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## Canada and the U.S. ready to 'take on China' on defence, trade: ambassador

Ottawa and Washington are prepared to "take on China" when it comes to protecting defence and trade interests, but there remains work to do to catch up to Beijing's lead on critical minerals development, the U.S. ambassador to Canada says.

In an interview Sunday with The West Block's host Mercedes Stephenson, David Cohen said if the two allies continued to work together and build on their successes, they will end up "being stronger and really moving the needle in 2023 and the years ahead."

"There is no light between the two countries as to the importance of taking on China, competing against them more effectively, calling them out when they adopt non-rules based trade practices," Cohen said.

"You sort of can't leave the overall impression of the visit without realizing that Canada and the United States together are prepared to take on China when China needs to be taken on, to protect ourselves from a defence and commercial capacity."

His comments echoed those from Joe Biden, who wrapped up his first visit to Canada as the U.S. president this week.

During his two-day official visit, Biden held bilateral talks with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and on Friday addressed the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa, saying the North American neighbours will "write the future together."

China was among a range of issues that were on the table for the two



leaders, as both U.S. and Canada are looking to become less reliant on Beijing for trade.

Cohen said China has a "big head start" in some areas, particularly the critical minerals sector, but there is a sense of urgency to take "one bite at a time" and catch up.

As part of that push, the two countries have launched a one-year task to accelerate cooperation on critical clean energy opportunities and supply chains.

A joint statement from Trudeau and Biden also stressed their commitment to competing "effectively with China on a level playing field."

"Canada and the United States acknowledge the serious long-term challenge to the international order posed by the People's Republic of China, including disruptive actions such as economic coercion, non-market policies and practices, and human rights abuses," the statement released Friday said.

Tensions between Canada and China have escalated in recent weeks

over allegations of foreign interference in recent federal elections.

"There are a lot of things that has been going on below the water level for many, many years by China in terms of influencing, interfering and meddling in Canadian affairs," said Cheuk Kwan, co-chair of the Toronto Association for Democracy in China.

The meddling has not been limited to federal politics, but also threatened school board trustees, municipal mayors and councillors to the provincial government, Kwan said on The West Block.

"So this is something that I think we should be aware that, we're not... backing up the wrong tree," he said.

"We should be looking at what's underneath that iceberg and really get a feel and understanding of perhaps the danger of such China's meddling in our affairs."

Another hot button issue has been the detention of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, who spent more than 1,000 days in a Chinese prison over espionage charges.

Ontario's new Working for Workers Act will slap the biggest fines in Canada on employers who withhold the passports of their temporary foreign workers.

"Anyone who preys on vulnerable members in our community has no place in our society," said Ontario Immigration Minister Monte McNaughton.

"If you think you're going to deny someone's basic human rights by withholding their passport, we're going to hit your pocketbook, and you will be behind bars for a long time. We will continue to use every tool in our toolbox to ensure Ontario is a province where hard work pays off and big dreams come true."

Under the proposed law which has been introduced in the legislature, withholding a foreign national's passport or work permit could lead to fines ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000 for every worker whose rights are violated.

In addition to the per-passport penalties, those found guilty of breaking the proposed law would be liable to either a fine of up to \$500,000 or up to a year in prison - or both. Corporations convicted would be liable to fines of up to \$1 million.

The Working for Workers law, which would be the third iteration of this law which has had previous versions in each of the last two years, also includes proposed changes to protect remote workers during mass terminations and expands the number of reasons for which reservists can take military leave.

The act would also force construction sites to have women-only washrooms and boost cancer coverage for firefighters.

Human rights activists are supporting the proposed legislation. Megan Walker, the now-retired executive director of the London Abused Women's Centre, says the

## Higher Fines In Ontario For Canada Employers Of Temporary Workers Who Withhold Passports

proposed legislation will send a strong message to those who exploit migrant workers.

"The government is giving migrant workers back their human right to have control over their own documents including their passports," said Walker.

There are those, though, who say even more needs to be done to beef up the rights of temporary foreign workers in Ontario.

More Needs To Be Done To Hold Employers Accountable, Says Refugee Centre Director

"While this will hold employers accountable, there is still much more progress to be made," said Loly Rico, executive director of the PCJ Refugee Centre. "This is only the beginning. We need to see changes in policies on a federal and provincial level that will protect workers and their rights and break down the barriers to equity amongst all workers in Canada."

Since November 2021, Ontario created a new unit to ferret out human trafficking and this has already led to criminal charges, occupational health and safety and employment standards prosecutions, orders and other compliance activities.

York Regional Police chief Jim MacKween says he and his investigators in the force's human trafficking section are eager to see this new legislation come into effect.

"This legislation... will provide us with another tool to fight labour trafficking and the exploitation of vulnerable people in our community," said MacKween. "This new law will



allow our officers to hold individuals and companies accountable for their actions."

Canadian employers can recruit and hire foreign nationals through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and the International Mobility Program (IMP).

TFWP Provides A Pathway For Employers To Hire Foreign Nationals To Work In Canada

The Global Talent Stream (GTS), a part of the TFWP, can under normal processing situations lead to the granting of Canadian work permits and the processing of visa applications within two weeks.

Foreign nationals hoping to gain their permanent residency in Canada can seize the opportunities offered by Canada's currently tight labour market to immigrate through the country's many economic immigration programs.

Under the Express Entry system, immigrants can apply for permanent residency online if they meet the eligibility criteria for one of three federal immigration programs, the

## A spring renewal for Canada's housing market

Realtors are expecting Canadians to move off the housing market's sidelines this spring.

They expect potential buyers to start hunting for a home because the Bank of Canada has eased up on interest rate hikes.

The quick succession of increases eroded buying power as borrowing costs rose and rent prices falling, discouraging sellers from listing their homes.

With Canadian Real Estate Association data showing average prices have dropped 19 per cent from their February peak of \$816,578 to \$662,437 last month and BMO Capital Markets' chief economist predicting they will bottom out after falling 20 to 25 per cent, realtors see many edging toward a purchase once more.

"We got a flood of buyers in January, in February and we still are getting more and more and we started seeing multiple offers return and bulky offers return," said Michelle Gilbert, a Toronto broker with Sage Real Estate Ltd.

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## This is how to get free help filing your income tax returns in the GTA

Some Torontonians are eligible to get help filing their income tax returns for free.

A handful of tax clinics across the Greater Toronto Area offer their services to eligible residents through the federally-run Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) for those with a modest income and a simple return, at no cost.

"Simple would be just one source of income, ideally," May Seto, program director of Applegate Community Complex, told CTV News Toronto Tuesday.

"Employment is one, social assistance is another, ODSP, pension for those who have retired. Self-employment, or if there [are] investments, then those [returns] become much more complicated."

At Applegate's income tax clinic, Seto says single-income tax filers who make less than \$35,000 a year, and two-person families with an income of less than \$45,000 are



eligible to book an in-person or virtual appointment at the clinic. An additional \$5,000 is added to the annual income for each dependent. Once an appointment is made, Torontonians must bring all relevant revenue slips, rent receipts, medical receipts, and donation slips. Seniors who still qualify for transit credit should also bring PRESTO receipts, Seto noted.

"We get calls constantly, we get emails constantly. We get a lot of regulars who come back to our community because they're familiar that we do it every year," Seto said. "It's a free service for those who need it the most, those who are low income, students, seniors or [those] on disability."

Applegate is one of the many tax clinics for Torontonians to turn

to during tax season, and if they cannot find an appointment here, there is a directory of several other free clinics across the GTA - where some even offer walk-in or allow customers to drop off their income tax documents to be picked up at a later time.

Outside of income tax clinics, eligible Torontonians can also attend facilitated self-filing tax workshops at various public libraries across the city.

Through these workshops, offered on a first-come, first-served basis, a spokesperson for Toronto Public Library (TPL) said these individuals can learn how to independently file their taxes online with the help of instructors.

These workshops are meant for those with modest incomes and simple tax situations, and attendees will be contacted ahead of time to review their eligibility and required documents. TPL also noted it provides online workshops on how to file simple tax returns.

May 1 is the deadline for most Canadians to file their income tax returns, with June 15 being the deadline for those who are self-employed.

## U.S. offers cash to Canadian critical minerals projects during Biden's visit

There was a pot of gold at the end of President Joe Biden's jaunt to Canada. It's going to Canada's mining sector.

The U.S. military will deliver funds this spring to critical minerals projects in both the U.S. and Canada. The goal is to accelerate the development of a critical minerals industry on this continent.

The context is the United States' intensifying rivalry with China.

The U.S. is desperate to reduce its reliance on the adversary for materials needed to power electric vehicles, electronics and many other products, and has set aside hundreds of millions of dollars under a program called the Defense Production Act.

The Pentagon already has told Canadian companies they would be eligible to apply. It has said the cash would arrive as grants, not loans.

On Friday, before Biden left Ottawa, he promised they'll get some. The White House and the Prime Minister's Office announced that companies from both countries will be eligible this spring for money from a \$250 million U.S. fund.

Which Canadian companies? The leaders didn't say. Canadian officials have the U.S. with a list of



at least 70 projects that could warrant U.S. funding.

Biden also said Canadian semiconductor projects would be eligible for access to another Defense Production Act program.

"Our nations are blessed with incredible natural resources," Biden told Canadian parliamentarians during his speech in the House of Commons.

"Canada in particular has large quantities of critical minerals that are essential for our clean energy future, for the world's clean energy future."

"And I believe we have an incredible opportunity to work

together so Canada and the United States can source and supply here in North America everything we need for reliable and resilient supply chains."

Canada has also promised billions of dollars to the sector. One participant at a recent Pentagon briefing in Washington said the U.S. funding would reassure potential private-sector investors that a given project has U.S. military backing.

It's not clear which types of jobs these projects would create in Canada. Biden may have triggered some

cringes in Canadian political circles when he appeared to suggest the

value-added transformation jobs from this future sector would go to the U.S.

He cast it as an ideal partnership: Canada would extract the minerals, Americans would build things with them.

"You guys - we don't have the minerals to mine, you can mine them," he said. "You don't want to produce, I mean, turn them into product."

Cut the red tape, mining sector says

Another unknown is how quickly this sector will grow in Canada, and whether it can ramp up in time for this country to become a major player in providing raw materials for growing fleets of electric vehicles.

Some business groups have told the Canadian government it must speed up permitting times or risk seeing this window close for Canada. The Mining Association of British Columbia, for example, has proposed numerous measures to alleviate what it called interminable delays.

The permitting and authorization processes that regulate mining projects are too cumbersome, untimely and inconsistent with the urgent need," it said in a recent briefing paper.

The federal government has acknowledged this issue and has promised to speed things up.

"It cannot take us 12 to 15 years to open a mine in this country. Not if we want to achieve our climate goals," Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson said late last year.

laptops, virtual/augmented reality systems and heads-up-display instrument panels.

VueReal's investment will expand the company's operations by boosting manufacturing capacity and accelerating microLED fabrication processes. Ontario is supporting this investment with \$2 million in funding provided through Invest Ontario, the province's investment attraction agency. The Government of Canada is also supporting

VueReal with \$8.5 million provided through Sustainable Development Technology Canada (SDTC). This is the second SDTC investment in VueReal and part of a continuing collaboration that is enabling the company to create high-brightness microLED displays.

In a time of global economic uncertainty, Canadian entrepreneurs continue to advance made-in-Ontario solutions around the world with support from the governments of Ontario and Canada.

These displays are used in the aerospace, automotive and medical sectors in a wide range of devices, including smartphones, televisions,

## Governments of Ontario and Canada Welcome \$40 Million Manufacturing Investment

Supported by \$18.5 million in federal and provincial funding, VueReal's expansion will create good-paying jobs in Waterloo Region

WATERLOO - The governments of Ontario and Canada are welcoming a \$40 million investment by VueReal Inc., a made-in-Ontario start-up located in Waterloo. This investment, supported by \$10.5 million in joint funding, will boost local manufacturing, strengthen cleantech innovation and create 75 new, good-paying jobs.

"VueReal's investment is a vote of confidence in Ontario's world-class workforce and advanced manufacturing sector," said Vic Fedeli, Ontario's Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. "We're building Ontario by working closely with companies like VueReal to create more opportunities for workers today and for generations to come. Thank you VueReal for choosing Ontario."

"Now is the time for ambitious climate action, and to support cleantech entrepreneurs like VueReal, who are turning vision into reality with help from today's investments," said François-Philippe Champagne, Canada's Minister of Innovation,

Science and Industry. "Our government is proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with these groundbreaking companies as they drive innovation and make their mark as international leaders in clean technology. We will continue to support our companies as they grow the economy and create well-paying jobs in this industry."

Since launching in 2016, VueReal has quickly become a leader in the development and manufacturing of microLED displays and sensors. These displays are used in the aerospace, automotive and medical sectors in a wide range of devices, including smartphones, televisions,

laptops, virtual/augmented reality systems and heads-up-display instrument panels.

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## Israeli diplomats in Canada return to work after strike against judicial overhaul

Israeli diplomats in Canada are set to return to work on Tuesday after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu caved to public pressure and announced a delay in his contentious plan to overhaul the country's judiciary.

Israel's embassy in Ottawa, as well as its consulates in Toronto and Montreal, were shuttered Monday after the country's largest trade union, Histadrut, called on its 800,000 members to strike in protest of Netanyahu's plan.

In addition to closing Israeli diplomatic posts around the world, Histadrut called for members to also stop work in health care, transit, banking and other fields, which threatened to paralyze the economy and halt essential services.

Histadrut's strike call came after Netanyahu fired Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant, the first senior member of the ruling Likud party to speak out against the plan. Gallant's dismissal sparked spontaneous



Protests across the country.

Faced with an unprecedented wave of resistance, Netanyahu announced late Monday that he was delaying his plan "as would be wise."

Immediately after Netanyahu's statement, Histadrut said it would call off its general strike.

"When there's an opportunity to avoid civil war through dialogue, I, as prime minister, am taking a time out for dialogue," Netanyahu said in a nationally televised address. Striking a more conciliatory tone

than in previous speeches, he said he was determined to pass a judicial reform but called for "an attempt to achieve broad consensus."

Netanyahu gave no timeline for a compromise to be reached, but expressed hope that the nation would heal and that people would enjoy the upcoming Passover holiday.

The speech appeared to calm tensions, but it did not resolve the underlying strain behind the protests. Even before he spoke, the grassroots anti-government protest movement

said a delay would not be enough. The protests are in response to Netanyahu's plan to give his governing coalition the final say over all judicial appointments. The government also wants to give Israel's parliament the authority to overturn Supreme Court decisions.

The plan has been driven by Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption, and his allies in Israel's most right-wing government ever. Critics have accused Israel's longest-serving prime minister of using the proposed changes to maintain his grip on power.

He denies wrongdoing, while the government has previously labeled protesters as anarchists out to topple democratically elected leaders.

Government officials say the plan will restore balance between the judicial and executive branches and rein in what they see as an interventionist court with liberal sympathies.

Canada and other members of the international community have been watching closely as the reforms have plunged Israel into one of its most serious domestic crises.

Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly said Monday that she had raised Netanyahu's proposed reform with her Israeli counterpart Eli Cohen recently, and that Canada has issues with the proposed overhaul.

tax increase will cost Canada's food-service industry about \$750 million a year, with the average casual dining restaurant expected to pay an extra \$30,000 towards alcohol.

The tax is also set to increase April 1 to \$65 a metric ton of carbon from \$50, which Charlebois said could impact alcohol prices as well since most producers do not have completely green supply chains. In addition, provinces individually typically increase their tax on alcohol as well.

Overall, the calculator tax alone will amount to an extra \$125 million a year that Canadians will pay to the government.

"It's just one tax people don't need right now," Charlebois said. "It doesn't seem like much, but it's more that the tax burden is only increasing."

"It's a lot of pressure," he added. Industry calls for no tax increase. There is still the possibility the tax could be scrapped, Yavlin said, as lobbyists are moving against it.

Beer Canada says that Canada has the highest alcohol taxes among G7 nations, with about half the cost of a typical can of beer going to taxes, while up to 80 per cent of a bottle of alcohol is taxed, according to Spirits Canada.

## Freeland's budget to include grocery rebate for lower income Canadians, here's what else to expect Tuesday

The 2023 federal budget will include a one-time "grocery rebate" for Canadians with lower incomes who may be struggling with the rising cost of food, CTV News has confirmed.

According to sources, the new measure will be unveiled in Tuesday's federal budget and will help nearly 11 million lower-income Canadians.

The new measure would see eligible couples with two children receive a payment of up to \$467, a senior would receive \$225, while a single person would receive \$234 dollars.

The benefit will be rolled out through the GST rebate system, once a bill implementing it passes in the House of Commons, according to sources.

This move is essentially re-writing and re-branding the recent GST rebate boost.



Both Trudeau and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland have been hinting for weeks that the 2023 budget would include targeted affordability measures to directly help those feeling the pinch of inflation.

"This support will be narrowly focused and fiscally responsible. The truth is, we can't fully compensate every single Canadian for all of the effects of inflation or for elevated interest rates," Freeland said last week in a pre-budget speech signalling her priorities. "To do so would only make inflation worse and force rates higher for longer."

On Monday afternoon, the finance minister took part in a long-standing tradition of picking out a new pair of shoes to wear on budget day.

This year, Freeland opted for a pair of black heels that were on sale at Canadian retailer Simons, from the store's in-house brand. She placed them in a reusable tote bag after purchase.

WHAT ELSE TO EXPECT IN BUDGET 2023?

With the economy expected to continue slowing in the months ahead, potentially leading to a recession, Freeland is facing calls for the massive fiscal document to include a plan to promote economic growth.

Amid Bank of Canada's interest rate

hikes, inflation cooled to 5.2 per cent in February. That's down from 5.9 per cent in January, after 40-year record highs over the summer, reaching 8.1 per cent in June.

"What Canadians want right now is for inflation to come down and for interest rates to fall. And that is one of our primary goals in this year's budget, not to pour fuel on the fire of inflation," Freeland said in her pre-budget positioning speech.

At the same time, she signalled the 2023 federal budget will still be prioritizing "two significant and necessary investments": the \$46.2 billion in new funding included in the \$196 billion federal-provincial health-care funding deals, and new measures to boost Canada's clean industrial economy.

It's the latter that government officials have signalled will get some attention in tomorrow's budget, with several news outlets reporting there will be sizable 30 per cent, according to Reuters.

new clean technology-focused tax credits to generate growth in the electrical vehicle supply chain and in critical mineral extraction and processing.

The November 2022 fall economic update had telegraphed that these kinds of credits and investments were ahead.

"Tomorrow...we're bringing forward a budget that is focused on affordability and supporting Canadians...and creating great jobs for the middle class in a clean and growing economy. Those are the focuses that we've been laser focused on over the past many years," Trudeau said in the House of

Commons on Monday, fresh off of U.S. President Joe Biden's visit, where the green economy was a central piece of discussion.

Canada's clear focus on the clean transition comes in part out of a need for these sectors to remain competitive in the face of the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act, which offers billions of dollars in energy incentives south of the border.

The Canadian Press has also reported that Tuesday's budget will include an increase to the withdrawal limit for a registered education savings plan (RESP) from \$5,000 to \$8,000, and a plan to go after hidden or unexpected consumer fees known as "junk fees" that inflate the overall cost of a product or service.

Finance Canada officials, who for some time have been parsing the stacks of pre-budget submissions from various industries and sectors, will also have to factor in the Liberal's commitments to the New Democrats, with key plans of the two-party confidence deal due to come to fruition this year.

"We still want to see confirmation of the dental care expansion to include seniors, people living with disabilities and kids 18 and under. We really want this budget to save money for people, and that's something really important for us," Singh said.

With this budget, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has called on the federal government to lower taxes, end "inflationary" spending, match new spending with savings, and improve housing affordability.

"He wants to take away everybody's money, centralize it in his own hands, and promise that it will trickle down through his mighty bureaucracy... And there will be a few little drops that get down to the people who actually earned it in the first place," Poilievre levelled at the prime minister during Monday's question period. "Will he cap government spending and put an end to the inflationary deficits, taxpayers?"

The fall economic statement issued in November 2022 projected the federal deficit at \$36.4 billion in 2022-23, down from the \$52.8 billion forecast in the April 2022 federal budget. Freeland also forecasted that federal coffers could be back to balance by 2027-28.

The 2023 federal budget is coming just ahead of a two-week break in the House of Commons, allowing Liberal MPs to then descend on their ridings to promote it to their constituents before coming back to the capital to work on getting the budget implementation legislation passed through the minority Parliament.

## Canada is set for its largest alcohol tax increase yet. Here's what to know

Canadians could soon be paying around a quarter more for a 34-pack of beer thanks to the largest increase yet to a federal tax on alcohol.

The "escalator tax" is set to increase by 6.4 per cent on April 1 unless a change is announced before then, such as when the federal budget is revealed on March 28, according to food distribution professor at Dalhousie University, Sylvain Charlebois. Charlebois told Global News that the tax, which was introduced in 2017, was designed to automatically increase over time based on the rate of inflation to avoid renegotiating it too often. Given the amount of inflation Canada has experienced recently, the tax is now set for its biggest increase ever, he noted. Last year, the tax went up 2.4 per cent. And while a penny a beer might not sound like much of a hike, industry experts say it's one more

factor pushing up costs for producers and distributors that's likely to have ripple effects on what consumers pay.

Breaking down the cost increase, Charlebois predicts the tax will increase the price of a single beer by one cent, while the finance ministry told Global News in a statement that the amount would be three-quarters of a cent. Charlebois said that the price increase would be visible immediately after the tax is scheduled to be implemented on April 1.

Beer Canada told Global News in a statement that the tax increase will bring up the price of a 12-pack by 10 cents. For a 750 ml bottle of wine, the price could increase close to three cents, according to figures from the Canadian Revenue Agency.

In a statement to the Canadian Press, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) said that a 750 ml bottle of a spirit of 40 per cent alcohol by volume (ABV) may increase 70 cents.

Charlebois said that the tax may have a smaller impact on the price of craft beer since it's lower volume and usually at a higher price, but could affect larger manufacturers.

The tax could have a ripple effect on costs, as well.

Beer Canada said since the tax is a production tax imposed on the brewer at the point and time of production, "it is then magnified by other fees and taxes imposed by distributors, retailers, and provinces, including sales taxes," making the impact on a 12-pack likely closer to 20 cents.

Along with other inflation factors, beer retail prices are projected to rise 10 per cent in 2023, according to the organization.

Beer Canada notes there has been a 60-per cent increase in barley prices, 40-per cent increase in packaging costs, and a doubling of freight costs. Industry group Restaurants Canada told Canadian Press it estimates the

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