

Heard on the Hill



By Christina Leadlay

Black Canadians' stories of political life recorded in new study and podcast



Former MP Celina Caesar-Chavannes, left, Liberal leadership candidate and ex-MP Frank Baylis, and ISG Senator Bernadette Clement took part in the Black on the Ballot study, sharing their experiences as Black-elected officials in Canada. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade, handout photograph by Jason McNamara Framed Photography

On the eve of Black History Month, a new research project and accompanying podcast are shining a light on the experiences of Black Canadians who've run for public office. It's a subject that's never been studied before, and its release couldn't be more timely as a federal election will happen sometime this year.

"You'd be hard-pressed to even find a complete list of Black Canadians in politics," Carleton University associate professor Erin Tolley told *Heard on the Hill* by email on Jan. 20.

"As former parliamentary poet laureate George Elliott Clarke says in Howard McCurdy's recent biography, 'Canadians do a lousy job of remembering Black Canadians.' This project aims to correct that by sharing stories of Black Canadians in politics, not just in the report, but in our companion podcast, *Black on the Ballot*," explained Tolley, who's been working with Operation Black Vote Canada to document Black Canadians' participation in electoral politics since 2022. Tolley holds the Canada Research Chair in Gender, Race, and Inclusive Politics.

Co-produced with Media Girlfriends, the special four-part

podcast—hosted by Carleton journalism professor Nanaa Abu Duncan—launched its first episode on Jan. 15.

Among the politicians Tolley and her team spoke with for the study—20 of whom have either run for or served at the federal level—include ISG Senator Bernadette Clement, former Liberal MP and current leadership candidate Frank Baylis, former Liberal-turned-Independent MP Celina Caesar-Chavannes, former Liberal cabinet minister Jean Augustine, former Liberal parliamentary secretary Marlene Jennings, and ex-NDP MP Tyrone Benskin.

"These interviews helped the research team to understand who runs, why they run, and what they experience while there," said Tolley, who pointed to four noteworthy findings:

- There is virtually no difference between Black men and Black women when we look at rates of candidacy; but

- Black women's candidacy is much more dependent on recruitment and encouragement from others;
- 71 per cent of Black Canadians have experienced discrimination while running for or serving in office; and
- 87 per cent of Black Canadians who have run for or served in office said they would do it again.

Tolley said she hopes these findings will not only help to boost our knowledge of Black Canadian trailblazers and politicians, but also to "increase diversity in politics and the number of Black Canadians running for and serving in elected office."

You can hear Tolley, Duncan, and others discuss this issue in person at Carleton University on Feb. 11 at a public panel discussion, "Black on the Ballot: Centring Black Narratives in Public Life."



Carleton University associate professor Erin Tolley has been working on the Black on the Ballot project since 2022. *Photograph courtesy of Erin Tolley*

Leslie Church joins Proof Strategies

Former Liberal staffer and recent by-election candidate Leslie Church has joined Proof Strategies as a senior counsellor.

The public affairs agency made the announcement on LinkedIn on Jan. 16.

"Leslie brings nearly 20 years of global expertise in government, public policy, and technology, making her an invaluable addition since joining us late last year," reads the announcement, acknowledging her background in law and private-sector leadership experience, as well as

her time as chief of staff to then-deputy prime minister and minister of finance Chrystia Freeland.

Church was a federal ministerial staffer from 2015 until 2024 when she stepped down from her role in Freeland's office to run as the Liberals' candidate in the Toronto-St. Paul's by-election last June (she lost to Conservative candidate Don Stewart).

She also directed the Liberal leadership campaign of Michael Ignatieff in 2006, according to her LinkedIn profile.



Former Liberal ministerial staffer and by-election candidate Leslie Church is now with Proof Strategies. *Photograph courtesy of Proof Strategies*

Canada-U.S. council team tapped from politics, labour, and business



Canada's Ambassador to the U.S. Kirsten Hillman, top left; ISG Senator Hassan Yussuff; Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association president Flavio Volpe, bottom left; and Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business president and CEO Tabatha Bull. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Borson and Andrew Meade, photograph courtesy of CCAB

One Senator, the current ambassador to Washington, three former premiers, and one former envoy are among the 18 people Prime Minister Justin Trudeau selected as members of the Council on Canada-U.S. Relations.

"Composed of leaders in business, innovation, and policy, the members of the Council will use their sectoral expertise to support the prime minister and cabinet at this important time in the Canada-U.S. relationship," reads the Jan. 16 press release.

Council members from the political sphere include ISG Senator Hassan Yussuff, Ambassador to the United States Kirsten Hillman, former Quebec premier Jean Charest, former Alberta premier Rachel Notley, former Nova Scotia premier Stephen McNeil, and ex-ambassador to the U.S. David MacNaughton. Notley's

former chief of staff—who's also a former NDP Hill staffer—Brian Topp is also at the table, as is ex-chief trade commissioner Steve Verheul, and Trudeau's former national security adviser **Jody Thomas**.

Representing union and association interests are Unifor national president **Lana Payne**, president of Unifon des producteurs agricoles **Martin Caron**, and president of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association **Flavio Volpe**.

And from the business community there are entrepreneurs and **CBC Dragon's Den** personalities **Arlene Dickinson** and **Wes Hall**, CEO of Linamar manufacturing **Linda Hansratt**, president and CEO of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business **Tabatha Bull**, CEO of BroadbandTV Corp. **Shahrazad Rafai**, and CEO of Cameco **Tim Gitzel**.

Canada Post to honour Brian Mulroney

Canada Post announced last week the images that will appear on this year's crop of stamps, which includes one featuring the likeness of the late former prime minister **Brian Mulroney**.

Mulroney served as Progressive Conservative prime minister from 1984 to 1993. He died in March 2024.

Marie Joseph Angélique, an enslaved Black woman charged with arson in Montréal in 1734; "Indigenous leaders;" "the dark history of civilian internment in Canada;" and "fascinating fungi" are among the list of stamp-worthy subjects coming to the corner of envelopes later this year.



The late former prime minister Brian Mulroney will be honoured with a Canada Post stamp this March. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

While Canada Post's media team declined to share a preview of the Mulroney stamp with HOH, they confirmed its issue date will be this March.

The stamp lineup announcement comes three days after the postal service delivered news that the cost of a domestic stamp would jump \$0.25 as of Jan. 13, going from \$1.15 to \$1.44.

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CORRECTION:
The Hill Times, Jan. 20 issue
Re: "Ex-Tory minister Solberg and sons shift gears" (*The Hill Times*, Jan. 20, p. 2) This *Heard on the Hill* item didn't clearly convey that Monte, Matt, and Michael Solberg, and Keith McLaughlin are still affiliated with New West Public Affairs, and that Shift is a new additional project. It also incorrectly stated that Monte Solberg was first elected in 1997. He was first elected in 1993.