




Hi ,

Who makes phones ring? And who can stop them?



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it's honestly perfectly rational to me that younger generations are afraid of phonecalls

nobody ever calls you on the phone to hang out, or share good news in 2025

most calls now are debt collection, scams, or someone letting you know that grandma just died

A new app called [Neon](#) was quickly removed from the app store this week after [TechCrunch revealed](#) the program exposed recordings of people's phone calls. As many as 250 million phone calls are made per day in Canada. How much of that information is being exposed along the way?



There are many areas of Canada's everyday economy that are totally predicated on trust with the United States. Through a series of handshake deals, business arrangements and trade pacts made over decades, dependency on the United States has become a defining feature of much of Canada's critical digital infrastructures.

One of those embedded and unnecessary weaknesses occurs every time you make a phone call.

It's a somewhat ironic vulnerability, given Canada's pride in the [patenting of the telephone](#) by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876.

But nowadays, a key pillar of Canada's telecommunications system is reliant on Neustar, a U.S. tech company.

Neustar, now part of [TransUnion](#), built and runs a range of telecom "plumbing" services: number routing, caller ID databases and other registry-style data services.

Behind the scenes, telecommunications carriers don't route the ten digits that you dial on their own.

At least not anymore.

Until the late-1990s, phone call routing was simplified by the fact that telecom giants like Bell and Rogers each managed their own proprietary list of phone numbers and didn't allow those digits to be transferred to other providers. That was quashed through competition reforms that achieved wireless number portability for consumers, making it possible to easily switch carriers.

Now, when Canada's telecoms route numbers they must query a database to see which network actually serves that phone number. The key tool is the [Number Portability Administration Center](#) (NPAC), which then returns a location routing number so the call can be sent to the right switch.

Canada's NPAC is administered by Neustar under the [Canadian Local Number Portability Consortium](#).

What began as a positive consumer protection initiative, resulted in Canada outsourcing an important piece of technological infrastructure.

So what?

There are a lot of obvious subjects that come up when we start talking about digital sovereignty, such as Canada's vulnerability to Washington's [CLOUD Act](#), which lets U.S. authorities compel data from U.S.-controlled firms even if that data is stored abroad, or the impacts of the constraints imposed through the [digital chapter of CUSMA](#) on Canadians.

But there are also so many cases where our digital dependency — and exposure — is underdiscussed and unexpected.

Even *outside of* the CLOUD Act's confines, we're constantly volunteering domestic information — in this case, who is calling who, and when.

But the real risk isn't continuous data streaming to the U.S., it's *control* risk. Key registries and trust anchors Canadians rely on are operated by U.S.-controlled firms subject to extraterritorial laws and courts. That's an inherent national security vulnerability.

Plus, we need this system to be able to make phone calls. What happens if a formerly trusted partner turns it off?

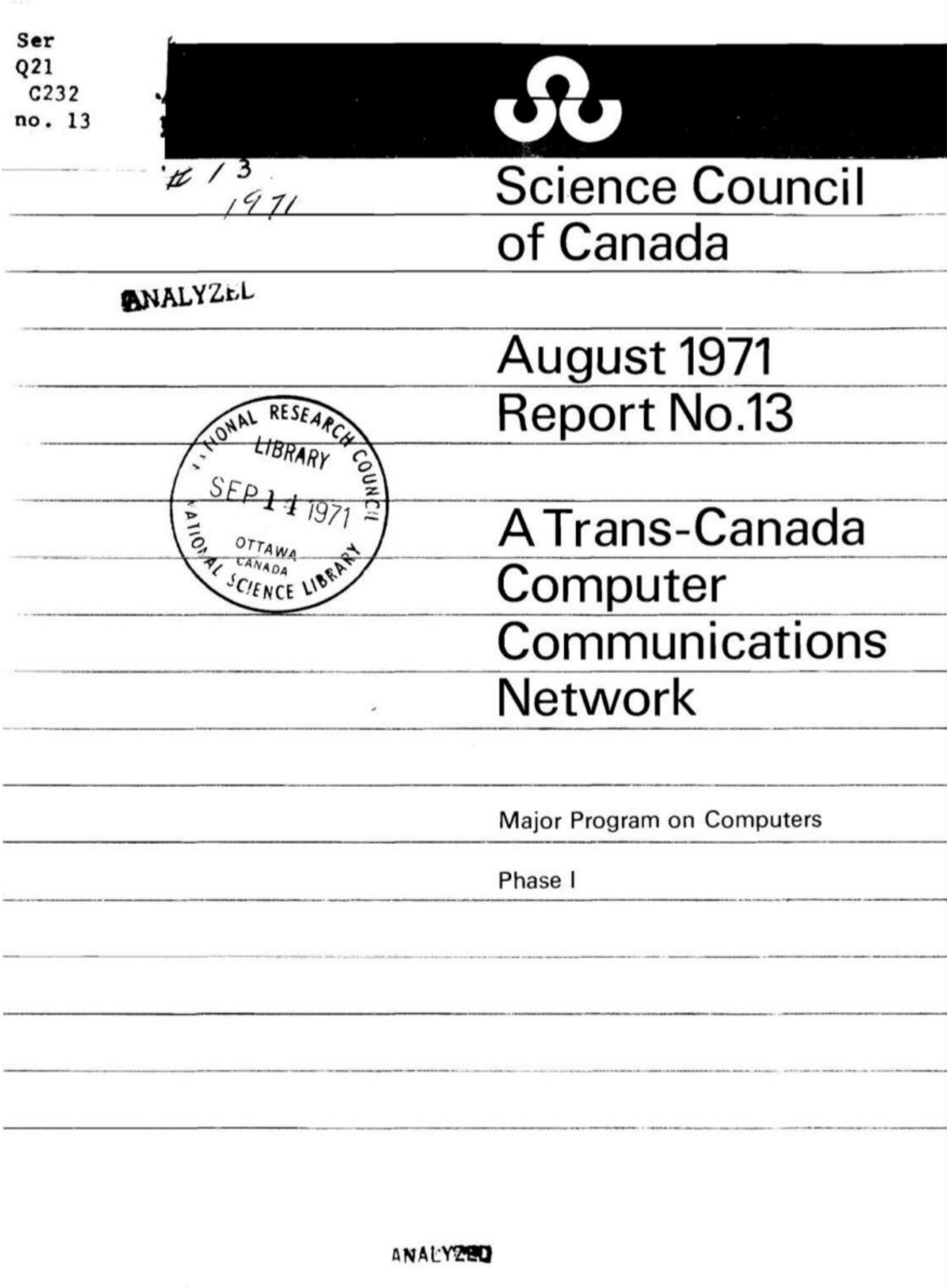
Telecommunications makes its way into Heritage Minutes with [Thomas Eadie](#) and [Signal Hill](#). And of course, [Alexander Graham Bell](#). It's part of the story our country tells itself about innovation, and we have lots to be proud of.

Reliance on U.S. call systems is a historical flub. Canada *could have* built a sovereign system that routed calls ourselves. It's not hard to imagine an alternative, even with a U.S. provider offering support in the interim.

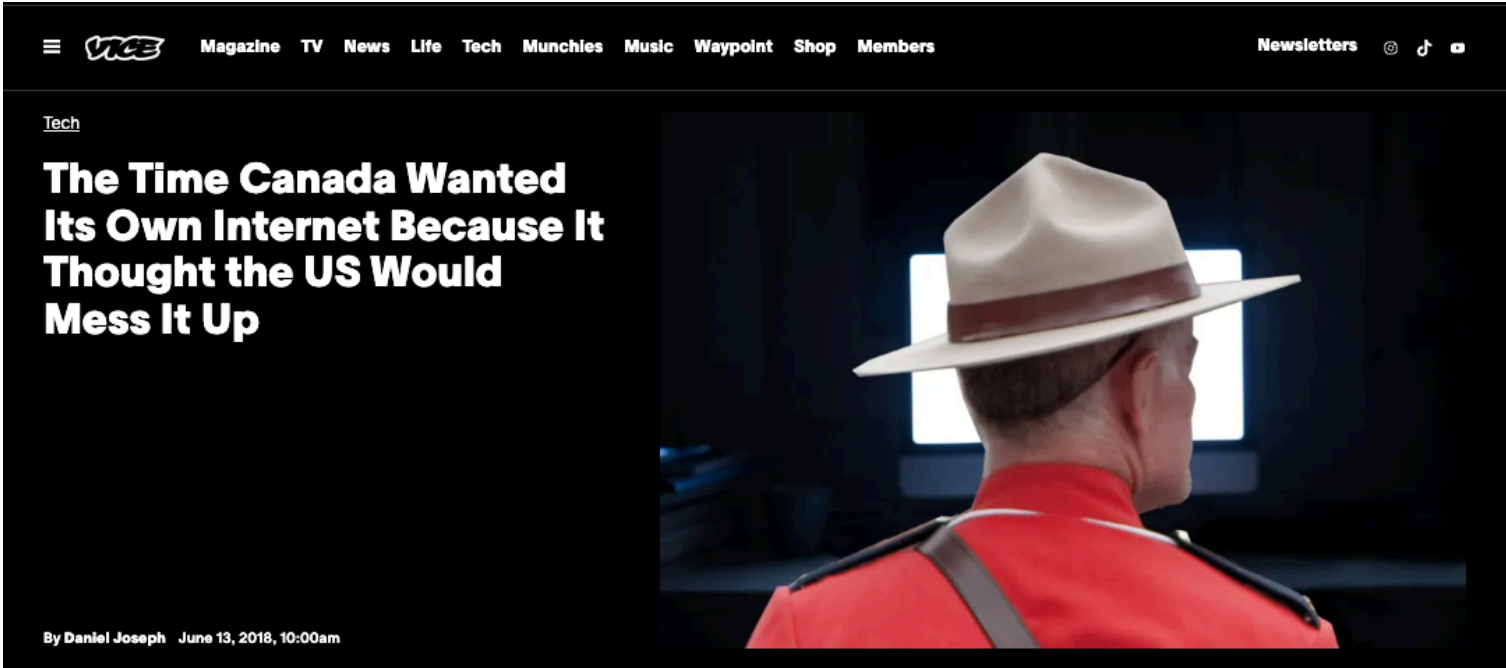
By allowing our telephony infrastructure to become interdependent with a U.S. firm, Canadians have abdicated our role as innovators and ceded control over systems we built.

It's in the national interest for essential communications infrastructure to be operated under Canadian jurisdiction and governance. This is the same starting point that is motivating the country's current consideration of a [sovereign cloud](#).

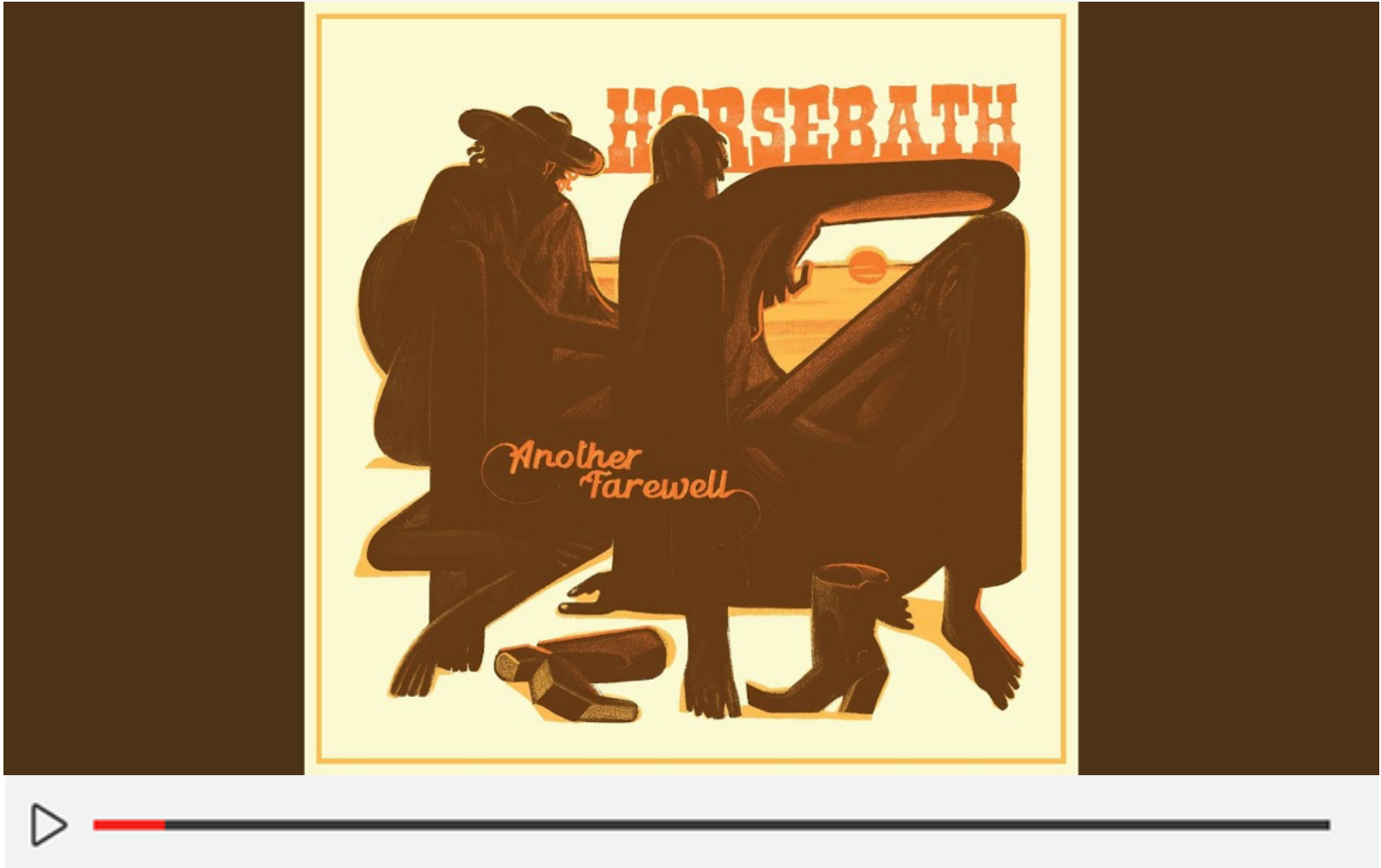
BTW, a [1971 report](#) from the Science Council of Canada warned of this: "A *laissez-faire*" attitude will eventually result in the supply of most computing and information services via spur lines from U.S. computer communications networks. Such an outcome is completely unacceptable on economic and social grounds."



If you want to read more about Canada's dependence on U.S. communications infrastructure, Robert Babe's [Telecommunications in Canada](#) (1990) and Dallas Smythe's [Dependency Road](#) (1981) are two great places to start, as is Andrew Clement's [Canadian Network Sovereignty: A Strategy for Twenty-First Century National Infrastructure Building](#) (2018), which covers how this same routing dependency also happens with the internet.



Below is "In The Shade" from Halifax band [Horsebath](#). This [interview](#) with The Big Takeover called them a 'sonic chameleon.' *Send us the Canadian music you've been listening to lately!*



SEND TO A FRIEND

