the belief that "groups and parties should accommodate non-affiliated Senators," the report "encourages" the Committee of Selection to further "explore a framework for allocating committee seats" that "could reserve a specified number" for affected parliamentarians.

It also "strongly recommends" the Senate's Chamber Operations and Procedure Office (COPO) work with the Government Representative Office (GRO) to develop "a formalized practice to ensure all Senators get 'timely, updated, complete, equal, and consistent information' on the Chamber's agenda, including last-minute changes—and that it be tabled with the committee for approval. As well, it recommends the "possibility of providing additional procedural support" to help non-affiliated Senators in scheduling Chamber interventions be explored.

No timelines, however, are attached to these recommendations.

Progressive Senator Peter Harder (Ontario), the Rules Committee chair, said the group found that non-affiliated Senators' ability to ask questions "was not disproportionate," and that the pace at which their public bills advance "was not identifiably slower." But he said it did find "gaps in the ability of a non-affiliated to have contemporaneous information" about Senate business—issues that "could not be appropriately addressed in rule changes, as such."

"The committee's recommendations, I think, will lead to not only a recognition of the best practices, but in a sense being held to

account to deliver on those," said Harder. "We take this seriously, and it's a set of best practices and changes to our processes that the committee will follow up on."

Harder said that while the report doesn't require adoption in the Senate, he rose to speak to it on March 10 to "draw everybody's attention," and noted he saw "Senators who are involved in scroll [meetings] were agreeing with the nodding of their heads that this is on their agenda."

Harder said he's not aware of talk of any specific sessional order for this Parliament, but said the committee wanted to flag that "tool should there be a large number of non-affiliated in the future."

"For the first time, we've articulated what are the best practices, and that would give a non-affiliated Senator a template through which to judge whether or not they feel that they are being dealt with appropriately in the Chamber. But again, we're talking about a very up-and-down level of non-affiliated Senators," he added.

McPhedran, however, was notably less enthused about the prospect of future improvements.

"If this report helps to inspire those who could have done this years ago ... to take some action now, that's great. But it is one hand clapping," she said.

Asked about the specific recommendation for the COPO and GRO to develop formalized communication practices to better keep non-affiliated Senators in the loop on the Chamber's agenda, McPhedran said "certainly it's a positive step forward—if the step is taken." She noted she's long had a designated staffer in her office focused on such communications, "who's on the phone and on email begging the GRO to follow through on what they said they would do" previously in terms of keeping non-affiliated Senators informed.

"I've spoken to them so many times [about this issue]. I've had occasions where I arrive, I get scrolls at like 12:30 [p.m.] and I find out that someone that I know well, [that] there are going to be tributes [to them], and then so I scramble" and end up last on the speaking list, "and often they don't even get to me," she said.

"It's a minimalist report. It's nicely worded. It articulates—if they were ever accepted—practices [that], certainly if they became rules, that would help," said McPhedran, but overall she sees it as a lost opportunity to make enduring changes to ensure the substantive equality of non-affiliated Senators.

ISG Senator Raymonde Saint-Germain (De la Vallière, Que.), a member of the committee, said the study made clear that non-affiliated Senators have "the same equality as affiliated Senators

with regard to legislation, tabling amendments to bills, speaking to bills, tabling their own Senate public bills," and that there is no breach of their parliamentary privilege.

"We were reassured on this important aspect. That said, we realized that the main issue was with their lack or inequality in access to information," but saw an "easy solution" in improving practices without needing to change Senate rules, she said.

Saint-Germain said she's happy with the recommendations produced, and feels it was a "fair study," adding that if non-affiliated Senators are given "advantages that don't come with the responsibilities that you have when you are a member of an affiliated group, when you are affiliated, it becomes unfair for the affiliated Senators."

"There's room for improvement for them first, but also for all Senators, and I have no doubt that the COPO team will care for this. There's a commitment from Senator Moreau, the government representative, and this will happen," she said.

Conservative Senator David Wells (Newfoundland and Labrador), also a committee member, said he advocated for the group not to recommend specific Senate rule changes, but instead lay out "best practices that would allow flexibility as we move forward," given the number of non-affiliated Senators has fluctuated over the years, "changing dynamics."

However, he said "full-throatedly" that "there's a willingness to ensure that everyone is treated fairly, that everyone gets a voice, that everyone can contribute within the systems that we have."

Echoing observations included in the report, Wells also said there's a trade off that comes with choosing to be non-affiliated, and that, regardless of affiliation, "the equality of all Senators individually is supreme" under current rules.

"The caucus system is a political system, but it is also a system that helps organize what we do," and there "are benefits to joining that system," he said.

McPhedran said that while she feels she's "paid a very steep" price, she chooses to remain non-affiliated—after previously being part of the Independent Senators Group—because "the culture of the groups is pressing so close to operating as caucuses, where the leaders issue a preference and everybody treats that as an order."

"I can't operate that way," she said, adding she sees it as part of the promise she made to be independent when she was appointed in 2016.

McPhedran said, in her view, there are some gaps in the committee's study, including a lack of consideration of non-affiliated Senators' decreased opportunities to travel as part of committees or associations.

By email, a Senate spokesperson said COPO "has taken note of the report and will" consider any subsequent Chamber discussion by Senators "carefully."

"COPO will take appropriate measures as directed by Senators," reads the email, which also outlines supports and resources already provided by the office.

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The Hill Times

# Canada deployed 30 consular specialists to countries bordering Iran: official

Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand has highlighted Canada's consular response in the days since the start of the war in Iran. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Diplomats have been sent to border towns in Turkey and Azerbaijan, but it remains a 'risk' for Canadians within Iran to travel to the border.

Continued from page 1

The scope of the deployment was revealed by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) consular official Sébastien Beaulieu, director general of the international emergency and travel advice bureau, when he appeared before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on March 12.

The SRDT is composed of diplomats who can quickly be sent to crisis regions to help Canadians in need.

"Our staff's presence at border crossings and transit points out of Iran and the region has enabled safe crossings out of Iran through Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkmenistan," he told the Senate committee. "SRDTs are also reinforcing missions in the region to meet clients at border crossings and airports as they make their way out of the region."

Beaulieu highlighted the limits of helping those in Iran, noting that deciding to venture to the border is a "very difficult decision."

"There is a risk to their security for moving to the border," he said,

but added: "Once they are at the border, they are very happy to be there."

"The situation in Iran for now is very difficult, and there are very limited elements that we can do in terms of physically supporting Canadians, other than giving them the information so that they can make an informed choice," he added.

Beaulieu confirmed to the committee that Italy remains Canada's protecting power in Iran, but remarked that it is "very limited" in what it can do. Canada closed its embassy in Tehran in 2012.

The SRDT are deployed within 24 to 48 hours after the onset of a consular crisis and work in two- to three-week deployments under the authority of an ambassador.

Beaulieu noted that Canada has diplomats in Van, Turkey, near the Iran border, as well as in Astara, Azerbaijan.

"We like to rotate them as the needs evolve, and either supplement or scale down, knowing that we remain responsive and are able to scale up again very rapidly," he said.

Yannick Lamonde, director of GAC's emergency operations division, noted that the diplomats aren't being deployed into "very dangerous situations," but remarked that "there are risks where we operate."

"Ultimately, we're not, for instance, sending SRDTs inside Iran because it's too dangerous," he said.

As of March 8, there were more than 3,000 Canadians in Iran who were registered with GAC. There were 440 who were seeking assistance, and 220 seeking assistance to leave the country.



GAC consular official Sébastien Beaulieu says there are 'very limited' options for supporting Canadians within Iran. Screenshot courtesy of SenVu

GAC said that it wasn't aware of any Canadians who have been killed or injured due to the war in Iran, as of March 13.

## SRDT an 'immeasurably helpful' consular tool: former official

Former Canadian diplomat Patricia Fortier, who was an assistant deputy minister for security, consular, and emergency management, told *The Hill Times* that deploying 30 members of SRDT is a "large" unit.

She said the SRDT would be working to connect with those who are trying to make their way to the border.

"But obviously we would have no in-country way of helping them aside from telling them

what we know, [and] what we pick up," she said.

She called the SRDT a "fantastic resource" who "know what they're looking for."

"They were immeasurably helpful because they were on the ground. They saw the conditions. They were talking, not only to the embassy, but other embassies [and] government officials on the ground," Fortier said.

The diplomats in the SRDT are trained and put on the roster, but have other day jobs back at headquarters.

"You have to be pretty creative, be able to think on your feet, have judgement, and to know how things work," she said. "They keep very close touch with the emergency management people in Ottawa."

Back in Ottawa, there is an emergency watch and response centre. At its peak, it was fielding 1,400 calls per day. But that has dropped to 400 a day, as of March 12, according to the department. The centre has been staffed by three shifts of 50 personnel per day. Those calls aren't just from Canadians in the region, but also from families in Canada, Beaulieu said.

Beaulieu said that the centre is staffed by GAC personnel in addition to or in lieu of their other duties.

## Consular pressures

Canadian consular officials have had to weather a series of responses where Canadians have been stuck already this year, including situations erupting in Mexico, Cuba, and Venezuela.

Beaulieu said GAC has the capacity to deal with the emergency issues simultaneously.

"I can reassure you that we do have the capacity to respond to a number of crises. As we say, we prepare ourselves for a polycrisis or perma-crisis world," he told the Senate in French.

Fortier agreed that consular officials can deal with crises erupting at the same time, but issues arise if a protracted response is required.

"People do get tired. That's why you have rotations of the rapid deployment teams. It's hard, focused, stressful work," she said. "And it's not exactly 9-to-5."

The 24-hour nature of consular work also means it can be expensive to do, Fortier said. Diplomats work around the clock, including over the weekends.

That financial strain happens as GAC is in the middle of extensive budget cuts.

Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand (Oakville East, Ont.) has highlighted that flights out of the Middle East will be on a "cost-recovery basis."

Beaulieu explained to the Senate committee that would mean Canadians are expected to pay for their seat on a commercial or charter flight at a commercially equivalent price.

But he said that people who can't pay won't be turned away.

"Ultimately, nobody gets turned down from our services. We do ultimately have an undertaking to repay where that is signed off by the client, and we do the recovery later," he said.

Fortier said that even if Canadians are paying for their seat on a charter flight, there usually will be empty seats, meaning the costs won't be fully recovered.

When Senators asked about the budget cuts affecting consular work, Beaulieu said that fiscal pressure is being felt across the department and across the federal government.

"We are able and have put forward plans to continue to respond by updating and upgrading our processes, our ways of working, [and] the use of technology," he said.

Fortier noted that consular work is "deeply personal," and not something that can be replaced by artificial intelligence.

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*The Hill Times*

## NEWS

# Carney starts the ‘churn clock,’ with half of the bureaucracy’s top civil servants in new roles

More than 54 per cent of the Carney government’s 52 top bureaucrats are in new roles, with 22 government bodies under new direction thanks to the December 2025 and March shuffles, and only a few departments under Trudeau-era leaders.

Continued from page 1

28 people to new posts, including 18 deputy ministers, seven to the PCO, and four new presidents or commissioners, bringing 22 government bodies under new direction. And, more than 40 per cent of the 75 broader leadership roles are new since June 2025 when including associate deputy ministers.

With a fresh slate of leaders, the upper ranks should now settle in for a period of stability, said David McLaughlin, a former chief of staff to then-prime minister Brian Mulroney and a former high-ranking public servant.

The high-profile double-barrelled shuffles follow more than a year of upheaval, including an election, a new prime minister, a new cabinet, a fresh PCO clerk, and a budget that projects a reversal in employee population after years of expansion.

“Carney hasn’t changed everybody, but in two years ... almost everybody has been changed,” McLaughlin said. “He’s basically remade the Privy Council Office, too,” with Isabelle Mondou fresh to the deputy clerk role, as well as several new faces in deputy secretary posts.

“That is Carney and Sabia putting their joint stamp on the complexion of the government,” said McLaughlin.

One of Carney’s most notable PCO moves was tapping longtime Global Affairs Deputy Minister David Morrison to be his new senior diplomatic and international affairs adviser. Morrison is returning as G7 sherpa, and will also be the G20 sherpa. Replacing Morrison at Global Affairs Canada (GAC) is Arun Thangaraj, who will return to GAC from Transport where he’s been serving as deputy minister. This month’s shuffle largely focused on foreign affairs, bringing in



Prime Minister Mark Carney, pictured, and Privy Council Clerk Michael Sabia have assembled their public service team by installing new deputy ministers in a broad swath of roles. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Glenn Purves from BlackRock Investment Institute, an international investment firm, to serve as the new deputy minister of international trade. He takes the job of Rob Stewart, who was tapped to run Carney’s new Financial Crimes Agency.

A deputy minister shuffle is perhaps not as headline-catching as a cabinet shakeup, but is nonetheless significant to the inner workings of government. It’s common following an election, or the naming of a new PCO clerk, who is the top federal bureaucrat and one of the key advisers to the prime minister. It also starts what McLaughlin refers to as the “churn clock,” or the amount of time a deputy holds their role before the deck is shuffled again.

“If the public service is going to reclaim its authority in terms of providing fearless advice, it needs to have knowledgeable experts as deputies,” he told *The Hill Times*. “You cannot provide fearless advice if your deputy is a travelling tourist, just going through.”

Such roving deputies “don’t have the same level of expertise on the files, in terms of advising the minister, and bringing forward that advice in a way that works,” he said.

“If you start moving people out and around after two years, three years, you start the churn clock all over again. And that’s an issue—too much churn in the system.”

He noted a 2010 report from the Prime Minister’s Advisory Committee on the Public Service,

which recommended deputy ministers stay in their roles for at least three to five years.

McLaughlin analyzed data from the 2015 election until mid-2024, and found then-prime minister Justin Trudeau had shuffled his deputy minister deck more than 98 times, or about 10 times per year.

Like Carney, Trudeau’s first big changes came in a one-two punch, with his first announcement on March 2, 2016, and another six days later. Spanning those two shuffles, 11 bureaucrats were installed in new positions.

At the time, the *Ottawa Citizen* characterized the shuffles as the fresh-faced Trudeau government’s manifestation of a “promise to restore the respect of Canada’s public service” by bringing in “new, young blood.” The shuffles happened shortly after Trudeau tapped Michael Wernick as PCO clerk, and approximately five months after Trudeau was first elected.

“The Liberals have been big promoters of encouraging millennials into the public service and grooming a new generation of leaders. One senior bureaucrat said the wave of retirements should leave ‘lots of room to promote and renew,’” the *Ottawa Citizen* reported at the time.

McLaughlin’s analysis, published in the *Globe and Mail* in 2024, saw considerable churn during the Trudeau years, including in intergovernmental relations, Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), the Treasury Board Secre-

tariat, Public Safety, and Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). He found they each had five deputy ministers under Trudeau. Then, four of those government bodies were again given new top bosses by Carney, with Alison O’Leary named the PCO’s deputy minister of intergovernmental affairs, Greg Orensak shuffled to run Natural Resources, Mollie Johnson as deputy minister of ECCC, and Ted Gallivan tapped to lead IRCC.

McLaughlin noted the immigration file has become “a huge political issue” that the opposition Conservatives have latched onto, and that, in part, could explain the high level of churn in the top ranks.

“It would be political and public service malpractice for the prime minister and the clerk not to pay attention and say, ‘Look, we need a strong-performing deputy in the immigration portfolio, because the issues there are not going away,’” he said.

A deputy who has staying power can bridge the gap in advising multiple ministers, and “bring order and discipline to the immigration system,” McLaughlin said.

Harpreet Kochhar was named deputy minister of IRCC in 2024, moving from his prior role as president of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. In Carney’s most recent shuffle, Kochhar returned to Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Gallivan was named as Kochhar’s successor at IRCC, coming from a background at the Canada Border Services

Agency and, most recently, interim deputy national security and intelligence adviser to the prime minister.

Bob Hamilton, commissioner of the Canada Revenue Agency, is among the longest-serving leaders in the public service, having held the position since 2016, though his retirement was recently announced. Data from the PCO shows Erin O’Gorman, president of the Canada Border Services Agency, is also one of the few long-tenured top bosses, named to the job in summer 2022. Caroline Xavier, head of the Communications Security Exchange, is also one of the leaders who has been in her current role for several years. She’s also had that role since summer 2022.

Since 2023, Public Services and Procurement has been run by Arianne Reza; Crown-Indigenous and Northern Affairs has been run by Valerie Gideon; and Employment and Social Development is led by Paul Thompson.

And, since 2024, Innovation, Science, and Economic Development has been led by Phil Jennings; Treasury Board has been in the hands of Bill Matthews; Agriculture and Agri-Food has Lawrence Hanson as deputy minister; Public Safety has been led by Tricia Geddes; and Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities has Paul Halucha as top boss. Most other departments have fresh hands on the wheel.

Daniel Quan-Watson is a retired public servant who held deputy minister and associate deputy minister roles in multiple departments. He said even an experienced deputy faces a learning curve in a new role, and the dust hasn’t yet settled from the most recent shuffle.

“It’s a huge thing for a department to adapt to a new deputy,” Quan-Watson said. “Even as an experienced deputy, it’s a transition.”

Unlike cabinet ministers, deputy ministers aren’t given a mandate letter with marching orders: instead, their priorities are communicated via conversations with the clerk and the Prime Minister’s Office. They also face pressure from their direct reports, who are eager to get face-time with a new deputy and advocate for their files.

“If you find the deputy minister who’s suddenly speeding up delivery processes, or who’s focusing in a particular area, there’s a really good chance that that comes from the marching orders that they got when they were told about their appointment,” Quan-Watson said.

Quan-Watson said Carney’s cabinet shuffles are “intended to be foundational for the future of the government,” and that differs from other shuffles, which are mostly addressing retirements and attrition, changing the public service’s leadership drip by drip.

Following the large shuffles, “I think there is a sense now that people have a clear understanding of the way in which this government wants to operate,” Quan-Watson said. “And so I suspect these appointments reflect those things.”

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The Hill Times

Critics tend to frame diversity initiatives as preferential treatment. Yet, historically, the real preference systems have often been informal, writes Akolisa Ufodike. Pexels photograph by Mikhail Nilov



# Merit, equity, and the Canadian talent question

The question is not whether standards should remain high, but whether the systems used to recognize merit are broad enough to capture the full range of available talent.

Akolisa Ufodike



Opinion

The recent decision by the University of Alberta to step back from what critics have described as “race-centric hiring” has reignited a familiar argument: that efforts to broaden representation come at the expense of merit. The claim is politically convenient and rhetorically powerful. But it rests on a misunderstanding of how hiring systems actually work, and the implications extend well beyond one provincially governed university.

A *National Post* column responding to the decision presents the issue in precisely those

terms. It assumes that giving consideration to historically under-represented candidates must mean lowering standards.

That assumption does not survive careful examination and is not grounded in facts.

While universities fall under provincial jurisdiction, the same questions about hiring systems, access to opportunity, and the definition of merit are deeply relevant to federal institutions. The federal government is the country’s largest employer. It shapes labour markets through immigration policy, research funding, procurement rules, and legislation such as the Employment Equity Act, which seeks to ensure that federally regulated employers remove systemic barriers facing groups historically excluded from opportunity.

If the public conversation around diversity and merit rests on flawed premises, federal policy risks reinforcing those same distortions.

The University of Alberta case illustrates the problem. The policy under debate did not instruct departments to hire unqualified candidates. In practice, such policies function primarily as tiebreakers when candidates are comparably qualified. Their purpose is to counterbalance a quieter but long-standing feature of professional life: informal networks, sponsorship, and familiarity that often determine who receives opportunities in the first place.

Critics tend to frame diversity initiatives as preferential treatment. Yet, historically, the real preference systems have often been informal; referrals from trusted colleagues, alumni networks, or professional circles that reproduce themselves over time.

In that sense, the debate is less about merit than about how merit is recognized.

The federal government has confronted a related question in its own workforce. For several years, Black public servants pursued a proposed class-action lawsuit alleging systemic anti-Black discrimination in hiring and promotion across the federal public service and the Canadian Armed Forces. The case of Nicholas Marcus Thompson et al. v. His Majesty the King sought damages of \$2.5-billion, and attracted national attention.

In March 2025, the Federal Court of Canada dismissed the claim, concluding that it could not proceed in its proposed form.

Yet the dismissal did not end the underlying debate. Advocacy groups involved in the case noted that the federal government had spent roughly \$15-million contesting the lawsuit rather than settling it, a decision that itself drew criticism from current and former employees who argued the concerns deserved closer examination.

Whatever one’s view of the litigation, the episode highlights a broader reality: concerns about hiring barriers are not confined to

universities or provincial governments. They exist within federal institutions, as well.

And this matters because Canada increasingly faces a talent-utilization problem.

For decades, the country has relied on immigration to strengthen its workforce. Ottawa actively recruits highly educated professionals from around the world. Yet many of those professionals encounter persistent barriers to entering or advancing within their fields. At the same time, employers frequently report labour shortages.

This contradiction raises a reasonable question: whether Canada’s systems for identifying and evaluating talent are consistently working as intended.

Diversity initiatives were originally designed to address that gap. But, over time, the term itself has become politically loaded, often misunderstood as a program designed to replace merit rather than reinforce it.

In reality, diversity policies are not meant to guarantee outcomes. They are meant to widen the field of consideration so that qualified candidates who might otherwise remain invisible are seen.

Equally important is what diversity is not.

It is not a system requiring the hiring of unqualified applicants.

It is not an abandonment of standards.

And it does not eliminate competition.

If anything, racialized professionals often face the opposite dynamic. In contrast to non-racialized Canadians, immigrants and racialized Canadians typically have far less access to the informal networks that provide mentorship, sponsorship, and patronage opportunities. The result, shown consistently in labour-market outcomes, is that they often must present stronger credentials simply to reach the same stage of consideration. Social capital can give some professionals room to “fail upwards,” but that cushion is not evenly available: immigrants and racialized Canadians are more often penalized for missteps than protected from them. That is precisely why it is inaccurate to suggest the purpose of diversity, equity, and inclusion is to let racialized candidates “fail upwards.”

In many sectors, this leads to a familiar pattern: highly qualified professionals who remain under-represented in senior leadership roles not because talent is absent, but because pathways to advancement remain uneven.

In my own research on governance and diversity, I describe this pattern using what I call the PESTS framework—five common rationales used to resist inclusion initiatives: public-interest arguments, equity skepticism, supply-side claims, temporal delay, and spatial deflection. Each presents itself as a neutral concern about standards or timing, yet collectively they tend to preserve existing systems even when evidence suggests qualified talent is being overlooked.

This is precisely why the debate over merit and diversity cannot be reduced to ideology.

Canada’s productivity challenge is increasingly tied to how effectively institutions use the talent already present in the country. When qualified professionals remain underutilized, the costs appear elsewhere; slower innovation, labour shortages, and weaker institutional legitimacy.

For federal policymakers, the lesson is straightforward.

The question is not whether standards should remain high. Of course they should. The question is whether the systems used to recognize merit are broad enough to capture the full range of available talent.

The University of Alberta debate has become a flashpoint because it touches a deeper anxiety about fairness. But framing diversity as the enemy of merit does little to resolve that concern. It simply assumes the existing system is already neutral.

Experience suggests otherwise.

If Canada wants institutions that are both excellent and credible, the goal should not be to abandon efforts to broaden opportunity. It should be to design hiring systems that ensure merit is actually visible.

That is not social engineering. It is sound governance.

*Dr. Akolisa (Ako) Ufodike is an associate professor at York University, and a former Alberta deputy minister of trade, immigration, and multiculturalism.*

*The Hill Times*

# Party Central



By Stuart Benson

## The 'Mark' of the Irish and International Women's Week on the Hill

Ireland's Ambassador John Concannon hosted his first St. Patrick's Day party at his official residence on March 11, smack dab in the middle of a full schedule of International Women's Week celebrations.

**Party Central** made an International Women's Week pit stop at the Irish ambassador's pre-St. Patrick's Day House Party alongside more than 100 parliamentarians, diplomats, members of Ottawa's Irish community—as well as those who wish they were—and County Mayo's very own, Prime Minister **Mark Carney**.

On March 11, Ireland's Ambassador to Canada **John Concannon** and his wife, **Mary**, hosted their first blow-out St. Patrick's Day festivities at the official residence in Rockcliffe Park since taking on the role in October 2024.

Carney was officially sworn in four days before St. Pat's last year, so these festivities also marked his first official appearance at Concannon's place since either of them took office, though one of his first major acts as prime minister was to attend Montreal's 2025 St. Patrick's Day parade with the ambassador.

To help welcome Carney and his wife, **Diana Fox Carney**, to his not-so-humble, multi-winged abode, Concannon called in Ireland's Minister of Social Protection **Dara Calleary** all the way from his home county of Mayo, with County Council Cathaoirleach **Seán Carey** tagging along for good measure, to remind the prime minister of his Irish roots—which include three out of four grandparents who were born there.

During his speech, Carney drew on his heritage—both genealogical and cultural—with several references to Irish poets like **W.B. Yeats** and **John O'Donohue**, the latter of whom had his poetry recited that night by **Mary Concannon** and a class of Mayo elementary school children via pre-recorded video message wishing "Prime Minister Mark" a happy St. Patrick's Day.

Carney also flexed his Gaelic muscle, including his rhetorical flourishes with the Irish tradition of *meitheal*—community co-operation for harvesting and home con-

struction—and his welcome to the gathered *daoine onóracha* (honourable people).

Alongside the Irish humour and culture, Carney also reflected on his own search for his roots, including his discovery of a birth certificate for his great-grandfather and a faded baptismal record.

As he spoke about the "X" marking the place where his grandfather's name should be, Carney held back a rare display of emotion as he recalled "the absence [and] presence" of that other mark across an ocean of time and saltwater, standing as "witness and affirmation" of not just his grandfather's struggles, but also the story of Ireland as a whole, and the people who had to search elsewhere, whether by choice or not, for greener pastures—with a statistically high portion of them landing in and around the Ottawa valley.

"What happens to a child like that, my grandfather, is he grows up a bit, takes a look around and says, 'I'm out of here,'" Carney said, allowing the laugh line to deflate the emotional tension.

For those of you who are curious, **Party Central** inquired with the ambassador over the implication of the X, who explained that it was the common mark for those without the ability to leave their own name.

As for when Carney will accept the current Taoiseach **Micheál Martin's** offer of a state visit, the prime minister confirmed a trip is in the works this year, but didn't provide a specific date for his prodigal return.

Speaking of humour, "Minister for Ireland" Liberal MP **James Maloney** was also on hand as the main man who brought Irish Heritage Month in Canada to fruition, and the guy who probably knew nearly everyone in the room on a first-name basis—though he prefers calling Concannon by his good-natured new moniker: "The Irish Tasmanian Devil." As usual, Algonquin Elder **Claudette Commanda's** pre-land acknowledgment comedy stylings managed to steal the show for a moment, particularly her digression on the similarities between the Irish Leprechaun and the Pagwadjinini of Anishinaabe folklore.

Once the speeches were complete, guests were also treated to a performance of The High King's *Parting Glass* by Ottawa's Rose of Tralee Róisín choir, featuring the 2025 Rose, **Aidan Russell**, and her predecessors, **Claire Conway**, **Laura Hay**, **Sarah Thorenton**, and  **Aoife McDonald**. There was also a touching tribute performance by the **Sue Fay Healy** School of Irish Dance, which is this year without its namesake after Healy died last June at the age of 67.

Continued on page 21



*The Hill Times* photographs by Stuart Benson

**1.** Prime Minister Mark Carney, right, joins Irish Ambassador John Concannon, centre, and Ireland's Minister of Social Protection Dana Calleary and hundreds of other parliamentarians, diplomats and Ottawa's Irish Community at the Emerald Ilse's official residence of the annual St. Patrick's Day house party. **2.** Concannon, right, welcomes Carney, left, Ireland's Minister of Social Protection Dara Calleary, and Ottawa's Irish community to his St. Patrick's Day House Party on March 11. **3.** As reminders of the prime minister's ancestral home county, the Carneys were also gifted a pair of wool blankets from Mayo's Foxford Mills, and a framed jersey from the county's Gaelic football team. **4.** Concannon, left, and Carney chat with guests after the performances. **5.** OpenText's CEO Tom Jenkins, right, signs a copy of his book *Shoebboxes: From Irish Roots to Canadian Branches* for Carney, Calleary, and any other guest looking to turn their free book into a collector's item. **6.** Whatever they may lack in brevity, Liberal MP James Maloney, top right, and Elder Claudette Commanda, bottom right, make up for it with hilarious wit.

# PARTY CENTRAL

Continued from page 20

With the night's programming complete, the guests dispersed, either to the smorgasbord of Irish cuisine in the opposite wing of the residence—complete with beef and carrot stew, baked baby potatoes, Scotch eggs, and so, so many different cheeses—or they headed off to one of many Guinness-draft stations to top up their pint and take another shot at “splitting the G.”

Among the crowd, **Party Central** spotted House Speaker **Francis Scarpaleggia**; cabinet ministers **Anita Anand** and **Marc Miller**; Liberal MPs **Kody Blois**, **Mona Fortier**, **Terry Sheehan**, and **Ahmed Hus-sen**; Ottawa Mayor **Mark Sutcliffe**, and Councillor **Theresa Kavanagh**; Assembly of First Nations National Chief **Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak**; National Arts Centre CEO **Annabelle Cloutier**; the National Gallery's **Serge Belet**; United Kingdom

High Commissioner **Rob Tinline**; Latvian Ambassador **Kaspars Ozoliņš**; Estonian Ambassador **Margus Rava**; French Ambassador **Michel Miraillet**; Danish Ambassador **Nikolaj Harris**; and Chinese Ambassador **Wang Di**.

As the guests filed out around 8 p.m., **Party Central** managed to sneak downstairs to the ambassadorial-afters in the basement rec room/library for some light banter and whiskey tasting.

Unfortunately, as there were multiple whiskeys requiring journalistic interrogation, and combined with the previous Guinnesses, **Party Central** wasn't able to make an Irish goodbye until nearly midnight. Suffice to say, this reporter was unable to make it to breakfast with the Women in Defence and Security the following morning, as effective a hangover cure as it would have been.



*The Hill Times* photographs by Stuart Benson

**1.** Maloney, left, and the Irish Embassy's Elisabeth O'Higgins, and Erin Hodkinson. **2.** Librarian and Archivist Leslie Weir, left, Barry McLoughlin, Laura Peck, Rev. Catherine Ascah, and the National Gallery's Serge Belet. **3.** Liberal MP Mona Fortier, left, British High Commissioner Rob Tinline, Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand, French Ambassador Michel Miraillet, and Danish Ambassador Nikolaj Harris. **4.** Caroline 'in the Capital' Philips, left, and comedian Mark Critch. **5.** Calleary, left, Maloney, and Carney. **6.** Claire Conway, left, Laura Hay, 2025 Ottawa Rose Aidan Russell, Sarah Thorenton, Aoife McDonald, and choir conductor Ellen MacIsaac.



## Conservative women talk politics, and Power Shift presents *Prime Minister*

While **Party Central** let the WIDS down, this reporter made sure to sit *his* butt down and listen earlier this week—alongside *The Hill Times*' **Marlo Glass**, **Samantha Wright Allen**, **Puran Guram**, and **Irma Guarneros**—at the Ottawa launch of *The Power Shift* series, and an exclusive screening of *Prime Minister*. The documentary follows New Zealand's **Jacinda Ardern** from her rise to leadership of the that country's Labour Party, winning her

first national election just before United States President **Donald Trump** did the first time, the Christchurch massacre, banning assault weapons, legalizing abortion, a random and deadly volcano eruption, and navigating her country through the COVID-19 pandemic culminating in New Zealand's own parliamentary “Freedom” occupation. It's great, and you should watch it.

After the screening, there was a panel discussion with Liberal MPs **Karina Gould**

and **Chi Nguyen**; former NDP national director **Anne McGrath**; and Amnesty International's **Ketty Nivyabandi**, moderated by *Power Shift* co-founders **Emily Feairs** and **Frédérique Tsai-Klassen**.

**Party Central** spotted several other big-name women in Canadian politics, but the more striking observation was the lack of any other men, except for a handful of gentlemen you could maybe count on two hands.

However, **Party Central** will now climb down from that tall horse to apologize to the Conservative Women in Politics (CWP) for missing their International Women's Week panel on March 9 in the Valour Building, featuring Conservative MPs **Raquel Dancho**, **Rachael Thomas**, and **Sandra Cobena**.

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*The Hill Times*



**1.** Liberal MP Chi Nguyen, left, Amnesty International Canada secretary general Ketty Nivyabandi, Anne McGrath, Liberal MP Karina Gould, and Frédérique Tsai-Klassen, founder of *Power Shift* and *The Iron Network*. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson **2.** *The Hill Times*' Irma Guarneros, left, Marlo Glass, Samantha Wright Allen, and Puran Guram. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson **3.** The Conservative Women in Politics' International Women's Week panel featuring CWP founder Jordan Weston, left, and Conservative MPs Raquel Dancho, second left, Sandra Cobena, and Rachael Thomas. *CWP* photograph by Jenisa Los **4.** Cobena, left, Thomas, and Dancho. *CWP* photograph by Jenisa Los **5.** Carolyn Paisley, left, Elise Wiebe, and Gail Dockstader. *CWP* photograph by Jenisa Los

# Hill Climbers



By Laura Ryckewaert

## Notable staff exits from Veterans Minister McKnight's office



Veterans Affairs and Associate Defence Minister Jill McKnight currently has a couple of key job openings in her office. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

the University of Saskatchewan (along with a master's degree from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv). Reaney was previously active with the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation, and has worked for the Saskatoon Open Door Society and Elections Saskatchewan, among other things.

All these changes leave McKnight with a nine-member staff team. Led by chief of staff **Dilys Fernandes**, the rest of the office currently includes: **Colin Lalonde**, director of parliamentary affairs; **Adam Rogers-Green**, director of communications; **Dana Shami**, policy adviser; **Nick Sushko**, West and North regional adviser; **Abina Mohanarajah**, Ontario regional adviser; **Daniel-Alejandro Pereira Rengifo**, Quebec and Atlantic regional adviser; and **Jacob Hiseman**, driver.

Meanwhile, over in Health Minister **Marjorie Michel's** office, there's a new hire to note: **Rebekah Cassidy**, who's been on the job as an Ontario regional adviser to the minister since Feb. 9.

Cassidy wrapped up an undergraduate degree at the University of Ottawa in 2024, and spent the last year working at Liberal Party headquarters, most recently as executive assistant to the party's national director, **Azam Ishmael**.

Previously, **Shanzae Khan** was a senior regional adviser for Ontario to Michel, but she was promoted to deputy director of operations late last year, as reported by **Hill Climbers**.

Also currently covering regional desks for the health minister's office are **Jaeda Schilke**, regional adviser for the West and North; **Mahamat Djatal**, regional adviser for Quebec; and **Josh Jagger**, senior regional adviser for the Atlantic.

**Yves-Joseph Rosalbert** is director of operations and outreach to Michel, and also currently oversees operations adviser **Sachini Liyanage**.

**Jade Mallette** continues as chief of staff to the minister. [tryckewaert@hilltimes.com](mailto:tryckewaert@hilltimes.com)  
*The Hill Times*

Plus, Health Minister Marjorie Michel has a new Ontario adviser on her team.

Call out to would-be and existing Liberal staffers looking for a new gig: Veterans Affairs and Associate Defence Minister **Jill McKnight** has some key staff positions to fill, with three staff exits among the recent changes to the minister's office lineup.

Among those who have departed from the minister's office since February are two directors: **Michael Hamm**, who led policy work for McKnight, and **Riya Khanna**, who oversaw operations.

Hamm had been working for McKnight since last summer, and exited in mid-February after a little more than six months on the job.

A former aide to Nova Scotia Liberal MP **Kody Blois**, Hamm previously worked for the Nova Scotia Liberal caucus and former government, and in 2024 ran for a

seat in the provincial legislature.

Khanna had marked her first day with McKnight's team on June 30, 2025, and officially became a former staffer to the minister as of Feb. 26, as per the post-employment status notice posted on the federal conflict of interest and ethics commissioner's website.

Khanna is now busy pursuing a master of business administration degree with Western University's Ivey Business School, as noted on her LinkedIn profile.

She'd been working in various offices on the Hill full time since 2022, including as an operations and outreach adviser in then-prime minister **Justin Trudeau's** office between 2023 and 2025. Khanna is also a past aide to now-Secretary of State for International Development **Randeep Sarai**, and a former special assistant with the Liberal research bureau.



Director of operations Riya Khanna has left Minister McKnight's team. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Also having taken her leave of McKnight's office in February is **Faith Ross**, who'd been executive assistant to the minister since July, and was hired fresh out of university after graduating with a bachelor's degree in political science and government from Carleton University last year.

On the other side of the ledger is **Lee Reaney's** early February hiring as an issues manager to McKnight.

Reaney spent the last almost two years as editor-in-chief of *Lviv Times*, an English-language Ukrainian lifestyle, culture, and news outlet launched in 2024, and until recently was also a senior editor with *The New Voice of Ukraine*, and a contributor to other outlets, including Turkey's TRT World, regarding wartime Ukraine.

Reaney is a former editor of *Lviv Today*, a past writer with *Lviv Post*, and a former reporter



Michael Hamm is no longer director of policy to Minister McKnight. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



Lee Reaney is a new issues manager to Minister McKnight. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

with *The Ukraine Business Journal* and *The Budapest Times*. Among many other past roles listed on his online CV, Reaney has also worked as a writer with the International Paralympic Committee, and has twice been a long-term observer with the International Republican Institute in both Ukraine in 2019 and Georgia in 2024.

He has roots in Saskatchewan, and holds a bachelor's degree in international studies from



Health Minister Marjorie Michel recently added a new Ontario adviser to her office. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



# 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.

## Health Minister Michel headlines Liberal fundraiser in Montreal on March 20



Health Minister Marjorie Michel will attend a fundraiser for the Judy LaMarsh fund, hosted by the National Women's Liberal Commission in Montreal on March 20. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

### WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18

**House Schedule**—The House of Commons is scheduled to sit for 117 days this year. Here's the schedule for 2026: it will sit Monday to Friday, Jan. 26-Feb. 13; Feb. 23-27; March 9-13; March 23-Thursday, March 26; April 13-May 8; May 25-June 19; Sept. 21-Oct. 9; Oct. 19-Nov. 6; and Nov. 16-Dec. 11.

**Bank of Canada Interest Rate Announcement**—The Bank of Canada will announce the new target for the overnight rate. Wednesday, March 18, at 9:45 a.m. ET. Details: [bankofcanada.ca](http://bankofcanada.ca).

**Book Launch: *Constitutional Challengers***—The University of Ottawa hosts the launch of a new book, *Constitutional Challengers*. Professor Adam Dodek and his team of researchers have collected 26 of the most significant cases and highlighted the people behind them, examining how they became entangled in the Canadian legal system. Wednesday, March 18 at 11:30 a.m. ET at the University of Ottawa, Fauteux Hall, 57 Louis Pasteur Priv., Ottawa. Details via Eventbrite.

**Pints and Politics with MP Wilkinson**—Liberal MP Jonathan Wilkinson and fellow Liberals in North Vancouver—Capilano will take part in a "Pints and Politics" event. Wednesday, March 18, at 6:30 p.m. PT at a location to be announced in Vancouver. Details: [liberal.ca](http://liberal.ca).

### THURSDAY, MARCH 19

**Global Healthcare Innovation Summit**—The Global Healthcare Innovation Summit brings together senior global decision-makers responsible for health-care strategy, public policy, investment, and system transformation to address the most-urgent challenges and transformative opportunities shaping the future of health care. Thursday, March 19 at 8 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St., Ottawa. Details via Eventbrite.

**Symposium: 'SAVE AS'**—The International Film Festival of Ottawa hosts "SAVE AS," a one-day symposium exploring the future of restoring,

preserving, distributing, and exhibiting heritage cinema with expert panels, case studies, screenings, and networking. Thursday, March 19, at 9:30 a.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details: [iffo.ca](http://iffo.ca).

**Minister Champagne to Attend Fundraiser**—Finance Minister François-Philippe Champagne will join candidate Dr. Danielle Martin for a fundraiser hosted by the University—Rosedale Federal Liberal Association. Thursday, March 19, at 5:30 p.m. ET at The National Club, 303 Bay St., Toronto. Details: [liberal.ca](http://liberal.ca).

**Madelaine Drohan to Discuss Her New Book**—The Canadian International Council hosts award-winning journalist and historian Madelaine Drohan who will talk about her new book, *He Did Not Conquer: Benjamin Franklin's Failure to Annex Canada*. Thursday, March 19, at 5:30 p.m. PT at Creekside Community Centre, 1 Athletes Way, Vancouver. Register: [theicc.org](http://theicc.org).

**Film: *Point of Order***—The International Film Festival of Ottawa will screen this landmark documentary. Emile de Antonio distills 188 hours of the 1954 Army-McCarthy hearings into a raw 97 minutes without narration or commentary. Thursday, March 19, at 8:30 p.m. ET at the Ottawa Art Gallery, 50 Mackenzie King Bridge. Details: [iffo.ca](http://iffo.ca).

**Minister Michel to Attend Fundraiser**—Health Minister Marjorie Michel will attend a fundraiser for the Judy LaMarsh fund, hosted by the National Women's Liberal Commission. Friday, March 20, at 5:30 p.m. ET at Chez Alexandre, 1454 Peel St., Montreal. Details: [liberal.ca](http://liberal.ca).

### SUNDAY, MARCH 22

**Film: *The Eyes of Ghana***—The International Film Festival of Ottawa will screen this 2025 documentary in which two-time Oscar winner Ben Proudfoot traces Ghanaian cameraman Chris Hesse's mission to preserve Kwame Nkrumah's 1960s political

footage amid upheaval. Executive producers: Barack and Michelle Obama. Sunday, March 22, at 2 p.m. ET at the Ottawa Art Gallery, 50 Mackenzie King Bridge. Details: [iffo.ca](http://iffo.ca).

### MONDAY, MARCH 23

**Saab CEO to Deliver Remarks**—President and CEO of Swedish defence and security company Saab AB Micael Johansson will take part in a conversation hosted by the Canadian Club of Ottawa. Swedish Ambassador to Canada Signe Burgstaller will give opening remarks. Monday, March 23, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St., Ottawa. Register: [canadianclubottawa.ca](http://canadianclubottawa.ca).

### TUESDAY, MARCH 24

**'A Preventative Approach to Targeted Violence and Hate'**—Senator Kristopher Wells and the Organization for the Prevention of Violence host "A Preventative Approach to Targeted Violence and Hate." Meet and network with professionals dedicated to addressing the crisis in youth violence and harm online, community safety, hate crime prevention, and countering violent extremism. Refreshments will be served. Tuesday, March 24, at 4:30 p.m. ET in the Senate Lounge, Senate of Canada Building, 2 Rideau St., Ottawa. Register via Eventbrite.

**Canada's Anti-Fentanyl Commissioner to Deliver Remarks**—Kevin Brosseau, commissioner of Canada's Fight Against Fentanyl, Privy Council Office, will take part in a panel discussion on opioids hosted by The Walrus Talks. Tuesday, March 24, at 7 p.m. ET at Isabel Bader Theatre, 93 Charles St. W., Toronto. Register: [thewalrus.ca](http://thewalrus.ca).

### WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25

**2026 Riddell Reception**—Liberal MP Karim Bardeesy, Conservative MP Melissa Lantsman, and former NDP chief of staff Jennifer Howard will take part in this year's Riddell Reception hosted by Carleton University. Students, political leaders and their staff,

government officials and others from the political spectrum will gather for a candid, respectful conversation about politics in Canada. Wednesday, March 25 at 5:30 p.m. at the National Arts Centre, 1 Elgin St., Ottawa. Register: [carleton.ca](http://carleton.ca).

**Lecture: 'Peace, Order, and Good Journalism (with a Side of Comedy)'**—Carleton University hosts the 2026 Kesterton Lecture featuring Stewart "Brittlestar" Reynolds who will speak on "Peace, Order, and Good Journalism (with a Side of Comedy)," exploring why journalism is needed more than ever, how algorithms shape what we see (and believe), and why getting your news from comedians on the internet (including him) is probably not the best idea. Wednesday, March 25, at 7 p.m. ET at Richcraft Hall, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Details: [events.carleton.ca](http://events.carleton.ca).

### THURSDAY, MARCH 26

**2026 Scorecard Reporting Event**—The Coalition for a Better Future and the University of Ottawa hosts the 2026 Scorecard Report, measuring Canada's progress toward long-term, inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Speakers include the Coalition's co-chairs Anne McLellan and Lisa Raitt; Catherine Blewett, ex-secretary to the Treasury Board and Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council; Justine Hendricks president and CEO, Farm Credit Canada; Stephen Lucas, former deputy health minister; and ex-Bank of Canada deputy governor Carolyn Wilkins. Thursday, March 26 at 8:30 a.m. ET at the Telfer School of Management, University of Ottawa. Register: [canadacoalition.ca](http://canadacoalition.ca).

**CRA Commissioner to Deliver Remarks**—Commissioner of the Canada Revenue Agency Bob Hamilton will deliver remarks at a lunch event hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Thursday, March 26, at 12 p.m. ET at the C.D. Howe Institute, 110 Yonge St., Suite 800, Toronto. Register: [cdhowe.org](http://cdhowe.org).

**Webinar: 'Restoring the Constitution's Economic Vision'**—The Macdonald-Laurier Institute hosts a virtual discussion on "Restoring the Economic Vision of Canada's Constitution." Based on three recent MLI papers on mutual recognition, property rights, and a new agency to facilitate internal trade, this event will help develop legislative drafting instructions to translate these ideas into actionable, ready-to-adopt policy. Thursday, March 26 at 2 p.m. ET happening online. Register via Eventbrite.

**Lecture with Environics Founder Michael Adams**—The Canadian International Council hosts the 2026 Macdonald Lecture featuring Michael Adams, president and founder of Environics Institute for Survey Research, who will explore the evolution and divergence of social values in Canada and the United States. Thursday, March 26, at 5:30 p.m. ET at the Munk School of Global Affairs, 1 Devonshire Place, Toronto. Details: [theicc.org](http://theicc.org).

**Politics at the Pub**—The Canadian International Council's National Capital Branch hosts "Politics at the Pub: Diplomacy with Authoritarian and Adversarial Regimes," featuring Pamela Isfeld, president of PAFSO, and former Canadian diplomats Christopher Shapardanov and James Trotter. Thursday, March 26, at 5:30 p.m. ET at The Bridge Public House, 1 Donald St., Ottawa. Register via Eventbrite.

### FRIDAY, MARCH 27

**Minister MacKinnon to Deliver Remarks**—Transport Minister Steven MacKinnon will deliver remarks on "Connecting Canada: The Trade Infrastructure Strategy to Power Canada's Economic Future" at a lunch event hosted by the Empire Club of Canada. Friday, March 27, at 11:30 a.m. ET at Arcadian Court, 401 Bay St., 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Toronto. Details: [empireclubofcanada.com](http://empireclubofcanada.com).

**David Suzuki at 90**—The Canadian Club Toronto hosts Dr. David Suzuki for a special luncheon celebrating his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and presenting him, alongside his wife Dr. Tara Cullis, with the Canadian Club Toronto Lifetime Achievement Award. Friday, March 27, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Royal York, 100 Front St. W., Toronto. Details: [canadianclub.org](http://canadianclub.org).

### FRIDAY, MARCH 27—SUNDAY, MARCH 29

**NDP National Convention**—New Democrats will gather in Winnipeg, Man., from Friday, March 27 to Sunday, March 29 for their National Convention where they will debate ideas, celebrate shared values, and help shape the future of their movement. Details: [convention.ndp.ca](http://convention.ndp.ca).

### SUNDAY, MARCH 29

**Ministers LeBlanc and Fraser to Attend Fundraiser**—Canada-U.S. Trade Minister Dominic LeBlanc and Justice Minister Sean Fraser will attend a party fundraiser hosted by the Central Nova Federal Liberal Association. Sunday, March 29, at 3 p.m. AT at Summer Street Industries, 72 Park St, New Glasgow, N.S.

**NDP Leadership Election Results**—The results of the election for the federal NDP's new leader will be announced today in Winnipeg.

### MONDAY, MARCH 30

**Ex-Senator Marc Gold to Deliver Remarks**—Former senator Marc Gold will deliver the 2026 Winter Eakin Lecture, titled "Two and a Half Cheers for a More Independent and Less Partisan Senate," hosted by McGill University. Monday, March 30, at 4 p.m. ET at the Faculty Club, 3450 rue McTavish, Montreal. Details: [mcgill.ca](http://mcgill.ca).

### TUESDAY, MARCH 31

**CEO of TC Energy to Deliver Remarks**—François Poirier, CEO of TC Energy, will take part in a conversation hosted by the Canadian Club of Ottawa. Tuesday, March 31, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St., Ottawa. Register: [canadianclubottawa.ca](http://canadianclubottawa.ca).

**Minister Joly to Attend Fundraiser**—Industry Minister Mélanie Joly and Liberal MP Tim Watchorn will attend a fundraising event hosted by the Federal Liberal Association of Les Pays-d'en-Haut. Tuesday, March 31 at 6 p.m. ET at Loiseau d'à Côté, 10 Filion Ave., Saint-Sauveur, Que. Details: [liberal.ca](http://liberal.ca).

**Bob Rae to Deliver Remarks**—Canada's former envoy to the United Nations Bob Rae will deliver remarks on "How the Light Gets in: Breaking Through the Shadows of an Orwellian World," hosted by the Balsillie School of International Affairs. Tuesday, March 31, at 7 p.m. ET at CIGI Auditorium, 67 Erb St. W., Waterloo, Ont. Details: [balsillieschool.ca](http://balsillieschool.ca).

### TUESDAY, APRIL 7

**Minister Anand to Deliver Remarks**—Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand will deliver remarks at an event hosted by the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. Tuesday, April 7, at 7:30 a.m. PT at the Fairmont Waterfront, 900 Canada Pl., Vancouver. Register: [boardoftrade.com](http://boardoftrade.com).

**Lecture: 'Rupture, Risk, & Creative Insecurity'**—The C.D. Howe Institute hosts the 2026 Sylvia Ostry Lecture: on the topic "Rupture, Risk, and Creative Insecurity: Is Canada Ready for a Strategic Shift?" Robert D. Atkinson, president of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, will discuss how Canada can leverage creative insecurity to strengthen its productivity, competitiveness, and global standing. Tuesday, April 7, at the C.D. Howe Institute, 110 Yonge St., Suite 800, Toronto. Register: [cdhowe.org](http://cdhowe.org).

### WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8

**Minister Anand to Deliver Remarks**—Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand will deliver remarks at an event hosted by the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. Wednesday, April 8, at 11:30 a.m. MT at the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre, 136 8 Ave. SE, Calgary. Register: [calgarychamber.com](http://calgarychamber.com).

### THURSDAY, APRIL 9—SATURDAY, APRIL 11

**Liberal National Convention**—The 2026 Liberal National Convention will take place from Thursday, April 9, to Saturday, April 11, in Montreal, featuring policy discussions, guest speakers, training sessions, and the election of the next national board of directors. Details: [liberal.ca](http://liberal.ca).

POLICY BRIEFING

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