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Politics This Morning

# Housing minister meets the Toronto mayor

Plus, Dominic LeBlanc's conflict of interest screen concerning J.D. Irving and his businesses has an update.



Housing Minister Gregor Robertson will make an infrastructure announcement in Toronto today. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

[FEATURE \(/IN-DEPTH-FEATURES/\)](#) | BY [RIDDHI KACHHELA](https://www.hilltimes.com/ht_author/riddhi-kachhela/)

Good Thursday morning,

The matter of security guarantees for Ukraine remains a hot topic among Western allies, with some countries, like Lithuania, pledging to provide troops for peacekeeping.

The British government plans to help Ukraine protect its skies and seas, but will not send troops to the frontlines, as per *The Guardian* (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/aug/19/uk-to-offer-troops-to-defend-ukraines-skies-and-ports-in-pentagon-talks>).

The defence chiefs of all NATO countries spoke virtually yesterday to discuss the arrangements to safeguard Ukraine from any further attacks by Russia after the ongoing war ends.



The chair of the NATO Military Committee said after the meeting ([https://x.com/CMC\\_NATO/status/1958191926097871142](https://x.com/CMC_NATO/status/1958191926097871142)) the alliance is “united” and its priority continues to be “just, credible, and durable peace.”

More such meetings are expected in the coming days, France 24 reported (<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20250820-war-in-ukraine-live-nato-military-chiefs-set-for-talks-on-ukraine-security-guarantees>), as details for a potential bilateral meeting between **VLADIMIR PUTIN** and **VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY** are being worked out.

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, pictured in Ottawa on Sept. 22, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

Canada has [offered Ukraine funding \(https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/g7-day-2-trump-iran-israel-1.7562980\)](https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/g7-day-2-trump-iran-israel-1.7562980) and trained its soldiers in the past, among other things. A [Ukrainian diplomat recently suggested \(https://globalnews.ca/news/11340642/ukraine-peace-security-talks-canada-trump-europe/\)](https://globalnews.ca/news/11340642/ukraine-peace-security-talks-canada-trump-europe/) the country would like to see Canada participate actively in the security guarantee's structure, but the specifics of what Canada will offer are currently unknown.

Speaking of Russia, today is the final day of the visit to Moscow by the Indian Foreign Minister **S. JAISHANKAR**. India came under fire from U.S. President **DONALD TRUMP** recently for its longstanding trade ties with Russia and got an extra 25 per cent tariff slapped on its exports to the United States.

India has argued in its defence that buying oil from Russia serves the interests of its people, and helps keep the costs low, while also pointing out that the EU and the U.S. continue to trade with Russia too.

Officials from the Russian embassy in New Delhi said yesterday the country will [continue selling oil to India \(https://www.reuters.com/world/india/russia-expects-india-keep-buying-its-oil-seeks-china-india-russia-talks-2025-08-20/\)](https://www.reuters.com/world/india/russia-expects-india-keep-buying-its-oil-seeks-china-india-russia-talks-2025-08-20/), and hoped for a trilateral meeting between India, China, and Russia.

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## Tensions between India and America an 'opportunity' for Canada, says foreign affairs expert

India strengthening its bond with Russia could put Ukraine's Western allies in a dilemma amid talks to end the war.

Canada has had its own ups and downs with India, especially since last fall (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/foreign-affairs-warning-indian-diplomats-canada-1.7356519>) when the relationship between the two countries took a nosedive, with Canada expelling some Indian diplomats in October. (<https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2024/10/minister-joly-announces-expulsion-of-indian-diplomats-related-to-ongoing-investigation-on-violent-criminal-activity-linked-to-the-government-of-india.html>)

Prime Minister **MARK CARNEY** has made attempts to thaw the relationship by inviting Indian Prime Minister **NARENDRA MODI** to the G7 Summit in Alberta this year.

According to **VINA NADJIBULLA** of Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, both Canada and India can use their struggles with dealing with the U.S. as an opportunity.

The U.S. threat of secondary sanctions on India over Russian oil, she said, is less to do with the Ukraine war and more to do with America trying to seek leverage over India in its bilateral trade negotiations.



Prime Minister Mark Carney. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

“If this was about Russian oil, then it wouldn’t just be about India ... it would be about China and Turkey and others who are also purchasing Russian oil and gas,” she said.

The conflict between the U.S. and India is a “significant” development and “really surprising” to many analysts, she added. It has, however, made India reach out to other foreign partners and put in place economic reforms that will likely open up the market some more.



“Both Canada and India need to diversify their partnerships. ... They are both engaged in very volatile discussions with the U.S., so finding other partners who can essentially help hedge against the effects of the U.S. trade war, is in the interest of both.”

She expects the Canadian government to name the high commissioner for India imminently to build on the momentum from the G7 summit. The next potential occasion for Canada and India to engage officially could be at the [UN General Assembly’s “high level week” in September](https://www.un.org/en/high-level-week-2025) (<https://www.un.org/en/high-level-week-2025>) where the foreign ministers from India and Canada will likely be present, Nadjibulla noted.

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## What else is happening today?

Treasury Board President **SHAFQAT ALI** [announced on X](https://x.com/shafqatalimp/status/1958163659135304043) (<https://x.com/shafqatalimp/status/1958163659135304043>) yesterday that he will be meeting ministers from Ontario’s provincial government over the next two days. The agenda, he said in typical government fashion, was to discuss “how we can best serve Canadians.”

Serving, in the general context, could refer to serving food and drinks, serving a tennis shot, or as Gen Z would say, serving looks. It could mean a hundred things, and *Politics This Morning* reached out to Minister Ali’s office to try to pin down what he really implied here, but alas did not get a response.

Elsewhere, in Toronto, Housing Minister **GREGOR ROBERTSON** is making some kind of “community infrastructure” announcement at **10:15 a.m.**, alongside Toronto Mayor **OLIVIA CHOW**.

In Winnipeg, Indigenous Services Minister **MANDY GULL-MASTY** will join Treaty One First Nations Chief **GORDON BLUESKY** in giving an update on the Naawi-Oodena infrastructure project at **10 a.m. CDT**. More details on the project’s master plan [are available here](https://treaty1.ca/naawi-oodena/) (<https://treaty1.ca/naawi-oodena/>).

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## In the news

**Lessons from the Air Canada vs. flight attendants conflict:** Canadian Labour Congress President **BEA BRUSKE** tells **ELEANOR WAND** that the feds’ frequent use of Sec. 107 of the Canadian Labour Code [is unconstitutional and unenforceable](https://www.hilltimes.com/story/2025/08/20/unconstitutional-and-offensive-use-of-labour-code-in-air-canada-dispute-marks-turning-point-union-leader/470771/). (<https://www.hilltimes.com/story/2025/08/20/unconstitutional-and-offensive-use-of-labour-code-in-air-canada-dispute-marks-turning-point-union-leader/470771/>)

**Hill Climbers: LAURA RYCKEWAERT** brings you the latest on new members in Energy Minister **TIM HODGSON**'s team that now has 17 people. (<https://www.hilltimes.com/story/2025/08/20/plugging-into-energy-minister-hodgsons-team/470811/>)

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## Today's Data

At **8:30 a.m.**, Statistics Canada will publish the data for the number of Canadians who received employment insurance benefits in June. In the report for May, the figure for regular EI beneficiaries went up by 44,000 compared to last year.

The unemployment rate for June, however, fell by 0.1 per cent (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250711/dq250711a-eng.htm>), suggesting there could be a marginal fall in EI beneficiaries that month. We will find out what the trend was like today.

Yesterday, the data agency released the stats for the New Housing Price Index recorded in July. The index continued its downward trend, and saw a small decrease from 123.4 in June to 123.3 overall in July. The index for only the house, without taking into account the price of land, stood at 125.4 that month —down from 125.7 in June.

The value indicates housing prices have been falling, although not evenly across Canada. In the Atlantic region, the house-only price index for July was 124.8, compared to 121.2 a few months earlier in January. This data is available on this link. (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250820/dq250820b-eng.htm>)

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## Ethics update: Minister Hodgson to decide on matters blocked by the conflict of interest screen for LeBlanc

Canada-U.S. Relations Minister **DOMINIC LEBLANC** updated details for his conflict of interest screen since taking on a new cabinet position in Prime Minister Mark Carney's post-election government (<https://www.hilltimes.com/story/2025/05/13/whos-in-and-whos-out-of-carneys-post-election-cabinet/460190/>).

It shields him from being involved in matters that can promote the interests of his friend, New Brunswick businessman **JAMES IRVING**, whose companies and various subsidiaries have operations in a range of sectors including agriculture and transport.

A declaration (<https://prciec-rpccie.parl.gc.ca/EN/PublicRegistries/Pages/Declaration.aspx?DeclarationID=e0d2e219-c272-f011-819a-001dd8b72449>) to this end was made by LeBlanc with the ethics commissioner, which was posted on Aug. 13, but LeBlanc has had a screen set up for the purpose since 2016.

A spokesperson for the commissioner's office, **MICHAEL WROBEL**, clarified with *Politics This Morning* that when a minister is appointed to another ministerial position, the office and the minister review the existing compliance measures and update them if required. In the May shuffle, LeBlanc retained his intergovernmental affairs responsibilities and also became the minister of "one Canadian economy."



Canada-U.S. Relations Minister Dominic LeBlanc. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

In the case of LeBlanc, who was the international trade minister in Carney's first cabinet and the finance minister before that, there were a total of 11 versions of his screen related to James D. Irving, J.D. Irving Limited, and its subsidiaries and affiliates over the years.

The current one will be administered by his chief of staff, the deputy clerk of the Privy Council and associate secretary to the cabinet, and the deputy minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. These officials are tasked with scanning the files to check for any potential links to Irving or his companies, and not pass them on to LeBlanc in case they include any such connection.

Since LeBlanc cannot be a decision-maker on these files, that authority has been transferred to the energy minister—currently Tim Hodgson.

In the previous version of the screen, posted in the registry on Feb. 10, this responsibility was split in two with the prime minister in charge of any funding decisions, and the Treasury Board president of all other matters.

The friendship between LeBlanc and Irving has come under fire in the past, with *The Globe and Mail* [reporting last December](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-leblanc-defends-stay-at-irving-home-as-conservatives-call-for-review/) (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-leblanc-defends-stay-at-irving-home-as-conservatives-call-for-review/>) that LeBlanc and his wife stayed at Irving's mansion in Florida when he went for a meeting with then president-elect Donald Trump's cabinet nominees.

The Conservatives called for a review of LeBlanc's conflict of interest screen following the news, but LeBlanc defended the stay, saying the screen allows him to have his friendship with Irving while not dealing with government files impacting Irving's interests.

A scan of the other recent entries in the commissioner's public registry revealed some more interesting nuggets of information.

Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Tim Hodgson. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Prime Minister Mark Carney, for example, was gifted a sculpture of **WINSTON CHURCHILL** by British Prime Minister **KEIR STARMER** when he had dinner at Rideau Cottage on June 14.

Starmer's wife **EMMA BRIDGEWATER** gave Carney's wife **DIANA CARNEY** a 10 Downing Street decorative tea pot and mugs in a classic British fashion.

And these weren't the only presents Carney got from world leaders in recent weeks.

He also received an Akubra Cattleman hat and a framed movie poster for a 1981 war film *Gallipoli* from Australian Prime Minister **ANTHONY ALBANESE** on the day of a bilateral meeting at the G7 summit in Alberta on June 17.

His Japanese counterpart, **SHIGERU ISHIBA**, gave Carney wireless earbuds on the same day at the G7.



His chief of staff **MARC-ANDRÉ BLANCHARD** also got a suitcase full of goodies after the premiers' meeting in Huntsville, Ont., in July from the mayor of Niagara Falls. It included items such as bottles of wine, some Wayne Gretzky red cask whisky, maple syrup, and two passes for Niagara Parks.

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## In case you missed it

### **POILIEVRE RENEWS CALLS FOR CRIME POLICY REFORMS**

Back from his parliamentary exile after winning the Battle River-Crowfoot byelection in Alberta, Conservative Leader **PIERRE POILIEVRE** demanded yesterday that the feds take a number of steps to be tough on crime.

These included listing the Bishnoi gang as a terrorist entity; setting a minimum sentence of three years for all extortion cases and four years in case it involves a gun; and repealing laws C-5 and C-75, which he said would keep violent offenders off the streets. More [on it here](#).

(<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/pierre-poilievre-bishnoi-gang-terrorism-designation-1.7613826>)

### **THE U.S. GOVERNMENT SANCTIONS A CANADIAN JUDGE**

The Trump administration yesterday slapped sanctions on a Canadian judge on the International Criminal Court on the grounds that she ruled in favour of an ICC probe into U.S. officials in Afghanistan. The Canadian Press has [covered the story here](#) (<https://nationalnewswatch.com/2025/08/20/trump-slaps-sanctions-on-canadian-international-criminal-court-judge>).

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## We asked, you answered

During his short time as prime minister in 1896, Sir Charles Tupper, left, appointed his son Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, right, as solicitor general.

By the time Sir **CHARLES TUPPER** became prime minister in 1896, his son Sir **CHARLES HIBBERT TUPPER** had been a Conservative MP for Pictou, N.S., for 14 years, and had served in the cabinets of Sir **JOHN A. MACDONALD**, Sir **JOHN ABBOTT**, Sir **JOHN SPARROW DAVID THOMPSON**, and Sir **MACKENZIE BOWELL**. Tupper senior’s government lasted only from May 1 to July 8, 1896—a mere 69-days—making it the shortest in Canadian history. Tupper the younger remained an MP until 1904 when he retired from politics.

A round of applause to **JANICE HAMILTON** and **ROB EDWARDS** for the correct answer, and to **ROD BUCKINGHAM** for taking part.

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