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Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 13th meeting of the House of Commons Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

[Translation]

This will be a hybrid meeting. Some members will be participating via video conference and some will be participating in person.

[English]

In order to ensure that those joining the meeting via video conference can be seen and heard by those in the chamber, two screens have been set up on either side of the Chair's chair, and members in the chamber can listen to the floor audio or to interpretation using the earpieces at their desks.

[Translation]

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name, and please direct your remarks through the chair.

[English]

For those joining via video conference, I would like to remind you to leave your mike on mute—

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Can the member wait for the point of order until we finish the introduction?

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: There is so much noise in the background over there, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That is a very good point of order.

I want to remind everyone that when we speak, it is picked up. We have amazing speakers—and an amazing Speaker, but that's a whole other story—and amazing microphones in the chamber, and they do pick up everything. I know there was some chatter going on in the background. I want to make sure everyone is aware of that.

Mr. Aboultaif, that was a very good point of order. I appreciate that.

For those joining us via video conference, I would like to remind you to leave your mikes on mute when you're not speaking. Also, please note that if you want to speak in English, you should be on the English channel, and if you want to speak in French, you should

be on the French channel. Should you wish to alternate between the two languages, you should change the channel to the language that you are speaking each time you switch languages.

[Translation]

Should members participating by video conference wish to request the floor outside their designated speaking times, they should activate their mic and state that they have a point of order. Those in the Chamber can rise in the usual way.

Please note that today's proceedings will be televised.

[English]

I understand that there are no ministerial announcements for today, so we'll continue to the presentation of petitions, for a period not exceeding 15 minutes.

[Translation]

I would like to remind members that any petition presented during a meeting of the special committee must have already been certified by the clerk of petitions. For members participating in person, we ask that they please come and drop the signed certificate off at the table once the petition is presented.

[English]

The first petition goes to Mr. Manly, who is joining us via video conference.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is a petition that calls on the government to deal with helping our honey bees. They are crucial to our food system. They provide hundreds of billions of dollars worth of services to commercial agricultural crops and other ecological services every year, and the European Union has put heavy restrictions on the chemicals that are affecting them, the neonicotinoids.

This petition calls on the Government of Canada, for the sake of bees and our food security, to follow Europe's lead and adhere to the precautionary principle by banning the use of neonicotinoids in Canada.

The Chair: The next presenter of petitions will be Mr. Genuis, who is very parliamentary and dressed from the waist up, I understand.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and that is all you need to see for the moment.

Canadians are horrified by the military report on the conditions of long-term care in Ontario. It raises big questions about the choices facing seniors in certain situations, which is what makes this first petition particularly timely.

I am tabling a petition related to Bill C-7, the government's euthanasia bill, which seeks to dramatically remove safeguards that the government said were vital only a short time ago. When some people are living in deplorable conditions, we cannot truly speak of them as having a choice of when they ought to die. Especially in light of that new information, I commend this petition for the consideration of members of the House.

The second petition is in support of Bill S-204 on organ harvesting and trafficking, put forward in the Senate. The bill would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ without the donor's consent. This bill seeks to combat the horrific practice of forced organ harvesting and trafficking.

The Chair: The next petition presenter will be Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and greetings from Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The petition I'm presenting today is petition e-2509, which has been duly certified. It relates to what I think many of us will regard as the real heroes of the last few months.

In this pandemic, there have often been very underpaid and overworked front-line workers who receive minimum wage and nothing more, and who are of course deemed essential services. The petitioners have asked the government to implement a wage supplement as a temporary measure to bring the wages for those who are in contact with the general public and working in what has been deemed an essential service to no less than \$20 an hour, in light of their service and the risks they're taking for all of us.

The Chair: We have a point of order from Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Chair, the honourable member who just spoke brought up a great point yesterday. She said that when we present petitions, we are simply supposed to give one or two sentences before putting them on the table. I believe that was more than one or two sentences.

The Chair: I want to remind honourable members that when they are presenting petitions, they should be very concise with the précis that they give up front, as opposed to going on for a long time.

Now we will proceed to statements by members for a period not exceeding 15 minutes, and each statement will be for one minute.

We will start with Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Today I am honoured to recognize the youth in my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville who are part of the 52nd Mississauga Scouts.

For over a decade, I've had the great opportunity to join the Scouts every year during the month of May for the door-to-door food drives. This year has been a lot different, owing to the COVID

situation, but our Scouts are not used to saying the word "impossible".

David Chant, head leader for their cub pack, reached out to share that the youth have found innovative ways to engage our community through a virtual food bank. I say a big thank you to Scout leaders like David, who are strong role models for our youth, teaching them the importance of leadership, kindness and giving back.

I've always been amazed with the support within our community for the Scouts' food drive. David and his group of Scouts raised over \$46,000 worth of food last year for the Mississauga Food Bank and The Compass.

Again, I give a huge virtual high-five to all of our young Scouts, who have taken the lead with lots of compassion and care.

• (1210)

The Chair: We'll now go on to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): May 24 to May 31 is Tourism Week in Canada. This annual celebration is a time for us to recognize the contributions and experiences of Canada's tourism industry.

[*Translation*]

This is a very important industry, and this year's Tourism Week is a little different from what it normally is.

[*English*]

The ongoing coronavirus crisis has closed provincial and international borders to recreational travel, and tourism operators from coast to coast have been among the first and hardest hit due to the government-mandated lockdowns. Clear criteria regarding border reopenings and health and safety requirements will allow hospitality and tourism businesses to sufficiently prepare to reopen. This includes rehiring employees, ordering supplies and putting together tour packages and marketing plans. Operators do not need to be set back any further because of a lack of clarity around reopening.

While this Tourism Week is not a celebration like the one we had expected, I anticipate next year's celebration to be a celebration of an even stronger and more successful tourism industry in Canada.

The 1.8 million Canadians whose jobs depend on a thriving tourism sector are counting on it.

Bonne semaine to tourism.

The Chair: We'll go on to Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Mr. Chair, Monday was a sad day in my riding of Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, and indeed our entire province. Please join me as I offer sincere condolences to the families of the men who lost their lives at sea in a tragic accident off the coast of St. Lawrence in Placentia Bay.

Ed Norman, his son Scott Norman and his nephew Jody Norman all tragically lost their lives while fishing for crab this past Monday. A fourth man, family friend Isaac Kettle, was also with them. After a courageous search mission by Canadian Coast Guard auxiliary members and the Department of National Defence and Provincial Airlines, he is unfortunately still missing. We grieve with the entire town of St. Lawrence as they mourn this tragic loss of life.

Mr. Chair, I am sure the entire province of Newfoundland and Labrador, this parliamentary family and Canadians from coast to coast to coast join me in thinking of these men, along with their friends and families, during this difficult time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: We'll now continue with Mr. Simard.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to speak to you today about a solid man who unfortunately passed away on May 25. We were greatly saddened to learn about the death of Francis Dufour. This builder of Quebec's political history drew his last breath at the age of 91, late Sunday night.

Mr. Dufour was the archetypal proud representative of my region who spent his entire life in Jonquière. He first became involved in the Alcan employee's union in Arvida, then continued his civic involvement at the municipal level as mayor, then in the Quebec National Assembly as the member for Jonquière.

He will be remembered as a man with deep ties to his community, a man of integrity, a people person, who dedicated himself to serving citizens and advancing the independence movement in Quebec.

On behalf of the people of the riding of Jonquière and all the people of Quebec, I offer my most sincere condolences to Francis Dufour's family and loved ones.

Thank you.

The Chair: We are continuing with Martinez Ferrada.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1215)

The pandemic has greatly affected Montreal East, particularly the riding of Hochelaga, which I represent.

Today, I'd like to recognize the exceptional work of all the volunteers and organizations in Hochelaga that are helping the more vulnerable populations, including Anonyme, CAP St-Barnabé, CARE Montréal, the Cuisine collective Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, Bouffe Action, the Centre Communautaire Hochelaga, Chic Resto Pop, Jojo Dépannage, Groupe d'entraide de Mercier-Ouest and many others.

I'd like to acknowledge the commitment of the merchants who have rolled up their sleeves, including the Coop Couturières Pop, to make masks. I'd especially like to recognize essential workers, especially attendants.

Allow me to offer our condolences to the loved ones of the attendants who have lost their lives to protect ours.

The citizens of Hochelaga are resilient and unified. I am proud to rise in the House to salute them.

[English]

The Chair: The next presentation will be by Mr. Cumming.

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I rise today to pay tribute to a great Albertan and former parliamentarian, Louise Feltham, who passed away this Monday after a lengthy battle with cancer.

Louise was an entrepreneur, a public servant and a force of nature. She inspired the family motto "How hard can it be?" by creating communities and building several homes in her lifetime. In all that she did, Louise broke glass ceilings. Her many firsts included being the first woman to serve as a councillor in rural Alberta, the first female reeve in rural Alberta and the first woman born in Newfoundland to serve in this chamber. She was the MP for Wild Rose from 1988 to 1993.

Her son Glenn served as the president of NAIT when I chaired the board. My thoughts and sympathies are with him, his wife Tammi and the rest of their family for this great loss. Her parliamentary family mourns with you today.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it is a great honour to speak to the House of Commons today from Whitehorse, Yukon, here on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

As a great historic Canadian event last week, Yukon became home to Canada's first university north of 60. Yukon University will provide Yukoners with educational opportunities closer to home, expand our research capabilities and expertise on the Arctic and climate change and allow those who want to study northern and first nations governance to do so in the north. I encourage all students living in the northern half of Canada to look at the many programs and degrees at Yukon University to continue their studies—in some cases this year, virtually—by remaining in the north.

I want to congratulate the staff of Yukon College, who spent the last decade working towards this transition, and especially the outgoing president, Karen Barnes. I wish her all the best in her retirement.

Thank you, *merci, mahsi cho* and *sóga senlá*.

The Chair: We'll now go on to Ms. Hutchings.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, from the Long Range Mountains, I too want to send my condolences to my colleague, Mr. Rogers from Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, on the tragic loss in St. Lawrence. We're all communities that rely on the sea, and we understand the importance and the tragedy, and the hard work it is being fishers.

However, today, colleagues, I want to mention, as my colleague from across the way said, that it's national tourism week, so please take the time to get out and thank the tourism and hospitality businesses in your ridings.

Most businesses around the world were hit hard by COVID-19. The tourism economy was hit very hard, especially seasonal and rural operations and the 1.8 million people the industry employs. However, this industry knows how to work hard. They know how to partner. They know how to look after their employees and their guests. They will find new and innovative opportunities and experiences. They will build new business and they will continue to attract visitors.

We know that the domestic and local markets will recover first. I know that the operators in my riding are getting ready just for that. It's exciting to speak with them about how they're working on their "new normal" and how it's going to be developed and implemented here in the Long Range Mountains.

Remember too that many of our national parks are opening on June 1, so get out and explore the park in your backyard.

I look forward to working with the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, Destination Canada and my colleagues so that when we turn the corner of this pandemic, we are ready to rebuild a stronger tourism economy.

Friends, go out and discover the tourism treasures in your province. They need your support. Tourism matters.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Some people were already too few in number and already burdened with heavy responsibilities even before the COVID-19 crisis occurred.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my admiration for the dedication of all the essential workers who stepped up in the riding of Lévis—Lotbinière. This crisis has created pressing needs and unprecedented emergencies. Fine men and women committed to human dignity, volunteers, retirees, and you, who have wisely agreed to stay home, you have been part, to varying degrees, of this great equation to minimize the impact of the spread and avoid the worst.

The snow has melted, the flowers have arrived. Many children are happy to be able to expend their energy again; our seniors are being cuddled, with great care, and our essential workers in the riding are still dedicated to the job.

I say "bravo", "thank you" and "don't give up", even though you have already earned your place in heaven.

• (1220)

The Chair: Ms. Bendayan.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My father, who is now retired, was a researcher for over 40 years. He was involved in many medical discoveries. From his laboratories at the Université de Montréal, he worked with CHUM and the Centre hospitalier universitaire Sainte—Justine, renowned institutions in Outremont. In fact, Outremont is full of professors, scientists and researchers. They are Quebeckers, Canadians, who are at the forefront of discoveries that save and will save lives.

[*English*]

Since coming into office, our government has reversed the funding cuts to medical research and has invested billions in science. Recently, we announced new funding for COVID-19 research for fundamental science and supports for academic researchers. We are working very hard to find a vaccine for COVID-19, and our fundamental research is helping us to understand viruses that we don't even know the names of yet. It is this work that will help us stay ahead of the curve rather than flatten it.

To all our Canadian scientists and to my dad, thank you.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: We'll now continue with Ms. Alleslev.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, citizens in my riding of Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill are showing incredible compassion as they help their families, their friends and even strangers during this difficult period. They are our community champions.

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce and the Richmond Hill Board of Trade are helping businesses navigate in these difficult times. Organizations like The STEAM Project and Ganesha Temple are making and donating face masks for those in need. The Aurora Museum & Archives is collecting artifacts to document the pandemic for future generations. The Aurora Farmers' Market is bringing local farmers and businesses to us, but this year with one key person missing. Our community has lost one of the farmers' market's founders, our jam lady, Jan Freedman. We were deeply saddened by her passing, and she will be sorely missed.

My sincere thanks to everyone who's working to ease the burdens on one another during this crisis. It's not easy, but this too will pass, and we will be stronger for it.

In the meantime, stay safe, and let us all do our part to be community champions.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Chair, we all understand that a crisis like the one the world is currently experiencing generates deficits. We also know that a deficit is a bill we send to our children and grandchildren, which is why it is important to be prudent, to make wise choices and, above all, to know where we are going.

It's a shame that every time we ask the government a question, no minister can tell us how big the Canadian deficit is.

We aren't the only ones concerned about the deficit and the government's lack of transparency. In fact, last Tuesday, at a parliamentary committee meeting in the Senate, the Parliamentary Budget Officer made some very scathing remarks about the government. He said he was concerned. He said that there had to be a deadline or we'd be heading toward taxation levels that haven't been seen in generations in this country because there is not a lot of ammunition left before we go into a large structural deficit.

I'm not the one saying it; it's the Parliamentary Budget Officer. For weeks, almost every day, the Prime Minister has been announcing cash injections for Canadians. We agree with that. However, hundreds of billions of dollars are being spent without any idea of the deficit.

That's why we're sounding the alarm and calling on the government to be careful. The Prime Minister needs to know that we can't play Santa Claus every day, because the bills in January come in fast, and they are high.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Chair, making sure science informs our health policies is critical during a pandemic. That's why I'm so disappointed that the Liberals have maintained the ban on blood donations from gay men and trans women. There is no science behind this ban. Not only does it reinforce homophobia and transphobia, it also reduces our blood supply at this critical time.

Now we've learned that the ban will also result in rejecting plasma donors, when plasma is so critical in emerging COVID-19 research and treatment. More than 17 countries, including Argentina, Italy and Spain, have no deferral period for men who have sex with men. They know that behaviour-based screening provides better security for the blood supply than discriminatory identity-based rules.

I have asked the minister many times to lift the gay blood ban and I do so again today, but today I also call on the family and friends of gay men and trans women to step up now and donate blood in place of those of us who cannot. When it comes to blood donations, we really should all be in this together.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Desilets, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. I've missed you, by the way.

On another note, the emergency wage subsidy was created for people who fear for their jobs or their businesses. It's for people who need it, not for millionaire political parties like the Liberals and Conservatives. In Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, as in many other ridings, we respond daily to businesses that don't have access to it.

Unfortunately, there are people in our ridings who won't have the opportunity to hire staff this summer. There are businesses that are losing less than 30% of their revenues; they are losing 29%. These businesses won't have access to it. Everywhere we look, there are businesses that are falling through the cracks. Meanwhile, the Liberals and the Conservatives are getting the wage subsidy to fund partisan activities. I repeat: it is to fund partisan activities. The Liberals and Conservatives don't even do it on the sly; they do it openly.

These two parties have raised millions of dollars since January. Every dollar that's taken comes out of the taxpayers' pockets. It's the workers' money, not the political parties'. It's so embarrassing that it's shameful, disrespectful and ridiculous.

The Liberals and the Conservatives have to pay that money back. I think that's obvious. For the Bloc Québécois, it's immeasurably clear. It's a question of ethics, morality and respect for citizens.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

This week is Paramedic Services Week, and I would like to take a moment to thank these men and women who work tirelessly at the best of times to protect and save lives. Their efforts during COVID-19, like the services provided by many front-line workers in health care, such as personal support workers, doctors, nurses, janitorial and clerical staff, lab technicians and many others, have been extraordinary and truly beyond the call of duty.

I hope this week all Canadians will take a moment to thank a paramedic or any front-line health care worker in their community for the amazing services they have been called upon to perform and will continue to provide in the challenging days ahead.

Chair, I'd also be remiss if I didn't mention another unfortunate consequence of the current pandemic, the cancellation of the Kinmount Fair, a renowned event that has been running since 1870. This year the fair was to mark its 150th anniversary, but in true Kinmount spirit, this heartbreaking decision will not deter organizers from planning an even bigger and better event in 2021.

The Chair: Now we will go to Ms. Dhillon.

[Translation]

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the members of the Canadian Armed Forces from the bottom of my heart for their invaluable assistance in the long-term care facilities.

Their deployment came at a critical time, when many seniors desperately needed them. Through the observations and testimonies of these members, we saw the extent of the nightmare that many seniors had endured for a long time.

[English]

These are human beings who could not fend for themselves. They were treated with profound cruelty and carelessness. Among many other loathsome details, they were left to starve, were abused and lived in filth, their cries of anguish ignored. They were tormented and left in their agony.

There is no excuse for this. No one ever deserves to be treated the way they were. I am talking about humanity, about compassion and mercy.

It is up to each and every one of us to make sure no elderly person is ever hurt in this vile manner again. I take this moment to honour these victims.

The Chair: Before moving on, I want to remind the hon. members that, as the rules state, statements by members should be 60 seconds. That's one minute. Usually there are a few extra seconds, which doesn't matter, but some of them have gone quite a bit over time, so starting Monday we'll be cutting them off at 60 seconds.

I encourage everyone to practise them or take a look at them, and try to keep them within the 60 seconds so that we don't go over our allotted time.

● (1230)

[Translation]

We will now proceed to the questioning of ministers. I would like to remind members to speak fairly slowly so that the interpreters can understand what they're saying.

[English]

I know sometimes we get excited in the House and we speak a little quickly. Just be conscious of it. I'm sure it will be appreciated by the interpreters and those at home who are listening in, as then they can make out the important questions and answers that are being given in this chamber.

We will go to our first question. We will begin with Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The government has consistently worked to shut down Parliament and undermine personal sittings and has argued that the business of this country can be done by Zoom. However, for work of the G7 the Prime Minister said, "there's no question that in-person meetings...are much more effective than even virtual meetings."

By pushing to go virtual, is it the Prime Minister's goal to make Canada's Parliament less effective?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr. Chair, it is absolutely not. In fact, I am pleased to be here in person meeting with members from across the country and pleased that our colleagues who live further away from Ottawa than I do have the opportunity to join us.

Parliament plays an essential role in our democracy, and it's—

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Chair, that is exactly the point. This isn't Parliament; this is a committee meeting. We do not have Parliament. This is a virtual committee.

A Saskatchewan producer called me and said that he tried to use the online AgriStability calculator. He said that most farmers can't use it, that in fact they can't put in their inventory changes. This means it will give them erroneous information.

Why is the agriculture minister touting this lifeline for farmers when it doesn't actually work?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, the agricultural sector is critical to our country, and the questions some of us have been asking around food security have reminded us how lucky we are, as Canadians, to be living in an agricultural superpower.

When it comes to the specific technical questions that farmers have, they should turn to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, who will be delighted to help.

Mr. John Barlow: Could the Deputy Prime Minister tell me how much it cost to develop this online AgriStability calculator?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: What I can say is that we are very mindful of and very grateful for the extremely—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Chair, farmers have even hired accountants to try to navigate this shiny online calculator, but they've been told they would go broke before they received any money.

Will the government admit that this is just a fig leaf before any actual assistance will come to Canadian farmers?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, very many farmers, and certainly many of the farmers of my acquaintance, have worked with accountants for a very long time. Farmers are sophisticated business people who deal in the futures markets every day. They run hugely important businesses—

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Chair, it's that kind of condescension that is so frustrating to Canadian farmers. They shouldn't have to hire an accountant to figure out an assistance program.

The last time I questioned the Prime Minister and the minister about the secret carbon tax data, they said that only part of it was secret and that the rest of it would be given to the House. I have yet to receive it.

Will that be tabled today, in both official languages, to justify to Canadian farmers why the government has increased the carbon tax in the midst of a pandemic?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, what is condescending is to behave as if farmers are not highly sophisticated businessmen. They hire economists. They hire agronomists. They are at the cutting edge. I am proud of the sophistication of Canadian farmers, and I'm proud of the support we offer them.

Some honourable members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I want to remind the honourable members that the background noise and the heckling really make it difficult for the members who are tuning in via Zoom. I just want to make sure they're aware of what they're doing to our colleagues who are online.

We will go back to Mr. Barlow.

• (1235)

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Chair, for 64 days the finance minister has failed to deliver on his promise to assist Canada's energy sector. Small oil and gas companies still can't qualify for BDC loans, and last week's announcement for large employers, in my opinion, was nothing of exploitive. If the government doesn't fulfill its promise to provide support for the energy sector, it is in turn supporting unethically sourced foreign oil and costing good reliable Canadian jobs.

After 64 days, when will the credit options be available to Canada's small and medium-sized energy companies?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I agree with the member opposite about one thing: The energy sector and energy workers are absolutely essential to our economy, and we support them.

One of the things I am most proud of is the \$1.7 billion our government has committed to cleaning up orphan wells. That money today has created jobs in Alberta, B.C. and Saskatchewan. People are working because of it, and they are cleaning up their communities thanks to that support.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chair, I'll try not to spend too much time.

Will the Liberal Party of Canada pay back the money it took from the wage subsidy program, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, the purpose of the wage subsidy is to support workers, help them keep their jobs and keep them connected to their workplace—

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, I'll take that as a no.

In my riding, Trillium Media owns several weeklies. The company doesn't qualify for the wage subsidy because it has suffered losses of 28% instead of 30%. The historic village of Val-Jalbert is in the same situation.

Does the Liberal Party of Canada consider itself to be in greater financial difficulty than the historic village of Val-Jalbert and Trillium Media?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, allow me to remind the hon. member opposite what we're doing to support Canadians: more than 8 million Canadians have received the Canada emergency response benefit.

In addition, 635,000 businesses have received loans through the Canada emergency business account.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, I'll take that as a yes.

Does my hon. colleague take into account the fact that the billions of dollars that are currently being handed out come from taxpayers' pockets? It even comes from the pockets of people who have lost their jobs and who pay taxes when they go to the corner store.

On the other side of the House, is it considered justified for multi-million dollar parties to finance themselves with public funds, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I would like to continue by reminding my colleague opposite what our government is doing today to support Canadians and Quebecers: 293 applications for the Canada emergency wage subsidy have been approved.

Over 2 million Canadians today have—

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, I'll take that as a yes.

It's fantastic! The money that the Liberals are going to get from the wage subsidy is going to go directly into their election kitty.

When they go to get their election expenses reimbursed, they're going to get 60% of that money back. So they'll have made the wage subsidy work for them. The businesses that'll have access to it won't, but the political parties will.

Doesn't that contravene the Canada Elections Act, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, our programs don't discriminate. They're there to help all workers, to help all Canadians, to help all Quebecers.

The hon. member talked about companies and sectors that need more help. We agree with that. We think we all need to work together to continue to help Canadians and Quebecers—

The Chair: Order. We are returning to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I don't know how to take it this time. I didn't get it all.

I think it's necessary to stop, eject and throw the tape out, and provide an honest answer to the questions we ask.

Can my colleague across the way answer a very simple question? Are their employees going to be used for political fundraising and so, once again, make the generous wage subsidy they receive work for them, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I want to point out something important when we talk about our work and our economy. The important thing is that we have put in place unprecedented economic measures that are absolutely urgent and necessary.

• (1240)

That's what we'll continue to do.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, we've already seen a Duceppe who denounces the use of federal programs by the Liberal Party for the Liberal Party.

Can my hon. colleague tell me if she's able to look the entrepreneurs in her riding in the eye and tell them that they don't deserve the wage subsidy, because their loss of income is only 28% or 29%, while her party is dipping into the cookie jar, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I am absolutely willing to look into the eyes of the entrepreneurs and workers in my riding because they know that our government is doing a lot to help Canadians in this historic crisis.

Our economic support program is the largest program in Canada's history—

[English]

The Chair: We will now continue with Mr. Singh.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Canadian Armed Forces report showed the relationship between equipment costs and the lack of care for our seniors. Will the government admit today that there is no room for profit in the care of our seniors?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, that's a very important question, and I would like to thank the member for asking it.

I think this is a historic week. All Canadians have seen what is happening in Ontario and Quebec. We—

The Chair: Order. We'll go back to Mr. Singh.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, experts and advocates have all pointed out that in the for-profit model of care for seniors, there is more emphasis on the bottom line than on care for seniors.

Will the Liberal government admit that there is no place for profit when it comes to the care of our seniors?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I want to start by saying one thing, and that is to publicly thank, in this House, Brigadier-General Conrad Mialkowski and his team for compiling the assessment that they did of long-term care homes in Ontario. They acted with courage. They acted with compassion. What they did is historic, and we all need to—

The Chair: We'll now go back to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The Canadian Forces, of course, always deserve our thanks. However, they don't need our thanks right now; they need to see some action on what they have pointed out.

The government owns Revera, the second-largest long-term care provider in Canada. It's for profit, and it's facing a \$50-million lawsuit for negligence.

What is the government doing to protect seniors in the long-term care homes that they own?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I agree with the member opposite that after what we have learned this week, all options must be on the table when it comes to how care for our elders will be provided in Canada in the future.

I think it is clear to us all that root-and-branch reform is necessary. We need to act with speed but not haste, and work with our provincial partners.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: If all the options are on the table, will the Liberal government commit to removing profit from long-term care, particularly in the Revera long-term care homes, the second-largest number in Canada, which the government owns? Will it commit to removing profit from long-term care?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: What we will commit to do—and I hope with the support of all members of this House—is work very carefully and also very urgently in close co-operation with our provincial partners, under whose jurisdiction this falls, to ensure that these heart-wrenching reports mean that as a country we turn the page—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, Revera is a Crown corporation owned by the government, so let's not hear excuses. Is the government doing anything to ensure that seniors are cared for? Is it providing for robust inspections, yes or no?

• (1245)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I want to clarify one point in the member's question. Canadian Crown corporations are not Liberal, not Conservative and not partisan.

One of the strengths of Canada is that we have non-partisan government institutions, and they serve us extremely well. Our—

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, right now the current government is responsible for Revera. It is a Crown corporation. Will the government commit to ensuring there is no profit anymore in Revera? As we've seen, it is facing a \$50-million lawsuit, and there's been horrible negligence.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, as I said at the outset, the ownership structure of long-term care facilities needs to be on the table. Everything does.

I also want to emphasize how important it is for us to do what we have been doing, which is to work very closely with the provinces, under whose jurisdiction this falls. In just the past 24 hours, I have spoken with Premier Ford, Premier Horgan and Premier Moe, and our conversation included long-term care facilities.

The Chair: We'll now continue with Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Today I join critics from the NDP, the Bloc and the Green Party who deal with women's issues and gender equality to ask where the \$75 million toward sexual exploitation and human trafficking has gone. Last week organizations had to close their doors and the programs that help vulnerable women and girls, so the simple question is this: Where is the money?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Mr. Chair, let me begin by thanking the member for that very important question.

I agree that human trafficking, which is a crime of coercion and exploitation, is unacceptable, and we have to ensure that we provide the supports necessary to the victims of this crime.

As the member knows, we have launched a new, comprehensive national strategy to combat human trafficking, and we've incorporated a new pillar in that strategy of empowerment to ensure that the focus—

The Chair: We'll go back to Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: With all due respect, it's great that we have a strategy, but when money is not going to the doors of these organizations that provide these services, a strategy is nothing. It's all talk and no action. Where's the money?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development): Mr. Chair, let me pick up where my honourable colleague left off by acknowledging that trafficking is a heinous crime and that hundreds of organizations across the country are working to solve the challenges that come with human trafficking.

I remind my honourable colleague that hundreds of organizations have received supports, and we will have more to announce to further support—

The Chair: We'll go back to Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It's so very simple. What should we tell the young women and girls looking for these supports right now? What is the answer from the government?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Chair, no one should have to live a life with violence, whether it's sexual, physical, financial or emotional, and that the government of Canada—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

Yesterday I happened to be part of the health committee, and the Battered Women's Support Services representative was there as a witness. She shared with me that the organizations that she is associated with, over 500 organizations that deal with sexual assault and shelters, did not receive funding. Can you explain why?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Chair, I want to thank Angela and the team at the Battered Women's Support Services. They are receiving funds through Feminists Deliver, but there are hundreds of organizations that will receive additional funds to provide the critical care that they need to support front lines and the most vulnerable in their communities, and we will have more to say soon.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Chair, we know that calls to centres like Battered Women's Support Services have gone up by 300 times, so this is a huge concern I have. What made this group of assault services and shelters ineligible?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Chair, my colleague is putting words in my mouth. As I said, hundreds of organizations like the Battered Women's Support Services are going to be receiving funds from the federal government in the coming days. We thank them for their work and we will have more to say very soon.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Chair, the need is now. For instance, at London Abused Women's Centre, calls are up by 45%. I've heard from communities where they've gone up 200%. As I said, yesterday I heard 300%. The money is needed now. Where is the money for this program?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Chair, some organizations are seeing demands up as high as 400% with their capacity limited by 400%. We've [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] centres and women's shelters, and 700 have received funds, with more to come soon.

I appreciate that this Parliament includes consensus among all colleagues that feminism and supporting women—

• (1250)

The Chair: We'll go back to Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: If we're talking about being a feminist government, I have one single question. Yesterday the minister was not willing to answer the question, so I will ask the Minister for Women and Gender Equality.

How can a feminist government support the Wet'suwet'en First Nation women whose titles were stripped from them?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Chair, it sounds like my honourable colleague wants to compare their record on advancing equality with ours. We are happy to do that, and the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations has been working very hard to move this historic agreement forward.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: These women have lost their titles, and the decisions were made with the hereditary chiefs and not the elected chiefs. Why is this government not standing up for these women hereditary chiefs who were stripped of their titles?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): Mr. Chair, I think the honourable member knows that the route to self-determination is to have first nations, Inuit, and Métis determine their own governance and abide by their own laws. Right now the Wet'suwet'en nation is in that process of determining what kind of governance they would like.

The Chair: We'll now go on to Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

The Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act has passed both houses of Congress in the United States and is now on the way to the Oval Office for signature. What is Canada's position on this Muslim minority being jailed and re-educated by the Communist Party of China?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade): Mr. Chair, we are deeply concerned by the human rights situation faced by the Uighurs and other minorities in China. This is an issue our government has raised directly with the Chinese. Canada has also repeatedly voiced its concerns at the UN Human Rights Council. We will continue to call on—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: The Burmese government is another being exploited by the CPC. Their Muslim minority was driven out and now languishes in Bangladesh, which is a commonwealth partner in the midst of this global pandemic. What will Canada do to answer the injustice done to the Rohingya?

Hon. Mary Ng: Canada will always stand with human rights. Canada has repeatedly voiced its concerns with the UN Human Rights Council. We will continue to call on the Chinese government to ensure that human rights of all of its people, including the freedom of religion, are fully respected.

Mr. David Sweet: Yesterday the rubber-stamp National People's Congress passed the national security bill undermining Hong Kong's autonomy and strengthening a grip of the Communist Party of China. Will the Prime Minister condemn this law?

Hon. Mary Ng: Canada, with our international partners in the U.S., Australia and the U.K., made a joint statement in which we are expressing our deep concern regarding China's imposition of a new security law for Hong Kong.

Mr. David Sweet: Canada has an admirable history of doing the right thing and helping when the situation is bleak. The Suez Canal, Cyprus, the fall of apartheid, child and maternal health in Africa, and Afghanistan are examples in my lifetime of how Canada has weighed in significantly. Why is the government letting down Hong Kong?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, with hundreds of thousands of Canadians living in Hong Kong, we have a vested interest in Hong Kong's stability and prosperity, the foundations of which are Hong Kong's relative autonomy and basic freedoms. Canada will always

support and promote freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedoms of the press around the world.

Mr. David Sweet: I think the 300,000 Canadians who are in Hong Kong want a little bit more than interest from the government. They'd like some action.

What exactly is the government going to do to help those 300,000 Canadians who are in the breach between democracy and tyranny now?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, Canada has expressed deep concern regarding China's imposition of the new security law for Hong Kong. The proposed law would undermine the one country, two systems framework. We are going to continue to support and promote freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of the press around the world.

• (1255)

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, I have deep concern. After being fired at with pepper bullets and tear gas yesterday, 300 students were arrested in Hong Kong while peacefully protesting.

Where is the outrage from this government with regard to what the CPC is doing in Hong Kong?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, as we have said, we are deeply concerned about the arrests of political figures and about the law that has been imposed on Hong Kong. As we have said, Canada will always stand up and support freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, I'm going to give the minister another opportunity to answer the third question that I asked.

Yesterday, the rubber-stamp National People's Congress passed the national security bill, undermining Hong Kong's autonomy and strengthening the iron grip of the Chinese Communist Party. Will this government condemn that law today?

Hon. Mary Ng: Canada will continue to support Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and freedoms under the Basic Law and the one country, two systems framework. Canada and our international partners, with the U.S., Australia and the U.K., have made a joint statement deeply expressing our concern regarding China's imposition of a new security law for Hong Kong.

[Translation]

The Chair: The floor goes to Mr. Lévis.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Some hon. members: Ha, ha!

Hon. Steven Blaney: I am pleased to represent the city of Lévis, because it is a privilege, Mr. Chair. It is the city where Alphonse Desjardins, who spearheaded the largest financial cooperative movement, was born. I hope you will not take that away from my time.

My question is for the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. On April 8, the minister announced measures for the Canada summer jobs program. We thought it was to improve the program, but can the minister confirm that the budget remained the same between April 7 and 9?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion): Mr. Chair, I can confirm that we have increased the wage subsidies for Canada student jobs. We have added flexibilities, including the ability to have part-time work and the ability to have the jobs extended until February of next year.

That said, the budget was not changed. It remains at 70,000 job placements for 70,000 students, with 100% of them being subsidized at 100%.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: The minister confirms that the budget remains the same, but that by subsidizing each job more, they are reducing the number of jobs in the midst of the pandemic.

Why reduce the number of jobs offered by our businesses in the midst of the pandemic, when our young people want to work?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, I can assure the member, all members and all Canadians that despite the fact that he's singling out the Canada summer jobs program, we also created an additional 76,000 jobs through our youth employment and skills strategy, with an additional 40,000 placements for students. I can assure the member that we are—

[Translation]

The Chair: The floor goes to Mr. Blaney once again.

Hon. Steven Blaney: How many jobs are vacant right now? The program is lagging behind compared to other years. Why, and how is it that there is still money to be invested in our businesses to create summer jobs?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, we are not lagging behind whatsoever. We created flexibilities in Canada summer jobs so that we can assuredly fill all of these 70,000 positions. We are rolling them out in waves. There are 45,000 jobs up on our job bank. I can assure young Canadians that there is work for them there, and I encourage them to check out the job bank.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: The minister confirms that there are delays in the midst of the pandemic, when the university year is over and businesses are waiting to hire young people. Why refuse to create additional jobs this year under the Canada summer jobs program, when businesses need them to adjust to the pandemic?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, I can assure you that we are not refusing to create any additional jobs. We've increased the number of jobs funded through our government's youth programs by over 100%. There are a number of jobs. We've added flexibilities

into the Canada summer jobs program to maximize that program in ways that it never would have been maximized had we not done this. I can assure the member opposite that we are doing our utmost to make sure that young people have good-quality job experiences this summer.

• (1300)

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: When the minister says “maximize,” she is actually saying that there are fewer jobs this year for young people because the budget has remained the same, but that each position is funded more.

My question is very simple: why not fund more jobs through the Canada summer jobs program instead of having open-ended programs like the Canada emergency student benefit, which does not allow young people to get work experience? We need young people and they want to work.

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I agree, absolutely, that we need young people to work this summer. That's why we're creating a number of opportunities through a number of programs, Mr. Chair.

Canada summer jobs is being maxed out, and that's a good thing, because we've increased the number of jobs and added an additional 76,000 jobs. I can assure the member that we're creating so many jobs, and it's so exciting for our young people.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: The Canada emergency student benefit does not encourage young people to go to work, and employers have difficulty hiring them. Yet they had applied for the Canada summer jobs program.

Why not enhance the Canada summer jobs program?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, I'm sure the member opposite is not implying that offering young people income support that they take out of necessity will make them not want to work. Young people want to work. They want to serve in their communities. That's why we're creating these additional jobs beyond the Canada summer jobs program. That's why we've increased the flexibilities in the Canada summer jobs program. It's so we can maximize these programs.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yesterday my colleague asked the Minister of Public Safety a question, and he did not get a good answer.

Why are asylum seekers being allowed to cross the closed border and reunify with their families when Canadians are not being allowed to reunify with their counterparts in the U.S.?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, to correct an error that was just repeated, we have put in rules that have excluded people from non-essential travel. We currently have an agreement with the United States that people crossing our border irregularly are being directed back to the United States. We've put in protection for those individuals to uphold our international obligations. We're continuing to deal with the—

The Chair: We'll go back to Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Chair, I have in my riding a pregnant woman who is having her first child. The father of the baby is not being allowed to come over. I have another citizen who's married to an American woman who needs medical services every three weeks who is not being allowed to go over and come back.

I also have parents who have not seen their children in months because they're not allowing custody arrangements between Canadians and Americans to continue.

Will the minister create exemptions to allow the reunification of these Canadians with their family?

Hon. Bill Blair: I thank the member for an important question.

It is never our intention to keep families apart. At the same time, we are exercising all due diligence to ensure that we prevent non-essential travel to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

We've been working very hard to ensure that we have a solution for those individuals who need and want to reunite with their families. We will have further information on that as soon as we're able to resolve that difficulty.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Chair, the Minister of Agriculture has known there's been a capacity issue on cattle processing for more than a year and has done nothing. We don't have a BSE exemption that would allow us to use American processors, and there's been no incentive to create additional capacity to process.

How bad does it have to get for the minister to act?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): We have done a great deal for the meat sector lately. We have invested \$100 million in the beef and pork sectors through the AgriRecovery program. That's a significant increase, because in the last few years the program has provided between \$7 million and \$15 million only. That is significant.

We have also invested \$77.5 million to improve the capacity of processors—

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go back to Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: It still hasn't solved the problem. That's not a beef burger; that's a nothing burger.

What is the minister going to do to help the cattle farmers who are struggling, especially in this pandemic?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, once again, we have helped the meat sector through the AgriRecovery program and we have put in place a \$77.5 million program to help meat processors

deal with the situation and reorganize their work environment in a way that is safe for workers—

[*English*]

The Chair: We will go back to Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: It's not enough for the farmers in my area.

To the Minister of National Revenue, I've had complaints from seniors in my riding that paper tax filings are not being processed. They're sitting on desks because people are not going in to the office.

When will we begin to process those paper tax filings so seniors can get the refunds they need?

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Chair, we consider this to be a difficult situation for Canadians, and our government will do everything it can to support them.

I can confirm that the CRA is still processing paper returns, but because of the reduced staff on site and the physical distancing, Canadians can expect delays. We regret the inconvenience this causes for those who file their returns on paper—

The Chair: We will go back to Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The sound is not very good. This happens when ministers respond in the House.

The Chair: We will talk to the technicians about that. I'm not sure whether there's anything we can do now, but we'll see if we can sort it out for the next meeting. It will certainly be fixed by next Monday. In the meantime, we will do our best.

Thank you very much for your comment.

[*English*]

We go back to Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Chair, obviously with COVID, many people are struggling with the loss of loved ones and their grief. The Canadian Grief Alliance has submitted a proposal looking for a very modest sum of funding from the government to extend their virtual grief counselling.

Can the Minister of Health let us know if that funding has been approved?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health): I'm not aware of that specific proposal, but I commit to asking my officials to bring it forward to me and I will take a look.

The Chair: Ms. Gladu, you have time for a 15-second question.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Many are struggling with mental health in this pandemic. Can the Minister of Health tell us what she is doing to increase the capacity to help people who are suffering?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I know I don't have much time, but let me repeat our infomercial to Canadians. They should visit Wellness Together Canada, the portal that will provide access for Canadians to a variety of mental health supports, including connection to professionals.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, you have the floor.

I'm sorry, Mr. Champoux; you are next. Mr. Waugh now has the floor.

[*English*]

Oh, it's Mr. Waugh. My apologies.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Major events and mass gatherings being really out of the conversation for the foreseeable future, many event venues right now, such as concert halls and fairgrounds, are looking at the possibility of going more than a year without any revenue. Many are owned or managed by non-profit organizations. I can think of many in my riding, such as the Saskatoon Fringe Festival, Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan, the jazz festival, the folk festival, along with WDM and the Aviation Museum.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell us what support has been made available to date to these organizations that are left up in the air?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, Lib.): As the member knows, we have done a number of things in the past weeks to help the arts and culture sector. We could talk about the Canadian emergency response benefit, or the wage subsidy.

We have provided advance help to a number of organizations from Canadian Heritage programs or the Canada Council for the Arts on top of the \$500-million program, which has started to be deployed and will continue to be deployed in the coming weeks specifically for these types of organizations.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Many media organizations are struggling. The reality only makes the allegations of predatory behaviour being levied against the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation even more disturbing.

I asked the minister on May 7 about these allegations, and he said he had not been informed of the allegations but would look in to them.

We can't afford to have a Crown corporation using its status to try to wipe out its competitors in this country. Has the minister begun the investigation into the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and does he have any information that he can share with us here today?

• (1310)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As the member said, these are allegations, and as you well know, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is an independent body. It's not controlled by the Minister of Canadian Heritage or the government.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Well, these allegations were in the National Post on April 22. I brought this up to you on May 7 when I talked virtually.

Even more interesting, Mr. Chair, is that these allegations against the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation came from an organization in the minister's own province of Quebec, so can the minister take action to address any predatory behaviour on behalf of the CBC, or can the government's friends at the CBC simply get away with anything?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Allegations are allegations, whether they are made in Quebec, Ontario or Alberta. As I said, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is an independent organization.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: When I last rose, on May 7, the committee responsible for the government's massive \$595-million media bailout package had not met. It is now three weeks later.

Has the committee met? If yes, when can the media organizations—and I hear there are only 29 publishers—expect the support promised? If it hasn't met, when is it going to meet?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As the member is well aware, this program is a tax-break program. In order for organizations to qualify, they had to file their income tax forms, which they have done over the last few weeks. The program is in place, and we are confident that media organizations will receive the money by the end of the summer.

The Chair: Mr. Waugh, go ahead with a 20-second question, hopefully.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: There was \$30 million rolled out to media organizations, some 1,400 organizations. Yesterday Postmedia announced another 40 layoffs.

Has the \$30 million been distributed so far in this country to all 1,400 media organizations?

The Chair: Honourable minister, go ahead for 20 seconds or less, please.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would be happy to provide the list of those 1,400 media organizations that have received funding through that ad campaign.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will continue with Mr. Champoux.

You have the floor, Mr. Champoux.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Chair, I'm feeling generous today, and I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères.

At the beginning of the crisis, the government called on entrepreneurs in Quebec and Canada, inviting them to set an example in the situation we are experiencing. Many of them turned to the supplemental unemployment benefit (SUB) plan to maintain the employment relationship and to preserve some security, enabling their employees to get through this difficult period with more peace of mind.

However, on May 22, despite the fact that these entrepreneurs had made sure that the SUB program would still be in place when the CERB was introduced, they were surprised. Employees were told at that time that they would have to repay the CERB because of the alleged gains they had made under the SUB program. At SO-PREMA, one of the large employers in the Drummondville region, 150 employees are affected. At Bridgestone, in Joliette, 1,100 employees are affected by this decision. At Goodyear, in Valleyfield, 150 employees are affected, and there are dozens more.

Does the minister intend to correct this mistake so that employers who are able and willing to do so can treat their employees better during this difficult period?

• (1315)

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: When we put in place the Canada emergency response benefit, the underlying goal was to make sure that every worker who needed it had access to income support as they were losing their employment for COVID reasons. We understood that meant some workers would not have access moving forward, although let me clarify that SUB plans that existed prior to March 15 are definitely in place. We consider the fact that workers have access to \$1,000 a month in addition to CERB—and we've spoken with employers about this—to permit employers to assist their employees in an equitable way.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, you have 15 seconds for your question.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Chair, employers received absolutely no news from the government before this measure was implemented, despite the fact that they were assured that this measure would be transferred to the CERB. That's not an answer when those folks acted honestly and in good faith. They feel cheated, and rightly so.

Does the government intend to fix this mistake, which would simply be the right thing to do?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, I can assure the member opposite that the SUB plans that were in place prior to March 15 are indeed in place now. In addition, employees who are now on the CERB as an alternative have access to \$1,000 of income in addition to their CERB. We are working with employers to perhaps provide the \$1,000 in lieu of the SUB plans.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will continue with you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On April 27, Option consommateurs sent a letter to the Minister of Transport to warn him that the airlines' refusal to reimburse their customers for cancelled flights was contrary to Quebec's laws.

What is the minister going to do to put an end to this situation?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport): Mr. Chair, I sympathize with the people who would have preferred to get a refund, and I understand their frustration. It is not an ideal situation. The airlines are going through a very difficult time right now. If they were forced to refund their customers immediately, many of them would go bankrupt.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Chair, the minister sounds like a broken record.

A few hours ago, the following motion was passed unanimously: "THAT the National Assembly ask the Government of Canada to order airlines and other carriers under federal jurisdiction to allow customers whose trips have been cancelled because of the current pandemic to obtain a refund."

What will the Minister of Transport tell the National Assembly of Quebec?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, as my hon. colleague knows, the Canadian Transportation Agency has ruled on this issue and has ruled that, in the present circumstances and in a non-binding way, it is acceptable for airlines to offer credits for up to two years. In the case of Air Canada, the credit has no expiry date.

The Chair: Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have about 15 seconds for a question.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Chair, I find it rather odd that the Minister of Transport and the Canadian Transportation Agency are telling the airlines that Quebec's regulations and laws are not important and that they can override them. It seems to me that this is a strange way to operate. Theoretically, under the famous Canadian Constitution, which they imposed on us, that is not how it should work.

Can they uphold their own constitution?

The Chair: The hon. minister can answer in 15 seconds or less, please.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, as my hon. colleague probably knows, the Canadian Transportation Agency is a quasi-judicial body that operates at arm's length from Transport Canada and the Government of Canada.

The Chair: We will now take a short break.

[English]

We're going to take a short break to allow employees supporting the meeting to switch in safety, including myself.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): We will now carry on with Mr. Baker for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Baker, go ahead.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'll be sharing my time with the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

My question is for the Minister of Health.

Minister, in Etobicoke Centre, we are mourning the loss of 42 residents to COVID-19 at the Eatonville Care Centre. This week, we received a disturbing report from the Canadian Armed Forces documenting appalling and completely unacceptable conditions in the Eatonville Care Centre in Etobicoke, Orchard Villa in Pickering, Altamont Care Community in Scarborough, Hawthorne Place in North York, and Holland Christian Homes Grace Manor in Brampton.

It is beyond reprehensible that our seniors are being treated this way. As I said in the House of Commons on May 7, we need immediate action and comprehensive reform of long-term care. The four other MPs who represent the residents of these homes and I wrote to Premier Ford yesterday to urge him to appoint a third party manager to oversee all operations, to call a full public inquiry—because a government commission is not enough—and to work in partnership with the Government of Canada to establish enforceable national standards for long-term care homes across our country.

• (1320)

Minister, will you call on the Government of Ontario to establish a full public inquiry, and will you work with provincial governments to establish and implement enforceable national standards for long-term care homes across Canada so that our seniors from coast to coast to coast can receive the quality of care they deserve?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the member for his very important question. I think all Canadians were horrified, shocked and saddened to hear about the conditions that elders were living in in those particular homes and that many seniors struggle with across the country. There is no question that we have to do better for our seniors.

I know the Prime Minister has been very vocal about the need to do more to support provinces and territories to provide better care for seniors, no matter where they live.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Mr. Baker, you have another 20 seconds or so if you can manage that.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you. I'll pass on my time to the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to Mr. Drouin, member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Chair, we know that farmers across Canada have been going through some difficult times in recent months. In my riding, farmers are looking for labour and young people are looking for jobs. The Canada summer jobs program plays a vital role in meeting this demand. I was very pleased to hear that the government has en-

hanced the youth employment and skills strategy program to help create 700 new jobs for young people in the agriculture sector.

Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell us when and how our farmers will be able to apply for this new program?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, in these unprecedented times, our producers are working that much harder to feed Canadians while facing challenges that are not always easy, particularly in terms of access to labour.

To help them, this week, the Prime Minister announced an increase in the youth employment and skills strategy program to help young people be hired in the agricultural sector.

This is a \$9.2-million investment that will help to attract young Canadians between the ages of 15 and 30 and to provide them with an exceptional experience in the agricultural sector.

I encourage all producers to apply through the Agriculture Canada website.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I think you finished, Mr. Drouin.

[English]

We'll move on now to Mr. Johns, Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, I'll be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg Centre.

In early April, the NDP asked for a commercial rent abatement program so that tenants could apply for help instead of depending on their landlords, but the government chose to leave commercial tenants helpless if their landlord can't or does not want to apply. On Monday we wrote to ministers again, asking them to negotiate a nationwide moratorium on commercial rent evictions with the provinces and territories so that tenants can't be kicked out.

Will the minister take action to ensure that no small business owner is evicted during COVID-19?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We recognize the challenges that small business owners in particular, as well as landlords, are facing during the course of COVID-19. We have worked together with the provinces to come up with an approach that would provide an incentive for landlords to give a rent reduction to commercial tenants. We opened that as of Monday.

Of course, we recognize that this is a jurisdiction of the provinces, so it will be up to the provinces to consider the next steps, if any, in this regard. We are looking toward seeing many landlords sign up for this. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage landlords to sign up for this, which not only gives them a sense of security but also their tenants.

Mr. Gord Johns: That's a no, so the government is still failing small businesses. If small business owners can't make June rent, thousands will have to close permanently. If the government won't negotiate a moratorium, will it at least let tenants apply for the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program so they can get help with 50% of their rent?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Again, Mr. Chair, I think it's important that we have clarity of understanding of jurisdictions. We have worked with the provinces in this regard. The federal government is working through the CMHC to provide support to landlords, which is conditional on their working with their tenants, but of course, it is a provincial area of jurisdiction, so any further actions and any decisions on restricting evictions are in the provincial jurisdiction and not ones that the federal government is able to move forward on.

• (1325)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to Ms. Gazan, Winnipeg Centre.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, they talk about wanting to support small businesses, but their failure to make rent support work is putting businesses out of business. When it comes to the rent for people's homes, the government didn't even try. Many people in my riding could not make rent on April 1 and May 1, and June 1 is coming up.

When will the government act to ensure that families and individuals make their rent payments?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, for individuals, of course we've worked hard to provide support. Over eight million individuals are taking the Canada emergency response benefit. For businesses, of course, we've put in place not only the business account for small businesses but additional support through the wage subsidy program. We know that the rent approach is one that can have an important impact. I would encourage landlords to—

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Ms. Gazan, just a moment.

Go ahead on your point of order.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I just want to remind my honourable colleague that his response is supposed to be within the same time period as the question I asked. It's just a friendly reminder.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): That is accurate. In fact, the minister was just coming up to the same amount of time it took for your question. I am monitoring that, and we will interrupt if one of the ministers responding goes more than just a short time over. In fact, we try to cut it off at the appropriate time, allowing a word or two perhaps to finish a phrase, and that's the extent of it. I'll watch that closely, the member can be assured.

Let's go ahead then and finish up.

You have another minute and 20 seconds to finish up, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Chair, Winnipeg Centre is the third-poorest riding in the country, and COVID-19 has put many of the residents in my riding on the verge of homelessness. Instead of bailing out its corporate buddies, when will this government provide proper

rental assistance so that families and individuals do not end up on the streets?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development): Mr. Chair, we have provided support for families and individuals to maintain their ability to pay the rent. In addition to that, we have provided over \$157.5 million directly to community entities for homelessness all across Canada .

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Ms. Gazan, you have about 40 seconds remaining.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Chair, adequate housing is a fundamental human right, especially in this time of crisis. How can the government not show leadership and provide the support that people need to afford their homes? Will this government provide support, yes or no?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, once again, we have provided support to families and individuals so that they have the ability to pay their rent and pay for essential supplies and expenses. In addition to that, we have moved additional dollars, in the amount of \$157.5 million, to the most vulnerable, including the homeless population in Canada.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We will now go to Ms. Harder from Lethbridge.

Ms. Rachael Harder: As this pandemic began to spread, the government propagated China's talking points about how human-to-human transmission was impossible. Now, I'm sure that the minister regrets those comments. Does she acknowledge that they were misleading?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, the member opposite's continued lack of awareness of how science works is somewhat disconcerting. I'm sure she understands that this is a novel coronavirus that appeared on the scene in late December, and as the research community worldwide struggled to keep pace with understanding how the virus was adapting, the information changed. As such—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll go back to Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I'm simply wondering if the minister would like to do the honourable thing and acknowledge that that information was misleading.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, since the very beginning, we have been advising Canadians that they need to protect themselves from the novel coronavirus. We have taken strong measures, as a country, to do so. We respect the professionals—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll go back to Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: The minister also said that face masks weren't necessary, that they wouldn't help Canadians. Would she acknowledge that that was misleading?

An hon. member: Good question.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, the party opposite, obviously, does not understand the way that research and science evolve. The member opposite is propagating information that's misleading. She is the one who is confusing Canadians.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Why is the health minister misleading the Canadian public?

• (1330)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, as the evidence changed about the novel coronavirus, as our amazing researchers gave us new evidence, we adapted to adjust our advice to Canadians.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Why is the minister not able to acknowledge that she fed the Canadian public misinformation?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, why is the member not able to understand that science evolves with new information?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Back in January when we started noticing other countries closing their borders to stop the spread of COVID-19, Conservatives asked the government if it would do the same. In response, the Prime Minister called us racist.

Does the Prime Minister still consider those who called for the closure of borders racist?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, providing misleading information to Canadians is not appropriate.

As the member opposite knows, we took strong measures at the border, as recommended by the international health regulations, and we were able to contain the virus for quite some time.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I cannot agree with the minister more that providing misinformation is, in fact, incredibly wrong, which is why the government should simply apologize to the Canadian public for telling them that there was no emergency at our doorstep, that they didn't need to wear face masks, that we didn't need to close our borders, that human contact or contraction was impossible. Those are incredibly misleading statements. Why will the minister not just do the honourable thing and retract them and apologize to the Canadian public?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I maintain that the member opposite does not understand that as new evidence comes forward, that as new advice comes forward.... Canadians understand that. I am unsure why she doesn't.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I understand that knowledge evolves. I'm just wondering if the minister will retract the statements that she made previously, now that she understands that they are misleading.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I am so proud of Canadians for being able to adapt to new evidence and public health advice as it becomes clearer and clearer what kinds of actions can protect our health. I want to thank all Canadians for having trust in the public health officials across this country.

Ms. Rachael Harder: On February 3, Conservatives called on the government to treat this virus as a public health emergency and to take immediate action. Unfortunately, Minister Hajdu scolded Conservative MPs, stating that we were spreading misinformation and trying to sensationalize the risk of the virus.

Would the minister like to apologize to the members opposite for that statement?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, very early on it was quite clear there were members of our community who were stigmatized by misinformation that was floating around in various circles in the Canadian community.

We took strong action to assure those Canadians that we would be with them as we also fought the coronavirus in Canada.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Would the minister like to retract her statement that this side of the House somehow blew this up into something bigger than it is?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, as early as January 2, Dr. Tam was convening members of the Canadian medical community to ensure that we would have a robust Canadian response to an issue of potential concern.

We have taken this virus seriously every step of the way.

Ms. Rachael Harder: In truth, Mr. Chair, while the government has told the Canadian public that the virus was not something to be concerned about, that we didn't need to close the borders and that face masks weren't necessary, they were misleading the Canadian public. Now they are crowning themselves as the arbiters of truth, spending millions of dollars to censor what information is and is not available online.

Would the minister like to respond to why she is misleading the Canadian public and then crowning her head with the ability to monitor—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We're out of time.

The honourable minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I want to thank our public health officials and medical community for their incredible work in ensuring that Canadians have accurate information about how best to protect themselves. We continue to work with the community and Canadians. Together we have managed to flatten the curve to date.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I invite the honourable member for Mégantic—L'Érable to take the floor.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One million dollars is the cost of installing air conditioning for a number of rooms in a CHSLD; it is a new fire station; it is 200 more student jobs for day camps in Quebec.

With \$1 million, the Liberal government plans to give an annual bonus to the president of the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

Does the Minister of Infrastructure agree with the bank's board, which is being so generous to its president with Canadians' money?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities): Mr. Chair, I am very proud of what our government has done to invest in communities across the country. We are investing in infrastructure. We are building by investing in renewable energy, green infrastructure and public transit, including in the member's riding. That is what we will continue to do.

I am very proud that Michael Sabia has decided to join the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

• (1335)

We are going to continue our work.

[*English*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, could the infrastructure minister explain to Canadians how it is better to give \$1 million in bonuses to the CEO of the Canada Infrastructure Bank than to invest in roads, schools, hospitals and long-term care homes?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Chair, I am very happy to explain to the member opposite that we are doing just that. Perhaps he isn't aware of our \$33 billion infrastructure program in which we are working directly with the Government of Quebec to build infrastructure that's making a huge difference, including projects in the member's riding.

We are going to continue doing that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, she is not answering the question at all.

On April 3, the previous president of the Canada Infrastructure Bank left his position for reasons that remain unclear.

How much did he receive in bonuses for his years at the helm of the Canada Infrastructure Bank?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Chair, the change of management at the Canada Infrastructure Bank marks a new phase in the development of the bank. We are working to build a modern, public infrastructure, to create jobs, and to make Canada more competitive internationally.

Mr. Luc Berthold: We are talking about the bonuses given to the president of the Canada Infrastructure Bank. We have received no answer on that.

What were the evaluation criteria that led to the decision that the former CEO had delivered a performance worthy of a bonus, when few, if any, projects were financed by the bank?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the former CEO, Pierre Lavallée, for his contribution to the establishment of this new institution. I am very proud that Michael Sabia has joined the bank.

We will continue to work to build Canada and create good jobs.

Mr. Luc Berthold: How much did he receive in bonuses?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: The range of compensation for the CEO is set by the bank and is publicly available.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Did the minister approve the bonuses paid to the former president of the Canada Infrastructure Bank?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: As I have already said, the compensation range for the CEO is determined by the bank and is public knowledge because of the legislation—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Mr. Berthold, the floor is yours.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If the new president stays in the position for five years, he could be entitled to a bonus totalling \$4 million, in addition to his salary of \$3 million. Does the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities consider that this is a good way to spend taxpayers' money?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: We have to build our country, create good short-term jobs, ensure that we have a cleaner future, invest in renewable energy and green infrastructure in order to build bridges, public transportation—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Mr. Berthold, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, if the new CEO stays in office for five years, he will be entitled to a total potential bonus of \$4 million, in addition to his salary of \$3 million.

Does the Minister of Infrastructure think this is a good way to spend taxpayers' money, yes or no?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Chair, I'm very proud that we have Michael Sabia, who is now head of the Canada Infrastructure Bank as the board chair.

We need to move forward in building infrastructure that's going to create jobs, including in the member's riding; that's going to help move us to a cleaner future; that's going to grow our economy and increase Canada's competitiveness.

The bank is a key part of the investing in Canada plan—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We will now move to Mrs. Gray, Kelowna—Lake Country.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Chair, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important it is to be able to move our goods interprovincially. Christian Buhagiar of Supply Chain Canada called for the government to revisit interprovincial trade regulations to ensure we can quickly move production and distribution from one region to another during times of emergency.

Will the government commit to immediately examine all our trade barriers that can affect interprovincial trade of essential goods due to COVID-19?

• (1340)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I'd like to thank the member opposite for her excellent point.

Our government is very committed to removing barriers to interprovincial trade. It's something that we have been working on with the premiers. Obviously the coronavirus has taken precedence in recent weeks, but it's a priority. It's the right thing to do.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Chair, the federal government has a regulatory reconciliation table as part of the Canada free trade agreement, focusing on breaking down interprovincial trade barriers. Due to COVID-19, it has been announced that deadlines for all of these items may be delayed.

What is the government doing to ensure there won't be delays on these items?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, it is absolutely right and appropriate for first ministers, who have been meeting every week for more than two months, to be focusing on the urgent threat posed by the coronavirus.

However, I agree with the member opposite that we need to lift barriers to interprovincial trade. That's something we're committed to doing and to working on with the premiers.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Chair, while many of these items were past due prior to the pandemic, two important items from the list that should be worked on now are meat inspection and food inspection.

Considering serious issues from these industries during the pandemic, would the minister commit to restarting the work on at least these two items?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can assure you, as far as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is concerned, that we are very open to that issue. Moreover, the authorities are front and centre in cases where there may be a food shortage in one region of the country or another.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Chair, COVID-19 is adding huge pressures to our national supply chain. Those I speak with in the industry tell me they are beginning to see a backlog of goods.

Does the government have a comprehensive plan to ensure the movement and resiliency of our national supply chain?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, since we are discussing the food supply chain, let me remind you that we are committed to spending \$50 million, specifically to buy surplus food and redistribute it, through the food bank network, to regions where the need is greatest.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Chair, reports state that activists' rail blockades earlier this year cost the Canadian economy \$275 million, and it took three to five days to catch up for every day that our transportation network was down. The supply chain industry just caught up, and then the pandemic hit, creating new issues and backlogs. We are hearing from those in the industry who are concerned about future blockades affecting essential goods getting across the country. Our railways are critical infrastructure.

Will the government commit to immediately dismantling any potential future blockades?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister may reply.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, I couldn't agree more with my colleague that it is important for our railways to be transporting all the goods that we produce in this country. I am in contact on a weekly basis with our major railways.

Certain products are moving very well at the moment, including grain, potash and coal, but other goods haven't moved as quickly, because they have been affected by the pandemic. We are very vigilant with respect to moving our goods as efficiently as possible, whether it's by our railways, by trucks or by ships.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Chair, at the standing committee for industry this week, David Montpetit of the Western Canadian Shippers' Coalition stated that they believe shippers are going to face a container shortage over the next six months. He also stated that we could be facing labour and capacity shortages in our trucking industry. This could backlog essential goods interprovincially, including food and medicine, if the capacity isn't there. What steps is the government taking to address this problem?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, of course it's always important to have the capacity to move goods across this country. At the moment, our trains have the capacity to move goods across the country. With respect to trucking, we do have issues with respect to a lack of truckers for moving some of our goods across the country. This is a problem that has existed for some time, and we're working on it.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now move on to Mrs. Wagantall of Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Wagantall, go ahead.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Young and new farmers are struggling, as they don't have enough equity built up to borrow money to survive these difficult times. Price insurance is key, but the premiums are so expensive due to COVID that they can't participate. Has a price insurance program been implemented in Atlantic Canada?

• (1345)

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes, Mr. Chair, we are encouraging the use of private programs, as well as the risk management programs. The initiative must come from the private sector. I cannot answer my colleague's question directly.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Has the minister worked with her provincial counterparts to secure a short-term cost-sharing agreement to reduce premiums where price insurance already exists?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I can assure my colleague that I am working very regularly with all my provincial colleagues. In addition to our individual meetings, we have a regular telephone meeting each week.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Is cost-sharing of premiums already available for crop insurance?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, for insurance protection, our proposal to the provinces is to include the possibility of recognizing a labour shortage as an insurable risk. It is up to each of the provinces to sign on to that or not.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Without price insurance, how many ranchers have had to address cash flow by selling cattle at the bottom of the market?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, we have established a number of programs in order to help our beef producers. For example, we are providing \$50 million through the AgriRecovery program and \$77.5 million for food processors.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: On May 1, the Young Cattlemen's Council asked the minister to extend the deadline for attaining calf price insurance. Today is that deadline. Did the minister meet it?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, we discuss different options with representatives of various organizations almost every day. We are trying to work with them to improve the various pro-

grams and to meet their needs, in addition to the risk management programs, of course.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: She didn't respond to the request of the Young Cattlemen's Council.

The minister is telling farmers to access the BRM program, but just now I got a text from a young cattleman in my riding who's losing \$250 to \$300 per head and just told me that those programs in no way increase their capacity to deal with this crisis. The Farm Credit Canada lending capacity was increased by \$5 billion, but only to service and manage loans of current customers. How many farmers have applied for that assistance?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: However, Mr. Chair, there is a whole range of programs for our producers, whether they be specific programs for the agriculture sector, or the Canada emergency business account, the CEBA, the criteria of which have been broadened. This allows us to provide more loans, also with a forgivable portion of 25%, which could amount to \$670 million for the agricultural sector.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: What percentage of Canada's farmers are customers of Farm Credit Canada?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, Farm Credit Canada is well-established from one end of the country to the other and it is ready to meet the needs of our agricultural producers. In addition—

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Back to Ms. Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Of the 25% of farmers who use FCC and have applied, how many have received assistance?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I stand to be corrected but, according to the most recent information I have received, \$4 billion in flexible loans to producers have been made available since the crisis began.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): You have 45 seconds left, Ms. Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Is the minister concerned that cow-calf numbers will sharply decrease if producers aren't able to protect the value of their herds, which they cannot do, jeopardizing the future of the Canadian beef supply chain?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I can assure you that I am extremely concerned about the future of the agri-food sector. That is why we are working extremely hard with the sector every day to improve existing programs and create new ones, especially in support of the meat industry.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: They made it clear that the BRM programs don't work and there's not funding in place to assist them. Three weeks ago, the processing backlog was more than 100,000 head.

How many beef operations are facing the real danger of going out of business because of this pandemic and the lack of support by the agriculture minister and this Liberal government?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Once again, Mr. Chair, we know that the risk-management programs are not perfect. That is why we are working with the provinces to find solutions. These are shared-cost programs with the provinces and we want to improve them. This is why we are trying to incorporate some flexibility. In addition, we are supplementing the funding, especially for the meat industry.

• (1350)

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to Ms. Wilson-Raybould in Vancouver Granville.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Minister of Employment has stated that measures would be forthcoming for individuals with disabilities, similar to the one-time payment increase given to seniors on OAS and GIS.

Could the minister please provide some more details with respect to the statement she made? When can individuals with disabilities expect meaningful financial assistance?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, we know that Canadians with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by COVID in terms of both their own personal health and the access to supports that they have, or don't have, more specifically. We are three days away from National AccessAbility Week, the first week after we legislated it in the Accessible Canada Act. I would expect something from our government during that week.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Thank you for that.

My office has heard from many constituents who are frustrated over the lack of information on eligibility requirements from the government regarding the business credit availability program. Furthermore, banks are giving small and medium-sized businesses mixed messaging.

How will the government ensure that the messaging for BCAP and similar programs is articulated properly?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Mary Ng: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the honourable member for her question. Nothing is more important to us right now than making sure our small and medium-sized businesses are supported. The lending program through BCAP is available through financial institutions; that's banks and credit unions across the country. The money is flowing to those businesses.

I would encourage Canadian businesses to get in touch with their financial institutions.

Thank you so much.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Mr. Chair, members may not be aware, but there are ongoing restrictions on when some civil servants can access government servers and their files due to the pandemic, to ensure that those dealing directly with the pandemic have priority. For example, this is affecting negotiations with indigenous peoples.

Can the government please tell us when the system will have sufficient capacity so that all civil servants can do their work remotely and without limitation?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleague for her important question, which indeed speaks to the importance of public servants continuing their important jobs for Canadians, being mindful, of course, of the difficult circumstances in which many of those workers find themselves, both personally and professionally.

We know that, in particular, indigenous communities need that support, and particularly so in the context of the crisis. We look forward to continuing to support them.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: As current and former parliamentarians call for a national inquiry into long-term care homes, something I would strongly support, can the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations please give the members an idea as to when the action plan on murdered and missing indigenous women and girls will be released?

In asking this question, I certainly understand the need for consultation and the reality of some delays due to the pandemic.

There are of course many actions that we all know need to take place now that do not need more consultation. The need for consultation cannot be an excuse for the lack of action.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I thank the member for her ongoing advocacy.

As we approach the first anniversary of the release of the final report, we are grateful for the work of all of our partners as they really try to do what they can to end this national tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and those who are two-spirited, plus.

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, they have put in good initiatives, and we look forward to releasing a national action plan that will include all provinces and territories as well as all of our indigenous governments and partners.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Ms. Wilson-Raybould, you're down to about the last 30 seconds, so please ask a short question.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: I have a short question for the Minister of Transport.

Does the government have any plans to step in and encourage airlines to return money to customers rather than vouchers? I've heard from many constituents and businesses in this regard.

• (1355)

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, as I mentioned before, we're very sympathetic to the situation that those who would have preferred a refund are in at the moment. However, the airlines are going through an extremely difficult time, and if they had to reimburse at this time, some of them could fail.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by indicating that I'll be splitting my time with the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Across the country, a lot of Canadians are preparing to go back to work right now and some employers are doing a good job of ensuring that there is a safe workplace, with the right procedures and the right equipment. Unfortunately, some employers are not. For Canadians who are employed by them, that means making a really tough decision between going back to a workplace where they don't feel safe and which may present a threat to their families or communities, and staying home and worrying about not being paid because they're not at work or because they will lose access to the CERB.

I am wondering what guidance the federal government has for people who feel that their workplace is not safe at this time and that their employer hasn't done its due diligence, and are concerned about losing access to the CERB.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, we are very concerned about the safety of our workplaces and we don't want workers to feel unsafe as they go back to work. However, we do want people to go back to work.

We are working very closely with the provinces. The Minister of Health is working on occupational health and safety guidelines. The Minister of Labour is working with her colleagues. We are taking an all-of-government approach to ensure that workers are safe, that they don't have to put their lives or the health of their families in jeopardy and that we can support them in these efforts.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Chair, I think the issue here is that Canadian workers really need some certainty about what the federal government would consider an adequate employment offer, or an offer to come back to work, so that they wouldn't be on the CERB. Can Canadians be confident that they can stay on the CERB whether they go back to work or not, whether their employer makes them an offer or not? I think a lot of people have anxiety about this and it's a difficult time.

When is the government going to release some formal guidance on how people go about refusing unsafe work?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, we know that the provinces have their own workers' compensation programs and refusal-to-work mechanisms, but the point for us, here in government, is to work with employers and with the provinces so that we make our workplaces safe.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: But this is about CERB eligibility. I respect—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. Mr. Blaikie, we have run out of time since we are splitting the time between two speakers.

We're now going to Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Canadians depend on municipalities across Canada for vital services, especially during this pandemic—services like transit, drinking water, parks and sanitation—yet the government has left municipalities in an unprecedented financial crisis. Local government leaders across the country have called on the government for help, yet mostly what we've heard are excuses.

Does the minister acknowledge that the federal government has a leadership role to play in getting financial help to municipalities at this difficult time?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: What we do acknowledge is the essential role municipalities play in our country at all times, and the particularly essential role they play today as our country gets ready to restart our economy.

We are working closely with the municipalities to talk about ways we can support them and are working closely with the provinces, in whose jurisdiction the municipalities fall.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Through you to the minister, we've seen deep cuts and more cuts are on the way. We've seen thousands of municipal workers laid off, and it's been over a month since municipal leaders called on this government for emergency financial relief.

My question is very simple. When can the municipalities expect the help they need from the federal government?

• (1400)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Let me just say again, Mr. Chair, that we are extremely alive to the importance of municipalities in our economy. We are very aware of the difficult financial situation they find themselves in, and we are very aware of how important it is to keep our municipalities functioning, particularly as we move into the restart.

We're working with municipalities and are urging them to work with their provinces, as we are doing too.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We have about 30 seconds left. Go ahead, Mr. Bachrach, for 30 seconds.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I have a very simple question, through you to the minister. Are there emergency federal dollars on the table for Canada's cities, yes, or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, the federal government very much understands and appreciates the importance of municipalities. We are prepared to support them. Provinces need to do their share too.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I now invite the honourable member for Manicouagan to take the floor.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At a time when we are asking our fellow citizens and Quebecers to make sacrifices and even greater efforts, the Liberal Party, the government, is directly pilfering from a subsidy program that should be going to those who need it, not to rich political parties and their millionaire supporters.

At a time when the work in the House is even more essential—we should be working even harder, just as we are asking the people to do—the government, with the complicity of the NDP, decides to suspend the work of the House. This is the result of an absurd agreement that is absolutely impossible for it to implement.

Can the government confirm to the House, and simultaneously to the NDP, that the measure involving 10 days of leave is absolutely not something it can do?

It is not in its jurisdiction, so it is a measure that it cannot implement.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Chair, in order to be part of any agreement, you have to negotiate and be sitting at the table. The Bloc Québécois says it wants to make gains for Quebec, but in order to do that, it must be sitting at the table, not outside the room. It's like a hockey game; if you want to score goals, you have to be on the ice.

The other day, I asked this question: how many of Guy Lafleur's 560 goals were scored when he was sitting on the bench?

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Let me shoot the puck back to the Leader of the Government in the House. He himself decided to close the rink, to shut down Parliament. That is where the teams are, and that is where the goals are scored.

But when you play a sport, when you are on a team, and when you are in Parliament, you still have to play by the rules. But the

government does not keep its word. It made a promise to us as well, just like it made one to the NDP. It was about the Canada emergency student benefit. The Deputy Prime Minister herself said that it was certainly a good idea. What did the government do? It backed away.

I play on a team and I play by the rules. I take it at its word because this is the right place. Here, in this chamber.

So I would like the government to tell people that this measure is absolutely not in their jurisdiction. That was my previous question. It was not about which parties were negotiating or not and when they kept their word or not. The NDP has to realize that their agreement is absolutely worthless.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, my colleague is alluding to previous current and future agreements. We have had discussions and we have reached a number of agreements with our friends in the Bloc Québécois. It was going very well, but there was one agreement they did not like and they went off and sulked.

When you are not happy, you do not go off and sulk; you stay at the table and negotiate. That is how things work.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I urge the honourable Leader of the Government to recall the House. I am ready to be here, on the ice, all the time. I must remind him that we are not sulking. The Bloc Québécois has self-respect and respect for the public.

An agreement is not a promise, it is an agreement. A word is given in dignity and sincerity; a bond of trust is created.

When a player decides not to play by the rules, I do not let myself be taken in twice. I prefer to negotiate here, as we should be doing all the time in Parliament, not trying to play with someone who never keeps his word.

• (1405)

I would just like the Leader of the Government in the House to tell us that the measure about the 10 days is not up to him and so he will not be able to make it happen.

I could also ask him whether he found out from the Government of Quebec whether it agreed with the measure.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, of course, it is not in my jurisdiction personally. We agree on that. It depends on a number of players, including the provinces and the private sector. We at federal level are holding discussions with the provinces and people in different areas. Of course, we are holding discussions with everyone involved.

I want to know what my colleague has against having six hours of questions instead of four. What does she have against the fact that, from now on, people will be able to ask questions about anything, not just about COVID-19? What does she have against the fact that we are going to meet again this summer? What is it that she does not like?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Ms. Gill, you have about 30 seconds left for your comment. Go ahead.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Let me teach the Leader of the Government in the House some arithmetic.

First, 37.5 hours per week, as well as the time we spend sitting on our normal committees, is quite a bit more than the eight short hours each week he is giving us.

Second, once again, the leader said that it is absolutely not in his jurisdiction. So he reaches agreements with parties though his word is worth nothing. I hope that the NDP has not reached an agreement with him.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, it all depends on government decisions, and clearly, we are having discussions with the provinces. Actually, we have already started doing that.

However, I still do not understand what she has against having more time than I do to ask questions. I would really like an answer from her.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We will now take a brief pause so that the technicians can spell each other off.

[*English*]

Order.

I see Mr. Bezan on a point of order.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Earlier, during the question time here, Mr. Sweet, the member for Flamborough-Glanbrook, got up and was raising a number of issues about the Hong Kong protests, where 360 people have been arrested. The People's Republic of China, the regime in Beijing, and their rubber-stamp parliament, the National People's Congress, are circumventing Hong Kong legislation and the Hong Kong government in putting their own will upon the people of Hong Kong. I believe this demands an emergency debate here in the House of Commons.

Mr. Chair, I'm asking if you would rule on this and schedule an emergency debate so that Parliament can actually discuss this crisis, this human rights crisis, as political protestors are being imprisoned because of their standing up against the communist regime in Beijing.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the honourable member, Mr. Bezan, for his point of order. It was really more of a request. He may know, and for the benefit of other honourable members, that we're operating in this Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic under the auspices of an order made earlier this week. There is no provision in that order for emergency debates.

However, I would certainly encourage him to speak with his House leader, whips and others. Of course, he'll know that discussions of this sort are being shared, so he might want to pursue that opportunity.

I see Mr. Bezan rising.

Mr. Bezan, is it a different point of order?

Mr. James Bezan: No. I'd just like to respond to that if I could.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Well, there's—

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, this is the problem with this special committee. Our rights and privileges as members have been

completely degraded. It makes it impossible for us to address the issues of this day.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Mr. Bezan, we're all operating under an order that was agreed to by the House. We'll stick to those provisions.

Again, understand the situation we're in. Certainly circumstances do change, but I leave that to the party leaders to decide.

For our last round of questions, we're going to Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Mr. Morantz.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for the Minister of National Revenue.

Minister, I've been informed by some of my colleagues that CRA officials have been directing constituents to phone their member of Parliament to resolve CRA-related issues.

Why on earth would CRA direct individuals away from the agency during this stressful time when they're just trying to get their tax information and file their taxes?

• (1410)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for that important question.

I can tell you that CRA employees have to deal with questions put to them. It is not up to MPs' offices to deal with specific questions about individual files.

[*English*]

Mr. Marty Morantz: Minister, you didn't answer the question. These are your CRA officials directing constituents away from the CRA. You really should be answering that question and not just talking about how inappropriate it is, although I appreciate that.

Also, on your website, it says that the telephone service for the individual-inquiries line will be available to Canadians until June 5, and there is no further information about further live service. When will you get your agency under control and make sure it provides an actual person on the other end of the line to provide the information that taxpayers need?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Just before we go to the minister, I would remind hon. members to address their questions through the chair. It's a little bit different from when we're questioning witnesses in a committee. We're using the rules more related to what we use in committee of the whole.

[*Translation*]

The honourable minister has the floor.

[English]

Mr. Marty Morantz: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, as far as I'm aware, this is not Parliament; this is a committee. I've been sitting on committees since October. I've talked to my colleagues, and no chair, including the chair of the finance committee, has ever asked me to address a question through the chair. So with the greatest of respect, unless this is in fact Parliament, which I'm told it's not and the Parliament voted that it's not, we really should be able to address the witnesses directly, should we not?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Thank you, Mr. Morantz. This really is a question around the way in which this special committee on COVID-19 has been structured. We're operating under the rules that were agreed to by the House in an order that was passed and adopted on Tuesday of this week, so we're bound to manage the affairs of this committee in that way, and one of those includes asking members to address their comments and questions through the chair to other hon. members. So I ask you to abide by the rules of the committee, and we'll pursue that.

Now we'll go to the response to your second question.

[Translation]

The honourable minister has the floor.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Chair, I must thank the officials who have done excellent work during this historic COVID-19 period.

I must tell you that CRA call centres are an essential service and the agency is able to answer calls quickly. The employees are answering calls from their homes.

[English]

Mr. Marty Morantz: Some of my colleagues have spoken to the CRA about drop-off boxes for paper returns actually being removed at some locations, citing COVID-19 as a reason. Has the CRA removed these boxes at all locations? Given this, will you commit today to make paper filing postage-free, since paper filers can no longer drop off their returns at all of the locations?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for that important question.

At the CRA, we continue to process paper returns and to do the work that we usually do.

I repeat, I must highlight the exceptional work that the agency employees are doing.

[English]

Mr. Marty Morantz: On the subject of paper returns, there have been numerous reports—in fact I asked you on May 10 for a writ-

ten response at the government operations committee, OGGO, which I have not yet received—on the delays in processing paper returns. Apparently this is still ongoing. When will Canadians who filed paper forms have their returns processed so they can get the refunds they need during this difficult time?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Chair, I can confirm that the Canada Revenue Agency continues to process paper returns. Because of COVID-19, we have had to implement distancing measures to protect the employees.

• (1415)

We must ensure that employees are safe, but we continue to process paper returns.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Mr. Morantz, you have about 45 seconds left. Go ahead with your question.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Sure, Mr. Chair.

During this crisis, the problem of illegal tax evasion and avoidance has been highlighted. The minister has been the minister since 2015 and should be able to answer this question off the top of her head.

How many successful prosecutions have there been in Canada for the illegal use of tax havens?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Chair, as we have said, one of our government's priorities was to invest almost \$1 billion to establish a system intended to fight tax evasion. That was not at all a priority under the Conservatives.

We continue to do that important work for taxpayers; everyone must pay their fair share.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): That concludes the 13th meeting of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

[English]

Speaker Rota asked me to remind all honourable members that during the next meeting, which will be next Monday, we'll be watching more carefully the time for members' statements. We're allowed one minute. We ask members who are providing those by virtual conference to time their statements to within one minute, as he will start to cut off members who go beyond the one minute.

With that, this committee stands adjourned until Monday at noon.

Enjoy the weekend.

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