
LOBBYING

Top 100 Lobbyists: Pandemic ushers in explosion of lobbying activity

By BEATRICE PAEZ AND SAMANTHA WRIGHT ALLEN (/AUTHOR/BEATRICE-PAEZ-AND-SAMANTHA-WRIGHT-ALLEN) FEBRUARY 22, 2021

Adaptability and a large Rolodex made the difference for those seeking access and influence as conversations migrated online over Zoom, say lobbyists.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured Dec. 7, 2020, and his government have taken an outsized role in the lives of Canadians, thanks to an unprecedented level of spending in response to the pandemic. The record level of spending has also been accompanied by a rise in lobbying activity. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

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The pandemic may have indefinitely suspended most in-person lobbying campaigns and social engagements, but lobbyists say they're busier than they've ever been.

While COVID-19 hasn't changed the "fundamentals" of the business, for those at the top of their game, it's driven home the need to be more attuned to the pressures facing the government, and has shown that connections with officials have to be built over time, rather than in the midst of a crisis.

"When you're in crisis mode, you have to be very cognizant of the pressures on the government," said Greg MacEachern, senior vice-president of government relations at Proof Strategies. "You have to be reasonable in terms of your expectations around people's availability and time. It's especially true when you have ministers with multiple portfolios."

"There's also been a realization that government relations should not be treated as something only for emergencies," he added.

This year's Top 100 Lobbyists list is a reflection of the many issues the government is wrestling with and the key players haggling over the details of its policy responses. *The Hill Times* reached out to more than two dozen lobbyists, including both in-house representatives and consultants, on background for input on developing this year's list.

There are some 6,383 active registrations in the federal lobbyists' registry, with consultants making up a smaller proportion at 1,097, while in-house organization lobbyists account for 3,138 and 2,148 for in-house corporate lobbyists. Since the onset of the pandemic, there's been a slight increase of 4.2 per cent in overall registrations. Consultant registrations saw the most growth, with a 9.1 per cent uptick during that timeframe, compared to a 3.6 per cent and 2.6 per cent increase for in-house organization and corporate lobbyists, respectively.

Between December 2020 and January 2021 alone, the number of new registrations grew by 45 per cent, from 149 to 216 new entries. Updated registrations were also up by 21.1 per cent, as were reactivated registrations by 90 per cent, and monthly communications reports rose by 8.1 per cent. Deactivated registrations were also up at 21.8 per cent.

While visibility within the so-called Ottawa bubble, partisan affiliation, and the number of communication reports filed federally, can serve as measures of a lobbyist's reach, the list also features those who work quietly behind the scenes offering strategic advice on how to press a client or group's case forward. It includes many fixtures from past iterations—such as lobbyists representing unionized workers, small businesses, and the tech giants nearly impossible for the government to ignore. There are also several new additions, including Pfizer Canada and the Hotel Association of Canada, which are tied to the pandemic.

The demand for interactions has been a two-way street—especially in the early stages of the pandemic—with policymakers needing information quickly from industry, and businesses anxious to know whether, or how, the government would address their issues.

So far, the government has spent upwards of \$240-billion in response to the pandemic, according to the CBC. The largest portion is tied to the nearly \$50-billion Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, a temporary program that aims to help employers keep workers on the payroll.

With the federal government taking on a greater role, there's been an accompanying explosion of lobbying activity, not seen since Ottawa first started tracking communication between lobbyists and public office holders. Total activity amounted to an 80 per cent



Proof Strategies' Louis-Charles Roy, left, and Greg MacEachern. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

increase over 2019 (an election year when interactions are always lower), and a 20 per cent increase over 2018.

"With COVID-19, almost overnight, the government was making decisions that were impacting big chunks of the economy, and if you weren't engaged, you needed to get engaged," said Jason Kerr, president of the Government Relations Institute of Canada. "Trying to play catch-up in a crisis is really no small feat."

Last year, lobbyists logged 28,293 communications, compared to 23,565 in 2018, the last normal year tracked by the federal lobbyists' registry. Consultants reported the largest jump in activity, at 32 per cent, disclosing 8,566 communications, compared to 6,477 in 2018. The 14,063 files logged by organizations made up half of all interactions, and represented a 20 per cent increase from 2018's 11,715 files.

A planned stimulus package that's expected to be worth up to \$100-billion will likely set off another record flurry of activity.

Looking at those numbers, Mr. Kerr, who is also senior director of government relations at the Canadian Automobile Association, said it's clear to him that lobbyists were able to adapt quickly for their clients and organizations.

Though the pandemic has dominated nearly every facet of life, of the 4,665 active registrations, only 584 filings referred to "COVID-19" as a key topic for discussion with officials in their disclosure filings, according to a search of the lobbyists' registry on Feb. 18.

Of those filings, some 403 belonged to consultants, 105 were tied to in-house organization lobbyists, 76 for those lobbying on behalf of their corporate employer, 11 on the board of directors, and two as consultant members of an organization. Nearly all, or 315, cited "health" as a subject matter, followed 283 for "economic development," 266 for "industry," 235 for "taxation and finance," 209 for "employment and training," 198 for "environment," to name several points of discussion.



Jason Kerr, president of the Government Relations Institute of Canada. *Photograph courtesy of GRIC*

There were also 71 filings that had jotted down “COVID” and 252 that cited “pandemic.”

Overall, according to the lobbyists’ registry, some of the biggest topics of discussions over the past year centred on economic development, industry, health, environment, infrastructure, the budget, and employment. The last two months of the year, for example, economic development topped the list of communication reports logged, with 626 filed in November and 329 in December. (Communications typically slow down over the holidays.)



Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland is overseeing the government's planned stimulus package, which could be worth up to \$100-billion, and is likely to set another record for lobbying activity. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Existing rapport with officials matters

Adaptability and a large Rolodex made the difference for those seeking access and influence amid a shift to online engagements that instantaneously removed the regular in-person and chance interactions on the Hill, said Kevin Bosch, vice-president of public affairs at Hill and Knowlton Strategies. The former Liberal staffer joined the Liberal research bureau in 1998 and left for government relations in 2017 (<https://www.hilltimes.com/2017/06/05/bosch-bids-farewell-parliament-hill-joins-public-affairs-firm/109210>).

“You can’t just hold an event and expect people to show up because there are no events,” he said, adding that existing personal rapport with officials matters. “You have to be able to reach out to people, have them pick up your calls, be able to direct your clients in the right directions and set up those contacts.”

The cabinet minister most in demand last year was Navdeep Bains (Mississauga-Malton, Ont.), who resigned from cabinet on Jan. 12 after overseeing the innovation file since 2015. His name was mentioned in 225 reports. Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson (North Vancouver, B.C.) at 201, Natural Resources Minister Seamus O’Regan (St. John’s South-Mount Pearl, N.L.) at 197, Economic Development Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.) at 164, and Heritage Minister Steven Guilbeault (Laurier-Ste-Marie, Que.), rounded out the top five most-lobbied cabinet members.

Top 100 Lobbyists

Search...

| Lobbyist | Title |
|-----------------|---|
| Alayne Crawford | government relations and regulatory affairs executive, IBM Canada |
| Andre Albinati | principal, Farnscliffe Strategies |

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| André Almeida | principal, Earthscape Strategy |
| Andrew Balfour | managing partner, Rubicon Strategy |
| Andy Gibbons | director, government relations & regulatory affairs, WestJet Airlines |
| Anthony Polci | vice-president, government relations, Canadian Bankers Association |
| Bharat Masrani | president and CEO, TD Bank |
| Brad Lavigne | partner and vice-president, Western Canada, Counsel Public Affairs |
| Brian Kingston | president and CEO, Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association |
| Brian Sauve | president, National Police Federation |
| Bruce Hartley | senior partner, Prospectus Associates |
| Carla Ventin | senior vice-president, government relations, Food, Health, and Consumer Products Canada |
| Carole Saab | CEO, Federation of Canadian Municipalities |
| Catherine Cobden | president, Canadian Steel Producers Association |
| Chad Rogers | partner, Crestview Strategy |
| Chima Nkemdirim | vice-president of government relations, Shaw Communications |
| Chris Aylward | national executive vice-president, Public Services Alliance Canada |
| Colin McKay | head of public policy and government relations, Google Canada |
| Conrad Sauvé | president and CEO, Canadian Red Cross |
| Dan Kelly | president, CEO, and chair, Canadian Federation of Independent Business |
| Daniel-Robert Gooch | president, Canadian Airports Council |
| Dave Carey | vice-president, government and industry relations, Canadian Canola Growers Association |
| David Coates | manager, government affairs, Janssen Inc. |
| David Cooper | vice-president, government relations, Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs |
| David Paterson | Vice President, Corporate and Environmental Affairs, General Motors of Canada |
| David Pratt | principal, David Pratt and Associates |
| Dennis Darby | president and CEO, Alliance of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters |
| Derek Nighbor | CEO, Forest Products Association of Canada |
| Diane Brisebois | president and CEO, Retail Council of Canada |
| Don Moors | president, Temple Scott Associates |
| Donald Walker | CEO, Magna International Inc. |
| Elise Maheu | director, government affairs, 3M Canada |
| Eric Lamoureux | managing director, Public Affairs Advisors |
| George Christidis | director, national and international government affairs, Canadian Nuclear Association |
| George Wamala | director, regulatory and government affairs, Royal Bank of Canada |
| Goldy Hyder | president and CEO, Business Council of Canada |
| Gordon Quaiattini | partner, Maple Leaf Strategies |
| Greg MacEachern | senior vice-president, government relations, Proof Strategies |
| Hassan Yussuff | president, Canadian Labour Congress |
| Heidi Bonnell | vice-president, federal government affairs at Rogers Communications |
| Huw Williams | president, Impact Public Affairs |
| Ian Edwards | president and CEO, SNC-Lavalin |
| Jackie Choquette | interim practice lead, Crestview Strategy |
| Jacob Glick | vice-president, public policy, Telus Corp. |
| Jacques Lefebvre | CEO, Dairy Farmers Canada |
| Jacquie LaRocque | principal, Compass Rose Group |
| James Kusie | director of government relations, Imperial Oil |
| Jane Chung | president, AstraZeneca Canada Inc. |
| Jason Kerr | senior director, government relations, Canadian Automobile Association |
| Jennifer Babcock | director, public affairs, Canola Council of Canada |

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|--------------------------|--|
| Jennifer Brown | interim CEO, Society of Composers, Authors, and Music Publishers of Canada (SOCAN) |
| Jerry Dias | national president, Unifor |
| Jim Irving | CEO of Irving Shipbuilding |
| Joe Jordan | senior associate, Bluesky Strategy Group |
| Joelle Walker | vice-president, public affairs, Canadian Pharmacists Association |
| John Delacourt | vice-president, public affairs, Hill and Knowlton Strategies |
| Kate Harrison | vice-chair, Summa Strategies |
| Kevin Bosch | vice-president of public affairs, Hill and Knowlton Strategies |
| Kevin Chan | public policy director, Facebook Canada |
| Lauren van den Berg | executive vice-president, government relations, Restaurants Canada |
| Leslie Swartman | director, public affairs, MDA Systems Ltd. |
| Lori Kennedy | director of regulatory affairs, Canadian Pacific Railway |
| Louis-Alexandre Lanthier | senior director, government affairs, CN Railway |
| Margaret Eaton | CEO, Canadian Mental Health Association |
| Margaret McGuffin | executive director, Canadian Music Publishers Association |
| Marlene Floyd | national director of corporate affairs, Microsoft Canada |
| Martin-Pierre Pelletier | senior partner, Prospectus Associates |
| Matt Triemstra | general manager, Ensign Canada |
| Megan Leslie | president and CEO, World Wildlife Fund |
| Michael Bernstein | executive director, Canadians for Clean Prosperity |
| Michael Rousseau | chief financial officer, incoming CEO, Air Canada |
| Michael Villeneuve | CEO, Canadian Nurses Association |
| Michel Liboiron | associate vice-president, public policy and government relations, CIBC |
| Michele Austin | head of government, public policy, philanthropy, Twitter Canada |
| Mirko Bibic | president and CEO, BCE |
| Monica Masciantonio | vice-president, government affairs, Scotiabank |
| Naresh Raghubeer | vice-president, federal government relations, Davie Canada Yard Inc. |
| Nicole Foster | head of public policy, Amazon Web Services Inc. |
| Pamela Fralick | president of Innovative Medicines Canada |
| Perrin Beatty | president and CEO, Canadian Chamber of Commerce |
| Philip Cartwright | senior vice-president, Global Public Affairs |
| Pierre Gratton | president and CEO, Mining Association of Canada |
| Pierre Pyun | vice-president of government affairs and public affairs, Bombardier |
| Richard Mahoney | managing director, McMillan Vantage Policy Group |
| Robert Ghiz | president and CEO, Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association |
| Robin MacLachlan | president, Summa Strategies |
| Sean Casey | vice-president, cultural industries, Global Public Affairs |
| Sheamus Murphy | partner, Counsel Public Affairs |
| Stéphane Cardin | director, public policy (Canada) at Netflix |
| Steven Hogue | manager, federal relations, Pfizer Canada ULC |
| Susan Smith | principal, Bluesky Strategy Group |
| Susie Grynol | president and CEO, Hotel Association of Canada |
| Tabatha Bull | president and CEO, Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business |
| Tim Gitzel | president and CEO, Cameco Corp. |
| Tim Gray | executive director, Environmental Defence |
| Tim Lambert | CEO, Egg Farmers of Canada |
| Tim McMillan | president and CEO, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers |

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|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| Timothy Smith | CEO, Canadian Medical Association |
| Tobias Lütke | CEO, Shopify |
| Velma McColl | principal, Earnscliffe Strategy Group |
| Wendy Noss | president, Motion Picture Association |

 A Flourish data visualization (https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/5325371/?utm_source=showcase&utm_campaign=visualisation/5325371)

Similarly, communications reports tied to departments somewhat mirrored the trends at the cabinet level. Officials at Mr. Bains' former department, Industry Canada, were consistently among the most sought after last year, with nearly 3,000 reports tied to it, as were those at Finance (1,643), Natural Resources (1,632), Global Affairs (1,379), and Environment and Climate Change (1,228).

With the Trudeau government framing the pandemic as an opportunity to ramp up the transition to a greener economy, the numbers suggested that lobbyists have taken those cues and are vying to help shape that recovery effort by targeting the key departments and officials involved in that transition.

The cocktail circuit was once key for influencers to build and broaden their network with sought-after officials on a continual basis. Now, relationships matter even more than before, said Susan Smith, a former Liberal strategist and co-founder of Bluesky Strategy Group.

“When you needed an answer to a question, it made things a whole lot more efficient if you could get straight through to the person who could give you an answer,” she said. “Your experience and networks came into play. It might have been a bit more challenging for someone who is brand new to the GR [government relations] field.”

Jackie Choquette, interim practice lead at Crestview Strategy, agreed. “When we talk to clients, we talk about the value of building long-term relationships,” she said. “These are circumstances when they’re valuable. It’s easier to pick up the phone and be able to move things quicker. It’s a little tougher to build relationships from scratch.”

In the absence of spontaneous encounters and networking opportunities, Ms. Choquette said, she finds that she needs to schedule more conversations than before—and there are only so many “16 half-hour slots” that can be fit in over the course of a regular work day.



Lobbyist Susan Smith, pictured in 2014 with Liberal MP John McKay on the Hill. *The Hill Times* file photograph by Jake Wright

Top 10 most lobbied cabinet ministers

| Cabinet minister | Communication reports |
|---|-----------------------|
| Innovation Minister Navdeep Bains * | 225 |
| Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson | 201 |
| Natural Resources Minister Seamus O'Regan | 197 |
| Economic Development Minister Mélanie Joly | 164 |
| Heritage Minister Steven Guilbeault | 148 |
| Finance Minister, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland | 134 |
| Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau | 123 |
| Trade Minister Mary Ng | 122 |
| Labour Minister Filomena Tassi | 99 |
| Finance Minister Bill Morneau * | 98 |

— according to a search of the lobbyists' registry on Feb. 17, 2021

- no longer a cabinet minister

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“It’s harder to get a group of people together because you don’t have the networking piece. At least in my personal experience, I need to have more conversations than I needed to before,” she said.

And though lobbyists have learned to adapt to the constraints introduced by the pandemic, and acknowledge that virtual meetings over Zoom will outlast COVID-19, many are wistful for the day when life in the “bubble” can take on a semblance of normalcy.

John Delacourt, vice-president of public affairs, said that conversations over Zoom and on the phone, which tend to be agenda-driven, are a “poor substitute” for the more informal interactions that broaden one’s perspective of issues.

“You just miss that ability to have those more wide-ranging conversations. A lot of us love policy; we love to hear about stuff we’re not working on that also sparks ideas.”



Canada's chief public health officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, is among the most visible spokespersons on the federal pandemic response. The first few months of the pandemic saw all other policy priorities pushed aside, as the government turned its focus on mitigating the virus' spread. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

In its early stages, pandemic blotted out all other priorities

Lobbying in the pandemic has been marked by three distinct phases, and organizations, or consultants, positioned their needs accordingly, said Ms. Smith.

The first phase was marked by widespread panic, with organizations trying to figure out how to manage under the lockdown restrictions and to keep their doors open, while the second “I can help” phase was all about connecting companies with the government to support its pandemic response. The third, ongoing, phase has stakeholders vying to shape the recovery effort.

“There was a new wave of clients, I think, that came forward, who wouldn’t typically have engaged in lobbying, but needed to because of the pandemic or wanted because of the pandemic,” she said. “And that’s in addition to all of the usual lobbying that didn’t stop.”

Sheamus Murphy, a partner at Counsel Public Affairs who oversees federal advocacy, said the period of intensity, and the blotting out of all other non-pandemic priorities, which marked the first few months of the pandemic, has passed.



Liberal strategist Jackie Choquette. *Screen capture courtesy of Hill and Knowlton Strategies*

“Businesses of all sizes were coping with COVID. We weren’t looking to advance those issues. There were pressing challenges that needed to be addressed,” said Mr. Murphy, also formerly with the Liberal Research Bureau. “Now, we’re in a phase where the government is trying to deal with those backlogs.”

For Mr. Murphy, there are three key pieces—being an effective communicator, having credibility, and knowing to leave one’s ideological baggage at the door—that make a lobbyist influential, regardless of whether there’s a pandemic.

“You’re really an interpreter between the private sector or not-for-profit and government. You’re trying to help them understand what the government is proposing, how policy changes should be made in a way that produces positive outcomes. No one has a monopoly on good ideas.” he said. “[It’s also about] being able to see all sides of an issue, and not about bringing a set perspective, an ideological position. You’re helping clients think through all of the different perspectives. The best outcomes do not come from a pitched battle from both sides.”

Top 50 most lobbied non-cabinet MPs

Search...

| Non-cabinet MP | Affiliation, role | Communication reports |
|-------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Wayne Easter | Liberal, chair of the Finance Committee | 190 |
| Lianne Rood | Conservative, vice-chair of the Agriculture Committee | 157 |
| Francis Drouin | Liberal, vice-chair of the Government Operations Committee | 147 |
| James Cumming | Conservative, vice-chair of the Industry Committee | 131 |
| John Barlow | Conservative | 123 |
| Tracy Gray | Conservative, vice-chair of the International Trade | 117 |
| Sean Fraser | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the finance minister | 111 |
| Francesco Sorbara | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the revenue minister | 109 |
| Michelle Rempel | Conservative, vice-chair of the Health Committee | 99 |

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|------------------------------|--|----|
| Garner | Conservative, vice-chair of the Health Committee | 88 |
| Dan Albas | Conservative, vice-chair of the Environment Committee | 97 |
| Matt Jeneroux | Conservative | 91 |
| Jim Carr * | Liberal, special representative to the Prairies | 90 |
| Erin O'Toole | Conservative leader | 88 |
| Jagmeet Singh | NDP leader | 88 |
| Peter Schiefke | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the environment minister | 87 |
| Heather McPherson | NDP, deputy House leader | 81 |
| Robert Kichen | Conservative, chair of the Government Operations Committee | 83 |
| Julie Dabrusin | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the heritage minister | 80 |
| Alexandre Boulerice | NDP, deputy leader | 80 |
| Patrick Weiler | Liberal | 80 |
| Larry Maguire | Conservative | 79 |
| William Amos | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the innovation minister | 76 |
| Stephanie Kusie | Conservative, vice-chair of the Transport Committee | 75 |
| Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay | Bloc Québécois, vice-chair of the International Trade Committee | 74 |
| Neil Ellis | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the agriculture minister | 72 |
| Terry Duguid | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the economic development and environment ministers | 71 |
| Ali Ehsassi | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the innovation minister | 71 |
| Paul Lefebvre | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the natural resources minister | 70 |
| Ziad Aboualtaif | Conservative | 69 |
| Terry Beech | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the fisheries minister | 68 |
| Jeremy Patzer | Conservative | 68 |
| Marty Morantz | Conservative | 66 |
| Julie Dzerowicz | Liberal | 66 |
| Alistair MacGregor | NDP | 65 |
| Tony Baldinelli | Conservative | 65 |
| Elizabeth May | Green parliamentary leader | 65 |
| Ron McKinnon | Liberal | 65 |
| Don Davies | NDP, health critic | 63 |
| Kody Blois | Liberal | 64 |
| Nathaniel Erskine-Smith | Liberal | 64 |
| Chris d'Entremont | Conservative | 63 |
| Andrew Scheer | former Conservative leader | 62 |
| Mike Lake | Conservative | 58 |
| Adam van Koeverden | Liberal, parliamentary secretary to the diversity inclusion and youth minister | 57 |
| Lloyd Longfield | Liberal, vice-chair of the Public Accounts Committee | 56 |
| Greg McLean | Conservative, vice-chair of the Natural Resources Committee | 55 |
| Michael Kram | Conservative | 54 |
| Yves Perron | Bloc Québécois | 54 |
| Brad Redekopp | Conservative | 54 |
| Marie-France Lalonde | Liberal | 53 |

- now a cabinet member

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The pandemic has arguably raised the stakes all around. The unprecedented speed at which the government has been able to build massive programs, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit for workers affected by the pandemic, largely from scratch has led to heightened expectations from stakeholders.

“Clients value the immediacy of information because everything is happening so, so fast,” said Kate Harrison, vice-chair at Summa Strategies and former Conservative strategist. “[The pandemic] has set a new bar in terms of how often we’re regularly communicating. It will be difficult to come back from that, but it’s not an unreasonable expectation.”



Kevin Bosch, VP Public Affairs at H+K Canada, pictured Nov. 24, 2018, speaking on a Pearson Centre Panel in Ottawa. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Post-pandemic, stakeholders are also likely to expect the government to be more responsive to relatively less urgent issues.

“As we’ve seen with the pandemic, the flow of work has increased, and the urgency with which files are moving have also increased,” said Ms. Choquette. “... All governments during the pandemic have responded at a rapid pace. They’ve designed programs in timeframes that, five years ago, we would’ve thought impossible. That is also raising the bar, and I think moving forward, there are stakeholders who are going to have increased expectations.”

The Hill Times