

'Thou shalt not touch':
BOIE land on Centre Block heritage list p. 4



Diplomatic Circles
p.15



Lisa Van Dusen p. 10

Surviving the
#WorkFromHomepocalypse

Hill Climbers
p.11



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Feature Public service

Situation 'changing hourly' as feds, unions, public service contend with COVID-19 work-from-home confusion

'The government of Canada will be as flexible as possible and will not only allow, but encourage teleworking whenever and wherever possible,' says Treasury Board President Jean-Yves Duclos.



President of the Treasury Board Jean-Yves Duclos is pictured at the National Press Theatre for a press conference to give an update on the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 16. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

BY MIKE LAPOINTE

With calls from the prime minister for Canadians to stay at home in the face of COVID-19,

union leaders say they are aware of some concerns being raised by federal public servants regarding confusing messaging from some government departments around

telework conditions, and that they're raising issues with the Treasury Board as they come up.

Continued on page 13

News Coronavirus

'Together we will beat this': MPs urge care and calm for those most at-risk with COVID-19

BY SAMANTHA WRIGHT ALLEN

For the Canadians at the greatest risk amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, Parliamentarians who

have been immunocompromised once before have pragmatic words of encouragement: trust the science, listen to health professionals, try to be positive, and be very, very careful.

Though none of the four cancer survivors who spoke with *The Hill Times* felt they were person-

Continued on page 12

News Legislation

'Decisive action was required': how MPs and Senators hammered out deal to close Parliament late into the night

BY PETER MAZEREEUW

It was about 10:30 on the night of March 12 when a small group of MPs and top staffers struck a deal to suspend Parliament amid the growing COVID-19 pandemic.

That deal was laid out in a single motion passed in the House the next day, one that included rushing two supply bills through Parliament, and another extraordinary piece of legislation to give the government the power to spend money during the suspension without parliamentary oversight—one of the most fundamental functions of the legislature

under Canada's parliamentary system.

It also pushed the implementation bill for the new NAFTA trade agreement through to the Senate, where all four pieces of legislation were passed almost immediately by the Upper Chamber the following day.

The speedy passage of those bills and the suspension of Parliament were a marked departure from the partisan tactics employed regularly in the Chamber by all caucuses. Government MPs often accuse members of the opposition of deliberately stalling

Continued on page 7

News Canada-China relations

'They have no right to ask me to be there,' says Chinese ambassador on possibility of appearance at Canada-China Relations Committee

BY NEIL MOSS

China's top diplomat in Ottawa says Members of Parliament on the Special Canada-China Relations Committee don't have "a right" to ask him to appear before the body.

Speaking with *The Hill Times* at the Chinese Embassy on March 12, Cong Peiwu said he wanted to see "more positive energy" being

put into the committee, which was struck in December after a push by opposition MPs, but he spoke against the idea of appearing in a hearing-style committee meeting, a possibility that's been floated by committee members.

"I think if they invite me to take part in a roundtable discussion, that's good. But if it's just

Continued on page 6



Canadians shouldn't have to experience buyer's remorse for Iraq mess

Like the sign says in the china shop, 'if you break it, you bought it.' Canada did not break Iraq.



Scott Taylor

Inside Defence

OTTAWA—Almost completely forgotten amidst the avalanche of news concerning the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic is the ongoing conflict in Iraq.

Canadians should be aware of the deteriorating situation because we still have some skin in the game to the tune of approximately 850 military personnel.

On March 11, as many as 18 Katyusha rockets slammed into the Allied base in Taji, Iraq, killing

three coalition personnel and wounding a dozen others.

No Canadians were reported injured in the attack, but Canadian military trainers are based in Taji. For security reasons, the Department of National Defence does not identify exact numbers of personnel deployed to Iraq.

It was believed that the rocket attack was perpetrated by an Iranian backed Iraqi Shiite militia known as Kataib Hezbollah.

This incident supports the March 9 testimony made by Canadian Lt.-Gen. Mike Rouleau before a House of Commons committee. Rouleau told the National Defence Committee that Iranian-backed, Iraqi Shiite militia are his No. 1 concern in Iraq, because "Daesh has been defeated militarily."

Astoundingly, Rouleau's statement caused not a ripple of response despite the magnitude of what his words mean.

Canada first deployed troops into Iraq in September 2014 to assist in the U.S.-led coalition effort to defeat Daesh (a.k.a. ISIS, ISIL, or IS). At the time, our soldiers were employed as trainers to assist Kurdish militia in the fight against Daesh.

Allied with us in that effort were a large number of Iranian-backed, Iraqi Shiite militia. One of the reasons for this was that

the U.S.-trained and -equipped Iraqi government army had simply melted away the minute Daesh appeared on the battlefield.

Now Rouleau is saying that our erstwhile allies in the successful battle to defeat Daesh are Canada's biggest threat. The question begs, when did Canada authorize our troops' participation in an inter-factional civil war in Iraq?

In addition to an ill-defined role for Canadian Special Forces personnel in Iraq, Canadian troops are deployed to that country to assist in a NATO-led initiative to train Iraqi government forces.

This initiative involves approximately 250 Canadian soldiers, and the overall NATO mission is commanded by Canadian Maj.-Gen. Jennie Carignan.

Carignan and the majority of those trainers have been relocated to Kuwait since early January following the U.S.'s targeted killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani.

Iran vowed revenge, and this sentiment was echoed by the Iraqi Shiite militia which Soleimani once commanded.

It was considered best to suspend the training in Iraq and have Carignan and company sit



Canadian Major-General Jennie Carignan officially assumed command of the NATO Mission Iraq on Nov. 26, 2019. Scott Taylor asks: when did Canada authorize our troops' participation in an inter-factional civil war in Iraq? *DND photograph courtesy of Cpl. Ryan Moulton*

things out in Kuwait until the dust settles. The DND website assures us that these personnel "remain ready to return to their mission when conditions are right to do so."

Even if rooted in blind optimism, that statement runs in stark contrast to reality of the situation on the ground in Iraq.

The Canadian-led NATO training mission is tasked with training an Iraqi government army.

The problem with that equation is that Iraq does not have a functioning government. When last summer's parliamentary election failed to produce a verifiable result, it was determined that a recount be conducted. Before that could happen the warehouse containing the ballots burned down. I kid you not.

Last November, interim prime minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi was forced to step down following nation-wide violent protests. In recent weeks, it appeared that a

man named Tawfiq Allwai was set to form a government and serve as prime minister. Internal dissent collapsed those plans on March 2, extending the power vacuum.

At present, the most powerful figure in Iraq is the Shiite warlord Muqtada al-Sadr, who leads the coalition of Shiite militia.

If they are now the biggest threat to Canadian military personnel, it is time we walk away from this conflict.

The U.S. does not have the luxury of walking away from this mess because they set it in motion in 2003 when they invaded Iraq under the pretext of securing non-existent weapons of mass destruction. Like the sign says in the china shop, "if you break it, you bought it."

Canada did not break Iraq. Bring our troops home now.

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

The Hill Times

'Safari Arie' is the new Man in Motion

In this time of fear and isolation, it is nice to hear of someone who beats the odds.



Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect

OTTAWA—Arie Hoogerbrugge is a man on a mission. Two missions, in fact: first, ride his bicycle to Tuktoyaktuk in the Arctic Circle, and then to the southern tip of Argentina, for a total of 55,000 kilometres. And once that's done, he intends to plant one million trees. Not unlike Rick Hansen's tour of the world

in a wheelchair in the 1990s, he is a man in motion.

The bike riding part sounds daunting enough, but consider this: he left St. John's, N.L., in late November and continued through the winter. He spent most of December crossing Newfoundland, then on to Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island for Christmas. Then New Brunswick and Quebec, before arriving in Ottawa on March 12. He has faced withering snowstorms, freezing rain, and heavy headwinds over his 4,560 kilometre journey.

The 46-year-old long-haul truck driver has camped overnight dozens of times, often sleeping in the shadow of a local Tim Horton's. Photographs of his little tent covered with snow in small towns have touched his more than 2,000 followers on social media. So much so they have reached out to offer shelter. "I did not foresee the response I received," he admits. "I expected to camp most of my time, but Maritimers were very generous." People stopped him on the road, took them into their homes and fed him, gave him money and generally encouraged him along the way.

As a result, he changed his route through Nova Scotia to travel around the province from Halifax to Yarmouth before embarking on the ferry to Saint John, N.B. Then across New Brunswick to Quebec City, Montreal, and Ottawa. He plans to go south to Hamilton before heading to Northern Ontario in April.

Paradoxically, Arie doesn't like winter, but he was nursing a broken heart after his fiancée split up with him last May, and needed something to take his mind off the hurt. His past experiences with long-distance biking in various parts of Canada inspired him to do this marathon, and for an extra challenge, to begin in winter.

As someone who cycled across Canada in the warmer months, I can attest to it being difficult enough in 25 C. And even though I winter biked for my commute in Ottawa, cycling 100 kilometres a day in -30 C is hard to fathom. Still, "Safari Arie," presses on, pulling a small trailer with 185 pounds of gear.

His impressions? "In winter, there is not a lot of pretty landscape, with the exception of

the coastline of Nova Scotia." As a truck driver travelling the continent, he is accustomed to long hours of solitude. But he admits it is hard to be lonely, "when people are always recognizing me and taking me in."

He should be in Tuktoyaktuk by summer; from there he plans to head south to Vancouver, the United States, then Central and South America. He owns a 40-acre property in the Central American country of Belize, where he has planted trees. This led to considering reforestation on a grander scale, and his second project kicked in.

"I have always been passionate about planting trees for a better environment. I felt, as an unemployed truck driver, I could not get much attention from the public or sponsors to plant a million trees. But I thought I might have some credibility after cycling 55,000 kilometres." Arie's project should resonate with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Canadian Forestry Service, which has been tasked with the government's throne speech promise to plant two billion trees in the next decade as a carbon sink.

At every stop, he is asked if he is undertaking the ride for a charity. So, he polled his social media followers on raising money for a cause. A resounding majority was against it, preferring the theme of "one human against the elements." So he will talk about tree planting, and see if the opportunity presents itself to raise funds for the campaign as the trip continues.

To some, the tall, thin, goateed cyclist might be seen as an eccentric, or even somewhat crazy. But he set an objective to ride a bicycle through cold, snow and ice, and the kindness he received has warmed his broken heart. For many long distance cyclists, his story is one to admire, and his cause a good one. In this time of fear and isolation, it is nice to hear of someone who beats the odds.

Andrew Caddell is retired from *Global Affairs Canada*, where he was a senior policy adviser. He previously worked as an adviser to Liberal governments. He is a fellow with the *Canadian Global Affairs Institute* and a principal of *QIT Canada*. He can be reached at pipson52@hotmail.com.

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