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'This is an all-hands-on-deck moment in Canada'

One big lesson of the current crisis: government matters and public institutions matter

Global pandemic crisis brings strengths into focus: government, health care, diversity in Canada

Hill bureau chiefs weigh in on covering COVID-19 pandemic, the biggest story in the world



Health Minister Patty Hajdu, Treasury Board President Jean-Yves Duclos, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, Public Safety Minister Bill Blair, and Transport Minister Marc Garneau, pictured March 18, 2020, on the Hill delivering their daily briefing. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

News Prime minister

'Everybody's scared shitless': PM needs to cut red tape to stimulate economy, say political strategists

BY ABBAS RANA

While economies around the world face the possibility of a depression as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberals need to cut the bureaucratic red tape and start a basic income pilot program to give money directly to all Canadians for the duration of the crisis, say political strategists. "Everybody's scared shitless. This is a challenge that exceeds the normal re-

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News Alberta

'It's incredibly dire here': Alberta MPs navigating COVID-19 and oil crises

BY PETER MAZEREUW

"I'm not really one to panic," said Alberta MP Stephanie Kusie, speaking over the phone from her home, after closing her constituency office in Calgary Midnapore as the COVID-19 virus spreads across Canada. "I believe in preparation, but I don't believe in panicking." Still, the former Canadian diplomat-turned Conservative MP says she is taking a "day by day" approach to her job,

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News Politics

'The boundary of acceptable criticism just got a lot narrower': not doing politics in the time of COVID-19

BY NEIL MOSS

With the country mired in a health crisis the likes of which hasn't been seen in Canada in 100 years, federal opposition parties have been remarkably supportive of the Liberal government, with little appetite among the Canadian public for parties to score political points at this time. Since the severity of the crisis has become apparent, opposition leaders

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News Lobbying

COVID-19 is forcing lobbyists to significantly shift strategies

BY BEATRICE PAEZ & PALAK MANGAT

As the federal government ramps up its effort to control the pace of the coronavirus pandemic and stabilize the teetering economy, lobbyists say much of their focus has either pivoted to responding to the immediacy of the crisis, or giving officials the breathing room they need. "I just don't think there is lobbying during the coronavirus. I really think

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HEARD ON THE HILL

by Neil Moss

Parliamentary Press Gallery Dinner postponed until October



NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, left, is pictured dancing with now-Yahoo Finance reporter Shruti Shekar, CBC host Chris Hall, and David Akin of Global News at the 2018 Parliamentary Press Gallery Dinner. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Like many events around Parliament Hill, the night some call the “Nerd Prom” is being postponed until October.

The Parliamentary Press Gallery executive board announced last week that the event that brings together the press and federal politicians and staffers will not

take place on its originally scheduled date of May 2.

“If all normal functions resume by our next scheduled date, we would be pleased to welcome a large crowd at the Sir John A. Macdonald building on Saturday, October 24th, 2020,” the executive announced in an email to Press Gallery members.

The dinner in the past few years has taken place at the Canadian Museum of History, but it was decided earlier this year that it will be hosted on the Ottawa side of the National Capital Region at the Sir John A. Macdonald building, just across the street from Parliament’s West Block.

Last year, the night of food, drink, and political roasts was hosted by Global News’ **Mike Le Couteur** and *Le Devoir*’s **Marie Vastel**, who had some killer jokes at the expense of former NDP leader **Tom Mulcair**, among others. The dinner raised more than \$5,000 for the Canadian Association of Journalists’ CBC Indigenous Fellowship and brought together more than 500 scribes, politicians, staffers, and lobbyists.

‘Reckless and inappropriate’: MPs urge CBC to reinstate local TV news right now

MPs are calling on Canada’s public broadcaster to reverse its decision to halt local television news in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

CBC made the decision to scrap the majority of its local TV news coverage for the time being in order to focus its resources on its national news program, CBC National News. The broadcaster’s flagship political show, *Power and Politics*, is also being put on hiatus. The only local TV newscast that will continue is CBC North.



Liberal MP **Wayne Easter** wrote a letter to CBC president **Catherine Tait**, pictured, urging the CBC to reverse its decision to shut down local news coverage. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Liberal MP **Wayne Easter** wrote a letter to CBC president **Catherine Tait** saying that local news should be used to inform Canadians about the coronavirus crisis.

“In the height of an international health crisis that has compounding effects on the well-being of Canadians and the Canadian economy as a whole, it is reckless and inappropriate to remove local reporting,” wrote Mr. Easter, who represents Malpeque, P.E.I.

“This lack of understanding and focus as to the proper role of a public broadcaster is deeply concerning, and it brings into serious question the judgement of executives in times of crisis,” he wrote to Ms. Tait.

Fellow P.E.I. Liberal MP and Veterans Affairs Minister **Lawrence MacAulay** tweeted that he had spoken to Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** about the importance of local news for the province.

P.E.I. Premier **Dennis King** also said in a statement that the decision was “incredibly disappointing,” and said he would raise the issue with Deputy Prime Minister **Chrystia Freeland**. He also raised the issue with Mr. Trudeau.

Conservative MP **Peter Kent**, a former journalist who anchored Global News, echoed the Islanders.

“Never has local news, reported by local journalists, been more important. A terrible decision by CBC bureaucrats—gross misunderstanding of public broadcasting responsibility in a year of licence renewal,” he tweeted.

NDP MP Jack Harris diagnosed with cancer



Before he returned to Ottawa after winning his seat in the 2019 election, Jack Harris was an MP from 1987 to 1988 and from 2008 to 2015. *The Hill Times* file photograph

represents St. John’s East, N.L.

He said he will have to avoid participating in community events and making public appearances for “the next few weeks.”

NDP MP **Jack Harris** announced last week that he has been diagnosed with cancer after discovering a lump on his neck.

“I am fortunate that it was detected and diagnosed early, and the prognosis is good,” he said in a statement.

Mr. Harris defeated Liberal MP **Nick Whalen** in 2019, retuning to Ottawa where he previously served as an MP from 1987 to 1988 and from 2008 to 2015. He

Those undergoing cancer treatment often have weakened immune systems, and potentially are more vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus.

“During the COVID-19 emergency, we are all expected to practice ‘social distancing,’ which is a very important public health measure to contain the spread of the virus, and I will be under an enhanced regime, working from home to avoid infection and ensure continuity of the treatment plan,” Mr. Harris said.

Former health minister Philpott returns to the front lines



Jane Philpott, left, is working at Markham Stouffville Hospital’s COVID-19 assessment centre. *Photograph courtesy of Twitter/Jane Philpott*

Former federal health minister **Jane Philpott**, who is also a medical doctor, has donned a face mask and returned to a familiar workspace.

“Like 100s of other Canadian health professionals, I’ve returned [to] the front lines, to help the amazing team at the [Markham Stouffville Hospital] COVID assessment centre,” Dr. Philpott tweeted on March 19.

The former Liberal-turned-Independent MP was chief of the department of family medicine at the hospital from 2008 to 2014 before joining public life.

During her single term as an MP, Dr. Philpott was also the minister of Indigenous Services and the Treasury Board president.

Since being defeated in the 2019 election, she has served as a special health adviser for the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and is soon to become the dean of Queen’s University’s faculty of health sciences.

Globe and Mail leads the way with 19 National Newspaper Award nominations

The Globe and Mail is up for the most National Newspaper Awards, including for its coverage of the SNC-Lavalin affair.

Robert Fife, **Steven Chase**, **Sean Fine**, and **Daniel Leblanc** of the *Globe* have been nominated for the John Wesley Dafoe Award for best political reporting.



Robert Fife is one of four *Globe and Mail* journalists up for a best political reporting award for their coverage of the SNC-Lavalin affair. *The Hill Times* file photograph

A team from *The Globe and Mail* has also been nominated for the same award for its reporting on private entities that capitalize on election spending law loopholes.

Andrew Duffy of *The Ottawa Citizen* is up for best long feature for his report on the experience of passengers on board an OC Transpo bus that killed three after it crashed into an awning.

A team from *The Citizen* has also been nominated for best breaking news reporting for its coverage of the crash.

The Globe’s **Geoffrey York** and **Melissa Tait** both have been nominated for three awards: Ms. Tait for her coverage of the manhunt to capture two suspected killers who were on the run. Mr. York was nominated, as well as **Matthew McClearn** and **Stephanie Nolen**, for coverage of Export Development Canada’s lending policies, as well twice being nominated for best international reporting.

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Covid-19: the exit problem

Unless this particular coronavirus fails to cause a second wave of infections next winter—it isn't certain—we will probably be stuck in lockdown most of the time until an effective vaccine becomes widely available, probably no sooner than 18 months from now. August of 2021, let's say.



Gwynne Dyer

Global Affairs

LONDON, U.K.—Most of the countries in Asia, Europe, and North America are now in lockdown to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This is the “suppression” strategy, and it should keep the death rate from going exponential for a while. The unanswered question is: what do we do next?

There is no exit strategy. “This type of intensive intervention package [‘social distancing’ of the entire population, home isolation of COVID-19 cases, and household quarantine of their family members] will need to be maintained until a vaccine becomes available (potentially 18 months or more)—given that we predict that transmission will quickly rebound if interventions are relaxed.”

That's from the executive summary of the key Imperial College London report that on March 16 forced the British government to abandon its insane policy of letting the infections grow and hoping the population (or what was left of it) would achieve “herd immunity.”

The 30-strong Imperial College team estimated that an “unmitigated epidemic”—no closure of schools, shops, restaurants and bars, no household quarantines of suspected coronavirus cases and their families, no “social distancing”—would directly cause 510,000 deaths in the United Kingdom in the first wave of infections (now to July or August).

Infections would grow rapidly through March, and the demand for beds in intensive care units (ICUs) would exceed supply by the second week of April. At the peak of the first wave of infections in mid-May, demand for ICU beds would be 30 times greater than supply.

They did the same calculations for the United States, and concluded that 2.2 million Americans would die in the first wave of infections. (This number was instrumental in jolting the Trump administration out of its “deny, distract and downplay” strategy last weekend.) Such huge case loads would inevitably crash the health-care systems in both countries, causing further “secondary” losses of life.



The United States, as a whole, is still in ‘mitigation,’ because it takes a long time to turn a supertanker like Donald Trump all the way around, but New York and some other big American cities and states have already moved on to suppression. *Image courtesy of Needpix.com*

So the team moved on to consider the “mitigation” model. This concentrates on “flattening the curve” of infections, which would now peak in late June. Suspected cases of infection are confined to their homes and their families are also quarantined, schools are closed, over-70s are required to self-isolate—but shops, bars, restaurants, etc. stay open, and the economy staggers on more or less intact.

The mitigation policy's outcome is slightly better, but the peak case load is still so high that it crashes the health system. Total deaths in the first wave are reduced only by half: i.e., a quarter-million die in the United Kingdom, and a million in the United States. So the Imperial College team moved on to examine the third option: “suppression.”

Suppression, or “lockdown” if you prefer, drastically reduces human contact in order to reverse the rate at which infections are spreading. “Social distancing” applies to everyone, not just the over-70s, and almost all public venues except food shops and pharmacies are closed. It does

the job—after a few weeks, death rates drop sharply—but the economy also goes into decline: probably six per cent down or worse by the end of the year.

This is now the policy in most developed countries: mass death is no longer on the doorstep. The United States as a whole is still in “mitigation,” because it takes a long time to turn a supertanker like Donald Trump all the way around, but New York and some other big American cities and states have already moved on to suppression.

It has all happened very fast, and governments are just starting to realize that we will be in this mode for a long time. In fact, unless this particular coronavirus fails to cause a second wave of infections next winter—it isn't certain—we will probably be stuck in lockdown most of the time until an effective vaccine becomes widely available, probably no sooner than eighteen months from now. August of 2021, let's say.

In the meantime, the best we can hope for is a few breaks when new infections have fallen so low that the controls can be

“relaxed temporarily in relatively short time windows” for a month or two. But the virus will still be at large in the population, and we'll probably have to re-impose the controls as the number of infections starts to spike again.

Economically, it will be as big a hit as the Great Recession of 2008-9. Saving everything from shuttered shops, theatres, and restaurants to passenger-starved airlines from bankruptcy will be a huge challenge. Keeping their laid-off employees out of poverty will be just as hard. There will have to be mortgage and rent holidays and maybe ‘helicopter money’ (dropped from above by central banks).

But here's a silver lining, if you want one. In every country we have collectively decided, without even an argument, that we care more about the lives of our fellow-citizens than we do about the damned economy.

Gwynne Dyer's new book is ‘*Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy (and Work)*’.

The Hill Times

COVID-19



Imagine a health system in which a national pharmacy program was built because the federal, provincial and territorial governments continued their collaboration and skills to work well together. Imagine a new Indigenous health system built across jurisdictions, even blatantly ignored jurisdictions, because this is what is needed to address the health needs for the population, writes Rose LeMay. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

What the shutdown might mean for Indigenous policy

COVID-19 is the defining challenge of our generation, and we're only beginning to feel the effects. Here's my question: if it's the right thing to do now, why not continue the collaboration after we get through this crisis?



Rose LeMay

Stories, Myths, and Truths

OTTAWA—Anybody else waking up each morning, and dreading picking up your phone? What else has changed while we tried to sleep?

COVID-19 is the defining challenge of our generation, and we're only beginning to feel the effects. There will be health risks, economic loss, stock unpredictability, and the list goes on. As well, there will be the impacts of social isolation. Social distancing, or distant socializing, as some have termed it, may be the impactful learning for many as we realize just how important the daily interaction is for our mental health.

The shutdown of shops, restaurants, and businesses is necessary to protect our health system, elders and seniors. So we work from home, or we cope at home, or a mix of both. So many people are working or coping from home that the miraculous has occurred—the LRT is meeting demand!

But seriously, it's a crisis that is almost beyond description, due to its breadth of impact across so many aspects of policy and daily life. We don't even know

the breadth and depth of impact in any one sector, much less the combined impact across sectors. We are faced with the stark realization that everything is interconnected.

In times of such widespread challenge, we have a choice. We can work together, or we can compete for scarce resources. Look to the few essential federal government employees working together to see evidence of what is possible. Or look to the numerous Indigenous organizations combining forces to ensure the most effective communications possible to combat COVID-19, which is being done for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, to see what is possible.

In this week, we will see the sense of "community" fundamentally change from "my community" to include all of us. Barriers drop when we are faced with a shared enemy. The perceived differences between my community and your community drop. People work together at times like these, because it's the right thing to do. Canadians are already model-

ling this through the social media care-mongering groups. One can hope that political parties join the collaboration and drop the partisanship, and perhaps put the country ahead of the party? It's likely that instances of hyper-partisanship during this crisis will be remembered for long after this year.

Here is the question. If it's the right thing to do now, why not continue the collaboration after we get through this crisis?

Imagine a Parliament known for its cogent discussion and debate of ideas, in which Parliamentarians modelled how to agree and disagree with each other, and modelled respectful debate for our children?

Imagine a health system in which a national pharmacy program was built because the federal, provincial, and territorial governments continued their collaboration and skills to work well together.

Imagine a new Indigenous health system built across jurisdictions, even blatantly ignored jurisdictions, because this is what is needed to address the health

needs for the population. And it occurs with Inuit, Métis, and First Nations combining strengths with provinces and territories based on full collaboration?

Imagine what we could do together. It's all just a dream, says the naysayers. It's too much to think about at this time, says the resisters. Yes, this is a crisis unlike any we have endured in recent generations.

We will get through it by protecting each other, by reimagining community to include all of us. And we will be changed by it, we will learn from it. There are all sorts of measures for contagion and the curve. Let's also measure how contagious is community and collaboration. Be the carrier.

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

The Hill Times

Isolation is the new normal

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is getting an early shot at the new form of communication. Self-isolation has not prevented him from getting his message out.



Sheila Copps

Copps' Corner

OTTAWA—Social distancing to a politician is akin to a hand sanitizer ban for germaphobes.

Politicians thrive on contact with people. But in the new normal, public figures may have to learn to campaign in a germ-free bubble.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is getting an early shot at the new form of communication. Self-isolation has not prevented him from getting his message out.

His government's handling of the situation to date has the potential to enhance his political capital.

Daily press availability and the major national stimulus package could calm the growing fears of worried Canadians.

Trudeau's new beard has been graying quickly, given the nature of the stresses he must be feeling at his wife's side while she manages her infection. The graying has added a hint of gravitas to what is obviously a very grave situation.

I was a late comer to the panic room. But I could not responsibly ignore the appeal of Canada's foreign minister to get back home.

Last week, I was hoping to continue plans for a two-week anniversary cruise, but the request by the Canadian government to get back home could not be ignored.

My husband and I managed to get waitlisted on one of the last international flights still landing in Ottawa, and after travelling for two days, arrived to a ghost town last Tuesday.

It is worth mentioning that Canadian border officials appear a lot more prepared to manage this crisis than our American counterparts.

En route to Canada, we transited through two American airports, landing first in San Francisco and next in Washington.

In neither airport was there a single reference, verbal or written, to the coronavirus. We were not asked whether we had experienced a cough, or any symptoms.

Nor were we warned to self-isolate when we reached our final destination.

It was a totally different story when we arrived in Canada. We were questioned at the border about health symptoms and travel history, and then given an information sheet with all of the contact numbers for reporting any potential infection.

We were asked to undertake a voluntary 14-day self-isolation plan, and signed a form agreeing to do so.

The Canadian message is clear. In order to stem the flow of the virus, we all need to limit social contact as much as possible. But the same warnings do not seem to have made their way to some parts of the United States.

An American friend just underwent a mastectomy operation in Houston and she actually went out to celebrate the surgery at an Irish bar with her family on St. Patrick's Day. She seemed oblivious to the notion that her own health could be at risk by gathering in a bar.

Most Canadian bars and restaurants are closed but it seems to be business as usual in some parts of the United States.

An aggressive Canadian lockdown may limit the spread here, but the laissez-faire approach of some American states could have a negative rebound effect on our country. As of last Thursday, there were 736 confirmed cases of the coronavirus in Canada, while in the United States, the reported number of infections surpassed 11,000.

The difference in infection rate may be partially explained by the capacity of a

public health system to respond in a coordinated fashion. Many Americans have no health care, and they are obviously at risk when it comes to curbing the transmission curve.

China is now in recovery mode but, according to media reports, hospitals across the United States have been asking health professionals to reuse single-use masks.

Beaches in Florida are still packed with young people who appear to be generally ignoring the warning to stay home. And bars in New York are still operating, with state governor Andrew Cuomo stating publicly that he will not exercise his legal options to keep people home.

At home, the prime minister is considering all options, including the implementation of a War Measures Act to ensure compliance with social distancing requests.

The thought of spending months in isolation is not something anyone looks forward to.

Netflix has been bending under the weight of millions of downloaders. The strain on their system has been so great that they just eliminated high definition transmission in favour of preserving bandwidth. Being restricted in close quarters can also be a challenge for families.

Puzzles and games have been flying off store shelves, purchased by harried parents looking to keep their children busy.

Isolation is the new normal.

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

The Hill Times

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COVID-19



Canada's chief public health officer Theresa Tam, pictured at the National Press Theatre in Ottawa on March 16, 2020. She has to be the coolest, calmest, and most authoritative health official ever. Born in Hong Kong and educated in the U.K., she delivers the warnings in a way that is straightforward and non-threatening, writes Andrew Cardozo. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

A crisis brings strengths into focus: government, health care, the online work world, and diversity in Canada

Government can be a huge force for good—in fact, it's the only central force for some time to come.



Andrew Cardozo

New Communications

OTTAWA—Some things are becoming clear through the COVID-19 crisis. First, government can be a huge force for good—in fact, it's the only central force for some time to come. Second, we are very fortunate to have a strong health-care system, and it's a good thing we don't have a confusing, two-tier system. Third, governments can effectively help with income. Fourth, we are being kicked and dragged into the online world really fast—virtually and through remote work. Fifth, we have become a lot more hygienic. Sixth, it is clear that a good part of the success of our health-care system is our diversity—the women and men of various origins who make the system run so well come from a range of origins. Lastly, a strong public broadcaster makes a difference.

Almost no one is criticizing government for taking action on

several fronts. To the extent there is criticism, it is that the government is not doing enough or fast enough.

Whether it's health care, income support, business support, immigration or national security and diplomacy; it's government, government, government.

As the crisis started to unravel, we were seeing situations of Americans not going for tests as it could cost several hundred dollars for each person. Not so in Canada. Never. That's why we have a universal system and not a two-tier system, which some people so desire.

And even if you really don't care about your less fortunate fellow citizens, the prospect of potential carriers of the virus

not being diagnosed meant that they would continue to carry it and spread it around—to selfish people included.

Isn't it time we move to universal pharmacare so people who get the virus do not have to worry about paying for the drugs required? And the areas of public policy should include

the economy, employment, and income support, and we should be trying to provide a "basic income" for Canadians. Isn't it time we move our whole system to one of ensuring a basic income for all Canadians permanently?

Then there's working from home. It's the big new thing.

Working remotely, and managing remote workers is suddenly the norm.

Oh and hand washing. My unscientific observations over the years is that one-third of men do not wash their hands after, you know. Yes, ladies, sorry to reveal the dirty truth. I hear on the

female side of the ledger that figure is close to zero per cent. And those remaining two-thirds—only one-third uses soap. My male friends generally agree that these proportions are accurate.

Now we men are 100 per cent washing with soap, at least I hope. That is a huge and sudden progress.

But washing hands after washroom use is just one element of hygiene. We are likely to become a whole lot

more hygienic—although I hope not overly so, or we will lose any built-up immunities.

The diversity of our top health officials is suddenly evident. It seems there is no other area of expertise where so many women and men of various origins have risen to the top.

Dr. Theresa Tam has to be the coolest, calmest, and most author-

itative health official ever. Born in Hong Kong and educated in the U.K., she delivers the warnings in a way that is straightforward and non-threatening.

Her deputy is Dr. Howard Njoo, a veritable global citizen born in Europe and raised in Canada, of Chinese-Indonesian-Southeast Asian origin.

Dr. Horacio Arruda is director of public health of Quebec. Dr. Wajid Ahmed is the medical officer of health for Windsor-Essex and Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang is Waterloo region's medical officer of health are among the top health authorities across Canada.

The faces on TV are numerous. Dr. Peter Lin, whose calming dulcet tones grace CBC TV and radio, is called the CBC House Doctor. Dr. Samir Sinha is director of geriatrics at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto and Dr. Susy Hota is a University of Toronto academic. Dr. Sumon Chakrabarti is an infectious diseases specialist in Mississauga and Dr. Samir Gupta is a clinician-scientist at the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St. Michael's Hospital, oh yes, there's that other billionaire immigrant, Li Ka Shing. Dr. Nisha Thampi is head of Infection Control at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa. Dr. Abdu Sharkawy, infectious disease specialist with Toronto's University Health Network frequently appears on CTV.

We would be woefully understaffed if it were not for the thousands of immigrants throughout the system, all the Filipina and Caribbean nurses, for example. Something for Quebec to watch closely—they may want to extend a more immigrant-friendly welcome mat and suspend Bill 21 for a while.

Overall, we are also seeing a large number of women in top spots in public health across the country. In addition to Dr. Tam and Dr. Wang noted above, these include Dr. Bonnie Henry, British Columbia's high-profile provincial health officer; Dr. Patricia Daly, her counterpart for Vancouver; Dr. Deena Hinshaw, chief medical officer of health for Alberta (who is leading from her home, in quarantine); and Dr. Jessica Hopkins, Peel's medical officer of health.

And, of course, at the political level, we are seeing the COVID cabinet committee, led by Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, and the competent and always informative Health Minister Patty Hajdu.

Lastly, the CBC. While the private networks are doing a great job, the CBC-Radio Canada is performing at its best. CBC News Network and ICI RDI are providing stellar services, which not only provide news about who is doing what, but provide a lot of information to viewers to help us understand what COVID-19 is all about and how we need to defend ourselves. The demonstrations on how to wash your hands could not have been more valuable.

In these troubled times, it helps to see the silver linings and the strong system we have in place.

Andrew Cardozo is president of the Pearson Centre.

The Hill Times



Howard Njoo, Canada's deputy chief public health officer, pictured on March 16, 2020, at the National Press Theatre in Ottawa, is 'a veritable global citizen born in Europe and raised in Canada, of Chinese-Indonesian-Southeast Asian origin,' writes Andrew Cardozo. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Journal from isolation: what happens now?

Two parents, two kids, health (and sanity) on the line. What could go wrong?



Peter Mazereeuw

Opinion

In hindsight, I chose a poor time to take a vacation.

My wife and I flew to a resort in Cancun, Mexico, on the morning of March 10, to get some much-needed R&R while my parents watched our children, aged four and (almost) two.

As we packed our bags the evening before we left, the trip still seemed like a low-risk venture. There hadn't been any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Ottawa, where we live and work. There were no travel advisories related to the virus for Mexico, only for those returning from China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, northern Italy, and Iran, or those planning on taking a cruise. I hadn't seen any news stories about the virus spreading widely in Mexico, and the government was not advising against travel there (except for all of the places under threat of gang violence).

By the second day of my vacation, Ottawa had its first case of COVID-19, and on the following day, its second and third—who happened to be Sophie Grégoire Trudeau. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau put himself into isolation that day, while I sipped on tequila in balmy weather.

That same day, unbeknownst to me, Global News published a story quoting Mexican health officials who were skeptical of the low number of cases reported in Mexico at that time—12 as of March 12—warning that many more cases could be circulating there undetected. Global also quoted a public health expert in Ontario, Dr. Jeff Kwong, who advised that “going to resorts might not be the best idea right now.”

Too late for me.

I returned from my vacation as scheduled on March 14, and ran into a wall of fellow travellers waiting to gain entry to Canada at Ottawa's International Airport. They must be screening for the virus, I thought to myself, and snapped a photo of the crowd to send to my father, who was waiting to pick us up from the airport.

Wrong.

It turned out the airport just didn't have enough border officers to deal with travellers from several international flights that had arrived in short succession. The closest thing to screening for COVID-19 was an extra question on the electronic form we had to fill out while in line: had we been to China, Iran, or Italy lately?

Ironically, that airport immigration lineup was a tailor-made virus factory. Hundreds of people waiting in close quarters, shoulder-to-shoulder, breathing and coughing on one another. Electronic kiosks that each traveller had to touch repeatedly in order to gain entry (hand sanitizer was on offer for those so inclined.) No instructions, at that point, to self-isolate.

So off we went, we merry several-hundred travellers, to spread through the city willy-nilly.

It was only the next morning that I discovered that the government's advice had changed, and travellers from ALL countries were now being advised to self-



Travellers, pictured at 4 p.m. on March 14, 2020, at the Ottawa International Airport arriving on Air Transat flight 2855 from Cancun to Ottawa, and several others line up to see an immigration officer. *The Hill Times* photograph by Peter Mazereeuw

isolate. My wife found out first, from her workplace. I saw this repeated on social media, but it took a while to confirm it on Health Canada's website.

Two weeks working from home in my pyjamas? Under normal circumstances, it's tough for a reporter to work from home, but these were not normal circumstances: Parliament had shut down, and no one wanted to hold meetings or exchange face-to-face gossip with reporters. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad?

Wrong again, when I reflected a little more deeply and concluded (correctly) that our daycare provider would be closing her doors to our little ones amid the crisis (as she should have).

Working from home with young children for (at least) two weeks is going to be a challenge, to put it mildly. But hold on—aren't my wife and I supposed to be self-isolating?

Health Canada's website has plenty of information about how to wall oneself off from human contact to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It's not so clear on what you should do if the other humans in your house rely on you for survival. Must we isolate ourselves from our kids to prevent them from getting the virus? Should they, and my parents, in turn isolate themselves from others? How should I treat them, or myself, if we get sick with the virus? Does it matter that my daughter has a mild, chronic respiratory condition?

It's harder to get answers to those questions. Public health telephone hotlines are drowning in calls, and for most people are effectively inaccessible. Upon close inspection, the Health Canada website does provide answers to some of those questions, though they aren't always reassuring.

Can I potentially pass on the virus, even if I don't have any symptoms? The answer, it seems, is that experts don't know.

“We are currently investigating if the virus can be transmitted to others if someone is not showing symptoms. While experts believe that it is possible, it is considered to be rare,” says the Health Canada website.

“There are no specific treatments for illnesses caused by human coronaviruses. Most people with common human coronavirus illnesses will recover on their own,” reads another section.

If that's true, is there any point in getting myself tested for COVID-19 if I—already in isolation—do experience symptoms of the virus? I haven't found a clear answer to that question yet. I imagine there is a trade-off between the value of keeping public health agencies informed, and the risk of unnecessarily exposing others along my path to the testing centre.

The question of childcare is not being sufficiently addressed by public health officials

so far, and I suspect it's because there simply are no good answers they can offer. Parents can infect children, and vice versa (though children seem to be tolerating the virus quite well). Young children nonetheless need parental contact and adult supervision.

Closing schools and daycares will limit the spread of the virus, and also pull a huge number of parents away from work—no doubt including health care professionals.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Monday that Canada was closing its borders to foreign nationals, excluding Americans and some members of air crews. He said all air travellers will now be screened for the vi-

rus before boarding flights, and barred from travelling into the country if they show signs of the virus—even Canadians.

The government also banned all but four Canadian airports from accepting international flights: Toronto's Pearson International, Montreal's Pierre Elliott Trudeau International, Vancouver International, and Calgary International.

The airport virus factories have now, hopefully, been closed.

Peter Mazereeuw is deputy editor of *The Hill Times*.

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Editorial

Co-operation, but not 'kumbaya' will be what gets us through

There are times when Canadians can look at the House of Commons as a fine example of how not to model behaviour. Question Period, in particular, can be a frustrating exercise in head shaking at how juvenile a room full of grown adults comport themselves.

In his remarks in December as he accepted the vote of his colleagues to the position of Speaker of the House, Liberal Anthony Rota had this to say: "I ask one favour of all Members: to just think every time they get up and to make sure that our friends, family, children, and parents are all proud of us when we are in the House. That is all I ask."

Mr. Rota has had to refer back to these words numerous times since then, attempting to appeal to the better angels of MPs' nature, the same way a kindergarten teacher's pleas for their charges to not eat paste fall on deaf ears.

But as the country grapples with a never-before-seen pandemic, we've encountered a level of rarely seen collaboration between politicians of all stripes that is absolutely a model for others.

For the most part, regardless of the colours of their party's flag, MPs, MPPs, MLAs, mayors, and councillors across the country have been willing set aside disagreement for politics' sake and find common ground to ensure that Canada and its citizens come out on the other side of COVID-19.

On March 19, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh sent a letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promising that his party would not stand in the way of the emergency financial measures the Liberals announced for individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic that require legislation.

Mr. Singh's letter said that he was "committing to [Mr. Trudeau] that New Democ-

rats will provide the necessary votes to pass these measures in Parliament."

Some, including former Conservative MP and cabinet minister Tony Clement, have said now is the time for Mr. Trudeau to open the doors of government to political opponents.

"At no time since the Second World War have Canadians been asked for so much for the common welfare," Mr. Clement tweeted on March 19. "Therefore, I call upon the opposition parties to bury the hatchet and for Justin Trudeau to form a national government with the opposition. We're all in this together!"

It's a nice sentiment, but that's probably a step too far. The country can only benefit from an arms-length opposition that holds the government to account while at the same time, working together to improve the supports that are being rolled out at an unprecedented pace.

To wit, Mr. Singh's letter to the prime minister, while committing to supporting votes, it also made clear that the NDP was pushing for additional and alternative measures.

"Make no mistake, New Democrats will continue to push for more help for Canadians as this crisis continues. We believe that much more will need to be done to help Canadians in the coming months. We will continue to advocate for the many Canadians who will continue to fall through the cracks," Mr. Singh wrote.

"Millions of Canadians are counting on us," he concluded.

Non-partisanship and working together is the correct move right now and everyone has a role to play, especially the opposition. Millions are counting on it.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

COVID-19: it may be a very long process

The COVID-19 crisis will not be over soon and it could be years before it is. Here are perhaps four timelines: 1. Maybe it will last for a few months, if new treatment drugs are developed. There seems to be some close to, or actually in, human testing. There will still be issues of cost and availability. 2. Maybe it will last for four or five months, if it just runs its course. Cases may be "plateauing" in China. In time, and with the help of containment measures, in four or five months, it may just fizzle out. 3. Maybe it will last for 18 months, if a new vaccine is available. There are some under development, but they take time and money to test for effectiveness and safety. 4. It last for several years (maybe three to five) if, society builds group immunity. But that probably means the majority of us will

have to first become infected, with the resulting big mortality numbers.

In the meantime, each and every one of us will have to: follow the advice of the medical authorities (cleanliness, social distancing); give our support to those on the front lines (health care and emergency service workers, food and other retail workers); and give what help we can to the more fragile seniors, the ill, the economically vulnerable, and the parents of children who have no schools, community programs, or libraries (and the children themselves). It will not be easy, but acting together, with diligence, caring, sharing, wisdom, personal sacrifice, patience and time, we can get through this. We have no other choice!

Ian C. MacLeod
 Richmond, B.C.

We should all hope and pray coronavirus does not emulate polio outbreak of 1950s

The coronavirus virus brings to mind, for those old enough to remember, the polio outbreak of the early 1950s which left an untold number of Canadians dead and others sick for life, with many confined to "iron lungs." We should

all hope and pray this current virus does not emulate that dreadful disease which devastated so many families and communities back then.

Emile Thérien
 Ottawa, Ont.

Canadian Forces should bring Canadians home, says Palmer

A couple days ago, in regard to stranded Canadians, I sent tweets out to CTV and also a message to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau saying they should perhaps initiate a Canadian Forces Airlift Operation to bring these Canadians home.

As the subject line indicates, I dubbed it "Operation Covid-19 Come From Away," not that it matters what it is called, just do it. Let's get our stranded Canadians home.

Using our C-17 Globe-Masters, the flight(s) could do designated circuits to a number of cities overseas to land and pick up stranded Canadians (with valid passports) and bring them home.

A team of a doctor, nurse, medics could be on hand to test and/or assist if anyone has COVID-19.

We could publicly announce using all means of media, email, tweets, texts, TV,

radio, etc., to advise stranded Canadians when and where these flights would be going so stranded Canadians could make their way to a nearby designated airport.

As a logistics senior NCO in the military, I believe that this would be worth doing as soon as possible.

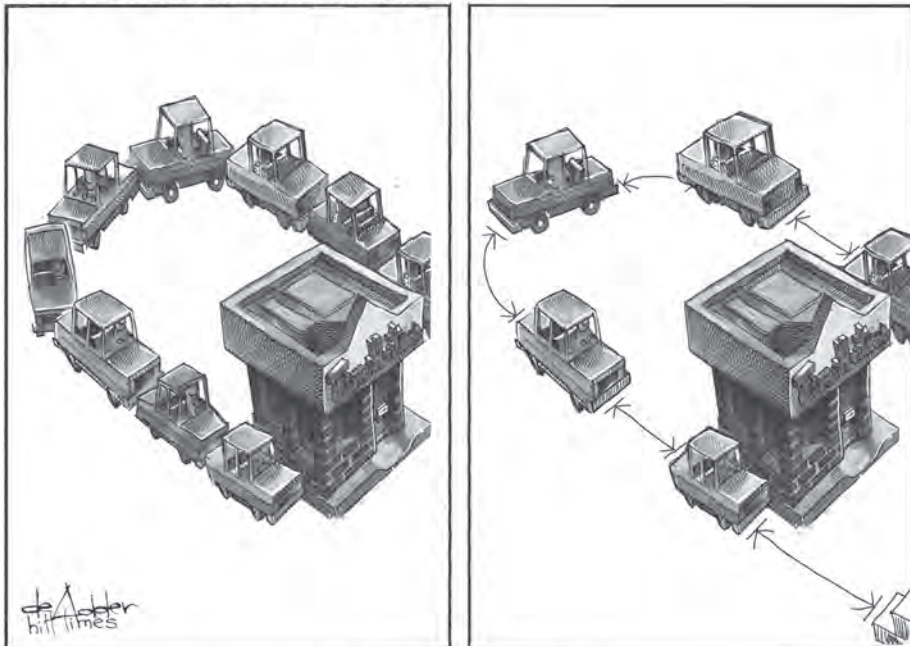
And as usual, on arrival back at Trenton, Ont., they would all have to be quarantined for 14 days or whatever other measures may at that time need to be implemented.

Of note: the Canadian Forces should have the necessary biological clothing and breathing apparatus to use if deemed necessary for such a mission.

Dave W. Palmer
 Nepean, Ont.

(The letter-writer is a 20-year veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces).

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This changes everything, for a while, at least

Everyone needs to be rowing in the same direction. Well-paid and well-insulated critics, sniping from the sidelines, need to put their outrage in park. Spats over the carbon tax, immigration policy, and deficits will all re-emerge after the worst is over. They just don't seem as important all of a sudden.



Susan Riley

Impolitic

CHELSEA, QUE.—After the virus is gone—and it will go—will life, particularly political life, be any different? Will ideology, of any stripe, look like the clumsy, rigid tool that it is, wholly inappropriate for dealing with the mess of a real-life crisis? Will the shared sense of purpose, the empathy for those leading the response, hold—and for how long? Will politics return to the mean-spirited, vicious game that it has lately become as the weeks drag on?

We won't know for a while—and, sadly, history is not encouraging in this regard. But, in the meantime, the present crisis has produced some astonishing reversals. Ontario Premier Doug Ford, for example, praising the federal government's initial response and offering any help his province could provide. Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, thanking the federal government for its "very good first measures" and, arch fiscal conservative that he is, calling for more, not less, government spending.

In fact, the sight of a premier engaged in a war with the province's doctors over wages, suddenly putting forward his own relief package to fill gaps left by Ottawa, and, like other premiers, expressing respect and gratitude for Alberta's public health defenders, is a lot to take in.

Then there are ordinary MPs, including Vancouver-area New Democrat, Don Davies, who tweeted his good wishes to Justin Trudeau last week, noting that the prime minister is "not only dealing with a national crisis," but



Public Safety Minister Bill Blair, Transport Minister Marc Garneau, and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, pictured on March 16, 2020, at the National Press Theatre in Ottawa. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

is also part of a family "dealing with COVID-19 personally. Thank you for your leadership in trying times."

That is class. It is also an acknowledgement that there is little public patience for opposition carping—notwithstanding occasional wobbles in the federal response—in the midst of a crisis that is personal for many. That may be why the usually astringent Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer has been conspicuously silent for much of the past week.

He's mostly limited himself to tweeting general support for the \$82-billion in federal "measures to put more money in Canadian pockets during this difficult time." Good. But he also wants "clean timelines" so Canadians will know when their cash is coming.

That is a fair question, and also, given the speed with which events are unfolding and the sheer bulk and complexity of government—any government—it is hard to answer. It is probably better to trust that an army of dedicated and experienced public servants, federal and provincial, are working day and night to get the money into the right hands as soon as humanly possible.

In fact, one heartening element in a worrying time, is the deference being paid, by politicians of all stripes, to the capable, calm and apparently tireless public health officials who are providing daily, if not hourly, briefings to an anxious public. British Columbia's chief public health officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, has developed a national profile, as has her federal counterpart, Dr. Theresa Tam, along with other provincial health ministers, including Alberta's Dr. Deena Hinshaw, who isolated herself with a

cold that, fortunately, proved not to be corona virus. These women, and their employees, labour in obscurity most of the time, but have risen to an unprecedented challenge when called upon.

So have the thousands of retired, or semi-retired, nurses who have answered calls in Quebec and Ontario, to help their overburdened colleagues by staffing tele-health lines and, in some cases, relieve exhausted professionals on the front lines. Their selflessness is humbling.



The present crisis has produced some astonishing reversals. Ontario Premier Doug Ford, pictured in this file photo, for example, praising the federal government's initial response and offering any help his province could provide, writes Susan Riley. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The contrast with the United States could not be more stark. U.S. President Donald Trump, a man with no discernible interest in anything beyond his own image and investments, trots out U.S. experts with the sole aim of adding lustre to his own performance. As in so many areas, Trump is over his head, and, unlike Canada's prime minister, premiers and cabinet ministers, he lacks the empathy and seriousness that the moment demands.

Not that we should be smug. As more people fall ill, as families miss paycheques, child care, and normal life, social cohesion may begin to fray. And there are always malign elements ready to exploit anxiety for their own ends.

We have already seen Maxime Bernier, for instance, denounce the federal government

for continuing to allow irregular migrants to cross our borders, inferring they are carriers of the dreaded virus. This is nothing less than race-baiting, given that many of those mostly African, or Central American, arrivals are no more, or less, likely to carry the virus than the flood of mostly white snowbirds returning last week from Florida.

But it is an ugly trope and Bernier's emergence—after a political career as a libertarian—can no longer be blamed on a posse

of over-zealous supporters. More serious, is that the complaint has been echoed by Peter MacKay, leading contender in the ongoing Conservative party leadership race. (Remember that?) In a tweet last week, MacKay complained that, "instead of turning people away, we are letting them in and paying for their health care. ... This must stop."

His chief rival, Erin O'Toole, echoed the call to "secure the border." So did Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet, playing to an undercurrent of xenophobia in Quebec.

To everyone's surprise, Trudeau agreed to close the border to asylum seekers late last week as a temporary and extraordinary measure. This is, apparently, part of a reciprocal agreement with the U.S. intended to severely limit all non-essential cross-border traffic.

This move comes despite Canada's international legal obligation to accept those claiming refugee status and adjudicate their cases before sending them home. As well, the threat remains that closing the Roxham Road entry in Quebec will only send asylum seekers to other crossings along our long, undefended border.

In the meantime, while Trudeau's action may quell the complaints of his right-wing critics, the government's original plan—to test and quarantine all irregular arrivals—may have been more effective in containing the virus. Nor have we heard an emphatic declaration from the prime minister that viruses do not distinguish on the grounds of race, or that the asylum seekers were no more likely to infect others than the thousands of white snowbirds returning to Canada from Florida last week.

That said, there are legitimate questions for government as it responds on the fly. Shouldn't businesses eligible for the recently announced \$55-billion in relief be asked for something in return—more investment in green energy, a commitment to remain in Canada and not lay off workers, or close down plants, in the near future? In the past, both automakers and steel plants have taken generous public bailouts only to move jobs elsewhere once the 2008-2009 recession eased.

Wouldn't direct cheques to workers who have lost shifts, or jobs, be quicker than making any-one apply through the cumbersome EI system? And, shouldn't this moment prod government to look at the economic crisis buried under the health hysteria: the crash of oil prices and consequences for Alberta and the entire economy? If there was ever a propitious time for transition to a green economy, this is it—certainly better rather than another bailout for Big Oil.

But for now, everyone needs to be rowing in the same direction. Well-paid and well-insulated critics, sniping from the sidelines, need to put their outrage in park. Spats over the carbon tax, immigration policy, deficits will all re-emerge after the worst is over. They just don't seem as important all of a sudden.

Susan Riley is a veteran political columnist who writes regularly for The Hill Times.

The Hill Times

COVID-19

There's one incontrovertible fact about pandemic that's both admirable and puzzling

While the fight against a single, deadly virus has united the world on what can only be described as a war footing, the biggest players on the planet continue to snooze on the monumental threat of global warming.



Michael Harris

Harris

HALIFAX—I am neither a scientist or a doctor, so I don't really know if governments are saving us from COVID-19.

If words were deeds, we would already be saved 10 times over.

But there is one incontrovertible fact about the pandemic that is both admirable and puzzling.

Let's start with the admirable.

The virus has focused the attention of the world on a single threat as rarely seen before—the Pearl Harbour of medical emergencies. It has also galvanized country after country into taking actions that can only be called draconian.

Democratic governments usually work slowly, prisoners of the very process that confers our freedoms. Suddenly, they are racing ahead at super-luminal speed on massive issues, scouring old emergency legislation for more executive powers, and assuring everyone they will be taken care of. The reassurances are needed.

Italy is now a giant ghost town by government fiat.

The entire state of California, home to 40 million people, is under governor's lockdown.

The governor of New York state has ordered all “non-essential” workers to stay home.

Presidential primaries have been cancelled and democracy put on hold in places like Ohio.

Everything from the Taj Mahal to the Louvre is padlocked.

You can't get a Pernod in a Paris cafe.

You can't get a gondola ride in Venice.

You can't watch an NHL match in Canada.

Hopping over to Michigan to take in a Piston's or Wing's game is out. The stadiums and auditori-

ums are as empty as the caverns of the moon.

Borders world-wide are closing like flower petals on a cold night.

As for social gatherings, even funerals have been cancelled in Washington state, a hotbed of the coronavirus outbreak.

The Day the Earth Stood Still is no longer a black and white sci-fi flick from yesteryear with Michael Rennie in a funny space suit. It is the stuff of the evening news with earthlings in hazmat suits. The current stasis hasn't been caused by an alien who has landed in Manhattan, but a deadly virus for which there is no vaccine and few defences—other than washing your hands and sheltering in place.

In fact, since that document was signed in 2015, 35 banks worldwide have lent more than \$2-trillion to the fossil fuel industry, \$975-billion of it to the 100 companies most aggressively seeking out new hydrocarbon resources.

That is strange.

People like former governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, have said that the vast majority of known reserves of fossil fuels are “unburnable.”

At least they are if the world is to keep global warming at or below 2 degrees Celsius. So why do we need more fossil fuels? If Carney is right, the banks are financing nothing short of a planetary demise, in the name of blowing Earth's carbon budget for profit.

defies the strictures of the fifteen minute news cycle. There is talk of dire consequences—if we don't reach a zero carbon position by 2050.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that there is only a decade or so to get carbon emissions under control.

In a world where families struggle to survive day to day, something that might happen decades from now simply doesn't top their to-do list. That allows governments to get by with token efforts to sustain the environment while maintaining the status quo—Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's “having it both ways” approach.

Then there is the nerdy side of making the case for climate ac-

Somehow, a bigger tent has to be created.

COVID-19 suggests a way. The world is transfixed by the health threat this virus represents. Could the same case be made for climate change and global warming? It most certainly can.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, climate change has a direct effect on human health. It will intensify existing health threats depending on a person's age, economic resources, and location.

These health affects include “increased respiratory and cardiovascular disease, injuries and premature deaths related to extreme weather events, changes in the prevalence and geographic distribution of food and water



Public Safety Minister Bill Blair, Transport Minister Marc Garneau, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, Health Minister Patty Hajdu, Treasury Board President Jean-Yves Duclos, and moderator Toronto Star reporter Bruce Campion-Smith, pictured on March 16, 2020, at the National Press Theatre in Ottawa. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Fear, of course, is the great motivator of this unprecedented global effort. For most, there is no fear quite like the fear of dying.

Hence the motivational power of COVID-19.

If there is one thing history has taught, it is that viruses are extraordinarily efficient killers. The Black Death, the “Spanish” Flu, Ebola, SARS, and the Zika virus collectively killed hundreds of millions of people. With some experts predicting as many as two million deaths in the United States from the current pandemic (the jury is thankfully out on that one), it is no wonder the world is acting as one.

Now for the puzzling part.

While the fight against a single, deadly virus has united the world on what can only be described as a war footing, the biggest players on the planet continue to snooze on the monumental threat of global warming. The United States, whose “war-time” president is belatedly leading the charge against COVID-19, is not even a signatory to the Paris Climate Accord.

You would think that with the small, blue planet running a fever the way COVID-19 victims do, governments would unite to hit their national emission targets; pull together on sustainable energy; and serve divorce papers on our troubled marriage with fossil fuels.

Instead, countries like Canada reliably miss those emission targets, while espousing all the right political sentiments—and green-lighting new oil and gas development.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has often remarked that the fight against climate change has been “utterly inadequate” so far. Worse, he has said that there is a real possibility that global warming could pass the “point of no return.” It is not surprising that “climate emergency” is the Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year for 2019.

So why the official complacency compared to the frenzied reaction to COVID-19?

For one thing, the descent of a planet into unimaginable climate chaos is a slow motion event that

tion, a tough sell in the age of the simple answer.

What does it matter if the temperature in 2019 rose 0.98 percent Celsius? So what if nineteen of the twenty warmest years on record have occurred since 2001? You say the ice-caps are melting? That might excite the people at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the California Institute of Technology. But it's still cold in Ottawa and Winnipeg and Chicago when the snow flies, right?

David Suzuki recently told me that environmentalists can't save the environment; their tent is too small and divided. Some want to save the oceans, others the polar bears, others still the forests, and on it goes.

Bottom line? As a marketing campaign, the fight against global warming has failed, partly by preaching to the converted, and partly by making the subject a boutique issue and the property of one political party. That has allowed politicians to dither where they should be decisive.

borne illnesses and other infectious diseases, and threats to mental illness.”

There is a reason that the American Medical Association and the Royal College of General Practitioners have both passed resolutions calling for divestment in fossil fuel companies.

Five years ago, the World Health Organization predicted that global warming would kill 250,000 people a year from 2030 to 2050. A new report in *The New England Journal of Medicine* says that is a “conservative estimate.”

After all, global warming isn't the only thing that is killing us. There is also the destruction of freshwater resources, ocean acidification, air pollution, and deforestation.

So wash your hands, and keep your distance to be sure. But if COVID-19 gets your knees knocking, what we're doing to the planet should have your hair standing on end.

Michael Harris is an award-winning author and journalist. *The Hill Times*

Global

Politicians are no match for a virus



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured on March 17, 2020, holding a press conference outside the Rideau Cottage on the grounds of Rideau Hall. The prime minister and his children are in self-isolation since his wife Sophie Grégoire Trudeau tested positive for the coronavirus on March 12. Ms. Grégoire Trudeau is in self-isolation. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently announced that, in order to combat the spread of COVID-19, he was going to shut down the border to non-citizens, my gut reaction was ‘Great idea, but probably too late; why didn’t you take such action four weeks ago when it might have really helped?’ I must confess I’m viewing this crisis much differently than I’ve viewed others in the past, when I could be analytical, detached, and dispassionate when judging politicians on the skill with which they communicated to a worried public. Now I’m part of the worried public.

Okay, maybe I’m not scared beyond the capacity for rational thought, but I’m anxious enough to have severe worries and not just about my dwindling supply of toilet paper.

After all, like everybody else, I’m hearing the horrific news about what’s happening in hotspots like China, Italy and Iran; I’m hearing about how the virus is spiking here in Canada, I keep hearing reports that things will only get worse before they get better, and while all this bad news is happening, I’m also watching the stock market get hammered.

On top of that, I also have more personal concerns, as I know several people who face high risk levels should they contract the virus; a brother who’s an asthmatic, a mother who’s pushing 88 years old, friends and relatives who have low immune systems.

And heck, I’m no spring chicken, what if I get sick?

As a result of my various anxieties, I must confess I’m viewing this crisis much differently than I’ve viewed others in the past, when I could be analytical, detached, and dispassionate when judging politicians on the skill with which

they communicated to a worried public.

Now I’m part of the worried public.

So when I turn on the TV to watch politicians explain how they’re dealing with COVID-19, I’m seeking reassurance that they will keep me and my loved ones safe; I want to know that they’re competent, that they’re on top of this crisis, that they’re going to stop the virus.

In short, I want to have confidence in my leaders.

And so far, that confidence is hard to come by, since our leaders seem to be outmatched by this COVID-19 bug.

Consider how, in a relative instant, they went from assuring us that the risk this virus posed to Canadians was “low,” to now issuing orders that we basically shut down the entire economy.

That’s not only a startling shift in strategy and tone, but it also lends credence to the idea that our political leaders actually don’t have a handle on what’s happening, which, of course, is hardly encouraging to worriers like me.

Plus, I can’t help but get the idea that in dealing with this crisis, government authorities are being reactive rather than proac-

tive, that they’re always one step behind the virus.

I mean, when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently announced that, in order to combat the spread of COVID-19, he was going to shut down the border to non-citizens, my gut reaction was “Great idea, but probably too late; why didn’t you take such action four weeks ago when it might have really helped?”

So yeah, it’s easy to get frustrated and angry with our leaders for not doing more.

But maybe such an emotional response is just a symptom of a modern mindset, a mindset which has conditioned us to believe government can protect us from everything.

If so, this crisis is a wakeup call, reminding us that our political leaders are not gods, that when dealing with something as unprecedented as a new rampaging virus, they’re probably going to initially look unprepared.

Anyway, the good news is, it’s not politicians who will end up saving us from this terrible virus.

Our help will come from where it always comes from: human ingenuity.

*Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.
The Hill Times*



Gerry Nicholls

Post-Partisan Pundit

OAKVILLE, ONT.—One of the best lines from the original *Ghostbusters* movie comes after the character Egon Spengler (played by the late Harold Ramis) beholds the evil god Gozer.

Says Spengler: “I’m terrified beyond the capacity for rational thought.”

Well, that’s kind of how I’m feeling right now in the midst of this Covid-19 crisis.

COVID-19

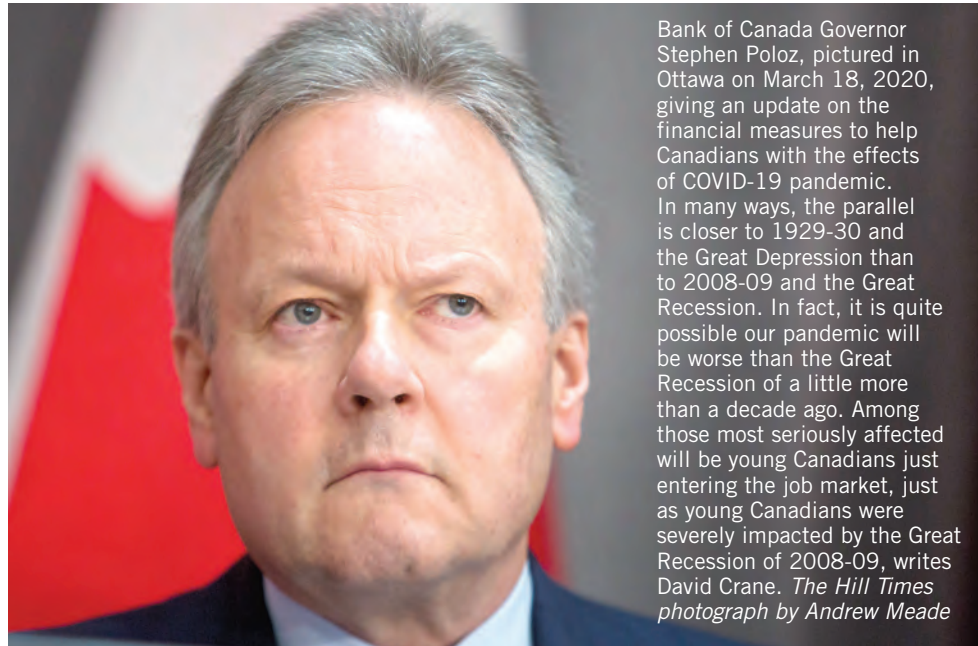
This is one of the big lessons of the current crisis: government matters and public institutions matter

No one need be denied testing or health care for lack of money. We now have a better appreciation of the importance of government and the regulatory state and we are likely to see a comeback in support for effective government and a decline in support for small government. Collective action matters.



David Crane

Canada & the 21st Century



Bank of Canada Governor Stephen Poloz, pictured in Ottawa on March 18, 2020, giving an update on the financial measures to help Canadians with the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. In many ways, the parallel is closer to 1929-30 and the Great Depression than to 2008-09 and the Great Recession. In fact, it is quite possible our pandemic will be worse than the Great Recession of a little more than a decade ago. Among those most seriously affected will be young Canadians just entering the job market, just as young Canadians were severely impacted by the Great Recession of 2008-09, writes David Crane. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

TORONTO—These are scary times, with no end in sight. While Canada has been more fortunate than many other countries, with relatively few cases of deaths from the virus, no one can say what the future may hold.

Will COVID-19 largely disappear in a few months or will it extend well into next year, before a vaccine can be publicly available? Are we approaching a peak in reported cases or are we still far from it? Will we have to move to closed communities where it will be illegal to venture outside except for food and medical supplies? Could our health-care system handle a sharp surge in identified cases?

Will the world face an economic depression far worse than the financial crisis of 2007-08? Will countries work together to seek global solutions or will we see a world of closed borders and beggar-thy-neighbour policies?

Layoffs are happening and many more job losses will occur. Many Canadian families are living paycheque-to-paycheque and are already burdened, in many cases, with high debt. Gig economy workers have no benefits and are torn between going to work while sick or losing the income to pay rent and buy food.

Small businesses are shuttering and many could go bankrupt as cash flow vanishes. The major collapse of stock market valuations and near-zero interest rates will severely affect retirees living off their savings.

Loss of income and self-isolation will mean less spending—and less spending by some means less income for since it is an economic reality that what one person spends is income for another, putting the economy on a downward spiral.

We have no experience of a peacetime economy where some sectors largely cease to function or shrink markedly—airlines, sports, and other public events, and tourism, and now automotive manufacturing, for example. And as we close borders, will farmers be able to bring in the migrant workers so essential for crop harvesting?

In many ways, the parallel is closer to 1929-30 and the Great Depression than to 2008-09 and the Great Recession. In fact, it is quite possible our pandemic will be worse than the Great Recession of a little more than a decade ago. Among those most seriously affected will be young Canadians just entering the job market, just as young Canadians were severely impacted by the Great Recession of 2008-09.

To be sure, governments are responding by providing essential cash for those who

need it, supporting sick leave, providing benefits for gig economy and other workers who lose their jobs and lack benefits, backstopping businesses, especially small businesses, with loans and other supports, injecting fresh money into the healthcare system and medical research, and more, as well as lowering interest rates.

So far, the Trudeau government has responded largely effectively, as have provincial and municipal governments. The critical question is whether it will be enough and whether assistance to those who urgently need it can be delivered fast enough.

Yet there are also reasons to be cautiously optimistic.

We have learned from the history of the Great Depression and the Great Recession. We have accumulated experience that can help guide us today. In the Great Depression of the 1930s, the crisis was prolonged because of misguided policies. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce called for balanced budgets as the cure, and countries pursued protectionist policies that were counterproductive. We now know that these were exactly the wrong policies.

Today, we know that government must use its fiscal muscle to the fullest extent possible and as soon as possible and that social support systems matter. At the federal level, we know that fiscal capacity is strong, as the Parliamentary Budget Office has pointed out, so that at a time when many provinces are in a weak position, the federal government is in a strong position to act.

This is one of the big lessons of the current crisis: government matters and public institutions matter. No one need be denied testing or health care for lack of money. We now have a better appreciation of the importance of government and the regulatory state and we are likely to see a comeback in support for effective government and a decline in support for small government. Collective action matters.

A second advantage we have today is that the level of scientific knowledge and capability is much advanced, even from the time of SARS in 2002-03. Even relatively simple advice, such as frequent washing of hands, keeping a distance from others, avoiding crowds and self-isolation are based on past experience, including our experience with SARS, which killed 44 people. Likewise, medical technologies, such as ventilators and testing systems are much more advanced, one reason being advances in computer technology.

More important, the huge advances we have made in genetics means we are much better equipped to decode viruses and develop vaccines. In the case of COVID-19, Chinese scientists were able to provide genetic information within days after COVID-19 being officially confirmed and several dozen corporations and research institutions are busy now working, with human trials, to develop effective vaccines that could be available in 18 months, though scaled-up production and distribution could take longer.

But each crisis should also teach us new lessons, just as the Great Depression led to the New Deal and the Great Recession reminded us that regulation-light, or self-regulation in financial markets, do not work and strict public oversight is needed.

One of the most important lessons in the current crisis is that we need much better policies to provide living wages and greater economic security for lower-income and vulnerable Canadians, including those in the gig economy across all age groups, at a time when the nature of work is changing. Another is that we must continue to invest in scientific research and preparedness for future pandemics.

These are testing times. We can be optimistic over the longer term because human ingenuity is our core strength. But it may also be that a new new-normal will follow as well.

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

The Hill Times

The Hill Times is pleased to announce the appointment of



Erveina Gosalci Director of Business Development

Erveina brings more than 16 years of work experience in education, NGOs, public diplomacy, human resources, and commercial law to The Hill Times print and digital advertising department. She worked for the British Council in Albania and as a consultant for the Youth Voice Group of the World Bank. Since 2009 she has been a member of the Youth Communications Network at the World Health Organization.

She holds an LLM (Valedictorian) from the University of New York in Tirana, in International and Commercial Law. Her new role draws on her expertise in policy messaging. The Hill Times is delighted that she has joined its premier government relations and advocacy advertising department.

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A call for humility in national security 'expertise'

I'd like to make a humble entreaty for humility. If you used to work for CSIS or an analogous agency, be honest with your audience. Do not embellish or exaggerate your deeds or your perspective. Do not speak to matters you really are not 'expert' in. Do not lie.



Phil Gurski

National Security

OTTAWA—'Experts' can help Canadians understand national security and public safety

threats, but only if they are truly knowledgeable.

One thing I have tried to be is consistent in since my retirement from a 32-year career in national security in this country is an honest assessment of what I know and what I can contribute to the national dialogue. Somewhat oddly, I have elected to remain active in commenting on these issues in the hopes that my perspectives are found useful to some (hence this column in *The Hill Times*). There are not many of us in Canada.

There are, of course, many things I cannot share even if I no longer have access to classified intelligence. Secret is secret, after all: much of what I worked on has not been released more widely and I have a duty to protect sources and methods.

Nevertheless, I do acknowledge that I did work in counter-terrorism for CSIS for 15 years and was part of a team that carried out hundreds of investigations, some of which eventually led to arrests (thanks to the RCMP, not CSIS), trials and convictions. I have been able to use that experience to write five books to date on terrorism.



RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki, pictured Sept. 17, 2019, at RCMP Headquarters in Ottawa. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

I thus believe that I do indeed have something of interest to say on terrorism, particularly, when it comes to the threat here in Canada and, more narrowly, with respect to Islamist extremism (as opposed to far-right terrorism). And yet I prefer not to be called an 'expert' for reasons I will return to.

CSIS has other investigative priorities aside from terrorism such as foreign espionage and foreign interference: the latter was the subject of a public release by the NSICOP recently. I did not work on either of those tasks, both of which are part of the CSIS mandate as per Sec. 2 of its legislation

(the CSIS Act). Hence, when approached to comment on these issues (by media, say) I make it clear that I am not the best person to ask. I will sometimes agree to go on air, but am careful not to sound authoritative.

Alas, some of my former colleagues seem to have no problem trying to come across on such threats even though, and I know this for a fact, they never worked these tasks. They should know better but appear not to. Don't worry, I have no intention of naming them.

This is why I prefer not to be seen as an 'expert'. The term has been so overused, especially in the post 9/11 era, as to be meaningless. There are so many pseudo experts out there now that we have entered a time where it is hard to figure out what to believe. I see this as dangerous.

This is irresponsible at a minimum. Canadians deserve to have the best advice available to them.

Since CSIS and CSE rarely come out publicly to speak to us it often falls to others, formers and perhaps academics, to fill the void. These people have a valuable contribution to make, but only if it is truly informed by actual knowledge or experience. Many have neither.

I'd like to make a humble entreaty for humility. If you used to work for CSIS or an analogous agency, be honest with your audience. Do not embellish or exaggerate your deeds or your perspective. Do not speak to matters you really are not 'expert' in. Do not lie.

At the same time, there is also an onus on the media in this regard. Just because you have succeeded in getting a former spy to have a conversation with you, do not assume that person is a know-it-all or has anything useful to add. Ask the person to elucidate what she or he did (there may be some hesitation, but there is no risk in admitting a focus on terrorism or espionage). Try to ensure that your 'source' is a reliable one.

That after all is how real intelligence agencies operate.

Phil Gurski is a former strategic terrorism analyst at CSIS and cannot spell 'cyber'.
The Hill Times

Upcoming access to information changes? It's a secret

The government is staying mum about a mandatory review of its previous changes to the Access to Information Act due this summer.



Ken Rubin

Transparency

OTTAWA—A minority Parliament should want greater transparency, hold Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to account, and review his false starts and fresh initiatives. That's hard to do under current access-to-information legislation.

One chance to change that is fast approaching. A mandatory

review of the Access to Information Act is due in June, under the terms of the law passed by Bill C-58 in the last Parliament. That's getting close, but so far the government is keeping its plans about the access law to itself.

The Trudeau government's changes to the Access to Information Act under Bill C-58 were given royal assent last June, but are not producing much in the way of transparency advances.

Bill C-58 allowed the government to produce more sanitized briefing notes "pro-actively". That's a plus for controlling its messaging but not that helpful for revealing the workings of government operations.

As well, Bill C-58 gave the information commissioner limited order-making powers, but to date that's not made much of a difference. The length of delays in responding to access requests keeps increasing as does the number of broad exemptions claimed.

The commissioner has not issued any orders, though she was about to issue a deemed refusal order against the RCMP. But at the last moment the RCMP agreed to produce some records.

Expectations were that the commissioner would already be issuing orders that count. When questioned, the commissioner's

office would only say that it does not track how many of its investigations have moved towards inquiries where orders can be issued.

Further, access to information records from Information Commissioner Caroline Maynard's office reveal that only four requests from the government to bar access users for "frivolous and vexatious" information requests were received. The government suggested the number would be at least a few hundred, if not more, making it an important feature of Bill C-58.

The four agencies making those requests to bar user access were the Public Sector Pension Investment Board, the Canadian Space Agency, the Canadian Dairy Commission, and Canada Revenue Agency.

In one case, the commissioner agreed to bar access by a person who had filed 893 requests over the years, and a dozen more recently, that the commissioner found to be repetitious.

Maynard rejected two other requests to bar the individuals from making access requests, given insufficient evidence. One case involved an individual asking for documents that had already been released, but covering a larger time frame. The other case was a former employee requesting data in a way the institution judged to be abusive. A fourth case has yet to be published on the commissioner website.

Part of the thrust of Bill C-58 was to put a damper on the rising number of requests, not to openly welcome and deal promptly with them, while putting forward sanitized government disclosures outside access to information's formal coverage.

The previously announced "second" phase of access changes were designed to tinker with the exemptions and to consider adding a limited public interest override clause to some exemptions claimed.



Jean-Yves Ducloux is president of the Treasury Board, and in charge of the government's management of the access to information regime. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Prime Minister Trudeau started his government's minority term in the 43rd Parliament by saying he wanted transparency, at least in the case of what happened with Flight 752, suggesting that the Iranian government take fuller responsibility for shooting down the plane. The Iranian government changed from denying

its missile downed the flight to saying it was accidental, without as yet providing full access to all information. Anger is still there among the families, friends, and colleagues of Canadian victims, and in Iran there are protests, and information is being suppressed.

But to date in Canada, the prime minister has not moved forward from his entrenched secrecy positions, including on air safety disclosures. No indication has been given that his government wants to repeal some of Bill C-58's flaws. Secrecy still acts like

a virus pervading every Canadian government action.

Bill C-58 required that the government deliver a report by this June setting the tone of any access-to-information changes.

But with summer coming, the Conservative leadership campaign underway, and pressing public health, economic and environment issues, will the statutory review exercise, in the end, amount to the bureaucrats getting to decide on further controlling what Canadians need to know?

Another COVID-19 causality: access to information

With the growing COVID-19 crisis and federal employees being told to work from home with limited access to government files, the access-to-information system is going into a temporary meltdown and shut down.

Add this to already lengthy delays and backlogs. Expect releases down the road to have more exemptions, and reliance on only proactive government statements and releases.

Here's one sample of a government access to information letter received: "In light of current events related to COVID-19, our capacity to process requests is limited, as well as the capacity of parties involved in the retrieval of records and/or representations. This has an impact on our regular ATIP operations. With this in mind, we are placing your request on hold for the time being. ..." Our apologies for the delay in completing your request. We thank you in advance for your consideration and understanding."

Ken Rubin follows transparency issues and is reachable at kenrubin.ca

The Hill Times

Opinion

Charging gray rhinos

Governments around the world are taking drastic measures to respond to COVID-19. Why not climate change?



Bill Henderson

Opinion

GIBSONS, B.C.—The coronavirus is forcing us to learn valuable lessons. Sometimes governments have to act, and quickly, in protecting their citizens.

Sometimes governments have to force a closure of business-as-usual, no matter what the cost, in order to protect all of our futures. Sometimes governments have to have a plan to do things not previously allowed, a plan to transition quickly in an emergency so that a future business-as-usual will be possible.

Both COVID-19 and climate change are “gray rhinos”—problems that we knew about, not black swans, but problems that we didn’t want to plan solutions for until forced by the imminent danger of their charge. As we are seeing now globally, but especially in the U.S., a little preparation and planning, a functioning public health-care system, could make all the difference in how a country, how our society, is able to quickly intervene and “flatten the curve.” Or not.

Over the past three decades, there have been many failed opportunities to take the necessary preventive steps to effectively handle these gray rhinos, but these opportunities were thwarted by an ideology that downsized government, inflated the power and privilege of investors, and enforced a golden straitjacket to protect business-as-usual while lifting all boats (some much more than others) which left us all in much more danger of extreme events that threaten societal collapse.

Humankind’s greatest crisis coincides with the rise of an ideology that makes it impossible to address. By the late 1980s, when it became clear that man-made climate change endangered the living planet and its people, the world was in the grip of an extreme political doctrine whose tenets forbid the kind of intervention required to arrest it.

“(W)e haven’t even started to talk about white might be ‘possible’ and are still mostly arguing about what is ‘feasible without compromising economic growth.’ These are of course extremely different things, and the latter will not get us anywhere near the 1/5 degrees C target,” Damon Matthews, a Concordia University climate scientist, told *Wired* magazine.

Under neoliberalism, climate change is extraordinarily difficult to deal with.

The options that do not violate the neoliberal worldview are few, which explains why so many governments resort to little more than mild carbon pricing that stops well short of what is needed, the Trudeau government’s Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change being a stellar example of this. Even when facing the end of the world, neoliberal governments would at most tinker only marginally with already low levels of industry and trade regulation, taxation, public investment, economic planning, and



Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson arrives for Question Period in Ottawa on Feb. 27, 2020. The modest carbon tax implemented by Canada’s Liberal government is an example of simply tinkering around the margins of a global problem, writes Bill Henderson. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

so on. Anything more would risk interfering with a society maintained for the wealthy in the name of market liberty and efficiency.

It was our bad luck that this idea that markets solve all problems and that government should be left to wither away crested just at the moment when it could do the most damage. Are we going to learn anything from COVID? Are we going to learn that sometimes we need to act fast, organized by our governments to behave in a manner that is against our short term personal and business interests in order to protect everybody’s future? Are we going to learn how to ignore ideology and enforce a radical change from B-A-U in order to flatten the emissions curve and survive an emergency?

We have a little self-isolation time to think about how we have been acting, mistakes made, and leadership not taken. Time to think about our kids and people in greater danger because they are poor or marginalized. Time to think about possible intervention steps

not previously taken for short term political or ideological reasons.

Look what is possible in an emergency if governments lead in initiating actions prescribed by experts to flatten the curve. We are past time trying to get GHG gases to peak globally—the equivalent action now necessary to flatten the emissions curve and protect our kid’s future is a regulated wind-down of all fossil fuel production globally, an urgent managed decline of what has become a possibly fatal pathogen, with Green New Deal-style plans for stimulus to stabilize our economies in the transition..

We will survive COVID—the vast majority of us personally, and the economy eventually. We will be able to go to work, to be social again, to go out for dinner, to hockey and concerts again. Every possible governmental intervention to protect, and if necessary, to reboot the economy is being considered.

But right now it looks almost certain that we will not survive

the charge of the climate rhino. We did not flatten the curve. We did not enforce the needed deep systemic change of reducing fossil fuel use rapidly and there is no effective planning for change happening at a global scale that could keep us safe in our very fortunate evolutionary trajectory.

NGOS such as OilChange International have repeatedly warned governments such as Alberta and Canada that it will be far easier to take the needed climate mitigation steps before rising GHG emissions and subsequent temperature rise create economic and societal chaos. The present deep slowdown in the global economy is one step closer to chaos, but it is also maybe a last opportunity to make the preventive steps necessary for a much swifter climate transition from threatening existential danger to a brighter, safer future. We could and should take the necessary steps to urgently lower the emission curve.

Bill Henderson is a longtime climate activist based in Gibsons, B.C. The Hill Times



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Agriculture Policy Briefing



President Donald J. Trump is joined by former-Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the USMCA signing ceremony Friday, Nov. 30, 2018, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Parliament ratified the deal less than two weeks ago, on March 13. *Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead*

farming in the 21st century. I was pleased that the committee unanimously agreed to this study as our first order of business.

Committee witnesses have repeatedly stated that the AgriStability program is in serious need of an overhaul. Participation enrollment in this program has dropped from the high 70s percentile to less than 20 per cent currently in Ontario, just in the space of 10 to 15 years. As one Ontario grain farmer told me: it's not because farmers have extreme wealth or no risk that they're not accessing this program; it's because the program is so onerous to navigate that many farmers are finding it too cumbersome. In addition to raising the reference margin to 85 per cent (the measurement used to activate the program), we must ensure that a program designed to help farmers in times of loss is easy to understand and access.

I look forward to continuing to work with the agriculture minister and members of the House Agriculture and Agri-food Committee to find solutions to these issues in the weeks and months ahead when Parliament resumes. There are many agricultural challenges on the horizon, not the least of which is the COVID-19 virus. Canadians working in the agriculture and agri-food sector can rest assured that MPs are continuing to work from our respective ridings and that the threat this public health emergency poses to our supply chains and farm operations is top of mind, especially to those of us with agriculture-dependent ridings and critic areas. We are practicing our social distancing at this challenging time, but all of us look forward to returning to Parliament once the spread of this global pandemic is brought under control.

Until then, my best wishes to all are that you remain safe and healthy. Take care of one another.

NDP MP Alistair MacGregor, who represents Cowichan-Malahat-Langford, B.C., is his party's critic for agriculture and agri-food.
The Hill Times

Agricultural priorities before and after COVID-19

CUSMA passage is another hit to the dairy sector, writes NDP MP Alistair MacGregor.



NDP MP Alistair MacGregor

Opinion

Parliament is now suspended until at least April 20 in the wake of the recent COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the globe, as parliamentarians do their part in social distancing. With the support of all parties, a motion was moved in the House on Friday, March 13, which moved certain legislative measures ahead with great rapidity. Among them was the passage at third reading of Bill C-4, An Act to Implement the Canada-United States-Mexico Trade Agreement (CUSMA). The bill moved to the Senate, where it was immediately passed at all stages without amendment and received royal assent by the Governor General later that day. With the bill's passage, a few key things are now enshrined into law.

Chapter 3-A-8 of the CUSMA trade deal imposes export threshold limits on certain dairy products: skim milk powder (SMP) and milk protein concentrates (MPC). These threshold limits go beyond

the scope of the three member-countries who are party to the trade deal, impacting Canada's trading relationship with countries other than the United States and Mexico. In "year 1" of the agreement, the export threshold limit is set at 55,000 metric tons (MT); the penalty for breaching the threshold would be applied at \$0.54/kg. In "year two" of the agreement, that export threshold limit drops to just 35,000 MT without penalty for those two classifications of products. Infant formula is also exposed to threshold limits, and the breach penalty is \$4.25/kg if we export more than 13,333 MT and 40,000 MT in year one and year two, respectively.

Given the dairy sector has already suffered great losses to our domestic market share through the whittling away of access through CETA, CPTPP, and now CUSMA, this additional hit to the dairy sector will be challenging. In the 2016-17 and 2017-18 dairy years (beginning

Aug. 1), SMP and MPC exports were 55,091 and 70,818 metric tons, respectively—already above the "year one" threshold mind-bogglingly agreed to by the Canadian negotiators in the agreement, and well surpassing the limits that will be imposed in the second year.

The coming-into-force section of Bill C-4 provides for it to be fixed by an order of the governor in council, meaning the prime minister and cabinet can ensure nearly an entire dairy year is not lost before the "year two" export thresholds take effect. I have already raised these concerns directly with Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau and will be watching closely to see how the Government of Canada responds to the dairy sector's concerns.

When I met with Bibeau back in December to discuss legislative and policy priorities for agriculture, one of the issues on which we found common ground was with respect to the suite of business risk management programs offered by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to aid farmers and producers in times of need. When the House Agriculture and Agri-Food Committee started up in the 43rd Parliament, I proposed a motion for a study to hear from agricultural stakeholder groups and farmers to examine whether these programs are, in fact, meeting the challenges of



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Policy Briefing Agriculture

Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau, pictured in this file photo. Despite the multitude of challenges, she's gone from an 'unknown' in the industry to a well-respected minister at the helm of an important department. *The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia*



Coronavirus, newest challenge facing Bibeau, adds impetus to risk management reform

The virus-induced economic slowdown comes at a tough time for the agri-food industry, which was already struggling with international trade restrictions, the affects of poor harvests, and fallout from recent rail disruptions.

BY AIDEN CHAMANDY

Canada's federal Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau has been at the head of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for just over a year. She hardly had a

chance to breathe since she was ushered into the post on March 1, 2019, in the midst of the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

Just five days later, on March 6, 2019, China barred Richardson International, a major Canadian canola exporter, from selling to China in response to Canada arresting Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou. Canada exported more than \$2-billion worth of canola to China in 2018, almost half of overall Canadian canola exports.

The 2019 harvest season provided no respite. Dubbed "The Harvest From Hell" by the Grain Growers of Canada, extreme weather like freezing, drought and flooding left million of acres of crops unusable.

"I think the reason why this year's harvest was so devastating is that it was weather-related and consistent across the country. No region of the country was immune," said Erin Gowriluk, executive director of the Grain Growers of Canada.

A few weeks before Ms. Bibeau (Compton-Stanstead, Que.) received her mandate letter for her second

tour atop AAFC, CN Rail workers went on an eight-day strike.

Since being reappointed to head AAFC in December, Ms. Bibeau faced another rail disruption with the Wet'suwet'en solidarity blockades. Then, the novel coronavirus shut down most of the Canadian economy.

Despite the multitude of challenges, she's gone from an "unknown" in the industry to a well-respected minister at the helm of an important department.

Ms. Bibeau hails from a rural-Quebec riding with lots of dairy farmers. She was minister of international development and La Francophonie prior to replacing Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, P.E.I.) atop AAFC. Mr. MacAulay was shuffled to Veterans Affairs, where he remains.

When she was appointed, Todd Lewis, president of the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, told Regina-based radio station 980 CJME: "She's going to have a steep learning curve and I sure hope we're going to do our best to contribute and

make sure our issues remain on the table."

Last week, Mr. Lewis told *The Hill Times* that Ms. Bibeau has faced a "perfect storm" of challenges and "has certainly done a good job in trying to keep up with the changes," and that "the doors have been open for discussions with both the Minister and her staff."

Mary Robinson, president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, said Ms. Bibeau has been "exceptional in terms of how much she's learned about agriculture," and that "she wants to help Canadian agriculture," but that "we need more buy in around the cabinet table. She can only be so effective working in isolation."

Before the novel coronavirus swept across the globe, the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry was facing lower yields, lower margins, and lower profits. To dull the impact of a bad harvest, trade disputes, and rail disruptions, many in the industry were looking to government support through the business risk management regime. Stakeholders and MPs say the slate of programs haven't been serving farmers' needs and, as the coronavirus fallout continues, is becoming more important by the day.

AAFC has three main risk management programs. AgriStability provides support when farmers face a large margin decline. AgriInvest provides cash to help manage income declines. AgriInsurance provides insurance against natural hazards to lessen the financial burden on farmers. Ms. Bibeau's mandate letter specifically mentioned a revamp of AgriStability. The Liberal election platform also said if elected, they would "move forward with a collaborative review of Canada's business risk management programs, with a special focus on Agri-Stability, and are prepared to increase federal support to farmers to help them manage risks beyond their control."

Risk management reform has long been a priority for the industry. It was mentioned in Mr. MacAulay's mandate letter when he was first appointed agriculture minister in 2015. Ms. Bibeau got started on risk management reform early in her tenure, during a meeting between federal and provincial agriculture officials held on Dec. 17, 2019 in Ottawa. Ms. Gowriluk said the meeting was focused on "what they could do to do the [AgriStability] program to ensure our members can receive some type of meaningful support from the government," but no agreement was struck.

Conservative agriculture critic John Barlow (Foothills, Alta.) said there isn't a big partisan divide on the issue on the House agriculture committee, but noted how difficult it is to revamp the AgriStability program because of the need for provincial buy-in. Ms. Gowriluk, Mr. Barlow, and Mr. MacGregor said they were disappointed with the results of the meeting. Another meeting is scheduled for June in Guelph. AAFC has not yet made a decision on whether to cancel or postpone the meeting.

"There seems to be a continued commitment to analysis. There's been very little action on this file," Ms. Gowriluk said.

Mr. Barlow and NDP agriculture critic Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan-Malahat-Langford,

B.C.) separately met with Ms. Bibeau in December after the mandate letter was released to discuss their priorities. Both said they welcomed revamping the risk management regime and look forward to working towards a solution.

The mandate letter told her and department to "undertake a review of risk management programs, with a special focus on AgriStability. Help producers manage environmental and business risks by providing faster and better adapted support. Draw lessons from recent trade disputes and evidence-based research." The House Agriculture Committee unanimously adopted a motion put forward by Mr. MacGregor to study risk management as its first order of business. The committee has met twice on the topic, first on Feb. 27, then again on March 10.

AgriStability is jointly administered by the federal and provincial governments, and cost is split 60-40. Currently, in order for a farmer to tap in to AgriStability they must see their margin decline to 70 per cent of the previous year's margin. If that threshold is met, AgriStability will provide money based on a five-step calculation. The previous Conservative government brought in changes to AgriStability in 2012 as part of Going Forward 2, a \$3-billion five-year framework that ended in 2018. The margin was reduced to 70 per cent, where it currently sits, from 85 per cent. Agriculture stakeholders were upset at the time, and many still say the cut made the program unusable. Ms. Robinson and Ms. Gowriluk both said they would like to see the 85 per cent threshold be reinstated.

Chris van den Heuvel, second vice-president at the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, said one of the reasons AgriStability enrolment has been steadily dropping is that the 70 per cent margin is too low, and farmers can't rely on it. Margins could drop enough to seriously hurt the farm, but not enough to meet the 70 per cent threshold.

"We've been seeing over the last number of years a decline in enrolment because the programs simply aren't robust, flexible, or timely enough to be able to help," he said.

Adding to the frustration over AgriStability in such an uncertain time are the administrative hurdles in applying, and a lengthy delay in benefit delivery. Ms. Gowriluk said these two factors also contribute to declining enrolment rates.

"A farmer will wait some time before they'll know whether or not they will be eligible to receive a payment through that program," she said. "Even when they find out that they have met the requirements and they will be receiving a payment, they'll wait up to 18 months to receive that payment. The program is not bankable and the program is certainly not timely."

With the House suspended until at least April further committee work on the problem will be put on pause, much like the rest of the country.

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The Hill Times

Agriculture Policy Briefing

Five key issues facing Canada's agri-food industry



Stanford Blade

Opinion

“Agriculture is a legacy industry.”
“We need to feed nine billion people by 2050.”

“Food security isn't a production issue, it is a distribution problem.”

“We need to invest in the industries of the future, not the past.”

“Amazing industry, but I hope my kid doesn't choose that as a career option.”

What is your favourite cliché regarding the agriculture and food sectors? Do you think they describe reality? What do you really believe about an industry which exported \$65-billion in products last year

with domestic sales well over \$100-billion?

Everything that you think you know about agriculture is changing. I grew up on a dairy farm in Alberta. I have worked in leadership teams in agri-food research institutions in Canada and Africa. I served as CEO of an Alberta group that placed investments in the agriculture, food and bio-economy sectors. And now I have the privilege of serving as dean of one of Canada's leading agriculture and food faculties.

Agriculture has been my life and yet I feel like I am struggling to keep up. Some things are still true. Canada has remarkably abundant and productive land, water availability that is the envy of most countries and amazingly talented people. Here are a few observations from my experiences in the last few months.

Food security

I was invited to Brunei to discuss the possibility of having students enroll in agriculture and food programs at the University of Alberta. With the downturn in petroleum prices, the Sultan of Brunei issued a royal decree that the country needed to be more focused on self-reliance for food security. In

Canada, we face our own challenges with food security in our northern, indigenous and low-income communities. COVID-19 is showing us that interruptions in global food supply chains have the potential to affect our families and friends.

New players

Our industries are ideally suited to participate in the artificial intelligence and machine learning revolution. We are an industry which is data rich in everything from soil fertility levels to consumer behaviour. At a meeting in Seattle on new opportunities in digital agriculture, the “usual suspects” of corporate agriculture and food were joined by Amazon, Airbus, Microsoft, Google Ventures, IBM and an interesting set of global venture capital firms. These groups will bring amazing new technology, experience and investment into agriculture and food. According to the financial monitoring firm AgFunder venture capitalists, hedge funds and others invested \$16.9-billion into agri-food tech startups in 2018.

Daunting challenges

We are constantly facing wicked problems which are beyond our control. These include transportation interruptions, increased energy costs and trade disputes in addition to our perennial issues of invasive pests and volatile weather. One *Academy Awards* speech can capture the interest and attention of millions of citizens while we keep telling ourselves that if Canadians only knew more about who we are and what we do everything would be fine. We need to find trusted partners and advocates outside of our industry who want to amplify our messages because our hard work aligns with their aspirations.

Recruiting great people

In our faculty, we now have more urban undergraduate students than those from

rural backgrounds. We have instituted a new “mini-internship” program so that these bright students can spend time with top-tier crop and livestock producers, food processors, and bio-industrial companies to provide experience that they didn't get growing up. We need to use everything in our power to draw talented people at every career stage into the exciting opportunities presented by agriculture and food.

Research & innovation are investments

The trend in Canada is to reduce public spending in developing the new people and new ideas that our sector will need. Our competitors are doing exactly the opposite. In February the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced the new “Agriculture Innovation Agenda” which will align the entire USDA “to position American agriculture increase production by 40 per cent while cutting the environmental footprint of U.S. agriculture in half by 2050.” Canada and its provinces need to respond to this (and similar initiatives in other competing countries) or our industry will be left behind.

If Canada is going to increase its agri-food exports from \$65-billion to \$85-billion (and domestic sales to \$140-billion) by 2025 we will have to think about what we need to do differently. Recent events have shown that there is no entitlement to the continued prosperity of our agri-food value chain. Perhaps the headwinds we face will provide the impetus and courage to think differently about what our future agri-food sector needs to do to be (in the words of the 2017 Barton Report) “the trusted 21st century global leader in the supply of safe, nutritious and sustainable food.”

Stanford Blade is the dean of the faculty of agricultural, life and environmental sciences at the University of Alberta.
The Hill Times



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Agriculture Policy Briefing

How free trade agreements can boost the presence of Canadian agri-food products in the global market



Then foreign affairs minister Chrystia Freeland speaks with reporters in Montreal on Jan. 29, 2018, after round six of talks to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement. The new NAFTA, which received royal assent on March 13, 2020, has boosted trade in new product categories more so than other FTAs. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

the project disaggregates trade into intensive margins (trade in previously traded goods) and extensive margins (trade in newly traded goods). FTAs are designed to reduce trade costs and offer preferential access. Reduced variable trade costs tend to benefit the intensive margin (tariffs and tariff rate quotas) while reduction in fixed trade costs (regulatory measures, sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures and labelling requirements) tend to benefit the extensive margin. Exporting firms must comply with these costs regardless of how many units are shipped, making them fixed.

Currently, Canada has fourteen FTAs in force and these FTAs widely differ in how they affect the intensive and extensive margins. Based on our analysis, FTAs with Jordan, Honduras, U.S., and Mexico (NAFTA) have significantly increased trade along the intensive margin. This is driven by preferential tariff rates for Canadian agri-food exports into these markets. Negative intensive margin effects are seen in agreements with Israel, Chile, Peru, South Korea and the EFTA (European Free Trade Agreement – Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Iceland). In these agreements, there was not sufficient reduction in variable costs (such as tariffs) giving no preference to Canadian agri-food products. Although Canada may have increased its exports into these markets, it has not increased them as much as other nations, despite the presence of an FTA. For example, Canada's tariff rates for Bovine Carcasses (HS code 02011000) experience the same tariffs entering Israel, Peru and Norway as all other WTO member nations. Canada has no competitive tariff advantage compared to the other 164 member nations in the WTO. South Korea has given Canada preferential rates against other WTO nations but not against other large agri-food exporters. For example, in 2017 the same Bovine carcasses discussed above faced a 29.3 per cent tariff when exported from Canada compared to a 26.6% tariff when exported from Australia and a 21.3 per cent tariff from the USA.

Contrast this with the extensive margin side. Our analysis indicates that Canada's FTAs with Chile, Peru, Honduras, South Korea and Mexico (NAFTA) have positive impacts on extensive margins. This means that growth in the number of product varieties exported to these partners has increased as a result of the FTAs. These FTAs have directed their focus on how to lower regulatory burdens and harmonize standards. This action lowers the fixed costs for exporting firms looking to break into a new market, making it easier for them to export new varieties and expand the extensive margin.

Signing a FTA does not automatically mean preferential access to foreign markets for Canadian agri-food products. Canada's FTAs have heterogeneous effects. Some of the FTAs expand trade of previously traded goods, while other agreements promote trade in new product categories. Preferential market access can be expanded either through lowering of variable trade costs like tariffs to a level that is competitive with other countries, or by lowering fixed trade costs through regulatory reform and harmonization of standards. Doing both is the best way to increase trade, however from a political perspective, this is sometimes easier said than done.

Sylvanus Kawku Afesorbor is an assistant professor, and Brendan McDougall is a master's student, in the food, agricultural and resources economics department at the University of Guelph.

Sylvanus Kawku Afesorbor and Brendan McDougall present a novel way to look at the benefits of free trade deals to the Canadian agri-food sector by separating products into 'extensive' and 'intensive' margins.



Brendan McDougall & Sylvanus Kawku Afesorbor

Opinion

Canadian agriculture is increasingly dependent on foreign markets to drive demand growth. Agriculture continues to be a highly protected sector in international trade. Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) aim to reduce these barriers through bilateral and multilateral negotiations giving Canadian agri-food exporters preferential trade access. These FTAs, however, do have a differential impact in promoting agri-food. Some FTAs foster innovation, business development and trade in new products. Other FTAs are more beneficial to existing exporters, helping them lower their trade costs, extract more profit and ship more volume. These differences in preferential trade access have important ramifications for diversification and future trade development of Canadian agri-food exports.

The University of Guelph's Department of Food, Agriculture and Resource Economics has an ongoing project estimating the effectiveness of Canada's FTAs in stimulating agri-food trade. Instead of looking at aggregate trade,



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Policy Briefing Agriculture



Between 2010 and 2015, the average annual growth of Canada's agriculture and agri-food exports to the world increased by 7.73 per cent. Since 2015, there has been a stark contrast as the average annual growth of our agriculture and agri-food exports to the world increased by just 1.82 per cent, writes Conservative MP John Barlow. *Photograph courtesy of Pexels*

Farmers need a champion, the Liberals haven't answered the bell

Missteps by the Liberal government have hurt Canadian farmers. Farmers need a champion, not handouts, to help with market access, non-tariff trade barriers, and more, writes Conservative MP John Barlow.



Conservative MP John Barlow

Opinion

Canadian agriculture is a critical pillar of our economy, but it can only reach its full potential with reliable, strong trade agreements.

The Canadian agriculture and agri-food sectors account for more than \$100-billion in economic activity every year and employ more than two million Canadians. However, few countries are as reliant on global trade as Canada as more than 50 per cent of the agri-food products we grow is exported to markets around the world.

Seeing the potential in modern Canadian agriculture, the previous Conservative government under prime minister Stephen Harper, successfully negotiated free trade agreements with more than 40 countries included the TransPacific Partnership and the Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) with the European Union. These agreements mean unprecedented new markets for Canadian agricultural products and unparalleled new growth for farmers, ranchers and processors.

However, this means not only are open markets important to Canada's farmers and producers, but also predictable and dependable transportation for agricultural products is essential to their success.

Unfortunately, the current Liberal government does not

understand the importance of our global relations with some of our most important partners. Time and time again, those paying for the geopolitical mistakes made by the Liberal government is Canadian agriculture. Those suffering the consequences are our farmers and ranchers who work extremely hard every single day to ensure they have the highest-quality products not only on our tables but for customers around the world.

Between 2010 and 2015, the average annual growth of Canada's agriculture and agri-food exports to the world increased by 7.73 per cent. Since 2015 there has been a stark contrast as the average annual growth of our agriculture and agri-food exports to the world increased by just 1.82 per cent. Put another way, in the last three years of government Conservatives grew agriculture exports by \$13.9-billion, under the Liberals they've only grown exports by only \$4.6-billion.

The impact has been profound as according to Statistics Canada net farm income dropped by

45 per cent in 2018, the largest reduction in 12 years. In addition, Canada's farmers are now burdened with record debt load of about \$106-billion.

Liberal political blunders have cost Canadian farmers vital trade markets.

Over a year ago, China began implementing several non-tariff trade barriers on Canadian agricultural products. This began with canola seed which the Chinese claim was tainted with pests. Soybean exports have also dried up, and we even saw a temporary suspension on pork and beef exports.

Canada has been dealing with China from a position of weakness.

It has now been more than a year since the Chinese government banned imports of Canada's world class canola. It impacts 45,000 producers and 250,000 jobs across the country. This has cost canola producers more than \$1-billion and soybean producers have lost nearly \$590-million.

Liberals repeatedly failed to stand up for our canola sector,

failed to support our farmers and producers and failed to resolve this critical market access issue.

China is not the only significant market lost under Liberal leadership.

Saudi Arabia announced it would suspend new trade and investment with Canada. The Italian government called on pasta makers to include country-of-origin on labels, which hurt Canadian durum exports. Italy also threatened to refuse to sign the trade agreement between the European Union and Canada over the durum dispute.

Under this Liberal government we lost our fumigation agreement with India and now face high tariffs on our peas, lentils and chickpeas and pulse exports to India have plummeted from an all time high of \$1.5-billion in 2015 to just \$158-million in 2019.

As a result of lost trade markets Canadian producers have lost more than \$5-billion in revenue since 2017, thanks to the geopolitical mistakes of the Liberals.

Canadian farmers and ranchers aren't looking for financial handouts. They're looking to grow and maintain their exports. However, lost market access, non-tariff trade barriers, relentless red tape and tax hikes, such as the carbon tax, make Canadian farmers uncompetitive.

Farmers are looking for a champion. Someone who will defend Canada's reputation of high quality, safe products on the international stage and secure vital market access for Canada's billion-dollar agriculture exports.

Clearly, the Liberals are not prepared to be that trade champion.

Conservative MP John Barlow, who represents Foothills, Alta., is the Conservative Party's critic for agriculture.

The Hill Times



Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Marie-Claude Bibeau, and Jim Carr, former-minister of international trade diversification, pictured in the West Block on May 1, 2019, giving an update on the government's response to the canola trade dispute with China. Conservative MP John Barlow writes that geopolitical missteps by the Liberal government have cost farmers billions of dollars. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Agriculture Policy Briefing

Food insecurity demands attention in a hungry, unstable world

As food insecurity becomes more common in the face of climate change, Canada can play a leading role in solving one of the biggest problems facing the world, writes Evan Fraser.



Evan Fraser

Opinion

The latest data from the United Nations are staggering. In 2019, 821 million people around the world were chronically undernourished, up 10 million from the year before. This means that an astounding 11 per cent of the world's population does not get enough food to eat. Equally concerning is that around two billion of us experience what the UN calls "moderate or severe food insecurity."

Taken together, these stats mean hunger is back up to where it was 10 years ago and foreshadows a dangerous world ahead. This is because the primary drivers of rising hunger are economic downturns, the climate crisis, and violent conflict. Regrettably, none of these challenges are expected to lessen anytime soon.

Hunger and food insecurity have mostly risen in countries where the economy has been in poor shape. Economic shocks

and slowdowns generally mean that people must spend a higher percentage of their salary on food and when they do that, food insecurity rises. Income inequality also drives hunger as countries divided between the haves and have-nots are less able to adapt to economic problems.

In many parts of the world, environmental problems also cause economic disruption. The number of extreme climate-related disasters is trending upward, and this not only undermines agriculture's ability to produce food but also the incomes of some of the world's poorest people, many of whom are farmers and depend on agriculture for incomes. For small farmers in Asia, Latin America or Africa, droughts and floods both directly and indirectly hurt food security by reducing the amount of food and people's purchasing power.

Finally, there is an almost perfect correlation between conflict and food insecurity in many parts of the world. South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and parts of Nigeria are all affected by conflict and are all at risk of major food insecurity.

These factors all interact to create vicious cycles that threaten to send waves of instability crashing across the world. What's especially frustrating is that there is nothing new about any of this.

Ten thousand years of agriculture history show a distressing number of situations where the unraveling of food systems, en-

vironmental degradation, economic inequality, and conflict all interact.

The Syrian Civil War, for instance, seems to have found at least some of its origins in a devastating drought that brought people out of the countryside and into cities where they grew upset over political corruption. There is some evidence that the pathways taken by the Rwandan genocide are related to soil degradation and farmland scarcity. The Arab Spring began as protests over food prices that were themselves triggered by droughts in Russia and China that sent world food prices skyrocketing. And, the French Revolution began when El Niño induced droughts caused crop failures and this helped expose the excesses of the French aristocrat.

Luckily, there are things we can do. And Canada can play a global leadership position.

Through institutions such as the International Development Research Council and Global Affairs Canada, we can position ourselves as technological leaders and fund the research that will allow us to breed plants and animals that are resistant to extreme weather and capable of remaining productive even under climate change. From the perspective of farm management, we can double down on our record of international development assistance to empower farmers—and particularly female farmers—to adopt management practices that

build up the soil and absorb carbon rather than releasing it. This can turn agriculture into part of the solution to the climate crisis rather than a source of the problem. And we can invest in strategies—such as helping low-income families all over the world—gain access to the basic supports they need and thus buffer communities from problems in the global food system.

For decades, activists and scientists have tried to make policymakers aware that they need to pay more attention to food systems and climate change. To a large extent, these efforts have fallen on deaf ears. But the evidence is now impossible to ignore. Food insecurity and conflict are inextricably intertwined and both will increase over the next generation unless we develop systems that are resilient, sustainable, equitable and robust.

When history books of the 21st-century are written, will the chapter on food security and population growth be a good news story, where we battled back the spectre of famine and conflict? The answer to this question can be yes. And through proactive policy, careful investment in key technologies, and empowering small-scale farmers, Canada can be one of the key global players that helped solve one of the century's biggest challenges.

Evan Fraser is the director of the Arrell Food Institute at the University of Guelph
The Hill Times

CANOLA FARMERS NEED ACTION



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Hillites gather at an industry event, hosted by the Canadian Media Producers Association in January, for a screening of *Cardinal* in Ottawa. Lobby days, receptions, and conferences have been effectively cancelled as public health officials work to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

COVID-19 is forcing lobbyists to significantly shift strategies

‘You can work with a client to figure out if there is a way in which the client can be helpful, genuinely helpful, and not superficially helpful,’ says Joe Jordan of Bluesky Strategy Group on lobbying amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

Continued from page 1

the focus has to be on getting through this,” said Joe Jordan, senior associate at Bluesky Strategy Group.

As a former MP, Mr. Jordan said he may not react too kindly to being approached by a lobbyist during this type of crisis, in which thousands of people are being effectively laid off and the health-care system is under strain.

“MPs have two parts to their job: they’re legislators, and they represent a constituency,” Mr. Jordan said. “What this thing has done is focus 100 per cent of their time on constituents. If you don’t understand that, and you’re trying to engage at this particular point in time, you’re not going to be very successful, and, in fact, you could cause your client great damage.”

Parliament has been suspended until at least April 20, though between 20 and 30 MPs are expected to convene on the Hill sometime in the week of March 23 to debate and pass the Liberal government’s \$82-billion relief package targeted at precarious workers and businesses struggling to make their monthly payments. Much of last week saw Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and his cabinet rolling out a series of measures to bolster the feds’ response to the pandemic that has encroached nearly every corner of the world, with more than 170 countries and counting hit by the coronavirus. Mr. Trudeau will likely not be in the House, given that he has to be self-isolation until March 26 following his wife’s positive COVID-19 diagnosis on March 12.

Since Ottawa’s focus “has fundamentally shifted” since the pandemic, he said, consultants need to change their focus to planning logistics and perfecting their pitches with clients, whether or not such asks are relevant in the short term.

“You can work with a client to figure out if there is a way in which the client can be helpful, genuinely helpful, and not superficially helpful,” Mr. Jordan said. “Because, again, you’re looking at what is this relationship going to look like in one year, two years, three years, or 10 years.”

Kyle Larkin, manager of public affairs at Impact Public Affairs, agreed there’s a “thin line” between engaging and not interfering with the government’s work. “I’ve noticed that MPs, and rightly so, have been focused on their own constituencies, focused on communicating information from the House of Commons to their constituents,” he said. “That’s become their No. 1 priority.”

‘We’re all improvising right now’

The House and Senate’s temporary suspension has also meant diminished opportunities for face-to-face interactions, whether through lobby days, receptions, conferences, and other routine gatherings for at least the next few months, as public health authorities have advised against holding in-person events to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Mr. Trudeau on March 19 said Canadians should brace for social-distancing measures to be in place for possibly the next few weeks or months.

“It [COVID-19] definitely has an impact. Traditionally, government relations is a very face-to-face business, and when you eliminate that from the equation, it makes it harder,” said Ian Chesney, consultant at Santis Health. “But I wouldn’t say that it completely disrupts day-to-day business.”

Much of the engagement has shifted online, he said, over teleconference or email, and over the phone, with many groups and businesses changing their strategies. “What it really means for government relations is more so a shift in tactic, strategy. [We’re] tying everything back to COVID-19,” he said. “A lot of GR consultants are going to be doing that anyway, whether you’re in

health care, non-profit. Other industries are all feeling the effects of this [pandemic] in terms of the economy.”

Jacquie LaRocque, principal at Compass Rose Group, said her firm has been “working with clients over the past week to shape the ideas and input they bring to the government” to delineate how the pandemic is impacting them and the supports they need.

She said clients are cognizant of the fact that their asks heading into the budget—which has effectively been delayed—have to “adapt to the current reality.” (The federal budget was initially to be tabled on March 30.)

“We’ve seen a few cancellations of high-profile outreach days ... but we actually feel good about how creative we’ve been able to be, in terms of adapting the format,” she said. “We can do some outreach by telephone.”

Mr. Larkin, who works with associations, said clients are bracing for social-distancing to be the new normal at least “well into May,” or perhaps even longer. “If this COVID-19 situation goes for a long amount of time ... advocacy efforts will have to shift towards digital advocacy, email campaigns, social media campaigns.”

John Delacourt, vice-president and group leader at Hill and Knowlton Strategies, agreed that there will be an uptick of digital advocacy and even “formally established coalitions,” with groups banding together to address the questions that remain “about how the fiscal stimulus will be effective in the months ahead.”

“We’re all improvising right now, by way of figuring out the best way to serve people. ... We’re all anticipating that this is not going to last six to eight weeks,” he said. “There will be ramifications [on the economy].”

He added that one upside to this crisis has been that it’s forcing everyone to focus on their strategies for engagement. “This government has never, in my experience, been interested in sitting down for what could be accomplished by visiting a website, exchange of business cards,” he said.

The pandemic has also forced lobbyists and their clients to “pause and reflect” whether they run the risk of “being a nuisance” at a time of crisis by approaching

governments with specific asks not related to the outbreak, said Yaroslav Baran, principal at Earncliffe Strategy.

“When government is dealing with a crisis, it really doesn’t make sense to start knocking on their door with the ‘business as usual, mundane kind of communication,’” he said. “What the circumstances have forced, is a need to do two things: first of all to triage the urgency of dialogue with government, and secondly, to be a little bit more creative about how we do it.”

At the same time, Mr. Chesney said, lobby groups can be useful conduits to the government in terms of relaying what’s happening on the ground in their industries. He added that engagement, so far, has been a two-way street.

For some parts of the health sector, he noted, there are business opportunities in terms of meeting the government’s needs around sanitation and infection prevention.

Garry Keller, vice-president at Strategy Corp and former chief of staff to then-interim Conservative leader Rona Ambrose, said he expects the workload to get heavier once the government shifts from holding near-daily announcements into “the actual administrative rolling out of funds and programs.”

“We’re not quite sure exactly how governments of all levels are going to be able to deliver stimulus funding. We have some high-level indications of how that might be, but we don’t actually have a lot of details,” he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) acknowledged last week that, given its rapidly shifting response to the outbreak, the government will, at times, announce steps and measures without full details. Ottawa, for example, announced March 18 its intention to close the Canada-U.S. border to all non-essential travel, but was unable to say when it will take effect, until a day later.

Mr. Keller said access to “front-line ministers” throughout the crisis will be limited, unless it is relevant to the outbreak, as MPs juggle cabinet meetings, their constituency, and other responsibilities as legislators. “I do think there’s an opportunity to engage, especially at the public service level, with people who are working from home,” he said, predicting that could come this week when further direction is given to public servants.

“It may shift into, ‘Okay, now we’ve made all these financial announcements. We actually have to get money out the door,’ so it’ll be focused on the delivery side,” he said.

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COVID-19



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who has been in self-isolation since his wife Sophie Grégoire Trudeau tested positive for the coronavirus on March 12, 2020, announced \$82-billion in financial aid last week for Canadians and businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The prime minister has continued to hold daily morning briefings from Rideau Cottage where he lives with his family on the grounds of Rideau Hall. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

‘Everybody’s scared shitless’: Trudeau needs to cut red tape, give money directly to Canadians to stimulate the economy, say political strategists

The COVID-19 pandemic makes 9/11 look like a ‘hiccup’ says EKOS president Frank Graves.

Continued from page 1

alities of life,” said Stephen Carter, an Alberta political strategist and president of Decide Campaigns, who worked on the campaigns of Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi and former Alberta premier Alison Redford.

“This isn’t a thing that can be solved by EI applications. This is a much bigger problem, and thinking that we can solve this through normal processes is naive to the extreme. Any program that requires an application is foolhardy,” Mr. Carter said in a phone interview with *The Hill Times*.

Mr. Carter suggested the government pilot a basic-income program, giving \$1,500 every month directly to Canadians to stabilize the economy.

Doing so would cost the government hundreds of billions of dollars per year. Canada’s government typically operates with an annual budget of roughly \$300-billion per year.

On March 18, Mr. Trudeau, who went into self-isolation after his wife tested positive for COVID-19 on March 12, announced an \$82-billion fiscal-stimulus package, which includes \$27-billion in direct support. It also includes \$55-billion to help business with their liquidity needs through tax deferrals. The package, which includes a temporary boost to the Canada Child Benefit, is about three per cent of the country’s GDP.

The announced measures include an “emergency care benefit” for those who don’t qualify

for sick leave or employment insurance; a six-month reprieve from payments on student loans; an extension for the tax-filing deadline to June 1; deferral of tax payments until Aug. 31; and funding for Indigenous communities.

Government officials have also hinted that more financial help is on the way for industries particularly hit hard by the virus, such as the tourism, airline, and energy sectors, and others who have started to lay off their employees.

During the announcement, Mr. Trudeau said that he and U.S. President Donald Trump agreed to close the border to non-essential traffic, while allowing for goods and essential workers to flow in and out. The U.S. is Canada’s most important trading partner, as goods and services worth about \$3-billion and thousands of people from both countries cross the border each day.

Given that these are exceptional times, and that the pandemic

is wreaking havoc worldwide, Mr. Carter said, the government should work to move as quickly as possible and seek to minimize the processing time for getting these supports to Canadians. He said that the application process might take a month before people receive the money, which will be too late, as many Canadians are facing a cash crunch now.

Mr. Carter said there are many vulnerable people who need financial resources to pay their rent, mortgage, groceries, and other essentials. He added the government should not be worried about borrowing money, as the interest rate is close to zero. When the economy recovers, he said, the government can tax that money back.

“I don’t want people falling through the cracks. This process just made bigger cracks,” said Mr. Carter. “If I send you \$1,000 and you don’t need it, right, you spend it, right. We can tax it back from

you later. We’re going to head into the biggest recession we’ve ever seen, and possibly another depression if we don’t have some sort of plan to get us out of this. This is scary as hell. ... People are laid off. People are being told just to go home and stay home with very little in the way of economic support.”

On top of a universal monthly payment for all Canadians, Mr. Carter also suggested that the government should find ways to further stimulate the economy and to head off the possibility of a depression, such as waiving property taxes and setting up a massive infrastructure program.

Mr. Carter said he is self-employed and still has all the contracts that he was working on before the Coronavirus made its way into Canada. He said he knows several others who have lost their clients or jobs because

Continued on page 25

COVID-19



Health Minister Patty Hajdu, pictured on Parliament Hill on March 18, 2020, speaking at a government update on the government's measures to help Canadians with the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. 'This is an all-hands-on-deck moment in Canada,' she said on March 19 in an appeal to governments, private sectors, and people across the country.
The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Continued from page 24

of the financial crunch. Mr. Carter cited the example of the Calgary Stampede, which recently announced it was laying off 900 people due to COVID-19 concerns. He said it's expected the unemployment numbers are expected to go significantly this month alone, with businesses closing down and employees being told to stay home as part of the "social distancing" strategy to limit the spread of the virus.

benefits get to targeted people. We are not in normal times. Pay out universal benefits and tax them back next year."

According to media reports last week, the Trump administration had proposed two rounds of direct payments to Americans with each payment based on the family size and income.

Prof. Duane Bratt, chair of Mount Royal University's department of economics and policy studies, said the government has been cautious in its plans to help out Canadians. Instead of trying

"By and large the steps that the government has taken are appropriate," he said. "People may question the timing, about whether these decisions could have been made sooner, but they're very difficult decisions."

Prof. Bratt said the Coronavirus story is changing fast and overshadowing everything else, to the point that it has overshadowed news of the Canada-U.S. border closure.

Pollster Darrell Bricker of Ipsos told *The Hill Times* that Canadians right now are in a wait-and-see mode. They're looking at how the government is handling both economic and health aspects of this crisis. This unprecedented situation is an opportunity for the prime minister to show leadership and provide direction to the country, he said.

"They focus on the economic aspects," said Mr. Bricker, president of Ipsos. "An increasing number of people are worried about their jobs, and an increasing number of people are worried about their retirement income, their day-to-day expenses, being able to stay up above the water, as all this is going on. I think that's what it's all about. Partisan politics, not really so much part of the mix right now."

He said now is not the time to pass any judgment on how the government is handling this unfolding crisis. Mr. Bricker said that anybody who pretends to know what will happen or what this crisis means for the Trudeau government, which is in a minority situation, is merely guessing.

"We're in the middle of it right now, and anybody who says they know how this is going to look, the effect is going to be—or what's going to come out of this—they're just guessing," said Mr. Bricker.

Pollster Frank Graves said that the Coronavirus crisis is making the Sept. 11 attacks look like a "hiccup." So far, he said, the Trudeau government has been handling the crisis "reasonably well." But, he said, it's too early to make an assessment.

"Obviously, there's always things you could have done better, in hindsight," said Mr. Graves, president of EKOS Research. "That's the problem here that we don't have a cookbook or a recipe for dealing with a crisis of this nature."

As of deadline last week, more than 700 Canadians across the country had been diagnosed with COVID-19, resulting in nine deaths, while 10 had recovered.

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Canada's Chief Medical Officer of Health Theresa Tam, pictured on March 18, 2020, delivering her daily update briefing on Parliament Hill along with her deputy medical officer and key federal cabinet ministers.
The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Mr. Carter said people on all sides of the political spectrum are demanding quick payouts to Canadians to get through this tricky economic situation.

Ken Boessenkool, a former senior adviser to then-prime minister Stephen Harper, echoed Mr. Carter's views on Twitter, last week.

"Immediate cheques of \$2,000 for anyone who filed an income tax form last year," Mr. Boessenkool tweeted Wednesday, March 18. "Claw back in next year's tax form as required. Targeted programs will create large cracks for people to fall through. Immediate cheques won't."

He also tweeted that the application process would delay the payments to Canadians who need money to pay for their expenses as soon as possible.

"I fear application-based programs will get delayed and tied up in bureaucratic red tape," he tweeted. "In normal times, that is a feature to ensure

new ideas suggested by likes of Mr. Carter and Mr. Boessenkool, he said, the government is trying to deliver resources using existing programs. He said we don't know for a fact if there will be any delays in the application process and money reaching Canadians. He hoped that the \$82-billion financial package would be the first step and that more help is on the way.

The provincial governments would put out financial packages matching the federal government to help their residents, he noted.

"We simply don't know at this point, if there will be delays," said Prof. Bratt. "There's always a difference in the design of a policy, in the implementation of the policy. The good news is, obviously, this is priority one."

Prof. Bratt said this is a time of "great uncertainty" with the Coronavirus having serious public health and economic effects, and he's satisfied with the performance of the government.

Timeline

Jan. 25, 2020

- Canada records first "presumptive positive" case in Ontario, a man in his 50s who fell ill after returning from the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the outbreak started.

Jan. 28, 2020

- B.C. records its first case of the virus, and within a week, several more are confirmed, but all who had been connected to people who had travelled to or visited from the affected region in China.

Feb. 6, 2020

- Ottawa begins repatriating what will eventually be hundreds of residents, chartering two planes to China and airlifting others from Japan on board the Diamond Princess cruise ship. The Diamond Princess had been quarantined off the coast of Japan since Feb. 3 with about 3,700 passengers on board. It wasn't until early March when Canada's public health officer started warning Canadians to "think twice" about cruise travel.

March 4, 2020

- Bank of Canada cuts interest rates by 50 basis points to 1.25 per cent amid Coronavirus concerns, following in the U.S. Federal Reserve's footsteps, in an effort to soften the economic impact.
- Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland is named chair of a new cabinet committee tasked with managing the federal response to the outbreak, convened to "complement" the work of the Incident Response Group that typically meets during a crisis.

March 8, 2020

- First COVID-19 death recorded when a B.C. resident in a nursing home died. Officials said the man was in his 80s and had other underlying health issues.

March 11, 2020

- World Health Organization declares COVID-19 a pandemic.
- The federal government announced a \$1-billion fund aimed at mitigating the spread of the Coronavirus, including \$500-million in support to provinces and territories, an additional \$275-million in funding for research, and waiving the one-week waiting period for employees who need to claim Employment Insurance sickness benefits on account of being quarantined or having to self-isolate.

March 12, 2020

- The prime minister's wife, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, who returned from a trip to the United Kingdom, was tested after having flu-like symptoms, and by evening, the PMO reported she had tested positive.
- Justin Trudeau started 14-day self-isolation, but with no symptoms. Officials said that meant he would not be tested. The in-person First Ministers' Meeting, planned for the same day, was cancelled, with Mr. Trudeau instead speaking with premiers over the phone.
- The impact of the outbreak, combined with diving oil prices, helped push the Canadian stock market to its worst one-day plunge in eight decades.

March 13, 2020

- Parliament agrees to suspend for five weeks until at least April 20 after unanimous agreement among all parties.
- Senate is recalled to sit on Friday (after it adjourned the day before) to finish business, most notably to pass the new NAFTA.
- Canada upgrades advice that international travellers should self-quarantine, but over the weekend, some passengers coming from abroad said they weren't properly screened, prompting some provinces—like Quebec, Alberta, and Nova Scotia—and Montreal city officials to send their own personnel to make sure the federal job was being done.
- Treasury Board Secretariat issues directive to federal public servants permitting them to work from home during the Coronavirus pandemic, per their managers' discretion.

March 15, 2020

- Emergency cabinet meeting held in Ottawa where ministers said new measures were coming, but rebuffed reporters' questions about why the government was waiting, and why there was insufficient screening at several airports.
- Canada's public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam warns the window to flatten the curve is closing.

March 16, 2020

- Mr. Trudeau announces major new measures, including banning entry to most foreign nationals, except for U.S. citizens. Anyone with symptoms, regardless of citizenship, will also be denied boarding of flights to Canada.
- Canadian death toll rises to four, and all are connected to the B.C. nursing home where the first Canadian victim died.
- Conservative Party says leadership race and rules will go forward, but it would give leadership candidates online tools to support efforts to canvas members from a safe social distance, including making easier to gather online signatures, but declined calls from some to push off the March 25 deadline.

March 17, 2020

- Mr. Trudeau announced Parliament will be recalled for an emergency session to pass legislation and that the government would announce a major economic aid package on March 18 to help workers.
- A fifth Canadian person, a 77-year-old man, dies with COVID-19 detected post-mortem, the first in Ontario.

March 18, 2020

- The new border measures come into effect, with only four airports in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and Calgary accepting international flights.
- Canada and the U.S. announce that non-essential travel between the two countries will be barred, not including trade and commerce.
- Mr. Trudeau announces \$82-billion support package, which includes two packages nearly totalling \$15-billion of employment insurance support for Canadians facing unemployment who are not eligible for EI, as well as \$300-million to address "immediate needs" in Indigenous communities, and a six-month moratorium on student loans, among other measures.
- Deadline for Canadians to file taxes is extended from April 30 to June 1.
- COVID-19 deaths in Canada increase to nine with seven dead in British Columbia, one in Ontario, and one in Quebec—the province's first.

March 19, 2020

- Mr. Trudeau announces that closure of the Canada-U.S. border to discretionary travel will likely take effect Friday night.

March 20, 2020

- Mr. Trudeau says Ottawa will also be temporarily turning back irregular migrants who try to cross the Canada-U.S. border, beginning midnight Friday, in what it called a "reciprocal" agreement with the U.S. That means the Safe Third Country Agreement, which governs the movement of refugee claimants, will be extended to unofficial ports of entry.
- He also announces that the government has signed signed letters of intent with three companies that will work to retool their production lines to help produce necessary materials such as ventilators, face masks, and hand sanitizers, which countries around the world are clamouring for.

—Compiled by Samantha Wright Allen, with files from Neil Moss

COVID-19



Conservative Party Leader Andrew Scheer, left, Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, and Green Party parliamentary leader Elizabeth May have stayed relatively muted in their criticism of the Canadian government's action plan to combat the Coronavirus crisis. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

'The boundary of acceptable criticism just got a lot narrower': not doing politics in the time of COVID-19

'The public tolerance for outright partisanship or point-scoring will be extremely low right now,' former NDP MP Nathan Cullen says.

Continued from page 1

have made only a handful of public appearances, and typical partisan attacks on government policies have been largely muted.

"The opposition has to remain free to criticize decisions that are made, but with the intention being to make things better, not simply to score points," former NDP MP Nathan Cullen told *The Hill Times* in a phone interview last week.

"The public tolerance for outright partisanship or point-scoring will be extremely low right now, would be my guess. Anyone doing it would be likely making a mistake," said Mr. Cullen, who served as the NDP's House leader from 2012 to 2014.

Speaking to CBC last week, Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer (Regina-Qu'Appelle, Sask.) noted his support for the government's emergency measures and said his party will "continue to be cooperative" in order to recall Parliament to get assistance to Canadians.

Noting that it is the job of the opposition to provide oversight of the government, Mr. Scheer said his party will be asking questions about any Canadians that the government's \$82-billion aid package doesn't "adequately reach."

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.) sent a letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) on March 19 outlining his party's support for the government's emergency measures, but added that he was "alarmed" by the timeline for the programs to be available to the public.

Green Party parliamentary leader Elizabeth May (Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.) said that she was "encouraged by the cross-party collaboration," in a March 18 statement announcing her party's support for the government's emergency measures.

There has been some mild criticism of the government's actions. Conservative MP Dan Albas (Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola, B.C.) told reporters on March 18 that the government's response to the crisis has been "inconsistent and often sometime confusing." He also criticized the government's slow reaction on "several fronts," including the decision to close the Canada-U.S. border.

Former Conservative House leader Peter Van Loan said the opposition should look to Ontario Premier Doug Ford for a way to influence government action

without being seen as using the crisis for partisan gain.

"If you ... look at how Ford has interacted with the federal government, he's shown a lot of support. He's been a team player. He's keeping an eye focused on the ball. But I look, for example, to how he kind of pushed them gently in a positive [way] on closing the border, he didn't criticize them for not closing the border. He didn't open up a conflict," said Mr. Van Loan, who was Public Safety minister from 2008 and 2010, and was then in charge of leading pandemic planning.

Before the decision was made by Canada and the U.S. to close their shared border, Mr. Ford said he would be "open" to closing the border, with the exception of trade and commerce.

"So it was an interesting way—from a different partisan side, a different perspective...on trying to push the envelope and influence policy and show leadership, at the same time as not being critical and not opening up a partisan divide or gap," Mr. Van Loan said.

Some of the most critical voices towards the government have come from Conservative Party leadership candidates, including Peter MacKay and Erin O'Toole (Durham, Ont.), who criticized the government for not closing informal entry ways into Canada, like Roxham Road in Quebec, before the government announced that irregular border crossers would be turned back.

Mr. Van Loan said the leadership race offers "a real problem."

"Who is speaking for the Conservative Party? Is it Andrew Scheer? Is it the public safety or health shadow minister? Is it leading candidates? And they all have a bit of a claim," he said.

Leadership candidates are not playing to the general Canadian audience, Mr. Van Loan said, but to the partisan audience that is the party's base that will vote in the leadership election.

"[An audience] which probably tempts them into more critical and more partisan positions, which may seem satisfying, but I suspect are ultimately unhelpful," he said.

Mr. Cullen said he didn't think it is wise of the Conservative Party to continue its leadership campaign during the crisis.

"[A delay of the race] would ... lower the temperature for some candidates who are desperate to get attention and willing to say things that they probably know are inflammatory if not outright dangerous to attract [support]," he said.

Former NDP national director Robin Sears said it's a difficult line to walk for the opposition to be critical, but not obstructionist.

"In calmer times," he said, "it might be acceptable" to block legislation if some funding was missing, which may no longer be the case.

"I think what I would propose as a political staffer for any of the people that have to make judgments about the public posture of leaders is that the boundaries of acceptable criticism just got a lot narrower, and be careful that you don't cross them," he said.

Mr. Sears said another change to the opposition's role is that a lot of discussions will now take place away from the public eye.

"When governments negotiate with each other, as Trudeau and Trump did on the border closing, again that's not something that can be done in public," he said. "And it's not, I don't think, a reasonable thing for opposition parties to criticize. It's just the way those negotiations have to take place."

Although the opposition may need to operate less in political theatrics during the crisis, long-time Conservative strategist

Geoff Norquay said the role of the opposition is "never more useful and necessary" than it is during a crisis like this.

"The basic role of the opposition in maintaining the accountability and transparency of the government remains essentially the same," he added, "that said, I think the tone and approach of the opposition parties should be more thoughtful. The questions and criticisms of the government need to be a little bit more muted."

"The opposition needs to recognize that the government is doing the best job it is capable of doing under the circumstance, but that does not take away the need for specific probing and questions and the presentation of alternatives," Mr. Norquay said.

Mr. Van Loan said the opposition cannot just offer opinions.

"They have to actually know the files, get to know the stuff in detail, work very, very diligently if you are going to perform that function well," he said.

Without the House sitting regularly the opposition will have to do most of its public positioning through the press and social media.

Conservative MP Scott Reid (Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston, Ont.) is calling for an emergency committee to oversee the government's response to the COVID-19 crisis.

"Oversight is needed—and if, as [Government House Leader Pablo] Rodriguez tells us, it cannot be given by the House of Commons in advance—then it needs to be given by a committee of the House of Commons, after the fact (and starting immediately)," Mr. Reid wrote in a blog post on his website.

He said opposition leaders should not provide unanimous consent to the government's emergency measures package when the House of Commons resumes this week unless an oversight committee is established.

"To do otherwise would be a gross abdication of responsibility," he added.

With a reshaped opposition role, politicians say there needs to be increased cross-party consultation.

"One thing I would offer to the government ... is recognizing the value of cross-partisan support. The more they can include opposition leaders and thoughtful MPs into the process, the better," Mr. Cullen said.

"First, there may be an insight that a minister or a deputy minister doesn't have. And secondly, I find solutions are much more strongly owned by all of Parliament if there's a sincere effort to include rather than exclude other voices," he added.

If the government's emergency measures are proving to be ineffective over time, the tone of the opposition could change to be more critical, said Mr. Van Loan.

"If this goes on for many weeks and months as has been suggested might be the case, there's not always going to be that same sense of urgency and there's going to be a greater opportunity to examine whether the decisions being made are the right ones, whether they should be tweaked," he said.

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'It's incredibly dire here': Alberta MPs navigating COVID-19 and oil crises

While the new Coronavirus spreads across Canada, a supply war between Russia and Saudi Arabia has led to a plunge in the price of oil produced in Alberta.

Continued from page 1

with her province under siege by a "triple whammy" of a struggling resource sector, a sudden plummet in oil prices, and nationwide measures to mitigate the damage from COVID-19.

"It's incredibly dire here, there is no doubt about it," she said.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) has closed Canada's borders to all but Canadian residents, and is encouraging Canadians to isolate themselves from each other as much as they can as confirmed cases of the virus grow daily. He also pledged an \$82-billion economic bailout package for individuals and businesses, many of which have been forced to close amid the crisis.

Meanwhile, a dispute over oil production between Russia and Saudi Arabia led to a price war, with world oil prices dropping, and the already-low price for Alberta-produced Western Canadian Select oil plunging into single digits last week, before recovering to more than US\$12 per barrel on March 19.

"When we come out of this, we will still be at a net deficit in terms of jobs, and I would even say revenue, within the province," said Ms. Kusie, who was first elected in a 2017 byelection.

"That will be the time again that we look to addressing the more mid-term and long-term economies here," she said.

"For now it's about implementing these measures as announced by the federal government to ease the pain as much as possible."

Alberta has 34 MPs, and not one is from the governing Liberal Party. All but one, NDP MP Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona), are Conservative. *The Hill Times* spoke with Ms. Kusie, Ms. McPherson, and fellow Alberta Conservative Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill) about the challenges facing their province, and how they were managing their duties as MPs during the crisis.

Like most MPs, all three have been using social media and their MP websites to post information to constituents about the COVID-19 crisis, and the government's response. Ms. Rempel Garner has redesigned a section of her website into a streamlined FAQ on the subject.



These are extraordinary times: Conservative MP Michelle Rempel Garner, left, NDP MP Heather McPherson, and Conservative MP Stephanie Kusie are trying to help their constituents in Alberta work through the COVID-19 crisis and a sudden crash to the price of oil that underpins the province's economy. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

She said she has been relying only on information from public health and government officials, and trying to gather details about how and when some of the government's measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis will apply.

"The problem, right now, for my constituents, is trying to aggregate essentially balkanized pieces of information [from] across government," she said.

She also said a government minister with whom she has a personal relationship—she declined to say who—reached out to her to ask for information. Ms. Kusie said she contacted local and provincial politicians to try to find information to pass back to the minister.

The government has been holding daily briefings for all MPs and Senators via teleconfer-

Ms. McPherson said she had also been working from home. She has kept her office open, but is not accepting walk-in appointments, and is helping staff to work from home as well if and when necessary.

"My constituents care about how we're helping small businesses and these families that have to stay at home because they have small children," she said.

eral residents of a trailer park in her riding. She said she kept her distance during the meeting.

"I'm a hugger. I love to hug people and there are these people who are seriously hurting, and you're not even allowed to shake their hand."

Ms. Rempel Garner said her staff was already doing a lot of their work through digital media before the crisis, and "social distancing" hadn't interrupted their ability to do their job. She declined to say whether she was working out of the office, her home, or elsewhere, but said she was carrying on with her work.

"We've had a significant uptick in casework obviously. This has just been devastating for our community."

Calgary is the heart of Canada's oil industry, which was already struggling before the price war between the Russians and Saudis caused prices to dive on March 7.

"A lot of my community who had been out of work, they had run out of EI a long time ago," said Ms. Rempel Garner.

Both Ms. Rempel Garner and Ms. McPherson said it was difficult to separate the economic harms caused by the latest plunge in oil prices and the troubles the oil sector has faced throughout the last few years. Ms. McPherson said Alberta hasn't done enough to diversify its economy. Both she and Ms. Rempel Garner said federal policies had damaged the province's economy and made it more vulnerable before the latest crisis.

Some of those who had already been laid off from jobs in the oil sector had turned to work in retail, said Ms. Rempel Garner. Many retail businesses are now struggling as well, as people are being urged to stay indoors and away from public spaces to avoid the spread of the virus.

The Liberal government's bailout plan includes a promise of cash for "workers who are not eligible for EI and who are facing unemployment," capped at a total of \$5-billion, according to a press release.

Ms. Rempel Garner said that part of her job now is to give her constituents confidence that the economy will recover.

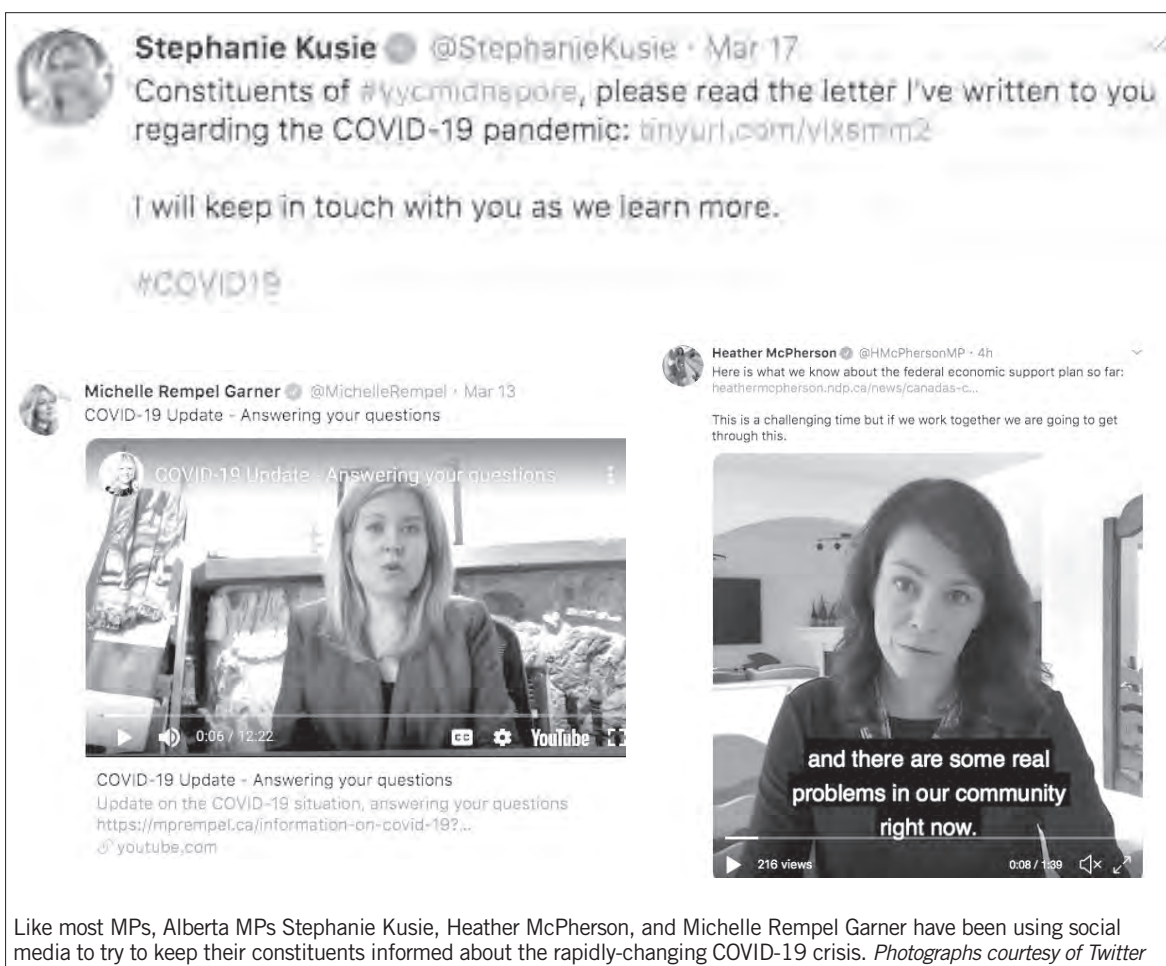
"We have to instill a sense of confidence in the community that different levels of government are working together," she said.

"I think a lot of people are looking at Italy and saying 'we don't want that.'"

More people have now died from COVID-19 in Italy—more than 3,400 as of March 19—than in China, where the disease first began to spread, or any other country in the world.

Nine Canadians had died of the virus as of March 19, and nearly 800 cases had been confirmed across the country.

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Like most MPs, Alberta MPs Stephanie Kusie, Heather McPherson, and Michelle Rempel Garner have been using social media to try to keep their constituents informed about the rapidly-changing COVID-19 crisis. *Photographs courtesy of Twitter*

There has been more communication than usual between the government and opposition during the early days of the crisis, said Ms. Kusie. She said she had been trying to keep government officials informed about the needs of her constituency.

The Parliamentarians are briefed by ministers and public health officials, and have opportunities to ask questions.

"So far we're much more well behaved [on the call] than in question period," said Ms. McPherson.

Ms. McPherson said she was calling as many constituents as she could, a form of "virtual door-knocking" to keep them informed. She said she did travel to meet in person with someone concerned about eviction notices that had recently been handed out to sev-

COVID-19

'The instinct is to throw yourself journos, bureau chiefs weigh in

'You need to look at what the facts are in front of you and make decisions quickly,' says PPG president Jordan Press. 'Nothing like I've ever seen,' says CBC reporter David Cochrane.

BY MIKE LAPOINTE & TESSIE SANCI

As the fallout from the global COVID-19 pandemic continues to derail business plans, investment portfolios and family planning across the country, Parliamentary Press Gallery reporters and Ottawa bureau chiefs are grappling with the challenge—and obligation—of keeping Canadians informed of lighting-speed developments, while at the same time ensuring they and those around them remain safe and healthy.

Journalists and Ottawa bureau chiefs say coverage of this event is like no other in recent memory, and requires reporters to rise to a challenge previously unseen in Canadian politics.

"The challenge here is that reporters, journalists of all kinds, do what they do out of a sense of mission, and when there's a big story, the instinct is to throw yourself at it with everything you've got until the story is over, however long that takes," said David Reevly, Ottawa bureau chief with The Canadian Press. "And I think everyone is going to have to pace themselves because these are events of an intensity that nobody has ever experienced before on the time scale that we're expecting, and that's going to be a challenge."

"Television journalism, in particular, is a team sport, so you've got to look after yourself, you have to look after everyone around you [in the newsroom], and you have to look after everybody who cares about you and is waiting for you to come home at the end of the day," said David Cochrane, a senior reporter in CBC's parliamentary bureau, in a phone interview with *The Hill Times* on March 18. "It's like nothing I've ever seen."

Across the country, governments are telling people to work from home and avoid social gatherings in order to slow the spread of the illness.

The CBC studio has been working with a "skeleton crew," Mr. Cochrane said.

Broadcast journalists working from home are using Skype and their smartphones to produce live broadcast hits and online stories are also being filed from journalists' homes. The network's parliamentary bureau has fewer than 20 people working in the CBC building which is significantly lower than usual, according to the senior reporter.

The plan is to switch the reporters working from home and those within the office so in-studio journalists can minimize their risk of infection and those filing from home can benefit from some social interaction.

Kristy Kirkup, a national affairs reporter for *The Globe and Mail*, has been working from home and considers herself one of the lucky ones. Her mother has been watching her two-year-old daughter during the day while Ms. Kirkup and her husband,

also a reporter, work and file from home.

"This is a story that affects everyone. Schools are shut down, day cares are shut down, families are scrambling, people are trying to make ends meet. That is not something that my family has had to deal with because we have the flexibility to work from home," she told *The Hill Times* in a phone interview on March 18.

She credits her news organization and Ottawa bureau chief Robert Fife for deciding that *Globe and Mail* staff should work from home. Mr. Fife confirmed that everyone in their office is working on coverage of the COVID-19 health crisis and economic fallout, and that they are all working from and relying on phones to get in touch with ministers, officials, business and other interest groups.

"We cover news conferences via conference calls and watching TV," said Mr. Fife, in a message to *The Hill Times*. "The staff in the press gallery have been particularly helpful."

With many journalists across the city and the country turning their homes into mini-newsrooms, the Parliamentary Press Gallery executive implemented new measures to increase reporters' access to the daily briefings being provided by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) in front of Rideau Cottage where he is in self-isolation, and a group of ministers speaking from West Block.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) and Health Minister Patty Hajdu (Thunder Bay-Superior North, Ont.), in addition to Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Theresa Tam, are consistently present at those press conferences.

A teleconference line is available at both briefings, and questions are taken from reporters physically present at the briefing and those who have called in.

"I can't recall ever being able to phone in to ask a prime minister a question. It's like you have to show up, you have to have a pass, you have to stand in the cold with everyone else," said Dylan Robertson, parliamentary bureau chief for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, to *The Hill Times* by phone on March 19. "To me, [the teleconference option] is quite extraordinary."

Mr. Robertson is choosing for now to continue to attend press briefings, describing it as a way to speak with government staffers in person.

But he also said that he could "self-isolate any day now" and that he makes a

daily judgment call to determine if it is of value to attend in person. His newsroom managers have told him to be careful, work from home when he can, and use common sense if he goes out to report.

The changes, such as the teleconference option, made by the Parliamentary Press Gallery during this time are appreciated by Ms. Kirkup, who said the executive team has been proactive in listening to members' feedback about the situation.

Todd Lamirande, a host and producer at APTN, said he approves of the press gallery's decision to move the ministers' press briefing to Room 225 in West Block from the National Press Theatre (NPT). The West Block room is ordinarily used for Liberal caucus meetings, but the NPT was too tight.

recently approached those staffers to ask them to encourage their ministers to provide more succinct answers. He added that those staffers were receptive and said they would look into the situation.

Reporters out in the field noted their own personal habits have changed. To avoid an infection and possibly bringing it home to his two young children, Mr. Cochrane said he has been washing his hands so hard that his knuckles have bled.

Mike Le Couteur, a correspondent for Global National, told *The Hill Times* on March 17 in West Block that he has been keeping the new ways to interact in mind.

"I would have instinctively put out my hand to shake your hand when saying hi, but instead we didn't do anything and I almost went for the elbow," Mr. Le Couteur

said, referring to public health advice that individuals avoid skin-to-skin contact and tap their elbows together as a way of saying hello.

With daily press briefings from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.), federal cabinet ministers, provincial and territorial premiers, and public health officials from across the country, the story of COVID-19 has become its own 24/7 news cycle.

"It is an endless torrent of information just coming at you and we have to

try and turn it all into a narrative form in real time to help people understand it. So, on the professional side of things, that is just really daunting, mentally and narratively," Mr. Cochrane said.

Mr. Cochrane has been on-air frequently within the last week on CBC News Network's live coverage of the daily briefings. He said CBC's live coverage has lasted between two and five hours daily and he has been working longer hours though he noted that his experience is "nothing compared to what a health worker or a border worker is dealing with right now."

Mr. Cochrane recalled being a local reporter in St. John's, N.L., and covering serious tragedies but noted the experience didn't affect him in the same way as this story. Although those events were terrible, he said, there was still the option of going home and turning off your phone.

"You could go to the bar or the restaurant, you could socialize with friends and tune out. You can't tune out from this one. That's the real challenge," he said.

Ms. Kirkup has been thinking about the loss of social activity, and how it has changed life for reporters who often get together after work to discuss the day. She has been actively communicating with her colleagues through phone calls and FaceTime chats as opposed to texts and emails.



Parliament Hill media, pictured on March 17, 2020, outside Rideau Cottage where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been holding his daily press briefings since he's been in self-isolation since March 12. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The theatre is "a small space and could be quite crowded if the topic you're reporting on was a big one," he told *The Hill Times* in a phone interview on March 18. "You're shoulder to shoulder with your colleagues."

Room 225 has seats that are joined, but a wooden panel between each one ensures that individuals are not touching each other when seated. The table at the front of the room where the ministers speak is also longer than what is available at the NPT allowing ministers to spread out. Press Gallery and House of Commons staff were seen sanitizing microphones and desktops prior to the briefings last week.

Mr. Lamirande said he attends briefings in part because he is a broadcast journalist and requires visuals. He said he is unsure of whether he would use the teleconference option and that it would depend on how the press conference is moderated, noting it can be hard for a reporter to have a question answered.

The move to West Block has also presented another challenge as a board member from the Press Gallery is not always present, which has resulted in ministers' staff moderating press conferences.

This has led to ministers giving "sprawling" responses and using press conference time to repeat what other ministers have already said, according to Mr. Robertson, who said he and four other reporters

at it with everything you've got': on covering COVID-19 pandemic

Continued from page 28

"Even for myself, I need the social contact," she said.

The way the complex story has blended into Mr. Le Couteur's personal life has him playing the role of unbiased interpreter of this information for his social circle.

"In our social groups, people will often gravitate towards us [as journalists] for either confirmation or denial of rumours they're hearing," he said, pointing to people's use of online chat groups as a source of information. "It's sometimes difficult to deal with all of that. You feel you have to possibly dispel the myth or debunk it. And it's a lot."

CP chief lauds reporters 'trying to bring it at work every single day'

David Reevely, Ottawa bureau chief for The Canadian Press, told *The Hill Times* that the bureau had made a number of changes in the week ending Friday, March 13, including having "virtually all" people work from home—and that a directive from Toronto was issued that people are simply not to work in office unless it's absolutely necessary.

"We are kind of lucky, as probably a lot of Hill reporters and bureaus are, in that we are used to working remotely, people working on laptops on the Hill, people following campaigns on the road, people traveling with the prime minister, so we have some experience with it," said Mr. Reevely. "Having everybody do it at the same time is a little bit new, but it wasn't that huge a difference on the work-front from what we're accustomed to."

Mr. Reevely lauded reporters "who are trying to bring it at work every, single day."

"Every reporter has someone in his or her life who is immunocompromised, who is older, who they need to worry about and who they are accustomed to helping or getting help from, so everyone's carrying around an enormous amount of personal worry," said Mr. Reevely. "That's going to be difficult to sustain."

Jordan Press, a Canadian Press reporter on the Hill who's been the president of the Parliamentary Press Gallery President for only a few weeks, said there's nothing that can prepare someone in the role for having to find a way to manage access while keeping a close eye on people's health and making sure they feel safe and they feel healthy in doing their jobs.

"There's very little experience that I think many people have doing that, unless you have very specific training, it's something you have to learn on the job," said Mr. Press. "But the thing that you do learn is how to evaluate things and make those decisions as required."

Mr. Press said that in this case, there's not a lot of time to think things through, and "you need to look at what the facts are in front of you and make decisions quickly."

"That's something journalists do every day and they do very well," said Mr. Press. "So, if anything, that's a huge help for me right about now."

Mr. Press also noted that the executive board he works with has been able to quickly find consensus around things that are immediately needed.

"What are we going to do, is to make sure that we balance the number of questions in the room to questions on the phone, because normally you would give preference to people in the room and then move to the phone lines," said Mr. Press.

"We've been able to make a lot of those decisions quickly."

Like all Canadians, journalists are continuing to do their jobs under incredibly stressful conditions, and they should be applauded for finding ways to do it and for keeping Canadians informed, said Mr. Press.

"That's what blows my mind as I see the coverage day, is just the ability for people to digest huge, vast amounts of information in short periods of time, under really stressful conditions, personally and professionally, and pump it all out, and keep Canadians informed," said Mr. Press. "That's amazing to me."

CPAC's Peter Van Dusen, who's had more than four decades of experience as both a reporter and anchor, is the network's executive producer and told *The Hill Times* their "number one obligation" and "responsibility and service to viewers," is to make sure they're getting as much information first-hand as they can.

"So that means taking all of the news conferences from provincial and federal political and health leaders across the country and making sure that as many Canadians as possible see them, we're playing them all in primetime," said Mr. Van Dusen. "All that to say, that requires a certain core number of producers and technicians to be able to make that happen."

"We are being very cautious and exercising our responsibility," said Mr. Van Dusen.

Mr. Van Dusen said they are sanitizing the office constantly, self-distancing, and have fewer people in the office. They have also re-configured their television control rooms so people are further apart.

When asked if there were any comparisons to previous events that could have prepared him—or any journalists covering COVID-19—for this scenario, Mr. Reevely said the obvious comparison is 9/11.

"I was a very junior reporter then, I was a weekend reporter at the *Ottawa Citizen* then, but the intensity of that and the sense that the world was suddenly very different and might not ever go back to quite the way it was, we had to rise to the challenge of that because our work was very, very important in that moment," said Mr. Reevely. "The combination of the emotional intensity of it and the absolute necessity to do the work, that's the only comparison I can think of."

But Mr. Reevely also said that the difference is that 9/11 was that the sense that the event "was happening directly to us personally passed fairly quickly. It was an intense day and there was a lot of fear, terror about what might come after that, like might there be other attacks, will there be a round two."

"We were kind of waking up to a world that was different from the one we were used to, but that subsided, I think, when there was a little bit of quiet afterwards, and we don't know how long [this pandemic] is going to last. It's happening to us, it's happening to our families, it's happening to our co-workers," said Mr. Reevely.

Mr. Van Dusen also said that "as journalists, we've covered natural disasters, nasty political campaigns, we've covered stories that have been bad but have also presented a personal threat and presented a threat to those around you, but I think the difference is, even with 9/11, this was really bad, but once you understood what it was, you know that it was terrorist attacks and it will pass

fairly quickly in terms of shock and the damage and then we'll begin to rebuild."

"With this, I don't think anybody can really say how long we're going to be at this, we're going to be in this different world of trying to decide and make decisions about personal health and where we go and how we cover this story for maybe weeks or months or maybe longer than that, and that's such a big difference compared to anything I've covered," said Mr. Van Dusen.

For the anchor, the biggest issue is uncertainty.

"The idea of not knowing if this is going to get a whole lot worse, and I think everybody believes it's going to get worse before it gets better," said Mr. Van Dusen. "But will it get so bad to the point that [where] we have a seriously hobbled public service journalism core for the country?"

"Just because it's changing so quickly, it's so unpredictable and changing from one day to the next, and I guess that's my biggest concern, is that there may come a point where we are unable to operate, and the consequences of that if that's a widespread media reality across the country," said Mr. Van Dusen.

Heather Scoffield, Ottawa bureau chief for *The Toronto Star*, told *The Hill Times* the bureau has been working from home and had very clear instructions from their head office in Toronto and were "well supported by them and our IT people."

"We were told to go home starting at the beginning of this week," said Ms. Scoffield. "Nobody has to go to any press conferences because the press gallery has managed to set it up all remotely and we can call in."

Ms. Scoffield also said that if reporters "absolutely have to go somewhere," they are sending masks and that reporters are keeping their distance from others.

"We've been able to avoid it for the most part," said Ms. Scoffield. "We're lucky because we're writers and we don't actually have to point a camera at people, and we have no photographers on staff here in Ottawa."

Althia Raj, Ottawa bureau chief for *HuffPost Canada*, told *The Hill Times* their work guidelines at the moment are for everybody to work from home and that they'll reassess next week.

"There's so many of us [in the gallery] and we all have questions and different angles, and they added a phone line for the prime minister's press conferences, so that's great. I think everybody is doing their best," said Ms. Raj in an interview with *The Hill Times* Wednesday evening.

Tessie Sanci is the health editor of Hill Times Research, which is owned by Hill Times Publishing.

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COVID-19

No more Hill parties as coronavirus grips country

'Politics and the Pen is probably the exact opposite of social distancing. We cram so many people into the ballroom that you can barely keep one to two inches away,' says Jim Armour.

BY AIDAN CHAMANDY

As COVID-19 cases continue to exponentially grow in Canada and around the world, possibly the only thing spreading faster is cabin fever.

Ottawans are shut in because everything has shut down. Seemingly half the city has taken up running in an effort to stave off insanity. Thanks to these keen folk, Sparks Street has actually become busier.

The province banned gatherings over 50 people: if the NHL season wasn't cancelled, the Ottawa Senators would still be able to host games.

Seeing as parties in and around the Hill are generally more well-attended than



Social gatherings on hold: Guests, pictured on the terrace of the Château Laurier Hotel in 2018 at the Politics & the Pen swishy fundraiser gala for the Writers' Trust of Canada. This year's Politics & the Pen, usually one of the hottest tickets of the year, has been postponed along with every other social gathering in political Ottawa. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Sens games, everything planned for the near future has been cancelled. MPs unanimously agreed to suspend the sitting calendar until at least April 20. On March 13, the Commons Board of Internal Economy

announced it will suspend all committee travel, parliamentary functions, visitor access to the House of Commons precinct, and all events in the precinct. On March 12, Conservative leadership candidates announced they would suspend all public campaign events.

Cory Hann, director of communications for the Conservative Party, addressed the leadership race in an email on March 12, "with our leadership event not scheduled for another three months, we have no changes to announce but continue to discuss options on how to mitigate concerns over a gathering such as that." The convention is still set for June 27 and six candidates have yet to meet the \$300,000 and 3,000 signature requirement. They have until March 25 to do so.

The party has two leadership debates scheduled in April and both will be held without attendees.

"As Canada's official opposition party, we have an important role in our democracy, and we owe it to Canadians to have the new leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in place under the timelines we've announced," the party stated.

The Senate took a rare step and expedited the passage of the new NAFTA legislation on Friday, March 13, while it was undergoing a pre-study. Some parties snuck in their celebration right before everything stopped, when tapping elbows instead of shaking hands was the joke (and legitimate precaution) de jour. Oh to be young again! The Canadian Cattlemen's Association held their annual party on March 11 in the Sir John A. Macdonald building. It was a packed and served as a fun sendoff, if only in retrospect.

In an alternative, non-COVID-19 universe, this would've been a fairly busy time for the Parliament Hill social scene. After an extended post-election and Christmas holiday hiatus, the House was finally gearing back up to a regular schedule. Lobby days were planned, travel for important conferences was booked, and award shows were polishing their trophies: not to mention the budget parties, pre-parties, after-parties, and after-after-parties. The federal budget was originally scheduled to be released March 30 but has since been postponed indefinitely.

Initially, some event organizers decided to make alternate arrangements to avoid cancelling entirely. The Manning Centre told *The Hill Times* on March 10 it would be taking precautions to avoid spreading the virus at its annual conference, scheduled for March 25-27 at the Westin Hotel in downtown Ottawa. These measures included replacing buffets with serving stations and making hand sanitizer more readily available. As the situation deteriorated and the reality of a long-term, whole-of-society approach to combatting the virus became the norm, on March 12 the Manning Centre decided to take the next step and cancel.

"Health and safety concerns combined with low participation make any event at this time impossible if not irresponsible," read a statement from Manning Centre president Troy Lanigan.

When the House is sitting, lobby day organizers salivate. Hundreds of legislators, department officials, diplomats and other politicians in the same city at the same time helps in finding a sympathetic ear for a given initiative. Open bars also help.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture was set to host their annual lobby day and post-budget reception on March 31. On March 11, they put out a statement saying the lobbying blitz will move to October. Last year, the organization met with several ministers, such as Finance Minister Bill Morneau (Toronto Centre, Ont.) and then-environment minister Catherine McKenna (Ottawa Centre, Ont.), and members of the opposition, including then-deputy Conservative Leader Lisa Raitt and then-Green Party Leader Elizabeth May (Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.).

Women on the Hill, an annual event celebrating, you guessed it, women in politics, was also cancelled. It was on for early May, but didn't have a set date.

The Governor General's Performing Arts Awards was scheduled for April 25 at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. Nine awards were set to be handed out, including to Ryan Reynolds and Catherine O'Hara. The GGPAA's are considered one of the most, if not the most, prestigious awards event in Canadian arts.

The organizing committee announced on March 17 that the awards show would be postponed until Spring 2021. A specific date hasn't been set. Still looking to provide some entertainment during a time of social-distancing, the GGPAA said in a statement that "we encourage you to binge watch the touching and memorable short tribute films on past laureates created by the National Film Board."

Two of the biggest events of the year were also set for the not too distant future, and have both been postponed.

The Parliamentary Press Gallery Dinner was postponed from May 2 to Oct. 24, assuming everything is back to normal. The Press Gallery's board of executives voted unanimously in favour of the proposal, Press Gallery president Jordan Press said.

Politics and the Pen was scheduled for May 13. The annual black-tie event held at the Château Laurier and put on by the Writers Trust of Canada presents the Shaughnessey Cohen Award for political writing to the best non-fiction book of the year. It also comes with a \$25,000 prize. Rachel Giese, author of *Boys: What it Means to Become a Man*, won in 2019.

Organizers Catherine Clark and Jim Armour, vice-president at Summa Strategies, said plans are in the works to reschedule for the fall. The event raises an average of \$375,000 for the Writers' Trust, according to Ms. Clark. Ms. Clark said the sponsors have "been incredibly supportive" and "almost entirely signalled that they will be with us in the fall."

"Politics and the Pen is probably the exact opposite of social distancing. We cram so many people into the ballroom that you can barely keep one to two inches away," said Mr. Armour.

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Unprecedented virtual campaigning for Conservative leadership will mean end of candidacy for some

‘The party is faced with a situation where they can decide to be flexible, or they can be inflexible,’ says leadership candidate Rick Peterson, who asked the party to extend the candidates’ March 25 deadline to April 17 because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

BY ABBAS RANA

Some candidates for the Conservative Party leadership will be knocked out of the contest by the COVID-19 pandemic, unable to get the required 3,000 signatures and \$300,000 by the March 25 deadline after being forced to campaign solely in virtual settings, said some of the contestants.

“We’ll see what happens on March 25, but we are in a situation right now where every single Canadian out there, and I would say 99 per cent of [party] members, this leadership race is not at all relevant to their lives,” said Edmonton businessman Rick Peterson, who dropped out of the Conservative leadership race on Friday, March 20.

“It’s not relevant to what’s important to them right now. It’s out of sight, out of mind. Right? Those of us who are in it are focused on it, but if you were to ask the average Canadian, the average Conservative Party member where the leadership race ranks in terms of the priorities of your day today, I think you find it pretty low down,” Mr. Peterson told *The Hill Times* in an interview last week before he dropped out.

In order to be approved as official candidates for the Conservative leadership contest, all candidates have to secure endorsements from 3,000 party members, and have to raise \$300,000 by March 25.

By Friday morning, according to the party website, four candidates—former Stephen Harper-era cabinet minister Peter MacKay; Conservative MP and former Harper cabinet minister Erin O’Toole (Durham, Ont.); Conservative MP Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Ont.) and lawyer Leslyn Lewis—had been “verified,” or officially approved as candidates, by the party.

This means all four are now official contestants, who have

paid \$300,000—a \$200,000 registration fee, and a \$100,000 compliance fee—and obtained 3,000 signatures from 30 or more ridings from seven provinces and territories nationally. As verified candidates, all four are guaranteed to be on the ballot.

According to the party website, there were four candidates in the “approved applicant” category, including Conservative MP Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia-Lambton, Ont.), former senior OLO staffer Rudy Husny, lawyer Jim Karahalios, and Mr. Peterson, until he dropped out. So far, they each have deposited the initial \$25,000 and submitted 1,000 signatures by the Feb. 27 deadline. These candidates can raise money and set up their leadership campaigns. Donors to these candidates will also be eligible to receive tax deductible receipts.

With the coronavirus becoming the No. 1 public health issue wreaking havoc on economies around the world, including Canada’s, Conservative leadership candidates have been forced to cancel all public events and campaign only online for about the last three weeks. In-person meetings are the life blood of politics, said Mr. Peterson, especially in leadership campaigns when the party faithful want to hear and see the candidate and then make up their mind about whether they want to support them.

Online campaigning is an important component of a modern-day campaign, but cannot replace campaign rallies or one-on-one meetings, said Mr. Peterson.

As of deadline last week, there were 846 diagnosed cases of COVID-19 across the country, resulting in 11 deaths, while 10 had recovered, according to Global News.

Before COVID-19 dominated the national and international agenda, leadership candidates were travelling across the country to attend Conservative Party events at the riding level, to give speeches to secure support and to raise funds.

“I can’t speak for others, but in my experience and in our campaign, we rely 80 per cent in terms of the number of people who become supporters, it’s in face to face contact, it’s in meetings, it’s in AGMs [annual general meetings],”

said Mr. Peterson. “And that’s been taken away.”

After cancelling public events, a number of leadership candidates reached out to the Conservative Party’s Leadership Election Organization Committee (LEOC) to request that they consider extending the March 25 deadline for candidates to send in their remaining money and signatures, or consider suspending the leadership election contest until September. But the 18-member LEOC co-chaired by former cabinet minister Lisa Raitt and senior Conservative Dan Nowlan, in a meeting on March 15, declined the request and said the leadership election schedule will stay unrevised.



Outgoing Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer, pictured in this file photograph on the Hill. Wednesday, March 25, is the deadline for all Conservative Party leadership candidates to get 3,000 signatures and to raise \$300,000 to officially become candidates to succeed Mr. Scheer. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

As a consequence, Mr. Husny stopped in-person and virtual campaigning March 19 because he says he doesn’t feel it right to ask people for support and money when they’re worried about their health and economic security.

“During this national health crisis, I don’t have the heart to call our members to ask them to support my nomination and to donate money,” Mr. Husny told *The Hill Times* on March 19, and reiterated the same in a statement. “I wouldn’t be true to myself if I did continue this campaign.”

This means he wouldn’t be a candidate for the leadership. He has asked the party in a statement to donate his \$25,000 deposit with the party to the Canadian Red Cross.

“The priority of Canadians across the country is primarily their health—the health of their loved ones and their financial security,” he said. “As I said, politics can wait, health cannot. If the Conservative Party of Canada wants to disqualify me on March 25th for being true to my values and refusing to campaign during this public health emergency, I will leave this race with no regrets, as I believe it is the right thing to do and what real leadership is all about.”

On March 16, Ms. Gladu told *The Hill Times* that by refusing

to extend the March 25 deadline, the party is being “tone deaf” to the impact the Coronavirus pandemic is having on Canadians and its effects on the leadership race. She said she had to cancel 26 events where she was supposed to meet with party members to speak to them and to seek their support and try to raise money.

Mr. Peterson had told *The Hill Times* three weeks ago that raising money was becoming more challenging amid the economic uncertainty, as people are concerned about their jobs and economic well being. Last week, he said he was suspending all fundraising. Mr. Peterson issued a press release Monday, March 16 saying the economic uncertainty

makes it difficult to raise funds, and that he would not be appealing to individuals for donations. Instead, he said, he would rely on loans from financial institutions to meet the required conditions to enter the leadership contest.

“We will be seeking alternative financing sources for our campaign,”

said Mr. Peterson in his statement, pointing out that Elections Canada rules permit campaigns to seek unsecured loans from a financial institution as designated by the Bank Act.

“In the meantime, our campaign team will continue working with Canadians, as we announced on the weekend, to see how Canada’s banks can help them by extending loans, eliminating fees, pushing back repayment schedules. We’ll do what we can to help Conservative Party members and all Canadians during these unprecedented times.”

On March 19, he told *The Hill Times* that it’s now up to the Leadership Election Organization Committee to decide if they want to stick to the deadlines or extend the March 25 deadline to April 17 to give more time to all candidates to adjust to the new reality of this unprecedented situation.

“These are unprecedented times for the party and for the candidates. Nobody expected this, right?” said Mr. Peterson.

“The party is faced with a situation where they can decide to be flexible, or they can be inflexible. That’s the only two alternatives they have: either they try to provide flexibility given the situation or they continue to follow the letter of the Constitution and the rules, which of course they

can do. So far, it appears from the messaging that they are not changing their plan.”

After the Sunday, March 15, LEOC meeting, the party offered some online tools to help leadership candidates to campaign. One of the tools they offered was virtual town hall meetings, a way for candidates to set up their own events online that the party would advertise to its members. The party has also set up a portal accessible to party members and if they like a candidate, where they can download a form to endorse a candidate of their choosing.

Mr. Peterson said these two tools wouldn’t be of much help, as they won’t replace the in-person campaigning experience. He said that each candidate already has the portal on their respective websites that the party has now has set up on its website.

“Individual members are extremely interested in hearing and seeing and meeting the candidate,” said Mr. Peterson.

“This afternoon, I informed the Conservative Party’s Leadership Election Organizing Committee (LEOC) that I will no longer be a leadership contestant,” Mr. Peterson stated. “This is a difficult decision, but one I had to make after LEOC informed me earlier today that, with the full support of national council, it will maintain existing deadlines for membership nomination signatures and fees due to the party despite the obvious difficulties the COVID-19 pandemic poses for all leadership candidates and for all Canadians.”

Former Conservative MP Alex Nuttall, who is now the campaign manager for Mr. McKay, told *The Hill Times* that it was a tough experience for his campaign to cancel all public events because all campaign events organized by their campaign were well attended. He said the campaign was now relying on social media platforms to campaign.

“It’s a unique experience,” said Mr. Nuttall. “You grow and you learn every day. It was a very difficult decision to make, not to have Peter going in front of people, because obviously that’s a big opportunity for us. But it was the right one...to protect the public and Peter had to make that tough decision, but he made the right decision. And so we stopped campaigning immediately. From that point we’ve moved into two new forms of campaigning and I think you’re seeing that unfold on daily basis.”

Mr. Sloan was not available for an interview last week, but his campaign sent a statement to *The Hill Times* saying it is forging ahead by campaigning using online resources.

“With the technology available today, it is possible to campaign without in-person meetings. There are ways to communicate with voters that do not involve in-person meetings, such as email and electronic methods of communication,” Mr. Sloan wrote in his email sent through a staffer to *The Hill Times*.

“People who work in retail sales, restaurants, cafes, or public events will be severely affected by COVID-19. Political campaigns, however, can now be run “virtually.”

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AGRICULTURE

Publication date: March 23, 2020 • Advertising deadline: March 18, 2020

Canada is the fifth largest exporter of agricultural and agri-foods in the world. In the age of trade wars and disagreements, The Hill Times will dig into what's going with preferential trade access to foreign markets in this agriculture policy briefing; we'll also look at the ongoing discussions on supply management and deregulation; and we'll take a close look at Canada's federal minister of agriculture and her top legislative priorities in this Parliament.

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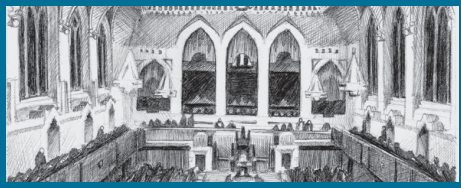
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Parliamentary Calendar



On Parliament Hill, it's been eerily quiet during coronavirus pandemic crisis



Parliament Hill is deserted these days. The Commons foyer in the West Block, pictured on March 16, 2020. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

MONDAY, MARCH 23

House Not Sitting—The House has been suspended until Monday, April 20, due to the COVID-19 virus, but it's expected to return this week for a short time to pass emergency measures in financial aid for Canadians and businesses to get through the COVID-19 crisis. As of April 20, it is then scheduled to sit for four straight weeks until May 15. It will take a one-week break and will resume sitting again on May 25 and will sit straight through for the next four consecutive weeks, until it's scheduled to adjourn on June 23. The House adjourns again for three months and will return in the fall on Monday, Sept. 21, for three straight weeks. It will adjourn for one week and will sit again from Oct. 19 until Nov. 6. It will break again for one week and will sit again from Nov. 16 to Dec. 11. And that will be it for 2020.

Senate Not Sitting—The Senate has also been suspended due to the COVID-19 virus. The possible sitting days are April 20, 24, 27, and May 1. The Senate is scheduled to sit April 21-23 and April 28-30. The possible Senate sittings are May 4, 8, 11, 15, 25, and 29. The Senate is scheduled to sit May 5-7 and May 12-May 14. The Senate will break May 18-22. It is scheduled to sit May 26-28. The June possible sitting days are June 1, 5, 8, 12, 15 and 19. The Senate is scheduled to sit June 2-4; June 9-11; June 16-18; and June 22, 23, it breaks June 24 for St. Jean Baptiste Day; and it's scheduled to sit June 25 and June 26. The Senate breaks from June 29 until Sept. 22. The Senate's possible September sitting days are Sept. 21, 25, 28. It's scheduled to sit Sept. 22-24 and Sept. 29-Oct. 1, with a possible sitting day on Friday, Oct. 2. The possible Senate sitting days are Oct. 5, 9, 19, 23, 26, and 30. It's scheduled to sit Oct. 6-8; it takes a break from Oct. 12-16; it will sit Oct. 20-22; and Oct. 27-29. The November possible Senate days are: Nov. 2, 6, 16, 20, 23, 27, 30. It's scheduled to sit Nov. 3-5; it will take a break from Nov. 9-13; it will sit Nov. 17-19; and Nov. 24-26. The possible December Senate sitting days are: Dec. 4, 7, and 11. The Senate is scheduled to sit Dec. 1-3; Dec. 8-10 and it will sit Dec. 14-18.

TUESDAY, MARCH 31

The Globe and Mail's Summit on Drug Shortages—*Globe and Mail* columnist André Picard will be the host and moderator; Dr. Jacalyn Duffin, professor emerita, Hannah Chair of the History of Medicine, Queen's University, will be the keynote speaker; and the panel discussions will include Jennifer Gerdt, executive director Food Allergy Canada; Jeff Mehlretter, director of

research Neighbourhood Pharmacies; Terri Drover, senior vice-president, Stakeholder Engagement, Canadian Association of Pharmacy Distribution Management; James Scongack, executive vice-president, corporate affairs and operational services, Bruce Power; Joelle Walker, vice-president, public affairs, Canadian Pharmacists Association; and Durhane Wong-Rieger, president and CEO, Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders. Tuesday, March 31, 8 a.m. to noon, Shaw Centre, 55 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Free event. For full agenda, speakers and tickets, visit globeandmail.com/DrugShortages.

MONDAY, APRIL 6

The Herblock Prize Award Ceremony & Lecture—Canadian editorial cartoonist Michael de Adder, who draws for *The Hill Times* and *The Chronicle-Herald*, will be presented with this prestigious award. José Andrés will be the lecturer at The Herb Block Foundation's event on Monday, April 6, 7-10 p.m., Coolidge Auditorium, Thomas Jefferson Building, Library of Congress, 10 First St., SE, Washington, D.C. Invitation only.

TUESDAY, APRIL 7

Policy Options Policy Circle: How Does Tax System Complexity Impact Different Segments of Canadian Society?—Moderated by *Policy Options'* editor-in-chief Jennifer Ditchburn, it will be an in-depth, intimate discussion, and will feature experts who have a deep knowledge of the issue, including Prosper Canada's CO Liz Mulholland; Helen Bobiwash, principal accountant; Brendan Pooran, founding lawyer Pooran Law; and Jay Goodis, CEO, Tax Templates. The event will take place on Tuesday, April 7, 9-11 a.m., Rideau Club, 99 Bank St., Lounge Room, 15th floor, Ottawa. Refreshments will be served. No cost, but registration is required.

Can Canada Lead in Sustainable Agriculture?—There will be 10 billion people to feed by 2050. Will we be able to nourish them and at the same time address agriculture's climate change impacts? Join Nutrien's Chuck Magro, in conversation with *The Toronto Star's* Heather Scofield who will discuss the high-tech future of agriculture and Canada's leadership role. April 7, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Adam Room, Chateau Laurier Hotel, 1 Rideau St., Ottawa.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15

AI and Human Rights Forum—The Montreal Institute of Genocide and Human Rights Studies, Element AI, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mitacs, and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO will be holding the Forum on April 15 at the De Seve

Cinema in Concordia University. Panel discussions will cover such topics as disinformation, online hate, ethics, AI governance, the United Nations and global co-operation. Speakers include representatives from WITNESS, Amnesty International, Stanford, Access Now, and the Office of the UN High Commission on Human Rights. For tickets, please visit <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/artificial-intelligence-and-human-rights-forum-tickets-88682486705>

FRIDAY, APRIL 17

Conservative Party English-Language Debate—The Conservative Party will host two official leadership debates—one English debate in Toronto, and one French debate in Montreal. The Toronto debate will take place on April 17 at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, while the Montreal debate will take place on April 23 at the l'Amphithéâtre du Gesù. Both debates will be open for Conservative Party members to attend, and further details around ticketing, the format of the debates, and moderators will be announced later. Both debates will also be streamed live online. Canadians who wish to vote in the Conservative Party leadership election have until April 17 to purchase a membership to be eligible to vote in the Conservative leadership election. For more information, contact the Conservative Party at 1-866-808-8407.

SATURDAY, APRIL 25

Governor General's Performing Arts Awards Gala—Mark your calendar for the star-studded event of the year in Ottawa. The Governor General's Performing Arts Awards gala will take place at the National Arts Centre on Saturday, April 25, at 6:30 p.m. Tickets include a cocktail reception, the red carpet, a tribute gala, and an after party with live band. The seven deserving laureates include actors Catherine O'Hara, Ryan Reynolds, and Tantoo Cardinal and composer Alexina Louie. Tickets are available at nac-cna.ca.

MONDAY, MAY 4

International Day of Pink—In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots/Pride; and the 30th anniversary of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia, we are proud to invite you to Stonewall 50 across Canada, in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, and Cape Breton, from May 4-21, featuring Stonewall riot activist Martin Boyce. Stonewall 50 across Canada is a free speakers' series in cities across the country featuring Stonewall Riot activist Martin Boyce. Boyce is

among a handful of surviving Stonewall activists whose contributions have had a significant impact on our communities. Join us as he shares his stories of uprising and rebellion, what motivated him that night.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

CJF Awards Celebrating 30 Years of Excellence in Journalism—The Canadian Journalism Foundation Awards will be held on June 10, 2020, at the Ritz-Carlton, Toronto, Ont., hosted by Rick Mercer, former host of *The Rick Mercer Report*. The CBC's Anna Maria Tremonti will be honoured. Tables are \$7,500 and tickets are \$750. For more information on tables and sponsorship opportunities, contact Josh Gurfinkel at jgurfinkel@cjf-fjc.ca or 416-955-0394.

SATURDAY, JUNE 27

Conservative Party Leadership Election—The 2020 Conservative Party of Canada leadership election will be held on June 27, in Toronto to choose a successor to Andrew Scheer.

The Parliamentary Calendar is a free events listing. Send in your political, cultural, diplomatic, or governmental event in a paragraph with all the relevant details under the subject line 'Parliamentary Calendar' to news@hilltimes.com by Wednesday at noon before the Monday paper or by Friday at noon for the Wednesday paper. We can't guarantee inclusion of every event, but we will definitely do our best. Events can be updated daily online, too.

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Opinion

Farmers fighting climate change, at home and abroad

Farmers everywhere are on the frontlines of climate change. Our global food supply depends on their success. The rest of us can no longer afford to sit on the sidelines.



Jane Rabinowicz

Opinion

When Linda Grossart checks the new organic wheat varieties she's breeding after each instance of "weird weather", she

hopes to find they fared better than the rest of her crop. For the Brandon, Manitoba farmer, the land where she and her husband conduct this breeding trial represents the frontline of their fight for their farm's future.

It's a fight that is taking place all around the globe. Isidora Garcia, in the mountainous Yoro region of Honduras, is dealing with increasingly intense hurricane seasons wiping out her corn crop just before harvest. Salif Gonde, from the Sahel region in Burkina Faso, is battling to prevent the desert from creeping across his once fertile farmland. The planet's tempera-

ture is rising, and erratic weather is the new normal. Water dries up in some places, floods increase in others. Unseasonal thaws cause germination problems, and entire crops are lost to early snows.

Everywhere, this translates in farmers living increasingly on the edge.

Between 2005 and 2015, the Insurance Bureau of Canada's severe weather insurance payments more than tripled over the previous decade, from an average of \$373-million to over \$1.2-billion in annual costs. The U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research estimates that Canada could lose 13 per cent of its GDP by 2100 without significant global action. If we're going to have any hope of avoiding this fate, we need to make agriculture more sustainable and more resilient, writes Jane Rabinowicz. Photograph courtesy of Pixabay



Between 2005 and 2015, the Insurance Bureau of Canada's severe weather insurance payments more than tripled over the previous decade, from an average of \$373-million to over \$1.2-billion in annual costs. The U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research estimates that Canada could lose 13 per cent of its GDP by 2100 without significant global action. If we're going to have any hope of avoiding this fate, we need to make agriculture more sustainable and more resilient, writes Jane Rabinowicz. Photograph courtesy of Pixabay

Canada could lose 13 per cent of its GDP by 2100 without significant global action.

If we're going to have any hope of avoiding this fate, we need to make agriculture more sustainable and more resilient.

First, agriculture-related emissions have to come down significantly. Food systems at large are usually estimated to generate 30 per cent of global emissions. The most recent data from the Government of Canada indicates that crop and livestock production alone generates 60 megatonnes of CO₂ a year, 8.4 per cent of the country's greenhouse emissions. A large portion of emissions comes from fossil fuel intensive nitrogen fertilizers—fertilizers that have become increasingly necessary to sustain yields for crops that are ill-adapted for our changing climate.

Linda, Isidora, and Salif are using a different approach to guard against falling yields: working the seeds. They're part of a global movement of farmers who are building on traditional breeding techniques to help crops adapt to changing conditions and produce better harvests without carbon intensive inputs. It's adaptation and mitigation all at once.

They are supported by an organization called SeedChange, which works with farmers in Canada and around the world to support and spread sustainable agriculture.

SeedChange, formerly the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada, is one of the country's oldest charitable organizations. Under the leadership of Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova, it dealt with many of the 20th century's greatest famines. With time, the organization developed an expertise in

farmer-led seed breeding and seed banking, to help vulnerable communities buffer their food supply against crisis and shock.

Now, the organization uses those same tools to help farmers cope with climate change. For example, the wheat, potatoes, oat and maize trials conducted by farmers like Linda and Ian Grossart through SeedChange programs are creating varieties that perform just as well without conventional fertilizers and are adapted to each farm's specific conditions. In Honduras, Isidora Garcia and her community built on their

Indigenous maize to release new varieties that have higher yields and shorter, sturdier stalks—a trait that helps them withstand harsher hurricane seasons.

Organizations like SeedChange are only one part of what must be a broader scale effort. Canada has an important role to play in this fight.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation must be at the heart of the next Canadian Agricultural Partnership, set to be rolled out in 2023. That starts with supporting producers in adopting low-input, low emissions practices and recognizing soil's critical role as a carbon sink.

We also can't afford to ignore the leadership role we must play in building sustainable agriculture around the globe.

It is an encouraging first step to see this acknowledged in the mandate letter given to the Minister of International Development Karina Gould, which calls for additional programming to better support women's rights and climate adaptation through sustainable and equitable agricultural production.

What we need now is for the federal government to commit resources to mitigation and adaptation in agriculture, at home and globally. We need to see a call for collaboration and ideas on how to best support global farmers as they work to combat climate change and preserve our capacity to grow enough food.

Farmers everywhere are on the frontlines of climate change. Our global food supply depends on their success. The rest of us can no longer afford to sit on the sidelines.

Jane Rabinowicz is executive director of SeedChange.
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The Hill Times is offering free access to all our coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

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HILL CLIMBERS

by Laura Ryckewaert

A dive into federal Heritage Minister Guilbeault's 24-person team

Senior staff to the minister include Rebecca Caldwell as director of policy, Michael Brewster as director of parliamentary affairs, and Linda Campbell as director of operations.

AN APARTMENT NEAR PARLIAMENT HILL—Canadian Heritage Minister **Steven Guilbeault**, a first-time Member of Parliament who represents Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que., has a 24-member ministerial team supporting him in his new role, led by former PMO senior adviser **Mathieu Bouchard**.

Running Mr. Guilbeault's policy shop is director **Rebecca Caldwell**.

Aside from a long list of experience in politics, Ms. Caldwell brings a background in media and journalism to the job, as a former reporter and later editor of *The Globe and Mail's* review section, a former senior editor with *Chatelaine* magazine, and a former interview producer for the CBC's *George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight*.



Rebecca Caldwell is policy director to the heritage minister. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

She spent the last four years working for **Justin Trudeau's** Liberal government, starting as director of policy to **Maryam Monsef** who was the then-named minister of status of women (now women and gender equality), and later become her chief of staff. For the last year, she was busy as a senior adviser to Finance Minister **Bill Morneau**. Ms. Caldwell is also a former policy adviser to then-Ontario minister **Tracy MacCharles**, focused on supporting her work related to the Ontario Women's Directorate, and is a former press secretary to then-Ontario premier **Kathleen Wynne**.

Working under Ms. Caldwell is a seven-member team, including: senior policy adviser **Maxence Bernier**; policy advisers **Irene Cheung**, **Sara Korajian-Rankin**, **Fred Lagrandeur**, and **Raphael Yacobi-Harris**; and policy adviser and head of appointments **Caroline Bourbonnière**.

Mr. Bernier is a former senior manager with Tide, a financial technology company based in the U.K., having spent the last three plus years working for the company in London. Before

then, he was a financial services analyst with Accenture in London, U.K. He's also previously been an analyst with venture capital fund White Star Capital in Montreal, and a junior strategy consultant with Pivot Strategy in the city.

Ms. Cheung first joined the heritage minister's team as a communications adviser to then-minister **Mélanie Joly** in April 2018. Prior to that, Ms. Cheung spent a little more than two years

as a communications adviser in the Liberal research bureau (LRB), overseeing parliamentary mail-outs coming from the caucus. She's also a former secondary school teacher with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, having spent around eight and a half years teaching before coming to work on the Hill.

Ms. Korajian-Rankin is another holdover from the team during the last Parliament, having first joined the heritage minister's office in November 2018 as a policy and Western and Northern regional affairs adviser. She's also a former special assistant for operations and Western and Northern regional affairs in the LRB, and a former assistant to Van-



Fred Lagrandeur is part of Mr. Guilbeault's policy team. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

couver Liberal MP **Hedy Fry**, who's successful 2019 re-election campaign she recently ran. Originally from the island of La Gônave in Haiti, Mr. Lagrandeur came to Canada to study a master's degree in international law at the University of Montreal. He went on

to become head of events organization for the Laurier-Sainte-Marie federal Liberal riding association, and in turn, was part of Mr. Guilbeault's 2019 election campaign. Ultimately, Mr. Guilbeault was elected to represent the riding with about 41.8 per cent of the vote.

Mr. Yacobi-Harris is a former assistant to Toronto Liberal MP **Arif Virani**.

Ms. Bourbonnière was last tackling public relations for Element AI, an artificial intelligence company based in Montreal. She's also a former senior account executive with Edelman, has tackled research and program development for the Clinton Global Initiative, and is a former co-ordinator for advocacy and public affairs for the Canadian Medical As-



Irene Cheung is a policy adviser to Mr. Guilbeault. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Canadian Heritage Minister Steven Guilbeault, pictured speaking to media outside the House of Commons Chamber in the West Block building on Feb. 3, 2020. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

sociation. As heritage minister, Mr. Guilbeault oversees appointments for a number of bodies, like the boards of the National Art Gallery of Canada or the Canada Media Fund, along with various advisory panels.

Noémie Dansereau-Lavoie continues as a senior adviser to the heritage minister. She first joined the office under Ms. Joly in May 2019 and has previously spent around eight years working for the CBC/Radio-Canada, last as head of strategic planning for French services.

Michael Brewster is Mr. Guilbeault's director of parliamentary affairs. He spent the last four years working for then-families minister **Jean-Yves Duclos**, starting as an issues manager and ending as senior policy adviser, and was part of Mr. Guilbeault's 2019 campaign team.



Michael Brewster oversees parliamentary affairs for Mr. Guilbeault. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Kathleen Legault-Meek has been hired on as a legislative assistant. She's a former legislative and research assistant to Quebec Senator **Dennis Dawson**, and a former assistant to Liberal MP **Steven MacKinnon** and then-Liberal MP **Michel Picard**.

Linda Campbell is director of operations in the office. Ms. Campbell is a former policy and Western and Northern regional affairs adviser to the small business minister, starting under then-minister **Bardish Chagger**—who's now Minister of Diversity, Youth, and Inclusion—and ending under **Mary Ng**. She's also a former assistant to Vancouver Liberal MP **Joyce Murray**.

Covering the Northern and Western regional affairs desk for Mr. Guilbeault is **Joshua Lindner**, who previously did the same for then-employment minister **Patty Hajdu**. He's also a former special assistant for outreach and Western regional affairs to then-science minister **Kirsty Duncan**.

Former PMO correspondence writer **Maria Browne** is the Atlantic regional affairs adviser in the office, as previously reported. While she initially wore two hats in Mr. Guilbeault's office, as a regional adviser and assistant to the minister's parliamentary secretary, Liberal MP **Julie Dabrusin**, she's now focused on just the one. In turn, **Brendan Parsley** has joined the heritage minister's office as Mr. Dabrusin's new assistant. A former tree planter, he previously worked as an assistant to Deputy Prime Minister **Chrystia Freeland** in her capacity as the Liberal MP for University-Rosedale, Ont., and is also a former social media manager for the federal Liberal Party.



Brian MacKay is a new addition to the heritage minister's office. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

MacKay is Mr. Guilbeault's Ontario regional affairs adviser. He's a former operations and Ontario regional affairs assistant to Ms. Duncan as the minister for science and sport during the last Parliament, and also previously worked as an assistant to Toronto Liberal MP **Julie Dzerowicz** and to then-Ontario Liberal MPP **Ann Hoggarth**. As heritage minister, Mr. Guilbeault is also responsible for the sport portfolio.

Viki Ozell-Landry remains in the heritage minister's office, now as the Quebec regional affairs adviser. She was previously a communications adviser under then-minister **Pablo Rodriguez** and is also a former assistant to National Revenue Minister **Diane Lebouthillier** in her capacity as the Liberal MP for Gaspésie-Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Que.

Justine Lesage is director of communications to Mr. Guilbeault. She spent the last year, roughly, as press secretary to Agriculture Minister **Marie-Claude Bibeau**, having been Ms.

Bibeau's press aide as international development minister before that. During the 2019 election, she was a communications co-ordinator for the party in Quebec. She's also a former communications and public relations co-ordinator for Oxfam-Québec.

Lynda Haddoud has joined the office as a communications and issues management adviser. She's a former special assistant to then-PMO director (and now executive director) of administration and special projects **Brett Thalmann**, and a former assistant to Quebec Liberal MP **Peter Schiefke**.

Philippe "Phil" Desforges is a social media adviser for the office. He's produced a podcast, *Just share it*, focused on mental health and self-improvement since February 2019 and was also part of Mr. Guilbeault's successful 2019 election campaign, tackling social media and creative content.

Sarah Leclair wears two hats in the office, as both a communications adviser and as assistant to Mr. Guilbeault's parliamentary secretary for sport, former Olympian turned Liberal MP **Adam van Koevorden**. Ms. Leclair is a former assistant to then-Liberal MP **Martha Hall Findlay** and more recently to Liberal MP **Bob Bratina**, and is also a former departmental assistant for parliamentary and caucus affairs for Employment and Social Development Canada.

Elena Mitchell has been hired on as executive assistant to Mr. Guilbeault, while **Vinciane Museru**, a former scheduling assistant to Mr. Rodriguez as heritage minister, is now executive assistant to his chief of staff, Mr. Bouchard.

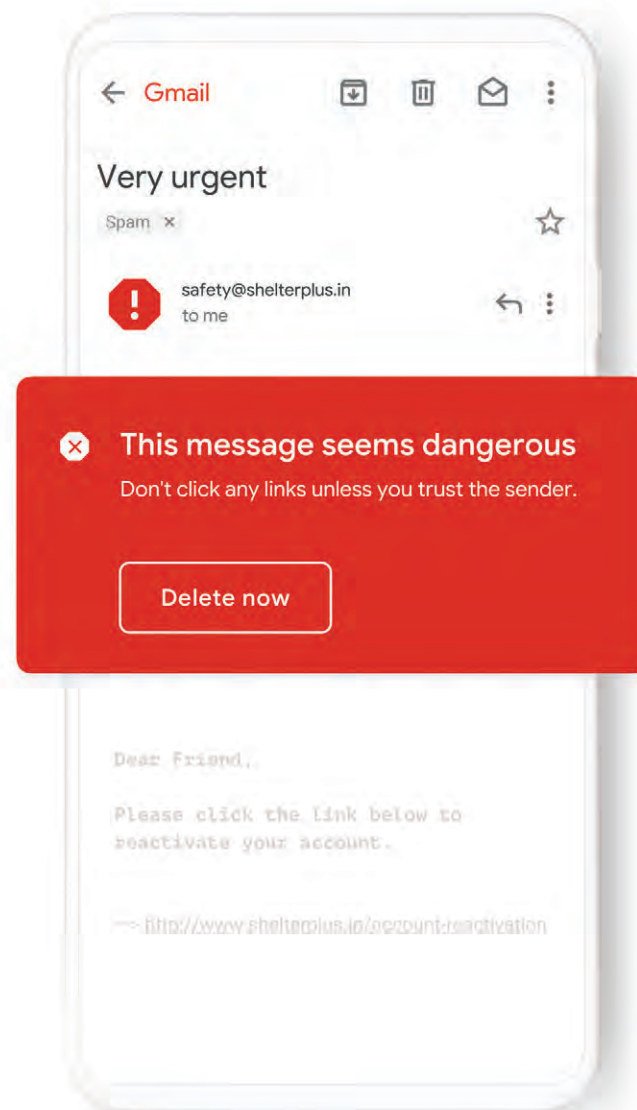
Mr. Bouchard's move from the PMO to Mr. Guilbeault's office has already been reported by *Hill Climbers*, so too has the hiring of press secretary **Camille Gagné-Raynauld**, who previously worked as a public and media relations officer at the environmental non-profit co-founded by Mr. Guilbeault, *Équiterre*.



Justin Lesage is director of communications for Mr. Guilbeault. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



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phishing
attempts,
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