Does Canada make the grade?

Defence policy briefing

pp. 15-25

Sen. Cardozo: Inside a parliamentary trip to Capitol Hill

pp. 10-11

AI alignment p. 13

Hill Climbers p. 30

Is Cancon current? p. 4

THE HILL TIMES

THIRTY-FIFTH YEAR, NO. 2128 | CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER | WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 2024 $5.00

NEWS

'We believe in international law, or we don't': South African envoy counters claims of moral equivalence in ICC warrant applications

BY NEIL MOSS

As the Canadian government rejects any equivalence between Israeli and Hamas leaders after the International Criminal Court prosecutor applied for arrest warrants, South Africa's top diplomat in Canada says the equivalence is in the breach of international law, not who is doing it.

On May 20, International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Karim Khan applied for arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanya-

Continued on page 26

South African High Commissioner to Canada Rieaz Shaik says everyone should be held equally to account for breaches of international law. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

NEWS

Prison-reform advocate calls on feds to permanently kill the Joyceville slaughterhouse

BY STUART BENSON

More than a year and a half after the Joyceville Institution abattoir in Kingston, Ont., closed down, Ontario beef farmers are ramping up the pressure on the federal government to give the 60-plus-year-old slaughterhouse a new lease on life. However, prison-farm-reform advocate Calvin Neufeld says he wants the government to finally "let it die" after spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to keep the building on life support, with more than $1-million in repair costs projected over the next five years just to keep the building empty.

Canada's last remaining prison labour-operated abattoir at

Continued on page 14

NEWS

'A very challenging site': breaking down Block 2 plans and progress

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

Each stage of the multi-year effort to renovate the Parliamentary Precinct brings its own set of challenges, and the overhaul of Block 2 is no different. With a new complex set to be built around—and in some cases connected to—existing heritage buildings, locals will see signs of construction activity around the site starting to appear this fall.

Continued on page 27

NEWS

Indo-Pacific pledge for new Fiji mission not yet met as diplomatic footprint slowly grows

BY NEIL MOSS

A year and a half after Canada's renewed plan for engagement with the Indo-Pacific region pledged a new mission in Fiji, it has yet to be opened, but a couple of Canadian diplomats are on the ground.

Continued on page 28

Publications Mail Agreement #40068926

0 94922 81130 1

News

Prison-reform advocate calls on feds to permanently kill the Joyceville slaughterhouse

The Joyceville Institution abattoir closed in 2022, and despite thousands of dollars in maintenance, getting the facility back up and running may no longer be economically feasible.

During a tour of the Joyceville prison abattoir last November, Evolve Our Prison Farms founder Calvin Neufeld said 'even the air felt unhealthy,' and without significant spending and thorough renovations, he doesn't believe any food should ever be produced inside again. *Photographs courtesy of Calvin Neufeld*

Continued from page 1

the Joyceville Institution closed on Sept. 30, 2022, when the lease of the facility's operator—Wallace Beef—expired after being extended for a year in 2021, and following the retirement of the company's owner.

A month before the abattoir closed, Evolve Our Prison Farms released the second edition of its report criticizing the slaughterhouse. The report claims to expose violations of inmates' human rights as well as legal, institutional, and ethical violations. The first edition was released in August 2021.

The report, *Bloody Bad Business: Report on the Joyceville Institution Abattoir (2nd edition)*, was submitted to the office of then-public safety minister Marco Mendicino (Eglinton–Lawrence, Ont.), and Correctional Services Canada (CSC) on Aug. 18. It included documentation that Neufeld alleged exposed a wide spectrum of infractions at the abattoir.

The report—which contains more than 1,000 pages of documents—claims to show evidence of illegal activities, including money laundering, contraband smuggling, abuse, improper slaughtering of animals, dumping of abattoir blood into the prison's water treatment plant, and blood contaminating the fields around the prison and the banks of the Rideau River Watershed.

Neufeld, Evolve Our Prison Farms' founder, said that while the abattoir has remained closed, taxpayers are still shouldering an unnecessary burden for an unwanted and unneeded facility, and that the easiest, most cost-effective, and evidence-based solution would be to dispose of the building entirely rather than continue to search for a replacement to take on the lease.

However, in response to a letter from Neufeld dated March 18 and shared with *The Hill Times*, CSC said that it had not made a decision about reopening the abattoir, and is "actively exploring all possible options for future use … in accordance with our mandate to rehabilitate offenders."

In response to a request for comment from *The Hill Times*, CSC said that if it were to seek out business interests to continue a privately operated abattoir, it would issue a public posting request through the federal procurement website, CanadaBuys.

Neufeld said that although the government is publicly presenting the future of the abattoir as still undecided, he believes there is mounting political and industry pressure toward its reopening.

"You don't spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on a building that you are going to dispose of," Neufeld said, pointing to the rising maintenance costs the building has and will incur over the next few years.

In an October 2023 briefing note to Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, N.B.), CSC disclosed that $435,000 had been invested that year on repairs and maintenance costs, with an additional $500,000 projected in 2024. Those repairs included clearing debris, repairing refrigeration and freezer units, flushing and cleaning blood and coagulants, replacing plumbing, repairing a ruptured water main, disinfecting, repainting, replacing doors, rebuilding a stairwell retaining wall, and repairing the roof and electrical wiring.

Additionally, the Building Condition Report recommended $1,235,070 in further repairs over the next five years, with CSC estimating that keeping the abattoir "in a state of good repair" over the first two years would cost $678,401 "strictly for building maintenance, not for an operational abattoir."

CSC also disclosed that from 2011-2022, the abattoir accrued $899,670 in revenue in response to an order paper question by Conservative MP Scott Reid (Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston, Ont.), whose riding contained the abattoir prior to this spring's redistribution of the federal ridings.

However, the briefing notes to LeBlanc did not include CSC's opposition to the reopening of the abattoir, nor did they mention the determination that CORCAN—the CSC agency responsible for employment and vocational training—didn't need it to train prisoners.

In a July 2023 email, which Neufeld obtained as part of an access-to-information request and shared with *The Hill Times*, CSC's chief financial officer Tony Matson wrote that the agency "[does] not support the leasing of the abattoir."

"If actually required by CORCAN, maintaining the abattoir in our portfolio for the training of 2-3 inmates goes against [Treasury Board Secretariat] policy and is not appropriate stewardship of government resources," Matson wrote.

In another email obtained by Neufeld, CORCAN itself answers that it does not need the abattoir to provide vocational training to inmates as it has "enough capacity with their other programs at Joyceville to train all inmates." This also was not mentioned in the briefing note, and instead, an agreement was proposed for a new private industry operator to provide "training for inmates."

In the second email, CSC staff also noted that since TBS policy requires the disposal of property that is "underutilized, inefficient or no longer needed for departmental programs," any recommendations not to do so "may invite scrutiny by TBS analysts."

The note to LeBlanc recommended that "[i]n accordance with the [TBS] Directive," reopening the abattoir would support "the optimization of the real property portfolio."

Neufeld toured the abattoir with Reid on Nov. 15, 2023.

Neufeld said that even the air felt "unhealthy," and that the tour guide informed them that large fans were needed to constantly circulate the air inside the building to fight the mould.

"No food should be produced in that facility ever again," Neufeld said, adding that he believes it would require full demolition and the construction of an entirely new building to get the facility up to code.

In a written response to questions from *The Hill Times*, Reid said that while he isn't an expert on decommissioned abattoirs, his impression from the visit is that it may prove "impossible to reopen the existing facility without extensive renovations."

Reid said that while CSC has maintained the building's structural integrity, no effort has been made to keep it up to code, including allowing areas previously kept at below-freezing temperatures to be left unrefrigerated. He added that any "grandfathering in" that had existed under the previous lease would have expired, and any parts of the abattoir that were non-compliant with updated provincial food-safety regulations and workplace standards would have to be brought up to code.

"It seems evident that reopening the abattoir as a [CSC]-run facility, staffed by inmates, would be prohibitively expensive, and would not serve the purpose of providing useful training to inmates," Reid said. "The only realistic option would be to turn the facility over to the private sector, to be staffed by non-inmate labour, and to operate entirely outside the corrections system."

Whether that can be done in a way that is "economically viable" is something that "only a consultant with the necessary expertise could determine," Reid said.

Neufeld said that despite "every single rationale" to keep it closed—from the burden to taxpayers to the lack of need from CSC and CORCAN, or benefit to inmates—the only justification for reopening the abattoir has come from the agricultural industry.

"[The abattoir] isn't good for anybody except for industry because they get a cheap slaughter service," Neufeld said. "Every single rationale says to keep it

A look inside the abattoir at the Joyceville Institution where prison labour was used to operate a commercial facility as part of an 'on-the-job' training program for inmates. *Photograph courtesy of Calvin Neufeld*

Continued on page 29

News

Prison-reform advocate calls on feds to permanently kill the Joyceville slaughterhouse

Continued from page 14

closed. It's done. It's lived its life, and all they have to do is just keep it closed and let it die, but industry says reopen."

Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) has been lobbying the government to reopen the abattoir, which previously serviced more than 250 local farms for nearly three decades after it stopped providing meat to the prison itself in the mid-1990s. At that time, the BFO said the abattoir had supplied more than 100 local butcher shops and restaurants, which were also being negatively affected by the closure alongside the local farms and economy.

At the BFO's annual general meeting (AGM) in February 2023, the organization passed a resolution accusing Evolve Our Prison Farms of spreading "disparaging mistruths about the value and importance of skilled abattoir training for offenders reintegrating into society," and resolving to "work with those interested in operating the abattoir to lobby the federal government and minister of public safety to take immediate action to successfully reopen the abattoir at Joyceville Institution."

In a letter published by the BFO dated Nov. 28, 2023, containing the resolution, the organization detailed the lobbying efforts already undertaken, including a letter sent by Ontario CSG Senator Rob Black to Mendicino and then-agriculture and agri-food minister Marie-Claude Bibeau (Compton–Stanstead, Que.), as well as then-employment, workforce development, and disability inclusion minister Carla Qualtrough (Delta, B.C.).

The BFO also said it met with Liberal MP Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Ont.) alongside Meat and Poultry Ontario to discuss the abattoir's reopening. During that meeting, BFO said they were informed that after CSC reviewed the building's condition, it would only require "minor repairs." According to the federal lobbying registry, Gerretsen met with someone representing the BFO on Sept. 7, 2023.

The BFO said it was working with Gerretsen's office on a parliamentary petition to "help expedite the [request for proposal] process."

The BFO did not respond to *The Hill Times* request for comment by publishing deadline.

Gerretsen recently submitted five identical petitions—on March 18, 21, 22, April 19, and 30—calling on the federal government "to explore all options to ensure the abattoir located at Joyceville Institution is re-opened" to address stated negative economic impacts.

While each of Gerretsen's presentations in the House of Commons had noted that the majority of the 176 signatures across the five petitions were from farmers and residents of Reid's constituency, when tabling the final petition, he quipped: "I do not know why the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston did not present this, but I will do it on behalf of his constituents."

Gerretsen did not respond to repeated requests for comment from *The Hill Times*.

"I was scratching my head as to why he is doing this when he knows as well as I do that even if the government committed today to reopen, they couldn't," Neufeld said, noting that Gerretsen and LeBlanc had toured the facility themselves on May 20, according to a community update distributed by Gerretsen's office.

In response to questions about his personal observations from the tour, LeBlanc's office directed all questions relating to the facility to CSC.

Neufeld noted that even though Gerretsen kept underscoring that the petitioners were Reid's constituents, the redistribution would put the entire Joyceville Institution—including the abattoir, the prison's farms, and the controversial planned goat farm—"out of Reid's hands and into his."

The boundary change allocated the parts of Kingston north of Highway 401 previously included in Reid's riding into Gerretsen's "to preserve their community of interest and to enhance their representation."

Senator Black concerned about lack of services for local farmers

In an interview with *The Hill Times*, Senator Black said he decided to write his letter to the cabinet ministers after meeting with the BFO at their AGM, where several local farmers raised the issue with him.

"Abattoirs aren't something that gets built every day," Black said, noting that the closure of the facility had left hundreds of beef farmers in Eastern Ontario without an abattoir that could meet the demand.

After sending his letter in March 2023, Black said he had not received a response until last December when he was contacted by CSC instead.

Kevin Shedden, the CSC regional deputy commissioner for Ontario, wrote that the service is "reviewing options for the future use of the building" and that, once repairs are complete, it will publish a request for proposals to seek private industry interests to operate the abattoir.

Black said he isn't sure that returning to a public-private partnership to use the inmate labour would be a useful or viable option, but regardless of the ownership arrangement, "we need the abattoir."

"At the end of the day, we don't have enough abattoirs in this country, and my concern is that there isn't one in Eastern Ontario," Black said. "They've got a building with a bunch of the infrastructure; the building is at least part-way there, so let's get it up to code and running."

sbenson@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Opinion

Canadian living standards declining with no end in sight

Employment Minister Randy Boissonnault, left, and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland hold a press conference in Ottawa on May 21. The federal and provincial governments largely maintained the status quo this past budget season, especially the Trudeau government, write Jason Clemens, Grady Munro, and Milagros Palacios. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

According to a new study, Canadians experienced a decline in living standards, as measured by per-person GDP, from the second quarter of 2019 to the end of 2023.

Jason Clemens, Grady Munro & Milagros Palacios

Opinion

According to a recent poll, two-thirds of Canadians believe the economy is headed in the wrong direction. Clearly, there's a disconnect between economic statistics, which show the Canadian economy is growing, and the experiences of those who feel like they're falling behind. In reality, Canadians are on the cusp of the worst decline in living standards in 40 years with no end in sight.

When measured in aggregate, our economy is growing, albeit weakly. In 2023, the economy grew by 1.1 per cent after adjusting for inflation. And so far this year, it grew by 0.5 per cent in January, and 0.2 per cent in February. But these statistics don't account for changes in the population. It's possible for the aggregate economy to grow because more people are coming to Canada (i.e. immigration) while per-person income levels decline. This happens when the growth in the overall economy is insufficient to account for the growth in the number of people in the economy. And unfortunately for Canadians, this is exactly what's happening now.

In 2023, Canada's population grew by 3.2 per cent or nearly 1.3 million people—the highest annual population growth rate since 1957, and nearly three times the rate of inflation-adjusted economic growth.

According to a new study, from the second quarter of 2019 to the end of 2023, Canadians experienced a decline in living standards, as measured by per-person GDP (inflation-adjusted). Except for one fiscal quarter of reprieve, this 18-quarter period represents the second-longest period of per-person GDP decline over the last four decades (exceeded only by the 21-quarter decline from the late-1980s to 1994). But critically, the current decline—based on the latest data available for the end of 2023—has not yet ended, and may extend into 2024.

Moreover, the percentage decline in living standards—again, as measured by per-person GDP—is the third-steepest of any decline over the last four decades at -3 per cent (exceeded only by declines from the late-1980s to the early-1990s and from 2008 to 2009, which both eclipsed 5.0 per cent). But again, the current decline has not yet ended, and we could see continued declines in living standards when the 2024 data is released. Simply put, Canadians could be experiencing the worst decline in living standards of the last 40 years.

Several leading economists have already raised alarm bells over our economic decline, including Carolyn Rogers, senior deputy governor of the Bank of Canada, who recently said it was time to "break the glass" to solve Canada's productivity crisis. Unfortunately, despite the calls for genuine reform, the federal and provincial governments this past budget season largely maintained the status quo, and continued to borrow and spend with no government demonstrating its intransigence more than the Trudeau government.

But if today's policymakers need a blueprint for reform, they can look to the recent past. During the prolonged decline in living standards from the late-1980s to roughly 1994, governments across the country—and in particular the federal government under Liberal prime minister Jean Chrétien—introduced large-scale reforms including spending reductions to balance budgets, paying down debt to reduce interest costs and create a more stable economic environment, and tax relief to incentivize investment and entrepreneurship. These reforms paved the way for nearly two decades of prosperity.

Today, the severity of Canada's economic decline demands a similar approach. Governments must either reform or eliminate low-priority and poorly performing programs to help balance their budgets; introduce meaningful tax relief aimed at improving Canadian competitiveness, and incentivizing investment and entrepreneurship; and move away from picking economic winners and losers to a more neutral policy of creating the best environment for all businesses, workers, and entrepreneurs. This is the recipe for widespread prosperity for Canadians and their families.

Jason Clemens, Grady Munro, and Milagros Palacios are analysts at the Fraser Institute.

The Hill Times