

CLOSING THE GAPS IN OUR BORDER SYSTEM

At last, the federal government is taking the necessary steps to shore up this country's border security while strengthening public confidence in its immigration system.

Not only have the Liberals pledged \$1.2 billion in new funding over five years to agencies that manage the border, they're working to close a loophole that let tens of thousands of asylum seekers enter Canada through unauthorized areas along our border with the United States. Both moves deserve applause.

Critics might accuse Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of dragging his feet on a matter of national importance but, in all fairness, the Liberals have been struggling with a complex situation they did not create.

Not only must they hammer out a solution with American allies who, in the paranoid era of Donald Trump, might prefer to see those asylum seekers remain in Canada, the Liberals must also uphold Canadian laws, including the charter rights of all who set foot in this country.

Yet despite such challenges, the necessity for action became undeniable when a huge flaw emerged in a Canada-U.S. border agreement. According to the terms of the Safe Third Country Agreement, both Canada and the U.S. are considered safe havens for refugees.

Therefore, they can both deny entry to asylum seekers who come to authorized entry points along their shared border.

But strangely, asylum seekers who arrive at unauthorized points along that border cannot immediately be turned away. If they're entering Canada, Canadian authorities must handle their claims to be accepted as refugees. How gaping a loophole this truly is suddenly became apparent in 2017 when growing numbers of asylum seekers began simply walking through it into Canada, especially at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle in Quebec.

In just over two years since then, more than 40,000 irregular crossers have entered Canada this way, overwhelming the federal government's ability to deal fairly with all the claims. During the same time, provincial and municipal governments have scrambled to provide shelter, health care, education and other social services to the migrants.

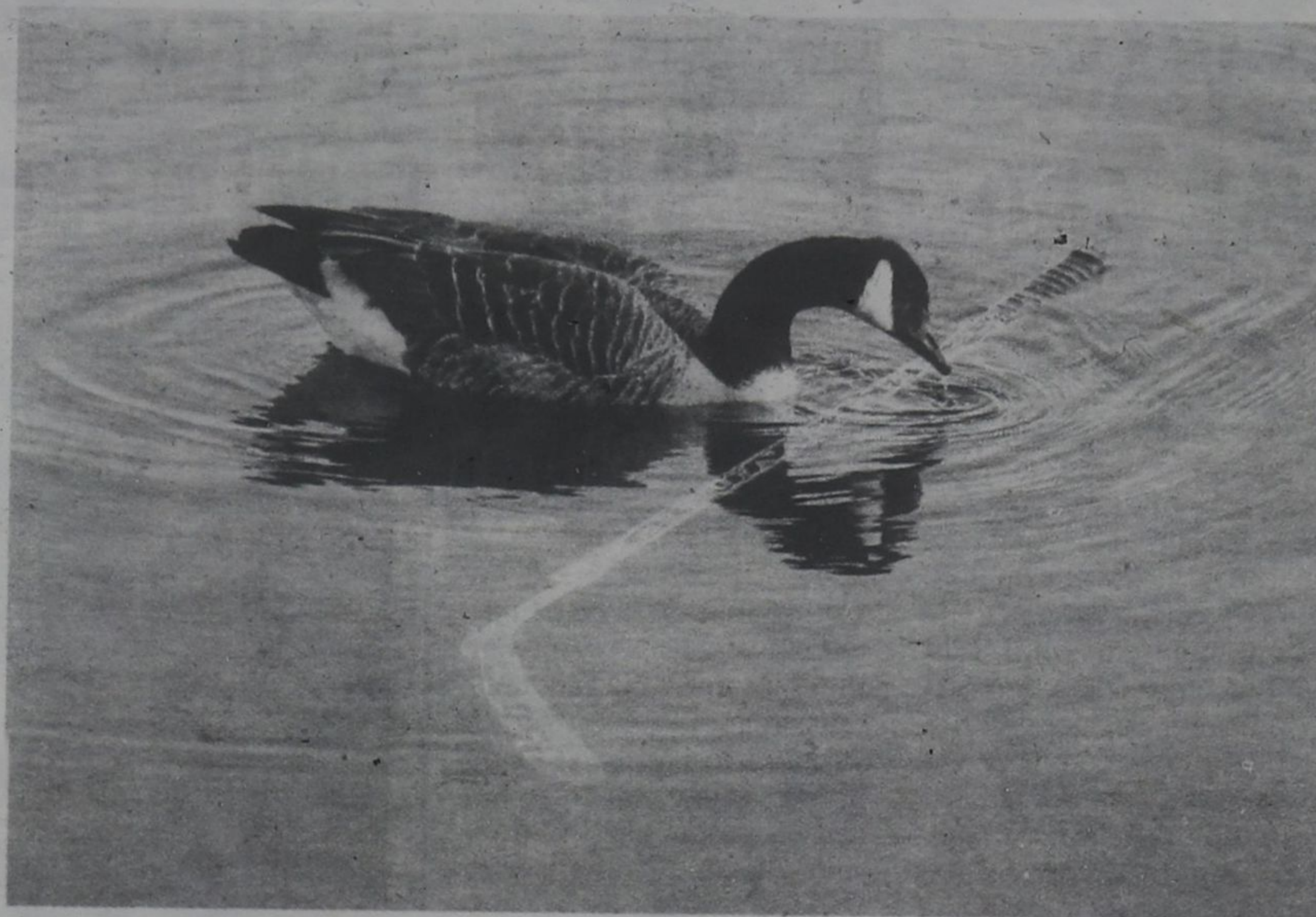
Despite the federal government's decision to hire more adjudicators to reduce the backlog of refugee claimants, wait times for hearings and decisions soared. Meanwhile, when the claims are finally heard, the percentage of claimants being rejected is larger than normal, fuelling concerns that many asylum seekers are actually economic migrants trying to enter Canada any way they can.

Such are the compelling reasons for plugging the holes in our porous border.

As Ottawa moves to address the border problem, it is defending the national interest and, as part of that, the integrity of an immigration system that is vital to our future but depends on continuing, nationwide support. That ongoing support is crucial: As nations around the world increasingly slam their doors to newcomers of all kinds, Canada should, for everybody's sake, keep its welcome mat out

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SNAPSHOT



A Canada goose encounters a hockey stick floating in the melting waters of the Mill Pond.

Janice Brawley photo

SPRING IS YOUR CHANCE AT RENEWAL ...

APRIL BRINGS HOPE, WRITES STEPHEN ILOTT



STEPHEN ILOTT
Column

Spring in the northern latitudes is filled with a sudden pleasantness. It's heralded by a collective unpuckering, when, all at once, people sense that the last bit of brrrr has been unceremoniously ushered out the door.

A sweet mildness descends, and it's followed by an awareness that the equinoctial days are as long as the tepid nights.

While March is filled with more tricks than a clown's pocket, April, ah, April, has hope. It may toss a slush ball in our face, just to be pesky, but at least we have hope.

We know the odds are on our side. Weeks earlier, we cranked the clocks forward like impatient time travel-

lers praying we could also rush the thaw.

When spring shows up in earnest, we set aside any dirty suspicions of winter's trickery, depopulate the car of war-weary ice scrapers, bag the snow tires, unclench our arthritic grips from our lapels, and preen for the sun like ambulatory solar panels.

Unfettered by head wrappings and snotcicles, we are aware of 360-degree vistas. When the alarm clock stutters us awake each morning, we linger horizontal that wee bit longer just to listen to the sweet clatter of birdsong. Signs of reawakening abound.

Neighbours appear like squinting moles to tiptoe squelch into their backyards, to pluck errant newspapers from bushes or unshroud the patio furniture and the sleeping barbecue.

They squeak open windows, desperate to let their daughter's aching choice in music out or replenish the air supply in the mouldy vacuum that is their son's room. More than anything

else, thoughts of renewal and reinvention invade our spring craniums.

The expression "spring forward" fills the air with possibility that a new, better journey is about to begin or that projects stalled may yet become projects achieved.

Now is the rare moment when hope and action collide.

To feel lighter, freer and more positive, declutter something underfoot, something you'll never get around to reading, something holding back your life, something that no longer serves you, something that removes any impediment to reinvention.

Declutter this spring, it'll bring possibility to your home life. Call me, I can help.

Stephen Ilott is a professional home organizer with decluttering.ca and author of *The Domestic Archaeologist*. For more information, visit www.decluttering.ca or contact him at info@decluttering.ca or 416-460-8098.

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ocna

editor@miltoncanadianchampion.com
MiltonCanadianChampion.com
[@Milton_Champion](https://twitter.com/Milton_Champion)

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CONTACT US

Milton Canadian Champion

901 Guelph Line

Burlington, ON L7R 3N8

Phone: 289-293-0615

Classifieds: 1-800-263-6480

Digital/Flyer/Retail:

289-293-0624

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