



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 008**

Thursday, May 14, 2020

---

Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota





## Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic

Thursday, May 14, 2020

• (1200)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order. Welcome to the eighth meeting of the House of Commons Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic. Today's meeting will, of course, be taking place by video conference.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, please activate your mike and when you are not speaking, please make sure that your mike is on mute, as it makes it easier for everyone.

[Translation]

I also remind hon. members that, if they wish to speak in English, they must choose the English channel and if they wish to speak in French, they must choose the French channel. If they wish to use both languages, they must change the interpretation channel to correspond to the language they are using.

In addition, I ask hon. members to address their remarks to the Chair. They must speak slowly and clearly at all times in order to help the interpreters. I cannot emphasize that enough. The interpreters work hard: they have to listen to what members are saying and then interpret their words. That is not always easy, especially when members reply to a question quickly or ask a question quickly.

Finally, we strongly recommend that those who are going to speak use a headset. We would be grateful for that. Yesterday, I noticed that almost everyone was wearing a headset and that everyone who spoke was wearing one. Hon. members and the interpreters are grateful to them for that.

[English]

We'll now proceed to ministerial announcements. I understand there are no ministerial announcements today. We'll proceed then to the presentation of petitions for a period not exceeding 15 minutes. I would like to remind the honourable members that any petition presented during the meeting of the special committee must have already been certified by the clerk of petitions. Our first petition goes to Mr. Julian.

Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure for me to present a petition on motion number M-1, regarding the green new deal, on behalf of dozens of residents

of Toronto and Scarborough, Ontario. They're joining their voices to the thousands of Canadians who have signed this petition thus far. All of them are calling on the Government of Canada to address this climatic emergency with the ambition and urgency required on behalf of present and future generations. Reconciliation with indigenous peoples and the recognition of inherent rights must be at the heart of Canada's approach to addressing the climate emergency. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to support my motion M-1, a made-in-Canada green new deal that calls on Canada to fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to take bold and rapid action to tackle the climate emergency and address worsening inequalities at the same time, and to support workers impacted by the transition to a clean and renewable energy economy that will create well-paid jobs across Canada.

• (1205)

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

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to have my house as part of the House of Commons or the House of Commons as part of my house. Last night I was asking my wife for permission to speak. I think this is getting a little bit too far into my homeland, but it's great to be here and thank you for giving us the opportunity.

I have two petitions today. One of them also is for motion M-1. Mr. Julian will be glad to hear that people from Guelph are also signing on to that petition. We have 263 signatures on motion M-1, which is looking at creating a made-in-Canada green new deal as part of our climate change and social change discussions going forward.

I also have a second petition signed by 108 people in Guelph around electoral reform. That's still an issue within Guelph that people would like us to be looking at and addressing. There is a group in Guelph that's proposed a local proportional representation idea that they would like us to consider as a government.

**The Chair:** Now we'll go on to Mr. McKay.

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's always a pleasure to see you, virtual or otherwise. Congratulations on your impending birthday.

I have two petitions to present.

The first one is from some concerned Somali Canadians who are concerned about the increasing violence in their homeland. They're asking that the House of Commons adopt a resolution condemning the encouragement of violence through incitement, hate, foreign payments, supporting hate and hostility by militias that may cause instability in a peaceful and stable Somaliland.

The second petition is from 41 signatories from the Canadian Federation of University Women in Scarborough. They're calling upon the government to introduce a bill that would require all judges to take training in sexual assault law, as it is a promise made by the Liberal Party in the last election.

**The Chair:** We'll now move along to Mr. Ferguson.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am very pleased to present a petition on behalf of 553 residents of Hull—Aylmer. It asks the Government of Canada to introduce a bill to protect us from massive purchases of Canadian medications, to prevent those medications from leaving our country, and to avoid potential shortages, or interruptions in supply.

This petition was started by a veteran in my constituency, Jocelyn Démétré. His wife suffers from a serious illness and needs the supply of medications to be uninterrupted. They are concerned. There is some unrest in the United States and some Americans have said that they should perhaps come to buy their medications in Canada. That is why they are proposing this petition.

Mr. Chair, while I have your attention, I would like to emphasize something. Yesterday, the hon. member for Carleton presented a petition on which I worked with him. Very honourably, he apologized for presenting a petition when I was the one who had it certified. I am grateful to the hon. member for having pointed out my interest in that petition.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ferguson.

Ms. May, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is an honour to have an opportunity in our virtual Parliament, and it certainly is lovely to see the faces of so many friends.

The petition I'm honoured to present today deals with an issue that we've become sharply aware of during the pandemic, which is that so many workers on the front lines, so many workers who are underpaid, are women. This petition calls for legislation at long last to ensure pay equality and pay equity and to make sure that women in Canada are treated absolutely as we are—equals.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** The next petition will go to Mr. Johns.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This petition couldn't be more timely given that it is on the morning of the announcement for independent fish harvesters, which overall was a good announcement, Mr. Chair.

This petition is about licensing and the inequality of licensing in British Columbia. With so much corporate and investor ownership of licences, we want to make sure that government, in that funding, makes sure that it goes to those who need it. and not those who don't.

The petition is with regard to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, which provided 20 recommendations to government last May. The consultations with independent fish harvesters, community organizations and industry identified the need for transparent fishing licensing and quota ownership. It is currently not known where the benefits are, or if fishery resources are truly flowing. Some of them are foreign owned, and we don't even know who owns the fish licences.

Right now this is certainly more important than ever. Many of the fish harvesters are locked into agreements based on last year's prices, and they're going to be bankrupt before they even leave the dock. We're disappointed that this wasn't addressed. They're calling on the government to commit to a timeline and a plan that respects and addresses the 20 recommendations laid out in the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans report entitled "West Coast Fisheries: Sharing Risks and Benefits". They're hopeful that the minister will actually take action for this season and make sure that there is more sharing of risks and benefits here for independent fish harvesters.

**The Chair:** Very good.

Those are all the petitions for today.

[*Translation*]

We will now proceed to questions to ministers.

[*English*]

The first question goes to Mr. Albas.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

How many people have received the CERB but should not have received it?

**The Chair:** The hon. minister has the floor.

[*English*]

Do we have someone who is on mute?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs):** Excuse me, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Sorry, I was on mute.

[*Translation*]

Our government's priority is to respond to the needs of Canadians during this economic crisis, a crisis greater than any other our generation has experienced.

[*English*]

**Mr. Dan Albas:** How many persons, Mr. Chair, have received the grant who do not deserve it?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, our priority is to support Canadians in the deepest crisis that we have experienced since the Second World War. This is what we will continue to do.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Mr. Chair, earlier this week we learned that the government has been ignoring fraud in the CERB, and today we learned that public servants have been told that eligibility has been thrown out the window. How many people have received the CERB who are not eligible for it?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, more than seven million Canadians have received the CERB, and I am delighted to be able to say that. Our country is experiencing the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. Our government is here to help, and we are proud of that.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Mr. Chair, yesterday the Minister of Employment said on CBC that it was not 200,000 people, so the government must know the number.

Will the government give Canadians a clear answer today?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, I will give Canadians a clear answer. Of course, instances of fraud will be looked into carefully. I also want to say to the member opposite that we trust Canadians. Canadians have shown tremendous resilience, tremendous dedication to the common good in this crisis, and I trust Canadians in accessing our benefits.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Mr. Chair, we're talking about cases where people are not eligible or are, in fact, engaging in fraud. Now, the CERB website says clearly that people cannot leave their jobs voluntarily and apply.

Why did the employment minister and the Prime Minister tell public servants to ignore the law passed by Parliament that states that people are only eligible for the CERB if they stopped working because of COVID-19?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, the member opposite may not appreciate, as our government does, that we are experiencing the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. That is why our government has acted, and it has acted with alacrity. We trust Canadians to do the right thing. Fraud, of course, will be investigated.

• (1215)

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Mr. Chair, memos do not write themselves. Why did the employment minister or the Prime Minister tell public servants to approve applicants who did not qualify for the CERB and are in violation of the law we passed?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, I feel, in the question periods we've had this week, that Conservatives want to have their cake and eat it too. Half of their questions are about businesses in their communities or sectors that are not receiving enough government

support. The other half of their questions are about how we need more red tape to make it harder to support Canadians.

Our government knows that Canadians need support. The Conservatives—

**The Chair:** We'll go back to Mr. Albas.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** —need to say which side they are on.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Well, we're on the side of the law that was passed by Parliament, Deputy Prime Minister. With all due respect, Canadians deserve that support, if they're eligible and not trying to defraud the system.

We know now that there are multiple memos directing staff to ignore fraud and misrepresented claims. The minister said that there was a piece of paper. Will the employment minister table these pieces of paper so that the Canadian people can know how her department is operating?

**The Chair:** I want to remind honourable members to place their questions through the chair and not directly to other members when they ask them, as well as when they answer.

The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me just say this: I will make no apologies for our government's approach, which has been to value speed over perfection and to be there when Canadians have needed us the most. Of course, fraud must be and will be looked into, but right now the priority is getting support to Canadians. You know what? I trust Canadians to do the right thing. I think that all members of this House should do that as well.

**The Chair:** We'll go on to the next question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thériault, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the Minister of Health.

We are facing the worst public health crisis in our history. Our health networks are under stress. For example, to understand the virulence of this contagion, when Quebec declared a state of health emergency, on March 13—it was the first to do so—there were 17 cases in Quebec and no deaths. In Canada, there were 176 cases and one death. Today, two months later, Quebec will exceed 40,000 cases and 3,000 deaths. In Canada, there are more than 72,000 cases and more than 5,000 deaths.

All the experts who have testified before the Standing Committee on Health have told us that, going forward, one of the great lessons that we must learn from the pandemic against which we are fighting, is that the chronic underfunding of health networks leads to weak links and makes dealing with pandemics of this kind difficult.

When will the Minister announce that health transfers have been put back to 6%, as was the case before Mr. Harper's Conservatives reduced them to 3%?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** My thanks to the hon. member for his question.

I completely agree that the pandemic crisis is truly very serious in Canada and very serious also in Quebec, especially in Montreal. A few days ago, I spoke with Valérie Plante, the mayor of Montreal, and I will be speaking with her again tomorrow. Our government is very involved. We are working in close collaboration with others.

At the same time as we are holding a virtual sitting of Parliament, the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces are providing their assistance to seniors in Quebec and Ontario. Let me take this opportunity to thank them.

As for health funding, we have increased the funds for the provinces and territories by \$500 million in order to help them prepare to fight COVID-19. It is very important to do so.

Finally, let me assure the provinces that the federal government is here to help you in the fight against COVID-19, including the funding for that fight against COVID-19.

• (1220)

**Mr. Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, I do not know whether it was a slip on the minister's part when she talked about the worst economic crisis. It is first and foremost a public health crisis, one that has repercussions on the economy.

The government has rightly followed our proposals and invested \$150 billion in order to better support workers. Meanwhile, \$500 million out of the \$150 billion represents only \$0.33 per \$100 invested in all the other programs.

It is not right that the government is not injecting funds now, so that people working on the front lines can fight the pandemic appropriately. Our health system is under stress, and 11,000 workers are sidelined.

When will you commit to putting the health transfers back to 6%?

**The Chair:** I remind the hon. member that he must direct his remarks through the Chair instead of addressing the person to whom he is asking a question.

The Honourable Deputy Prime Minister has the floor.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks also to the hon. member for his question.

I must emphasize that we do understand the importance of working in close collaboration with Quebec during the crisis. In fact, that is what we are doing.

We have already increased the health transfers by \$500 million, in order to help the provinces to fight the pandemic. We are ready to do more, because we understand that this is a genuine health crisis.

Let me now give an example to prove that the federal government has stepped up. The Canadian Armed Forces are in Quebec at the moment. We are working in close collaboration with Quebec on the matter of procurement, which is an extremely important problem.

We have to work together and we are going to continue to do so.

[English]

**The Chair:** For the next question, I'm going to go to Mr. Cannings.

**Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to pass on my best wishes for your birthday tomorrow as well. I hope you have a good Zoom birthday party.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Mr. Chair, the new support package for large employers apparently excludes companies that have been convicted of tax evasion. The problem there is that most tax avoidance by Canadian companies is completely legal. Companies like Cargill that shelter their profits in Luxembourg and have been convicted of tax evasion in the U.K. don't have a conviction in Canada. Has Cargill requested taxpayer help in this pandemic?

**The Chair:** The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Not to my knowledge, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Mr. Chair, Canadians have seen companies get bailouts and then move their operations and jobs out of the country. Can the Deputy Prime Minister guarantee that money going to help major corporations will actually benefit the workers here in Canada?

I think Canadian workers would be much happier if they knew that big companies getting public dollars actually pay their fair share of taxes, so can you assure us of that?

**The Chair:** Once again, I want to remind the honourable members to place their questions through the chair and not directly to whoever they're asking their question of.

The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Thanks for that reminder, Mr. Chair. I should also say happy birthday. *Buon compleanno.*

It is easy to forget to respond through the chair when we see each other so intimately on video, so no problem.

Look, I really want to thank the honourable member for that very important question. Let me assure him, through you, Mr. Chair, that our government is absolutely focused on ensuring that our support for the Canadian economy is designed to support Canadian workers. Sometimes that does mean supporting Canadian companies, but I want to assure the member opposite that we will put every measure in place that we can to ensure that this support does what it's designed to do.

• (1225)

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Four years ago, a huge rockfall damaged a critical irrigation canal that provides water to much of the South Okanagan. That canal allows orchardists and vineyard owners to grow the crops that make the valley famous. The Town of Oliver has tried to secure federal funding of about \$5 million to help repair the canal, but the federal agriculture department won't provide money because it's an infrastructure problem, and federal infrastructure department won't provide funding because it would benefit agriculture.

Last month, the infrastructure minister announced that she was looking for shovel-ready projects to help local economies pull out of the pandemic. This project has been shovel-ready for two years. Can the Prime Minister find one ministry that would step up and help fund this critical work?

**The Chair:** The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Like many people who grew up in Alberta, I am very familiar with the amazingly beautiful Okanagan, but I am not personally familiar, I'm sad to say, with that canal. I can commit to the member opposite that I will raise this issue with our Minister of Infrastructure, who is working very energetically with the provinces right now to get money to shovel-ready projects.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Well, Mr. Chair, we've been waiting for two or three years now for the funding. It doesn't fit into the little packages that federal money tends to come in, so the Town of Oliver and the people of the South Okanagan would like a federal commitment today that, in this situation, would say, let's find the money to build this project and keep those vineyards and orchards growing, because without water they will die within weeks.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, I totally support Okanagan vineyards and orchards, but I think the member opposite will agree that it is imprudent to make a commitment without knowing all the details. What I can commit to doing is to looking into this and getting back to the honourable member.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cannings, we have about 55 seconds left.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Mr. Chair, even before the pandemic knocked the bottom out of the oil markets, workers in Alberta and other parts of the oil patch were hurting, and the long-term future looks just as difficult. Those workers need good long-term jobs now.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister commit today to direct funds towards diversifying the Alberta economy to give workers the support they deserve? Can the Deputy Prime Minister guarantee that the support goes to workers and not to executive bonuses and stock buybacks?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** That's a great question, Mr. Chair. Let me just say that yesterday I had a very good conversation with the

Premier of British Columbia, John Horgan, who told me how glad he had been yesterday to announce a project putting to work federal support for cleaning up orphan wells and how many great jobs that was creating. It's one example of doing what the member opposite suggests, and I agree that there is always more to do.

**The Chair:** The next question goes to Mr. Steinley.

Mr. Steinley.

**Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My constituent, Samir Patel, purchased multiple restaurants last year, buying two smoothie bars in October and a pizzeria in July. Samir reached out to our office and reported that his CEBA loan application for the smoothie bars had been denied, yet the pizza application was approved.

My question for the Deputy Prime Minister is when will her government change the CEBA program qualification criteria to support business owners like Samir who have been excluded from the program because of when they purchased their business last fall?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade):** Mr. Chair, I'm really proud that CEBA loans right now are helping over 580,000 small business owners all across the country. That is real help directed to businesses, and we're going to keep working to make sure that our businesses are indeed supported by this loan program. The work isn't done, and we continue to work.

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** Mr. Chair, a father and son duo called my office last week and said that their bank had turned down their CEBA loan application because the father had transferred ownership of the family business to the son in January even though the business has not changed its name, staff, location, or services offered.

When will the Prime Minister change the CEBA qualifications to accommodate recently transferred, family operated businesses?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** We have listened to business owners across the country to make sure they are indeed supported. Right now, we're really pleased that almost 600,000 businesses across the country are getting this support, but we will always make sure that there's more to do so that our small businesses are supported in our country, including those in the honourable member's riding.

• (1230)

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** Just think how many more businesses you could support if you would investigate the fraudulent claims made to CERB.

Another application issue that has arisen in Saskatchewan is with non-profit sports and recreation organizations. Sask Sport does payroll for 150 organizations, and because of this, the 150 individual organizations do not have a CRA payroll number.

I have spoken with Kevin Gilroy, the CEO of Sask Sport, and he is hoping that the minister can resolve this problem. Will she?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Of course, our programs and the various measures we have put in place are there to help our businesses get through this very difficult time of COVID-19. The work isn't done, and we will continue to work to help our businesses.

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** I'm hoping we will be able to follow up with the minister's office so we can get some support for Sask Sport and the 150 organizations.

Mr. Chair, I was born and raised on a dairy farm in Rush Lake, Saskatchewan, and I'm proud to have strong roots in Saskatchewan's farming community. In speaking with my family, friends, constituents and business owners, nobody agrees with the Prime Minister's claim that our country's agricultural producers are better off with a carbon tax, let alone an increase in this tax during a financial crisis.

Will the Prime Minister apologize for his blatantly false and out-of-touch comments that ignore the nearly unanimous opposition within the agriculture sector to the Liberal's job-killing, revenue-stealing carbon tax?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

[Translation]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food):** Mr. Chair, we put that price on pollution because it is important for our economy to go in a different direction. We know that we must support our agricultural producers. That is why the fuel that farms buy and use for agricultural work is exempt from the tax. We have also provided a reduction for greenhouse producers.

[English]

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** That's not enough for agriculture producers. You're leaving them behind.

The Prime Minister said he would be open to providing farmers with additional funding. Will this be like the help the Liberals promised the oil and gas sector? When can farmers expect to see funding that doesn't put them further in debt, or hasn't already been previously announced like the last two announcements by this minister?

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Mr. Chair, last week we made significant announcements specifically for our beef and pork producers and processors. We have also announced a significant contribution to buy surplus food and send it to people in need across the country.

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** A few days ago, the Liberal government promised the oil and gas sector the urgent relief it so desperately needs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and historically low oil prices.

When will the government step up and stand by its promise to help our oil and gas sector by granting it access to the cash liquidity it needs to survive this crisis?

**Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry):** Mr. Chair, the oil sector and its workers have been deeply affected by the COVID-19 crisis, and of course we've seen what's happened internationally as well in terms of supply. That's why we put forward measures around liquidity. We have focused those measures on small and medium-sized players that make up 85% of the jobs in this sector. In the recent LEEFF initiative that we put forward, bridge financing is also available for the oil and gas sector. These liquidity measures supplement the wage subsidy initiatives, as well as other direct measures that are helping us—

[Translation]

**The Chair:** We now go to Mr. G n reux.

**Mr. Bernard G n reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, CPC):** Mr. Chair, C line Dumont, the owner of la Ferme Labrie Saint-Alexandre, operates a family farm that is set up as a general partnership, a SENC, as they are known in Quebec. She is contributing to Canada's food security in this time of crisis, but she is still not eligible for the small business emergency account because of the restrictions that the government has put in place.

Will the government be changing that position soon?

● (1235)

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Yesterday, we made a very important announcement for agricultural producers who were not eligible for the emergency assistance for businesses. It involves the regional development agencies, Economic Development Canada, and the CFDCs and BDCs. So I am inviting farms across the country that were not eligible...

**The Chair:** Mr. G n reux, you have the floor.

**Mr. Bernard G n reux:** As I understand it, they are now eligible for assistance. I am happy about that.

Micro-chalets des Appalaches, in Montmagny, is a company operating in the tourism sector. Like everyone, of course, it has bills to pay, but it is not sure that it will be able to open this summer. The owner-operators do not quite reach the minimum payroll level of \$20,000. They are very close, at \$18,000. They award maintenance contracts that are not considered in the payroll calculation, as is the case for a number of companies.

Can either of the ministers tell us whether Mr. Falardeau and his wife will be eligible for the new emergency account?

**Hon. M lanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages):** My thanks to my dear colleague. We have had the opportunity to speak together on several occasions in recent weeks and I know that he is an ardent supporter of economic development in his region.

As my colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has said, the Falardeaus will have access to assistance...

**The Chair:** One moment, please. We have a point of order.



[English]

Who is making a point of order? I'm afraid I can't see.

**Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC):** The translation and the French are at the same volume on my headset.

**The Chair:** Mr. Epp is having some issues with translation. The buttons, I take, are all put in place. Ms. Jansen is as well.

I think we've solved it. It's important that whenever you're speaking that you be on that channel, as opposed to speaking one language and then switching over and not remembering to change over to the other channel. I've done it before.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Mr. Chair, I want to make sure that I am not losing my speaking time.

**The Chair:** No, he stopped. Do not worry. I'm sorry for wasting your time when I am speaking.

**Some hon. members:** Ah, ah!

**The Chair:** Madam Minister, please continue.

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Okay. There were some little technical problems. When I was on the French channel, I was hearing the interpreter as well. I just wanted to point that out.

To answer my colleague, the Falardeaus will be able to access their local CFDC or Economic Development Canada for the regions of Quebec. I will be happy to work with my colleague to help the Falardeaus.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Mr. Chair, in my riding, as elsewhere in Quebec, a number of companies from the cultural community, such as Les Productions Giard and Animations de l'Est, participate every year in a number of festivals across Canada and in the Lower St. Lawrence. This year, they are being told, and rightly so, that unfortunately they will not be able to take part in those festivals because the festivals will not be taking place.

As owner-operators who pay themselves with dividends, will they be eligible for the new regional relief and recovery fund (RRRF)?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** The purpose of the business assistance program that we announced yesterday is to allow those who do not have access to the wage subsidy and the \$40,000 loan to turn to the Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions or other economic development agencies in the country, which can help them get through these difficult times.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** It's the same thing, I imagine, for non-profit organizations that are supposed to be supported by the programs put in place by the government. Unfortunately, many do not have access to them. Will those organizations have access to support from the RRRF?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly:** Of course, for-profit companies are targeted. In the case of some not-for-profit companies that do not have access to the fund, we could have some meaningful conversations and try to find solutions.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Last week, in Lac-Saint-Jean, a dangerous criminal who had planned the murder of his ex-wife was

paroled after serving only one year of his seven-year prison sentence.

Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness tell us whether the victim, Johanne Bérubé, was informed of the date and place of her attacker's conditional release? She was not allowed to participate in the hearings leading up to his release.

Why is the government still not taking additional measures before releasing dangerous criminals? Why is it not protecting the rights of victims?

• (1240)

[English]

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** In the support for victims of these crimes and in the consideration of the release of prisoners, the opportunity for victims to participate and be heard in those processes is an important principle and one that we have worked very hard to maintain, even during this very difficult time of the COVID pandemic. Arrangements have been made to allow victims' voices to be heard in those hearings, first of all, through video conferencing or by telephone or in writing, because although we are trying to keep it safe—

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Généreux, you only have 25 seconds left. Please keep your question very short.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** It does not seem that this was the case for Johanne Bérubé in Lac-Saint-Jean, since she was unfortunately unable to speak on the matter during the hearings.

I would like the minister to explain why that was not the case.

[English]

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I will happily look into that particular matter, but I want to assure the member and that particular citizen of Canada that we understand how important their voice is at these hearings and that victims are able to listen to the hearings and to present their statements to the board members for their consideration in decision-making. That was not available to this victim in this case and we'll find out why.

**The Chair:** Our next question goes to Mrs. McLeod.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This week, the Prime Minister acknowledged the failure in our long-term care and senior residences. He noted it was a system with serious and significant challenges that must be strengthened.

If we look back three short years to 2017, the Prime Minister was warned about approving the sale of Retirement Concepts, 22 Canadian seniors facilities, which are now owned by the Chinese government. At the time, the Prime Minister defended the decision by saying that we have a strong regulatory regime that imposes rigorous standards and that the regime ensures that the care our seniors receive is top quality.

My question, through you to the Prime Minister, is this: Did he simply neglect to ensure due diligence, or was he so anxious to respond positively to the Chinese communist government that he put the health and safety of our seniors at risk?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I share the member's concerns about the conditions in long-term care homes across the country. We know that this sector and the seniors who live in these homes have been significantly impacted by the outbreak of COVID-19. We've been working closely with the provinces and territories most affected—in fact, with all provinces and territories—to ensure that they have the support to get through this crisis and to save lives. We have committed, as the Prime Minister has noted, to working with the provinces and territories to create stronger standards, and I look forward to that work.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** In 2017, the Minister of Industry approved the sale under the Investment Canada Act, noting it would provide growth and opportunity for seniors. Two short years later, prior to the COVID pandemic, four of the Chinese government state-owned facilities in Canada had been put under health authority management.

Let me share some of the inspection reports: complaint, a resident went five weeks without a bath; complaint, understaffed by eight registered care aides; complaint, facility was under-staffed and a resident was left in bed with no food, no care.

Although the magnitude of the pandemic was unforeseen, it was inevitable that a virus would spread through these nursing homes. I would like to provide an opportunity for the Minister of Industry to apologize to the residents and families for putting the health and safety of their family members at risk.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I agree with the member that the living conditions of seniors in long-term care homes must, first of all, be safe and also afford the dignity that seniors deserve. I know that in the case of British Columbia, where this particular facility is located, the province has been working very diligently to ensure that stronger protections are in place for seniors. I know that all provinces are working to strengthen protections as we get through this pandemic together. I know that all provinces agree that we need to have a stronger network and safety for all seniors as we go forward.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** In 2017, the industry minister responded to a question about health and safety concerns with respect to the Government of China owning our seniors homes. He stated, “Under the Investment Canada Act, we have a very robust...process that examines all these issues.”

In 2019, another licensing report stated that the operator was “either unwilling or unable to meet” basic requirements.

Under the act, the minister has a responsibility to evaluate the performance 18 months after the acquisition. Was this done and was remediation action required?

• (1245)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The member is purposely obfuscating both acquisitions and long-term care standards. As she well knows, it's provinces and territories that do inspections in long-term care homes and provide the guidance and standards these homes must fulfill in order to protect the members they serve.

As I've mentioned, all provinces have been working diligently to improve care during this crisis and to ensure we save lives. I know all provinces and territories are interested in strengthening care for seniors who reside in these congregate settings.

**The Chair:** We will go back to Ms. McLeod. You have 44 seconds, so you can have a 20-second question, hopefully.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** There is no confusion here. We warned the government about state-owned enterprises, and what we have seen is that the quality of care is worse than it is in many other facilities. It is unprecedented for a health authority to have to take over control of these facilities.

My question to the industry minister is this: Did the government do the proper review it was supposed to do regarding the acquisition, in which it guaranteed that the standards would be maintained?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I want to give a particular shout-out to Dr. Bonnie Henry and Minister Adrian Dix on the work they've done to take very strong action to protect the lives of seniors in their particular jurisdiction. We know this is the work that health ministers are doing all across the country. We have been working beside them to ensure they have the resources they need to get through this crisis and to have those long-term conversations about how we improve the quality of care for seniors living in long-term care facilities across the country.

**The Chair:** The next question goes to Mr. Kitchen.

**Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, the Chinese government must be held to account for its mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its lack of transparency and suppression of information caused significant delays in the rest of the world's ability to prepare for and react to this virus, contributing to an unnecessary loss of life across the globe.

Our traditional allies are calling for an international investigation into China's concealment of key COVID-19 data. The Conservatives support our allies and an investigation. Does the Prime Minister?

**The Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, as the Prime Minister recently said, it is absolutely appropriate for us to look into the behaviour of all countries in the handling of this global pandemic—

**The Chair:** We seem to have an issue with the transmission. It's frozen and not coming back.

Maybe we'll go back to Mr. Kitchen and then we'll come back to the Deputy Prime Minister for an answer right after.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

From my Zoom indicator it looks as though your Internet signal is very weak. That happens with several members as well. As a result, your video and audio are both very jerky.

**The Chair:** I believe we're both in West Block, so it's an interesting comment. I'll have the technical people take a look at it and we'll see what we come back with. Thank you.

We'll go back to Mr. Kitchen. There's about four minutes and eight seconds left, but there is some time for the Deputy Prime Minister if we get her back.

Mr. Kitchen, I'll let you ask the next question. Go ahead.

**Mr. Robert Kitchen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate having my time kept.

Mr. Chair, we've learned that more and more Chinese-made masks approved by Health Canada are failing to meet minimum safety standards. Guangdong Golden Leaf Technology Development Co. is one of 65 Chinese manufacturers that have lost approval to sell products in the U.S. following tests by the CDC there, yet the manufacturer remains approved to sell in Canada. Waiting until after the fact to do quality control puts the lives of Canadians at risk. What is the minister doing to protect the lives of our front-line health care workers from defective PPE?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

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

I agree that we need to protect the health and safety of front-line workers during this pandemic, particularly health care workers, who are relying on quality standard PPE. That's why any medical supplies or PPE that are donated or that we purchase, procured by PSPC, to distribute to provinces and territories—and, therefore, to health care workers—are verified by the Public Health Agency of Canada to ensure that they meet appropriate standards for use.

Some KN95 masks imported into Canada by medical device companies and individuals have not been tested. They were imported independently. Following our review, we are now requiring independent testing data for new KN95 approvals from Health Canada. Our bulk-buy procurement process is not affected—

• (1250)

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

**Mr. Robert Kitchen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One month ago, when asked for thoughts on the legitimacy of the COVID-19 data that China has shared with the WHO, the Minister of Health accused the media of peddling conspiracy theories. Canada, with a population of 37 million, has had over 72,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases as of today; however, China, with a population of 1.4 billion, has confirmed less than 83.... Does the minister continue to trust that China has not suppressed any information and that it has been open and transparent with the WHO?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think, as our government has been very clear, a post-pandemic review of all of the actors, including Canada, will be an important part of how we assess the world's response to this pandemic, the international bodies that serve us, and certainly our own response. We know that during the course of an outbreak it's very difficult to collect data. We've seen that even in our own country. When things are happening quickly, it can be difficult to assess what's happening. We also know that it's difficult to assess the death rate because sometimes people are dying and it is only afterwards that a review determines the related COVID-19—

**Mr. Robert Kitchen:** Mr. Chair, it's all well and good for a cleanup after the fact, but if no lessons were actually learned, as we are finding with the recommendations that went unheeded after the SARS epidemic, then history is bound to repeat itself.

In December, Bruce Aylward was appointed the co-lead of the WHO-China joint mission on coronavirus, and he has served as assistant director general at the WHO in the past. He is, by far, the most informed Canadian with respect to the WHO's actions on COVID-19. Mr. Aylward has twice rejected invitations to appear at the health committee, forcing the committee to take the extraordinary step of issuing a summons.

Given that the Government of Canada heavily relies on the information provided by the WHO to make decisions around COVID-19, can the Prime Minister inform this House of what action he is willing to take to put pressure on the WHO to force it to comply with the orders of this country's legislature?

**The Chair:** The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** When it comes to the work of committees, let me just say that we strongly support the essential work of parliamentary committees. They are, of course, absolutely independent. We support their work, and we support their ability to call all the witnesses that they feel they need to speak to in order to best inform Canadians.

**The Chair:** Very good.

The next question goes to Mr. Dreeshen.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The residents of my Red Deer—Mountain View riding are strong, independent, common-sense people. They, like so many other Canadians, are being severely tested by this global pandemic and are equally concerned about the long-lasting effects it will have on their physical, mental and economic health. What they want and deserve are straight answers from this government. They see billions of dollars allocated for the promotion of pet global ventures, but only a tiny fraction of what farmers need to weather the crisis at home. Farmers hear of fellow Canadians being arrested and fined for merely walking in the park, and they try to square this with foreign-backed protesters being treated with kid gloves as they blockade railways carrying Canadian farm products to market.

Another critical issue that particularly frustrates our farmers is the way in which the Prime Minister and his cabinet use campaign-slogan rhetoric to talk about the carbon tax. Farmers bear a disproportionate burden. Farmers are in a carbon-tax trap. Our global competitors are not burdened by tens of thousands of dollars of carbon-tax debt. Our farmers do not have the ability to add the carbon-tax levy to the prices of their products, but they are subject to paying this tax as it is levied by their input suppliers. This is what farmers mean when they talk about the damage being done to their livelihoods by this government's questionable policies.

My question to the Prime Minister is this: Will he, in the future, leave the campaign slogans out of his answers, directly acknowledge the detrimental effect that his carbon tax is having on this critical industry, and also respect the jurisdiction of provinces opposing the carbon tax?

• (1255)

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

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

First, let me say that it's not only a slogan. This is something that we deeply believe in. We have to work on lowering our emissions. It is important for our next generation. This is why our pollution pricing policy is designed to grow a clean economy.

We have made sure that emissions from livestock and crop production are not priced and that farm fuels and fuels from cardlock facilities are exempted. There is a partial rebate for propane and natural gas used in commercial greenhouses.

Furthermore, Mr. Chair, AAFC, Agriculture Canada, used data from the agricultural tax data program to show the impacts on a per farm basis and as a percentage of total operating costs. The estimates ranged from \$210 to \$819 per farm.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thank you so very much, Mr. Chair.

I also have information from the agriculture census of 2016, which indicates that in a province like Alberta, for example, an average 855-acre farm at \$50 per tonne is \$17,321, so there are a lot of different numbers that are being thrown out there. I think it's important that we get this information, if the government has it, so that we can correlate just where all of that is going.

I guess it's going to take a little bit of time to see through this government's divide-and-conquer strategy, because never has this country been so polarized. The boastful way they approach governing—as though it's always somebody else's fault—is wearing thin.

What they don't understand is that this Liberal government, under this leader, is now the old and tired regime and their solution of massive indebtedness for generations, which started long before the crisis, will be their only legacy.

Our forestry and agriculture sectors counter any Greenpeace rhetoric. Our oil and gas sector ethically supplies the energy and the petroleum-based products that the world desires. We need them to survive and to be championed by the government.

Mr. Chair, will the Prime Minister end his attack on our resource-based industries and remove the regulatory burdens on our own industries that are effectively giving our global competitors an unfair advantage?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

[*Translation*]

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

You will not be surprised to learn that I do not agree with my colleague. All the efforts we are making to change direction in the energy sector, by respecting our energy workers and by investing in this transition to good jobs, are important, in my opinion. We need to make the appropriate investments. It is even more important for future generations.

Yes, we are looking at the debt and we are working to make responsible investments, precisely because we care about the future of generations to come. We do not want to leave our children with an environment and an economy that do not meet their expectations. They are the ones asking us to do that. So yes, we will continue to make responsible and respectful investments, and we will support our energy workers, because they are extremely important.

**The Chair:** I will now turn to Ms. Chabot.

One moment, please.

[*English*]

We have a point of order.

**Mr. Robert Kitchen:** Mr. Chair, on my first question, which was to the Deputy Prime Minister, we did not get an answer. I'm asking if I can re-ask that question and get an answer, because she was cut out on her computer.

**The Chair:** On a technical basis, yes. What we'll do is let Ms. Chabot finish and then allow the Deputy Prime Minister to answer. She'll have about 30 seconds. We'll go to her as soon as Ms. Chabot finishes.

Is that acceptable?

**Mr. Robert Kitchen:** Will I get a chance to give my question again so that everyone can put it in context?

**The Chair:** Unfortunately not. We've only got so much time. What I've found with a lot of the questions that have been asked is that especially the last questions seemed to be going long. One thing we discussed the other day, as I mentioned, is that I might start cutting off the question just so it's fair to the person answering, so that the answer and the question are given the same time.

I'll start doing that, starting right now, maybe. I think that's fair. If you can make it concise and quick, a very concise question, then hopefully we have the same—

• (1300)

**Mr. Robert Kitchen:** I can give the question without the preamble and then she has the context.

**The Chair:** That would be appreciated.

I think she's already got the answer ready.

I'll let Madame Chabot finish. Then we'll come back to your question very briefly and get an answer from the Deputy Prime Minister.

I'll allow 30 seconds each if that's okay.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

I apologize, Ms. Chabot. You have the floor.

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Chair, my question will essentially deal with federal health care funding.

Before being elected and named “the hon. member Chabot,” which I am proud of, I was a nurse, and I was very proud of that as well. I represented Quebec nurses at the national level for many years, and I was the leader of a large labour union that represented workers in health care, education and many other sectors. So I can tell you that I am very familiar with the current reality of the health care system and the reality before the crisis.

I have always said that our health care and social services network must be a priority. This is an important issue. The quality of the network depends on adequate funding to ensure that we have human resources able to use their full potential.

Are you prepared to ensure adequate, stable and predictable funding and, to that end, to increase federal funding to 6% permanently?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, all levels of government are working together to protect Canadians from COVID-19. We have increased funding to the provinces and territories by \$500 million to help them prepare for COVID-19 outbreaks.

This funding is in addition to the \$40 billion we already provide to the provinces and territories each year. We will continue to work with the provinces and territories to fight COVID-19 together.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, that does not answer my question, so let me repeat it.

We are told that \$500 million was given to the provinces on an emergency basis. In Quebec, this is about \$100 million, or \$0.33 per worker. I am thinking in particular of orderlies.

Meeting health care needs, both in times of pandemic and in normal times, is a priority.

Will the government commit to increasing its annual funding to 6% permanently? The annual funding increase has been reduced to 3%.

Will the government restore funding for health care?

[*English*]

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

Yes, of course, we have worked very closely with the provinces and territories over the last five years to increase health transfers to provinces and territories to make sure that needs around mental health and home care especially were more adequately funded.

In addition, this year there will be a \$40-billion transfer to provinces and territories. As you know, that is our federal commitment to making sure that all Canadians have access to quality public health care no matter where they live in Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, if the increase in health care transfers is not raised to 6%, Quebec, among others, will continue to lose \$13 billion annually and progressively. It is urgent that we address this issue, because we will not be able to adequately fund our health care services and support staff. Funding must be commensurate with the needs and the demographic realities, which I have not even mentioned yet.

• (1305)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The honourable health minister, in 40 seconds or less, please.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** As the member knows, health care is a shared responsibility, with provinces and territories actively involved in delivery and financing. Because we have recognized the increased costs to provinces and territories over the past five years, we have increased transfers significantly, in particular to address areas where provinces and territories indicated an increased need. That would be support for people aging at home and support for increased mental health and treatment services.

**The Chair:** We'll now go back to Mr. Kitchen. You have 30 seconds for a question and the Deputy Prime Minister will have 30 seconds to reply.

**Mr. Robert Kitchen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Our traditional allies are calling for an international investigation into China's concealment of key COVID-19 data. Conservatives support our allies and an investigation.

Does the Prime Minister?

**The Chair:** The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As the Prime Minister said yesterday, it is absolutely appropriate for us to be all asking questions about how different countries have behaved in a crisis, including China. Our Minister of International Development has spoken with the head of the WHO about a post-crisis review.

Let me simply say that I am personally convinced, and I think all members of this House are, that democracies will always be more transparent than authoritarian regimes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. McLeod.

**Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be splitting my time with the member for Davenport.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. Our government has rolled out a historic number of supports to help those experiencing significant financial burdens during this pandemic, supports for individuals, businesses, NGOs and governments. Some of these have been amended and adjusted to improve their impacts as time has brought us more knowledge and greater awareness of those who are falling through the gaps. This flexibility continues to be needed in the north.

While I know the Government of Northwest Territories welcomes Canada's strong and targeted economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has asked for an increase to its federally imposed borrowing limit. Whether a temporary increase or a more permanent one, it needs this flexibility to address the dual COVID-19 related own-source revenue and expenditure shocks. This limit increase will help territorial governments with short-term needs, but also ensure a more successful and robust economic recovery over the longer term.

I hope the finance minister has taken this request under advisement and has some good news to announce very soon.

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance):** Mr. Chair, through you, I want to take a moment to thank the member for Northwest Territories for his tremendous advocacy on behalf of his constituents. We recognize the fiscal constraints the territories are experiencing during these very difficult times. We will continue to ensure the people of the Northwest Territories have the help they need to get through this crisis.

This issue is on the radar and I'd like to thank the member for his important advocacy. I also want to thank him for his work on the Standing Committee on Finance, supporting our government as we take steps to support Canadians in this unprecedented time. As the member may know, over 7.8 million Canadians have applied for the Canada emergency response benefit, nearly 600,000 businesses have applied and been approved for the Canada emergency business account and, starting tomorrow, applications will open for the Canada emergency student benefit. As well, we have announced a one-time, tax-free increase to the old age security and guaranteed income supplement, ensuring our most vulnerable seniors receive an extra \$500 to help them through these difficult times.

In these times, Canadians should not have to worry about paying their bills and rent or putting food on the table. I can assure the member our government is one—

**The Chair:** The next question goes to Ms. Dzerowicz.

• (1310)

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My riding of Davenport is full of so many talented artists, creators and those working in cultural industries. Most of them have been impacted economically in a significant way by COVID-19. Despite this, many of them have stepped up during this pandemic, sharing free songs, poems and stories online and also putting on impromptu concerts on their porches to put a bit of joy and levity into our days.

Indeed, we saw Canadian artists step up during some of our darker moments during the pandemic, including the virtual vigil tribute to the victims of the Nova Scotia tragedy. We saw them come out to produce hopeful memories and hopeful moments when 86 Canadian artists took part in the *Stronger Together* virtual show, getting us to sing and dance while helping to raise money for Food Banks Canada amid the pandemic.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage please tell this House how our federal government is allocating the \$500 million in emergency funds for the arts and culture sector and how fast they'll be flowing? Too many organizations have lost operating income and need this funding as quickly as possible.

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I too would like to take this opportunity to wish you a happy birthday.

Our artists have kept us strong and connected throughout this crisis. It is our turn to step up for them.

I want to thank you for your resilience and your patience. Your continuous feedback and inspiring work have helped us get where we are today.

Our government allocated \$500 million to respond to the specific financial needs of the arts, heritage and sports organizations and help them be more resilient through these difficult times. Last week, I was proud to announce how this funding will be rolled out. In total, our cultural sector will receive over \$422 million in this emergency funding. We are making sure organizations can continue delivering programs to Canadians, while protecting more jobs in our economy.

The funding process will be streamlined and will mostly use existing programs and partnerships to disburse payment as quickly as possible. Our government has always been there for our arts and culture communities. We continue to support them for our people and our economy during this difficult time.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC):** We'll now move on to the honourable member for Hamilton Centre, Mr. Green.

**Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There have been bailouts for oil and gas, big business and Bay Street, but there's still no clear new deal with cities and municipalities, yet cities from our larger urban centres, like right here in Hamilton Centre, to our small, rural and remote towns are increasingly being faced with the impossible task of either deep cuts to critical local programs and services or significant increases to municipal property taxes, or perhaps both.

Will the Prime Minister commit to providing real leadership in working with provinces to help fund our cash-strapped cities and municipalities to develop a new deal for municipalities or will this COVID crisis be yet another unbearable download onto the backs of municipal property taxes?

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

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I agree with the member opposite that our cities are absolutely essential engines of growth for our country at all times and they are going to be particularly essential as we look towards restarting our economy. If our cities can't work, none of us is going to be able to work. That is why our government has been energetically working with and talking with cities. We have been urging the cities to talk to the provincial governments and we are very keen, working with provincial governments, to find ways to support our cities.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Mr. Chair, talk will not fund budgets locally. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities recently stated that municipalities are facing a minimum \$15 billion in near-term, non-recoverable losses due to COVID-19. Municipalities cannot run deficits. They do not have the ability to raise necessary revenues to meet the scale and scope of COVID disruption.

What is the Deputy Prime Minister saying to FCM, the mayors and the thousands of municipal councils that are facing the terrifying prospect of deep cuts to their critical local services, while facing soaring property taxes?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I speak with the cities very often, in fact I have been speaking with them a lot over the last few days, and let me tell you what I tell them. What I tell them is they are absolutely essential to our country, to our economy and to our restart. Cities, of course, fall under provincial jurisdiction. Having said that, our federal government is ready and willing to work with the provinces to support our cities.

• (1315)

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Mr. Chair, locally the provinces are crying poor, too. They know what's about to come and it's pretty clear that the Deputy Prime Minister and her government are content to continue passing the buck while our municipalities are being forced to bear the brunt of this crisis.

As a case in point, public transit is a critical service used by essential workers to get to work and by Canadians to run essential errands, but municipalities are unable to absorb the increased transit

operating costs that have arisen during COVID-19. The TTC alone is predicting a \$300-million funding shortfall by Labour Day.

With the recent poll by Probe Research that indicates 91% of Canadians agree that the federal government has a responsibility to provide access to safe, reliable and affordable public transit, will the Deputy Prime Minister commit to providing emergency funding to backstop public transit during this COVID pandemic and commit to investing in a bold national public transit strategy by providing direct, sustainable and annual operational dollars towards public transit?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Let me just remind Canadians and the member opposite, Mr. Chair, that our government has made unprecedented investments in cities, unprecedented investments in public transit. It is something we believe in very strongly. I agree with the member opposite that having public transit up and running will be absolutely essential to the restart. I have been speaking, just over the past 24 hours, with Canadian mayors and premiers. We believe that we need to work together to support our cities to keep them going, and that is what we will do.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Mr. Green, you have about 40 seconds left.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Big announcements, big-dollar announcements do not equal the delivery of the actual funding. One-third, one-third, one-third models from municipalities are broken. I understand it better than most. I'm a former municipal councillor.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister commit to doubling the gas tax transfers to be able to provide operational funding to transit, yes or no?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Chair, what I will commit to do is to work with our cities, to work with our provinces, to ensure that our cities are able to be the essential part of the reopening of our economy that they need to be.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We will now move on to the honourable member for Richmond Centre.

Ms. Wong.

**Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I start asking questions, I'd like to say a special thank you to all the front-line workers who have been risking their lives to make sure we stay healthy and safe.

Many seniors have spent their entire working life saving for their retirement, putting money away into their RRSPs. Given the current situation, those who want to should not be punished for accessing their own money, come tax season. We have asked the government for registered plan withdrawal changes to allow for limited tax-free or tax-deferred withdrawals.

Why won't the government allow seniors to access their own money penalty-free?

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

**Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors):** Thank you very much. I want to also acknowledge my honourable colleague for her advocacy and her questions.

Definitely, we have been mostly focused on supporting seniors and supporting them directly in their pocketbooks and accounts, so that they can help pay for the additional costs that have been seen through this pandemic. That's what we've done with our measures that we announced just recently, with the \$300 to OAS recipients, a special one-time payment, and an additional \$200 for our GIS recipients.

**Hon. Alice Wong:** Going back to the same question, can the minister clarify who actually is eligible for an OAS or GIS top-up? What about those who choose to defer the collection of OAS until a later date?

**Hon. Deb Schulte:** All those who are eligible for OAS will receive the additional tax-free payment that we have just announced of \$300, and there is an additional \$200 for those who are eligible for the GIS.

• (1320)

**Hon. Alice Wong:** My question is, how about those who choose to defer their OAS or GIS benefits?

**Hon. Deb Schulte:** In this case, we will be providing those who are eligible this special payment so that they can deal with the extra costs that seniors are seeing for the pandemic, and we are hearing those stories.

**Hon. Alice Wong:** Exactly one month ago today, I, along with my colleague from Bow River, wrote to the Minister of Seniors to outline several key concerns regarding the financial and physical security of seniors in the face of COVID-19.

Could the minister provide an update on the steps that she, along with her colleagues at the federal and provincial levels, have taken to balance the need for social distancing and the threat of social isolation among seniors that it entails?

**Hon. Deb Schulte:** I'm really delighted to have the opportunity to share with Canadians the extra work we've been doing through our new horizons for seniors program. We announced \$9 million to United Way and Centraide to help focus on those isolated seniors so that they can be connected with their communities. Even though they have to be physically distant, they need to be socially connected to stay healthy with their mental health.

We have also changed the requirements for the recipients of the new horizons for seniors money this year so that they can change their programs and help those seniors who are much in need.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** There is one minute left.

Ms. Wong.

**Hon. Alice Wong:** On April 6, 2020, the Minister of Seniors announced structural changes to the new horizons for seniors program, the NHSP. In relation to that specific announcement, can the

minister please indicate what real-world benefits Canadian seniors have experienced as a result of changes to this funding structure, or will they only start seeing them after this pandemic is over?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The honourable Minister of Seniors.

**Hon. Deb Schulte:** I'd like to give a real example of where there have been changes to the program that have allowed seniors to connect. Where they were brought together physically in a facility a couple of times a week, now they are brought together virtually to do their exercise and to access important information. I've heard these seniors. I joined them one day on their Zoom session, and they have shared with me how incredibly life-saving this initiative has been.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All right. Now we move on to the honourable member for Provencher, Mr. Falk.

Mr. Falk, go ahead.

**Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In my riding of Provencher, we have many small and medium-sized businesses and employees...to be able to function. However, I'm hearing many stories of Canadians who have been offered their old jobs back, but are choosing not to return to work because they are currently receiving more money from the Canada emergency response benefit than they would be from returning to work.

Why has the Prime Minister failed these small and medium-sized businesses again? What will he do to ensure that folks are always better off working than staying home?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Who is going to take this one?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development):** Mr. Chair, I believe that Canadians, given the choice, will always choose to work. Canadians want to work. The Canada emergency response benefit was designed and was meant to help Canadians who are out of work, whose job disappeared or they were laid off because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We trust Canadians and we know that they want to work as a default.

**Mr. Ted Falk:** Mr. Chair, that sounds nice, but in reality we know there are many folks who are taking advantage of this program. As provinces are starting to ease restrictions and businesses begin to reopen, they're counting on employees coming back to work, and they should be.

Some of these folks are very unclear, though.... If and when they do return to work, are these CERB benefits that they've been receiving going to be taxable, and at what rate? Can the minister tell Canadians how, when and at what rate the Canada emergency response benefits will be taxed?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The honourable Minister of Employment.

• (1325)

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.



The CERB isn't taxed at source. It will be dependent, of course, on the individual's overall income next year at tax season as to how it will be taxed. It's not a question I can answer with any specificity because it will be absolutely dependent on the individual's overall tax situation.

**Mr. Ted Falk:** I want to thank the minister for being so clear.

Under the current criteria, small businesses must have a pre-existing business account to qualify for the Canada emergency business account benefit, but many sole proprietors simply use a personal chequing account and, thus they don't qualify. The Liberals have failed to consider these sole proprietors. Will the Prime Minister lift this restriction to ensure that these relief programs are accessible to all Canadian entrepreneurs?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The honourable Minister of Small Business.

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

I want to assure sole proprietors and all businesses in the country, small businesses, how important you are and what you contribute to our Canadian economy. I just want to say that the work isn't done, and we continue to work on this so that we can provide support to your small businesses like the ones that are so important in the member's riding.

**Mr. Ted Falk:** Statistics Canada designates a medium-sized business as one with between 100 and 499 employees. Small businesses can apply for the \$40,000 Canada emergency business account loan and large businesses can apply for the multi-million dollar loans through the new, large employer emergency financing facility program, but what about medium-sized businesses? They don't seem to qualify for either one.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to provide cash flow assistance of this type to medium-sized businesses?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** I want to assure the member that there absolutely is lending support for those businesses he talks about. I would encourage those businesses to go to their bank or credit union, their financial institution. We are providing government-guaranteed loans that go all the way up to \$12.5 million to those businesses of the size he talks about. Large or small, as well as medium-sized, businesses have this support.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Mr. Falk, we've got time for another short question and response. There are about 40 seconds left in total. Go ahead.

**Mr. Ted Falk:** Businesses also must have a payroll of at least \$20,000 to qualify for the Canada emergency business account, but newer, family-run businesses typically have no payroll because family members do all the work and are often paid simply by dividends. Moreover, these businesses tend to have less cash to cushion them when their expenses arise.

Will the government expand the eligibility of the Canada emergency business account to include these types of family-run businesses?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Mr. Chair, the kind of business that my honourable colleague just mentioned is exactly the kind of family business that I spent many years working in, so I understand how important it is that they be supported during this difficult time. The

work is not done. We will continue to make sure that we are supporting these businesses, and I hope to have more to say about that very soon.

**The Chair:** The next question goes to Ms. Jansen.

Ms. Jansen.

**Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

On May 4, dozens of my Conservative colleagues and I sent a letter to the Minister of Health. We were asking for an update on what she is doing to support negotiations with the pharmaceutical company Vertex to ensure that Canadians have access to Trikafta. This drug is the single biggest advancement in treating cystic fibrosis in history.

Has the Minister responded to our letter?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I know that many people have their eye on this drug, especially those from the cystic fibrosis community. We know this is a drug that shows great promise in treating cystic fibrosis. The challenge is that the manufacturer of Trikafta has not submitted an application to market this product in Canada.

**Mrs. Tamara Jansen:** The question was: Has the Minister responded to our letter yet?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I am unaware of whether that response has gone out. I will check.

**Mrs. Tamara Jansen:** Mr. Chair, as the Minister of Health is aware, this is especially urgent for cystic fibrosis patients, as their disease makes them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. The healthier their lungs, the better they can resist this virus.

Can the minister inform the committee what she's doing to support the negotiations with Vertex to ensure that it is able to bring Trikafta to Canadians?

• (1330)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The challenge is that Vertex has not submitted an application, nor is it in negotiations with Canada to market this product. However, we do have the special access program that the member may be aware of. In fact, out of 98 patients who applied for special access to Trikafta, 95 were approved as of May 6.

**Mrs. Tamara Jansen:** I'm wondering if the Minister is talking at all with them about how we could make the changes to PMPRB a bit more reasonable. Currently it takes two to five years for a new life-saving drug to become available to Canadians via that approval process, and even then, like in the case of Trikafta, they're not even putting in an application. It may never stand a chance to reach approval stages because of these proposed changes to the PMPRB. Companies like Vertex have so little confidence in the regulatory framework these changes will create that they're choosing not to even apply to market their drugs in Canada.

Will the government stop the implementation of the proposed changes to the PMPRB so that new life-saving drugs like Trikafta will not be denied or delayed by unnecessary red tape?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** As the member knows, the PMPRB is not the reason this drug is not being marketed in Canada. There may be a multiplicity of reasons.

The PMPRB is a very important body. It helps regulate prices of pharmaceuticals in Canada. We know that many countries that have much lower medicine prices gain access to new medicines in the same time frame or even faster than Canada does. It's part of our commitment to improving the PMPRB review to ensure that pricing in Canada of life-saving drugs, as she says, is affordable to Canadians all across the country.

**Mrs. Tamara Jansen:** Mr. Chair, what would happen if a new drug to treat COVID-19 were developed, but the manufacturers were unable to market the drug in Canada because of all this red tape at the PMPRB? Would the government create special exemptions in that case?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, as we work through the COVID-19 crisis, of course our government is going to be working very quickly to gain access to any therapeutics that help with the treatment of COVID-19, and to imply otherwise is disingenuous.

**The Chair:** Ms. Jansen, you have 57 seconds left.

**Mrs. Tamara Jansen:** We've been hearing about the millions of masks arriving in Canada that are unuseable. Bill Matthews, the deputy minister, mentioned that the PPE we are ordering from China is being inspected by embassy staff in China before it leaves, and then again in Canada. I'm wondering how it is possible that millions of unuseable masks are still arriving.

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement):** I will say that the inspection of masks is not a process of simply doing a look-over. There are machines that are required to inspect N95 masks. The important thing is that once they were in Canada they were inspected by the Public Health Agency of Canada, and they were not distributed to health care workers because they did not meet those specifications. However, 1.8 million masks have been deployed to other areas and are still useable.

**The Chair:** The next question will go to Ms. Wilson-Raybould.

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

While recognizing the federal jurisdiction for the border, many of my constituents, like most British Columbians, are extremely concerned about the possible spread of COVID-19 from the United States. In lifting the restrictions, other parts of the country seem to be doing that more quickly. This is also the concern.

With health and safety being of paramount importance, can the government please confirm that it has no intention of opening up the border to the United States for non-essential travel anytime soon, and that it will respect the wishes of the British Columbia government, which has been very emphatic on this point?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Let me start by saying that, when it comes to the Canada-U.S. border, decisions about our border will be taken by Canadians in the interests of Canadians. We are taking a cautious and prudent approach. Canadians have made huge sacrifices in fighting the coronavirus. We respect those sacrifices. We will not squander the gains we have made.

We are very aware of the particular concerns of British Columbia. In fact, just yesterday, I spoke with the premier of B.C.—

• (1335)

**The Chair:** We will now go back to Ms. Wilson-Raybould.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:**—about this issue.

**Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould:** Thank you.

Last week at this committee I reflected that, thankfully, there were no major outbreaks of COVID-19 in indigenous communities in Canada. However, this no longer appears to be the case with La Loche and the Clearwater River Dene. There are growing concerns among indigenous communities that there will be more outbreaks, particularly as restrictions are lifted. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to support indigenous steps to protect their communities from COVID-19 and affirm their inherent right to do so.

One of the consequences of the pandemic is to highlight the conditions in indigenous communities, such as overcrowding, lack of infrastructure, food insecurity and lack of appropriate governance, that make indigenous populations more vulnerable. Can the government please explain why we still do not have a recognition of rights framework to support true reconciliation, self-determination and nation rebuilding that would have helped indigenous peoples to be less vulnerable during this pandemic, and when is it coming?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs):** Thank you very much.

That's a very good question. Before I answer it, on behalf of the entire House of Commons, I want to wish a happy Indigenous Nurses Day to all the indigenous nurses who are doing tremendous work all across our country.

I'm very proud of the work we've done on indigenous issues. We've spent over \$23 billion of new money since being elected on housing, health care and education. I believe that we've removed close to 80 to 85 boil water advisories. This pandemic has, of course, slowed down the entire work plan, but the plan was to have all boil water advisories removed by March 2021.

As well, the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations is working diligently on an agreement with the Wet'suwet'en nation.

I believe that a recognition of rights is so very important for our country—

**The Chair:** We'll now go back to Ms. Wilson-Raybould.

**Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the answer [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the concerns and situations in indigenous communities will continue.

Mr. Chair, over the last few weeks, our office has heard from many organizations and businesses that do not meet the criteria for the Canada emergency wage subsidy and/or the Canada emergency business account because they do not have a business account with a financial institution or, in some cases, their payrolls are handled by umbrella organizations. These businesses and organizations need to be included. Does the government plan on expanding the eligibility for these programs?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Mary Ng:** I want to assure the honourable member that we are continuing to work very hard to make sure that small businesses are able to access the range of programs that we have to help them through this difficult period. Whether it is through the regional development agencies or the almost 600,000 businesses that are getting support, the work continues. We'll need to keep working together to make sure our businesses are supported.

**The Chair:** The next question goes to Mr. Diotte.

Mr. Diotte.

**Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC):** Mr. Chair, for weeks Canada Post was refusing to deliver sorted mail to a seniors living facility in my riding of Edmonton Griesbach. It was citing worries over COVID-19.

I'm wondering how many other seniors facilities Canada Post is no longer serving amid this pandemic. We know that seniors, of all people, very much rely on their mail service.

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Anita Anand:** I will say, Mr. Chair, that Canada Post is closely monitoring the pandemic as it is taking action to protect employees and customers, including by offering priority service to those at higher risk, such as seniors, during the first hour of each day.

With regard to the particular instances mentioned by the member opposite, I will gladly look into those matters further, but I can tell you that top of mind for Canada Post is the delivery of mail. It is taking this matter very seriously, Mr. Chair.

● (1340)

**Mr. Kerry Diotte:** Mr. Chair, an official at that facility and I made several calls to Canada Post. After quite a lot of hand-wringing and so forth, we now have a situation in which they are delivering to that seniors facility. It's been restored, but it's only once a week.

I'm wondering how many other seniors living complexes in Canada are only getting once-a-week mail delivery.

**Hon. Anita Anand:** I will tell you that there have been areas across Canada where delivery has been interrupted but restarted because of the global pandemic.

The employees of Canada Post are working so hard to ensure that deliveries continue to reach Canadians during this crisis.

I would like to take a moment to thank the employees of Canada Post as well as the union members for their hard work during the pandemic to do whatever they can to ensure that Canadians continue to have their mail delivered on time or as close to on time as possible. This is difficult.

**Mr. Kerry Diotte:** I share the minister's thoughts about Canada Post employees. They're very hard-working individuals. However, constituents in my riding have also complained about sporadic mail service.

I'm wondering what impact COVID-19 has had on national mail delivery service. I'm also wondering what action the minister has taken to support Canada Post and ensure that seniors especially, but all Canadians, still receive their mail.

**Hon. Anita Anand:** I will say that there have been incredible volumes and some delays.

I am in regular touch with Canada Post, and it has been taking action to protect employees and customers while continuing to deliver mail. Some of these actions are extra cleaning in facilities, reduced hours of service to clean, priority service for those at higher risk, signage and floor decals, suspending normal 15-day hold periods, and asking customers who are ill or self-isolating to delay their visit to pick up mail.

It is a priority for our government to ensure that mail is delivered, and we will continue to monitor that.

**Mr. Kerry Diotte:** I will switch gears, Mr. Chair. A memo from Employment and Social Development Canada, which we all know about now, tells federal workers they should give people EI and that \$2,000-a-month CERB benefit, even when they know applicants are committing fraud. How is [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] programs?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Mr. Chair, I can assure you that we take the integrity of our programs incredibly seriously, and we will recover funds from anyone who has received the CERB and shouldn't have received the money.

The reality is that we have thousands of public servants processing millions of applications, and as I made it very clear from the beginning, we moved some of our integrity measures to the end, but that is in no way saying that we are compromising integrity.

We will make sure that money is recovered from anybody who got CERB payments when they shouldn't have.

**The Chair:** The next question goes to Ms. Gazan.

**Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Happy birthday, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Mr. Chair, families of murdered and missing indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people are tired of all the talk and platitudes, especially in light of the pandemic when we are seeing a drastic increase in domestic violence. In fact, the Native Women's Association of Canada reported that one in five indigenous women has experienced some sort of violence during COVID.

Although \$10 million was invested in shelters on reserve and in Yukon, this has been highlighted as grossly inadequate. Lives are on the line.

Mr. Chair, my question is for the Prime Minister. Although he acknowledged that this work is more important than it has ever been, why does his government continue to knowingly underfund measures to keep indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people safe?

• (1345)

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development):** Mr. Chair, let me begin by recognizing that the COVID pandemic has hit women the hardest, and those who are already vulnerable are even more vulnerable now.

We've invested more than any other government to support the safety and well-being of all women in all their diversities. Over 500 organizations have received supports, but we are not done yet and will have more to say in the near future.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I want to thank my colleague for her response, although I was hoping for one from the Prime Minister.

Mr. Chair, this government has committed to publicly releasing a national action plan to address the calls to justice of the national inquiry into murdered and missing indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Families deserve a timely release of this action plan.

My question is for Minister Bennett. Can the minister confirm that her government will release the action plan by June as promised, and why does her government continue to inadequately respond to the calls for justice now? It was a crisis before, and with the increased rates of violence occurring during the COVID, communities are being left in further turmoil.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Through you, Mr. Chair, to the member, our government, indigenous nations, provinces and territories are working together to co-develop a national action plan that will set a clear road map to end the systemic causes of violence against indigenous women, girls and LGBTQ and two-spirit people. This work remains a priority, but at this time the focus is working together to respond to COVID.

As part of that commitment, we are investing \$50 million to support shelters and sexual assault centres for women and children fleeing violence, which includes targeted funding for facilities—

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. His screen is frozen.

**The Chair:** Yes. We have a point of order that is well placed.

Minister Vandal, could you repeat the last part of your statement so that we can get it?

We seem to have lost Minister Vandal.

There we go. He's back.

**Hon. Dan Vandal:**—which includes targeted funding for facilities serving indigenous communities.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Mr. Chair, the lives of indigenous women and girls are dependent on long-term sustainable funding with programs that are rooted in indigenous knowledge and are indigenous-led. That continues not to occur.

My question is for Minister Vandal. When will his government act on "Calls for Justice" section 1.8, and make proper and sustainable investments to ensure that the epidemic—

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I could not hear the first part of the question.

**The Chair:** Ms. Gazan, if you don't mind, please repeat the question right from the beginning, and hopefully the technology will co-operate.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** The lives of indigenous women and girls are dependent on long-term sustainable funding with programs that are rooted in indigenous knowledge and are indigenous-led. This continues not to occur.

My question is for Minister Vandal. When will his government act on "Call for Justice" 1.8 and make proper and sustainable investments to make sure that the epidemic of murders and violence against indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people ends?

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Mr. Chair, as our Prime Minister has often said, there is no relationship more important than the one between Canada and indigenous nations. All of the calls for justice are a priority for our government, as I've clearly stated. However, at this time, we are in a pandemic; we are dealing with the COVID issue. But all of the calls for justice are a priority for our government and we are committed to getting them all done.

**The Chair:** We have 22 seconds left. The honourable member has time for a 10-second question.

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Mr. Chair, according to Hilda Anderson-Pyrz and Sandra DeLaronde, co-chairs of the MMIWG2S—Manitoba Coalition, families and grassroots organizations have not been consulted in the development of a national action plan.

Why does the Prime Minister continue to leave out impacted families and indigenous organizations on the front line?

• (1350)

**Hon. Dan Vandal:** Mr. Chair, I know that there's been a lot of consultation on our plan, which will be rolled out shortly. Since the people whom the member has referenced are from Manitoba, I will reach out to them personally and make sure that they are consulted.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor.

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

Since mid-March, thousands of Quebeckers whose flights were cancelled have been forced to accept a simple 24-month travel credit as compensation. In Europe and the United States, this practice is prohibited. Carriers are required to reimburse their customers. Here, on the contrary, the practice is even encouraged by the Canadian Transportation Agency. However, the government has been advised by Option consommateurs that this practice contravenes the Civil Code. For his part, the Minister of Transport remains completely silent.

Why does he tolerate airlines confiscating the money that people need to pay their bills?

**Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport):** I fully understand the frustration of people who would have liked a refund instead of a credit. However, our priority over the last nine weeks has been to help those Canadians who need it the most, those who have lost their jobs, small and medium-sized businesses, students and seniors. That is what we have focused on.

Having said that, we must also face the facts: the airlines are in trouble right now. They have lost 95% of their revenue, but they still have fixed costs to pay. The situation is very difficult, but I understand the frustration of people who would have liked a refund.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Mr. Chair, it is important to keep in mind that some of the people who were denied reimbursement have also lost their jobs.

This week, we learned that Export Development Canada offered Air Canada a generous sum of \$788 million in assistance. That amount is not to be laughed at. It does not include the 75% wage subsidy that the company is receiving.

I would like to know why the minister did not take that opportunity to require that, in return, the company reimburse the thousands of Quebeckers who are being held hostage by those travel credits.

**Hon. Marc Garneau:** It is important to also understand that the airlines have lost 95% of their revenue. Some of them have stopped all their flights, but they still have fixed costs. Air Canada is losing more than \$20 million a day because its flights are interrupted. The situation is very difficult, even with the measures that the government has put in place.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** To give you the exact information, according to some analysts, Air Canada has enough cash to cover several months and the situation is not very urgent. In fact, according to those analysts, the company had more than \$6 billion in cash over the past few months.

I understand that the airlines may need help, but can they reimburse the average people who have paid for their airfare and need that money to pay their bills?

**Hon. Marc Garneau:** Once again, I understand the frustration of people who would have liked a refund rather than a credit for a future flight.

At the same time, we in the government must ensure that, once the pandemic is over and the economy recovers, companies will be able to resume providing the air services that are so important to our country.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** In its financial statements as of March 31, Air Canada had \$2.6 billion in prepaid customer revenues in its coffers. That is \$2.6 billion that the thousands of people who have lost their jobs do not have, when they need to pay their bills at the end of the month.

If I understand the minister's answer correctly, he thinks it is okay for a company to rebuild its financial health on the backs of its customers and to benefit from government money that comes from taxpayers.

Is the minister serving the public or the big companies?

• (1355)

**Hon. Marc Garneau:** I thank the hon. member for his question.

My colleague keeps giving Air Canada as an example. It is important to keep in mind that there are other airlines in our country that are in dire straits. Some are even facing bankruptcy right now. It is a very complex situation and we must help our airlines.

At the same time, as I mentioned, I understand that people are frustrated, but they know that they will be able to use the credit for a flight over the next two years.

[English]

**The Chair:** The next question goes to Mr. Mazier.

**Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, many people in my rural Manitoba riding are feeling unfairly impacted by the Liberal government's firearms ban. These citizens are law-abiding firearms owners who safely, responsibly and legally use firearms. Not only was this order in council signed behind closed doors without any democratic debate, it also does not address the criminal use of firearms. Can the minister inform Canadians how many criminals will be impacted by this order in council?

**The Chair:** The honourable minister.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I would remind the member that the weapons we have prohibited are not designed or intended for hunting or sport shooting. They were designed for soldiers to use while engaged in combat. Nothing we have done in any way impacts the legitimate, law-abiding activity of hunters and farmers and sport shooters across this country. I would invite the member to give some rationale why anyone would require a weapon that was not designed for hunting and sport shooting, but rather for killing people.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Mr. Chair, many legal experts have stated that shotguns with removable chokes will technically now be banned because of the existing worry of the Liberals' order in council. This is leaving many Canadians confused and concerned. Will the minister commit to changing his order in council so it clarifies that shotguns used for hunting and sport shooting will not be banned?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I welcome the opportunity to share with the member and all Canadians the clarification that the Canadian firearms program has already provided. There are standards for the ammunition and armaments. There are manufacturer-instituted standards that are applied, and it's very clear, and the Canadian firearms program has made it explicitly clear, that 10- and 12-gauge shotguns are not included in this prohibition. All people who were concerned about that need not be concerned.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Will the minister put words into action and commit to exempting any shotguns from his firearms ban by clarifying that exemption in the order in council, not on Twitter, not on Facebook?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Perhaps the member did not hear when I explained that the prohibition did not include these weapons in any way and the clarification has been provided by the Canadian firearms program, utilizing the widely accepted standards, and it states explicitly that those weapons are not prohibited.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Mr. Chair, can the Liberal government inform Canadians if they plan on banning any more firearms in the future, yes or no?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I'm very pleased to tell the member that we will be bringing forward legislation that will bring forward new regulations that will further restrict the storage of firearms to make sure that they can't be stolen; additional offences and penalties at our borders; and to prevent the criminal diversion of guns.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Mr. Chair, not only are thousands of Canadians unfairly impacted by the government's firearms ban, but many small and local businesses who probably rely on the income from the legal sale of firearms, ammunition and accessories will be impacted. One of my constituents who owns one of these businesses is expecting to see a 25% drop in sales because of such a ban. Can the

minister explain how this government is going to support the businesses that will experience such a large financial loss from existing inventory and future sales as a result of this decision?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Again, I would remind the member that weapons that were designed for hunting and sporting purposes can still be sold and purchased in this country. The only thing we have prohibited is weapons that have no place in a civil society, weapons that were designed to kill people.

Those weapons are now prohibited, but there are no restrictions on the weapons that Canadians are lawfully able to use, those that were intended for hunting and sport shooting purposes.

• (1400)

**The Chair:** Mr. Mazier, we have about 40 seconds left. I'll leave it with you for a 20-second question.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** I'll switch it up.

Mr. Chair, the Liberal government continues to make life more difficult for farm families. Farm families aren't asking for more debt. They need relief now, not months from now.

When will meaningful reform to the business risk management programs be announced?

**The Chair:** The Honourable Minister.

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

I want to reassure my colleague that we are working hard to improve the business risk management suite of programs. I am having ongoing conversations with my counterparts in the different provinces because, as you know, these programs are cost-shared and need to be agreed to by all of the provinces.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That's all the time we have for questions today. I want to thank everyone.

The committee stands adjourned until Tuesday, May 19, 2020, at noon.

---









Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>