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I can't even begin to put into words what that hug felt like. All I wanted in that moment was to lift her up, hold her close, and never let go.

DAVID GEBALA, IN A FACEBOOK POST AFTER HIS DAUGHTER, TUMBLER RIDGE SURVIVOR MAYA, 12, WAS ABLE TO SIT ON THE EDGE OF HER HOSPITAL BED WITH HELP FROM HEALTH-CARE STAFF. A2

NOTE
There will be no paper on Good Friday.

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GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Is this the best way to spend \$90B of taxpayers' money?



The money for the Alto high-speed rail project from Toronto to Quebec City could fund other "bold and ambitious" projects, writes Tristin Hopper.

A fireable offence

Any judge who tries to change notwithstanding clause should go

YUAN YI ZHU
Comment

In a normal country, ideas about the ideal arrangements for society's well-functioning are debated by the public and voted upon by either elected legislators or, in some cases, through direct democracy. But Canada isn't a normal country. Last week, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the challenge against Quebec's secularism law, which imposes all manner of restrictions on the public practice of religion in the name of secularism. For good measure, the legislature insulated it from constitutional challenge by invoking the notwithstanding clause.

Both the bill's substance (with a few small exceptions) as well as Quebec's invocation of Section 33 were upheld in the Quebec Court of Appeal. But critics of the law, supported by the federal government and numerous NGOs, have taken the case to the Supreme Court. They hope not only to strike down the law, but to introduce limits on the invocation of Section 33, a long-standing goal of a segment of the Laurentian elite (think Andrew Coyne).

See ZHU on A11

THE UNBELIEVABLE THINGS CANADA COULD DO WITH THE BILLIONS IT'S WASTING ON HIGH-SPEED RAIL

TRISTIN HOPPER
Comment

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre said that if he ever became prime minister, he would scrap the Alto rail project, a \$90-billion program announced in the final days of Justin Trudeau's premiership that proposed to build high-speed rail between Toronto and Quebec City.

Poilievre's main stated objection to the project is that it will require extensive expropriations of private property across Ontario and Quebec. "The Carney Liberals will confiscate farmland and private property," he told a press conference at a rural location in Peterborough, Ont., this week.

But expropriations aside, \$90 billion is a jaw-dropping sum of money for Canada to spend on anything, much less a project the chief promise of which is that it would be about twice as fast as the existing Via Rail service.

Given that Canada has roughly 22 million people who are net tax contributors, Alto would represent

a starting cost of at least \$4,000 per Canadian taxpayer.

The Liberals have countered that Alto is a "bold and ambitious" project that would be "transformative" for the nation. But if the goal is to spend \$90 billion on something bold and transformative, there's much more that kind of money can do aside from making it slightly more convenient to take a train between Quebec and Ontario.

Below, a cursory look at how much Canadian infrastructure \$90 billion could buy.

BUILD AN ENTIRE SECOND CANADA

Canada, at least the western part of it, is essentially a planned community. The federal government of the late 19th century cut a railway to the Pacific Ocean and encouraged development to bloom around it.

The prosperity that has resulted has dwarfed the cost of the railroad that spawned it.

See HOPPER on A6

'Revolving door' of insiders, lobbyists behind government scandal a click away

STUART THOMSON AND CHRISTOPHER NARDI
in Ottawa

The new frontier of government accountability could be a colourful, AI-generated image connecting the dots between all the different players in one of Canada's messiest procurement controversies.

The Phoenix pay system — which was designed to centralize payroll for the federal government but quickly racked up a long list of issues, including overpayments, underpayments and missed payments — is estimated to have cost nearly \$5 billion.

The replacement software is now

estimated to cost more than \$4 billion, putting the total price tag of the calamity at nearly \$10 billion, according to Auditor General Karen Hogan last week.

Now, using the government's lobbying registry, auditor general reports, media stories and government press releases, a new interactive website is drawing a vivid picture of the complicated and frenzied lobbying activity beneath the surface of big-money government contracts.

See WEBSITE on A5

When serving coffee is racist

Saskatchewan rights case over Starbucks



JAMIE SARKONAK
Comment

In Saskatchewan, the authorities are currently deciding whether to treat Tagalog like an official language.

It all started at the Starbucks in Saskatoon's Royal University Hospital. Vanessa Casila, a Filipina woman, tried to order in Tagalog. The employee taking her order refused, saying she would receive a formal reprimand from the manager if she went along with it. Casila then filed a human rights complaint, claiming that the "English only" policy amounted to discrimination based on race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, and nationality.

Casila also claimed that Starbucks' language policy prohibited staff from communicating among themselves or with the public in any language other than English or French. This, she said, was spawned by customer complaints to the company about Starbucks staff not speaking English.

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission dismissed the complaint quickly, stating that Casila hadn't put forth enough evidence to get it past the threshold for deeper consideration. It needed to have "reasonable grounds to believe that there had been discrimination based on a prohibited ground," which was not made out, in the eyes of the commission.

Casila was given a second chance to make her point. See SARKONAK on A10

Advertisers can no longer turn blind eye to social media harms: prof

KENN OLIVER

When American sociologist and economist Herbert A. Simon first introduced the idea of the attention economy in 1971, the model was based on the "information-rich" mediums of the day — television, radio and print.

Boiled down, the theory posits that in a world with

more and more information for humans to digest, the scarcity of their attention becomes a valuable commodity.

Over 50 years later, while older media survive and claw for scraps of advertising revenue, today's attention economy exists predominantly in the online ecosystem and nowhere more so than on social media sites.

Like TV and radio before

them, as largely free-to-use services, behemoths like Meta, Snapchat, TikTok, and others don't generate their billions in ever-growing annual revenue from users — it comes from advertisers. And with children and teenagers among the largest cohorts of users, all manner of companies have shown little compunction about using the websites and apps to market

their products and services specifically to one of society's most vulnerable populations.

In the matrix of harms posed to Canadian youth through regular or excessive social media use, targeted advertising may not be as worrisome as cyberbullying, predators, pornography or the host of other dangers, but it's no less pervasive. See HARMS on A4