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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1700)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 10 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Pursuant to the orders of reference of March 24, April 11, and April 20, 2020, the committee is meeting for the purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters related to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Today's meeting is taking place by video conference, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

In order to facilitate the work of our interpreters and ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

First, and this is especially important for the witnesses—I think most of the MPs have the hang of it now—interpretation in the video conference will work much like a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French. In order to resolve sound issues, please ensure that you are on the English channel when speaking English, and on the French channel when speaking French. If you plan to alternate from one language to the other, please also switch the interpretation channel so it aligns with the language that you're speaking.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you're ready to speak, please click on the microphone to activate it.

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

This is for members, and by now you would all be aware of it. If you need to request the floor outside of your designated time, for example to raise a point of order, you should simply activate your mike and indicate that you have a point of order. If anyone wishes to speak to a point of order that's been raised by another member, they should use the "raise hand" function.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When not speaking, your mike should be on mute. The use of headsets is strongly encouraged, and our level of compliance is getting much better, which is also encouraging. If you have a microphone on your headset that hangs down, make sure it's not rubbing on your shirt during your questioning time.

Should any technical challenges arise, for example in relation to interpretation or if you're accidentally disconnected, please advise the chair or the clerk immediately, and the technical team will work to resolve them. Please note that we may need to suspend during these times as we need to ensure all members are able to participate fully.

Before we get started, please click on the top right-hand corner of the screen to make sure you're in gallery view. With that view, you'll be able to see all of the participants in the grid, and all video participants will be able to see one another.

With that, I would now like to thank the witnesses for joining us here today.

With us we have, from Durham College, Meri Kim Oliver, vice-president of student affairs. From Universities Canada, we have Paul Davidson, president and CEO; and Wendy Therrien, director, external relations and research. From the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association, we have Megan Town, vice-president of education; and Matthew Gerrits, outgoing vice-president, education.

As a reminder for members, today's witnesses were asked to keep their opening remarks to a maximum of five minutes because I know that our members are a very curious lot and they have lots of questions.

Ms. Oliver, please proceed with your opening remarks. You have five minutes.

Ms. Meri Kim Oliver (Vice-President, Student Affairs, Durham College): Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to join you.

I'm here representing our president, Don Lovisa, today, who's unfortunately on another call like this.

I will try to give you an overview of our current circumstance and profile.

Durham College currently enrolls over 13,000 post-secondary and apprenticeship students in programs at our Oshawa and Whitby campuses. This includes over 1,500 international students. The college also operates employment services sites at four locations throughout the region.

Colleges in Ontario have over 50 years of experience delivering post-secondary education within the local communities and providing accessible education to a wide range of students. Hands-on learning and skills development are embedded in programs to ensure that graduates are well prepared to enter the workforce with relevant and up-to-date skills. A focus on accessible education means that the student population is a diverse microcosm of the local and global communities that colleges serve.

At Durham College the student population includes students who are Crown wards. Students with disabilities make up approximately 15% of our total student population, including students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health issues. We have second-career students who are retraining after job loss or injury. We have students who are dependent on financial aid, academic upgrading students who are completing secondary school programs and college credits simultaneously, single parents, an indigenous student population and international students, who comprise approximately 17% of our students.

The move to online platforms for delivery of the final weeks of the winter semester was accomplished in record time and with great success. Students, faculty and staff were creative, persistent and dedicated to finding solutions. However, the transition did not come without significant challenges and learning opportunities.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has had a wide-ranging impact on college students as programs have moved to online delivery, campuses have closed, and opportunities for employment and experiential learning have stopped.

As of mid-March, our apprenticeship programs were suspended. Field placement, internships and co-operative jobs that could not be completed virtually are now incomplete. Programs requiring laboratory or studio work that could not be completed virtually are pending completion. Approximately 15% of our students have been unable to complete their semester as of today's date, and that has delayed graduation for many. Students with learning disabilities really struggled to move into the virtual platforms, and faculty struggled to convert to a virtual delivery that was accessible.

Significantly, though, the disruption to students' lives was more impactful in other areas. I believe it's widely known that one in five Canadian students lives with mental health challenges, and the majority of post-secondary students with mental health needs access mental health supports through their campuses. While campuses have continued to provide support virtually, students report difficulty finding confidential space when the family is at home, and they report escalating mental health challenges related to the new life challenges that all of us are facing. There are also a lot of feelings of isolation or of feeling trapped in environments where their mental health issues may have originated, and the limitations of virtual care have been very deeply felt.

Other students with disabilities have reported struggling to adapt quickly to a virtual delivery mode for their coursework and difficulty adapting their accommodations to the virtual environment. Students with children or senior parents struggle to attend virtual classes and manage child care or elder care when there are not options outside the home. Campus food banks are not accessible, and local food banks are facing supply challenges. Our indigenous students

often have limited access to Internet, and it has created additional barriers to the completion of courses and being able to maintain social contacts. Our international students who did not return to their home countries experience isolation, the financial strain of staying in Canada longer than expected, and the uncertainty of how or if they will be able complete programs if they do leave Canada.

Many students were laid off from their part-time jobs and have been unable to start summer work because they're employed in industries that are closed, and 70% of Durham College students receive financial aid. With the semester ending in April and with a lack of employment, many of them do not have resources for rent or food. Students who are still employed tend to work in industries such as health care, grocery stores or elder care and feel the pressure of being at risk of infection and transmission to families. Finally, our students continue to seek campus support for issues related to escalating incidents of domestic violence, assistance with landlords who threaten eviction, or even deportation and racially motivated incidents related to COVID-19.

- (1705)

Government programs that have been created to support students are welcomed, particularly those announced over the past week or so, but they can't bridge the gaps that the level of disruption has created for our community and the associated uncertainty of the future.

In short, the current pandemic has shone a light on how critically important colleges are in providing not only education, but the social supports of thousands of students. It also highlights the fundamental need to build a resilient post-secondary system that's nimble and can be sustained through a global crisis.

Colleges, like so many other organizations, are significantly challenged financially as a result of refunding fees, stopped programs and declines in enrolment. We are going to be seeking support going forward to meet the following challenges:

The education and training of all employees, faculty and staff in more effective use of technologies that are universally accessible to deliver programs and services in as robust a manner as possible, both on campus and virtually.

The identification of, and advocacy for, options to ensure that all students and employees have access to robust and reliable Internet services, regardless of their location and economic resources.

Advocacy for employer support to create new jobs that are flexible in delivery methods, and to ensure sustainable employment for students.

Advocacy for research into more effective ways to reduce the need for escalating mental health supports in favour of proactive measures that build resilience and well-being for all.

Advocacy for more effective mental health supports for those who need them.

Finally, advocacy for enhanced financial resources for students who cannot be employed, or whose education may be disrupted again by COVID-19 spread, and effective mechanisms for accessing these supports.

Thank you for your time and for listening today.

● (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Oliver.

Next we have Universities Canada with Mr. Davidson.

Mr. Paul Davidson (President and Chief Executive Officer, Universities Canada): Good afternoon. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you. I really appreciate this. It's really good to see members of Parliament working so hard in this virtual way. Thank you for the extraordinary work that you're all doing as you fight the pandemic.

With me today is Wendy Therrien. She is our director of public affairs.

I think most members know that Universities Canada represents all 95 universities in Canada. Taken together, Canada's universities are a \$35 billion-a-year enterprise and are significant drivers of economic prosperity. They provide employment for over 300,000 people and are the talent engine for Canada.

I want to echo and applaud the remarks of the previous speaker, because colleges and universities are working together on these issues. Canada's universities are an integral part of the team Canada approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, from mitigating the risks to finding a cure and accelerating Canada's economy into recovery.

In just 10 days, universities moved about 1.4 million students online to finish the semester. Universities are conducting COVID-19 related research and donating equipment. They've repurposed dormitories to house front-line health care workers, and are converting research labs to testing facilities as they step up to serve in the national response.

We deeply appreciate that the government has recreated Canada's social safety net in just a matter of weeks, and injected record liquidity to keep the economy moving. We're particularly pleased to see the \$9-billion investment in support measures announced for students earlier this month, including the Canada emergency student benefit, the changes to student financial aid and support for job opportunities and volunteer service. These measures are essential to helping young people through the pandemic, ensuring they can continue their studies in the fall and contribute over their lifetimes to building a stronger Canada.

However, for students to succeed, universities also need to be strong. Like most sectors of the economy, universities have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic. One of the biggest sources of revenue for Canadian universities and their communities is international student revenues. They contribute more to Canada's econo-

my than the export of softwood, more than the export of wheat and more than the export of auto parts. They contribute \$6 billion in tuition revenue to universities annually. For many institutions, international students contribute over 50% of tuition revenue.

With closed borders and closed visa application centres, we can anticipate significantly lower international student enrolment this fall. The loss of these revenues will directly impact all students and the ability of universities to meet the needs of Canadian students.

In addition, universities have had to wind down non-essential research and massively reduce on-campus activities, creating a difficult fiscal situation for the institutions, including job losses. We've been working with federal officials to develop a range of measures that will help support students, stabilize university operations and contribute to economic recovery. For example, we are proposing a direct federal transfer, or other mechanism, to help universities bridge their operations until borders are open and international student visa processing returns to a normal level. There's every chance that Canada will emerge stronger in international education post-pandemic, but the loss of revenues could be catastrophic. Canada needs those students to meet our labour force and immigration goals.

With the fall session set to begin in a few short months, we know that there is considerable anxiety among students and parents. Sixty per cent of students surveyed said they would prefer an online study option in September, even if health authorities deemed it safe to return to campus.

Universities need urgent federal support to undertake large-scale digital transformation to meet the needs of students. This includes the transition from in-person courses to accessible, high-quality online or hybrid courses; major upgrades to university IT infrastructure to ensure universities are able to deliver academic support, career counselling and mental health measures online; and supports to help with skilling, re-skilling and upskilling for the millions of Canadians without work who are looking now to enhance their skills.

For students to succeed, universities must be strong. Federal supports to stabilize universities will help ensure that we are able to accelerate Canada and Canadians into recovery.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davidson.

Speaking next, from the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association, is Ms. Town.

Ms. Megan Town (Vice-President, Education, Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association): Good evening, Mr. Casey and distinguished parliamentarians. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I am the vice-president, education, for the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association, WUSA. My predecessor, Matthew Gerrits, joins me today to speak on behalf of the Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities, or UCRU.

I would particularly like to commend Ms. Oliver for her statements, which covered the wide array of concerns that students are facing. I'll focus now on students' financial concerns.

I would like to express gratitude for the government's action to support Canadian students, as well as to Parliament and the wide array of members who showed their concern for students. The aid package will be a welcome relief for thousands of students WUSA represents.

We do, of course, continue to monitor students' concerns, and I can share some of them with you today. We know that the Canada emergency student benefit excludes international students. We've heard stories like that of an Egyptian student who had to find a Canadian lease when his home country's borders closed to him. This leaves international students studying and residing here without support to pay the same expenses that Canadian students do, while struggling to save money for tuition in the fall. We are asking our university, the provincial government and the federal government to coordinate to ensure these students do not fall through the cracks.

We are also hoping for a quick rollout of the announced programs to assist students who are already experiencing significant financial need. We appreciate the rapid development of support programs and thank the civil service for their tireless dedication during this time. We are hoping that applications will soon be open and that students can have certainty about when to apply and when to expect payment, so they can adjust their financial plans accordingly. Accurate information and a timely rollout are key to achieving the policy goals of the new student benefit, the service grant, changes to loans and grants, and other programs.

Once again, I thank you for your time today, and I will now pass it over to Mr. Gerrits.

Mr. Matthew Gerrits (Outgoing Vice-President, Education, Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association): Thank you, Ms. Town.

Through the chair, thank you to the committee. It is an honour to be here today. WUSA is one of nine members of Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities, or UCRU, which represents over 250,000 students across Canada. Last month, I had the privilege to work on a report drafted by UCRU that detailed our members' concerns about financial situations and recommendations for student support in response to COVID-19. I will detail some of my thoughts here today on the government's response where Ms. Town has not already covered them.

We have heard concerns from one of our member institutions about support for indigenous students, and we are hoping more information will be made available to provide clarity to them about what supports might be available. Currently, it is unclear to students whether support programs for indigenous students are complementary to the CESB or whether they are exclusive. More information about this and other programs, including the Canada student service grant, will be key as students plan out their summer.

Students are also concerned about the rising cost of tuition, especially as post-secondary programs are administered online. Years of decreases to public funding of post-secondary education by provincial governments has led to an increased financial vulnerability of institutions to drops of enrolment, especially international enrolment, a condition that we fear this crisis may bring. The vulnerable institutions are diverse in size and in geography. Therefore, we ask that the federal government collaborate with the leadership of post-secondary institutions, as well as provincial ministers of higher education, to explore what role the federal government may play to ensure universities' finances can weather this pandemic.

Students are concerned about being able to afford to continue school in September. For that reason we'd also like to mention that we see the increases to the Canada student grant program as stepping into that gap for most students in need, and we are incredibly grateful that these increases were included in the student aid package. However, student aid usually uses the previous year's tax data, which may not account for how the income of a student's parents or guardians may have been affected by COVID-19. We ask the government to investigate how to account for this in the fall 2020 Canada student grant disbursements.

Finally, an area of concern is with regard to eligibility requirements, which prevent students from accessing CESB if they have income even slightly in excess of \$1,000 per month. In the event that CESB must be extended, which we hope will not be required, we suggest the government investigate a phase-out of the benefit for students earning above \$1,000 in a more gradual fashion, while holding steady or increasing the \$1,250 base amount.

On behalf of UCRU, I would like to convey our thanks for the government's action, which we understand to be the largest one-time financial investment in student aid in history and proportional to the crisis that students face. We also hope that action can be taken on these outstanding priorities of international student inclusion, efficient and timely rollout, clear communication of information and coordination to support our post-secondary institutions. We have also provided some additional detail in our joint brief, which is still under translation and will be distributed to members in the coming days.

Thank you very much for your parliamentary service during this time, and for listening to students' concerns. Both Ms. Town and I look forward to your questions.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerrits and Ms. Town.

Before we go to members of Parliament for questions, Mr. Davidson and Ms. Town, I have a note from interpretation. They're having a bit of challenge in picking you up. When you are speaking, if you could just hold your mike a little closer to your mouth, that would be extremely helpful.

With that, we're going to start with the Conservatives and Mr. Melillo for six minutes. Welcome to the committee.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. I would like to say thank you to our witnesses, of course, for joining us to speak on these important concerns. I trust you're all doing well and staying safe.

Conservatives know that many students are going to have difficulty funding their future education and are even struggling just to get by right now if they cannot find employment. That's why we supported the government's student benefit legislation.

However, I've had many conversations with business owners who have concerns about the program, and that is why we have advocated for making it more flexible. As it states now, subsection 5(2) of the act identifies applicants as students who apply "on the basis that they are seeking work...but are unable to find it". The act further states that they must "attest...that they are seeking work", and that the "Minister is to make available...information" to the job bank if there are "employment opportunities".

I have a question for the witnesses. Do you believe that these provisions are adequate to ensure the benefit does not disincentivize work for students?

The Chair: I believe that question was directed to Ms. Town or Mr. Gerrits.

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: I think that is generally something that we would like to see. We have a hypothetical—and it's more than a hypothetical—example about somebody who chooses to work as a grocery clerk. If they earn \$999, they can receive the benefit, but if they were to earn \$1,001, depending on what levels are prescribed in regulation, they would suddenly lose a lot of money.

The kind of policy you describe is valuable to us for a different reason as well, which is the predictability of income for students. Not knowing whether they're going to be scheduled for shifts that will put them over that limit might make students' financial planning difficult. We would like to see that investigated.

Of course, I don't have a major in public policy, so I'll leave it up to policy folks to figure out what structure will work toward those ends.

• (1725)

Mr. Eric Melillo: Thank you. I definitely understand that.

I apologize for the confusion on who was to answer. I'll try to keep this going directly with you, but if anyone else has a point to make, please jump in.

I was concerned about that, because I was a student very recently—just last year—and I know that I wouldn't have wanted a long gap in my resumé if work was available. We all know that employment opportunities offer a lot more than just the income. One gets to gain experience, learn new skills and build relationships that will help in future studies or careers.

Just to expand on that, do you believe the federal government should provide alternative programs for students who would rather be working?

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: I think the government stepping in, in some form—either to provide work or to help connect students with work—is a policy that is going to be beneficial. I think you identify very correctly that students don't want a gap in their resumé, nor do they want a gap in their pocketbooks.

We see experiential education as something that is going to be very key. We know that some programs have already been rolled out by the government, as we saw in their backgrounder. We're interested to see where those go, how quickly they roll out and for what duration they exist, but we definitely see the opportunity to have students at work as positive, and I think many students do as well.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Absolutely, and there are a lot of concerns right now, particularly in the agriculture and agri-food sectors, and that hits home in my riding as well. There are places like Freshwater Cuisine, which is doing great work but facing difficult times. I'm hoping not to be repetitive here, but our party proposed a specific plan to match youth to jobs in the agriculture and agri-food industries. Do you believe that something like this might be more beneficial to some youth than the emergency payout?

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: I'll start by saying that it definitely resonates in my riding as well. My father making use of my own labour on our own farm was.... I'm sure he would be happy to have a hand to replace him.

On a more general note, a variety of students and young people across Canada are going to be affected by a loss of income. Matching their skills to jobs that they can fill is going to be very important.

I remember hearing from a student on the day the program was announced who said, "It's something I'd be willing to try". I think that is something some students may look into.

I am not able to comment on the specifics of your plan—I apologize—because I have not read it; however, I think it probably merits further investigation, especially insofar as how motivated students might be to take those jobs in particular.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we're going to the Liberals.

Mr. Turnbull, please, you have six minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to start off by saying that I think we all recognize that post-secondary institutions and the sector in general, which includes student associations and many groups that support students in that sort of ecosystem, are essential to the fight against COVID-19.

I'm really happy that you all made some time today to be part of our standing committee and to provide some testimony. I really appreciate your role.

I'll start with a few opening remarks and then my first question will be for you, Mr. Davidson.

Our government recently announced a \$9-billion package of support for students and recent graduates. We know that students are under considerable pressure right now; they are vulnerable and need financial support to continue their studies in the fall. This is an important step in terms of starting their careers eventually.

I read a report recently by an organization called Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities. It was a petition about post-secondary student supports, and it was before the federal government launched the CESB, the Canada emergency student benefit. It identified two pressing gaps: students who got financial aid in the last year who were having trouble meeting their financial obligations, i.e., their living expenses over the summer; and students who did not get financial aid during that last academic year, but who were also having trouble meeting their financial obligations over the summer. In many cases, I think their parents might also not have been working at this time, as we know some students do rely on their parents for some financial support.

These two groups of individuals, which I understand are a considerable number of students out there, were the target specifically for the Canada emergency student benefit, which offers \$1,250 per month from May through August and \$500 extra for students with dependants or a permanent disability.

With more than one million students expected to receive this benefit, do you think we got it right, Mr. Davidson? Is this really covering off the immediate needs of most students?

• (1730)

Mr. Paul Davidson: I think there's been some tremendous work done over the last several weeks to rebuild Canada's social safety net. In rebuilding it, you do find people who have been missed or vulnerabilities. That is the really exciting public policy work to be done for years to come, how we build back better.

The scale and scope of the CESB is unprecedented. It's has been developed at lightning speed, and it's making a difference in the lives of students. One of the reasons we're so pleased about that is it gives hope and confidence to students that their economic needs will be met as they move through the summer and into the fall.

We want to make sure that students remain attached to their post-secondary enterprise, whether it's through the college system or through the university system. This is a generation that Canada is going to need, so these investments are really important.

I would say that it's not just about the student financial aid components of it but also about the work-integrated learning aspects of it. Those programs are oversubscribed already. Helping businesses take on students to provide a work-integrated learning experience is critically important.

Seeing the policy iterate out to include an alternative for volunteer service is also really important.

I know a number of young people who have been at home for four, six, seven or eight weeks, and they are eager to take on work they can find. They are resilient and they're going to do great for their country.

This kind of support is the sort of thing that puts us all in a good space for a strong fall in September.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Mr. Davidson.

To echo my colleague, Mr. Melillo's, comments about students really wanting to work, I think another key aspect of that \$9-billion package was really looking at re-enrolment in the fall. Certainly all students and all post-secondary institutions out there want to see students continue their success and continue advancing in their learning. I think we've created measures that basically create more targeted job opportunities for students and greater access to financial assistance.

There's been quite a bit in both of those areas. The Canada summer jobs program was already creating about 70,000 jobs per year, but we've expanded that and made it much more flexible. We've added agriculture jobs and a targeted platform, a portal for finding those jobs, the Canada service corps, the Canada student service grant, and so on. There are numerous activities and measures that have been targeted towards job creation for students.

For the financial assistance piece, we've doubled and enhanced the Canada student grants and loans program, broadened and created more eligibility for student financial assistance, and increased the amount for indigenous post-secondary education and those distinction-based supports, which I'm really happy to see have been increased by about \$75.2 million.

Ms. Oliver, maybe you could start by commenting on whether you think these measures are really going to help students and the re-enrolment that I'm sure we're all concerned about in the fall.

• (1735)

The Chair: Ms. Oliver, that was a long question, but it requires a short answer.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sorry.

Ms. Meri Kim Oliver: I think we're actually seeing the impact of it already. We're starting to see shifts in enrolment and our students talking more positively about returning in the fall. The biggest barrier for our students right now is the anticipation of whether or not we are going to have to deliver programs online, which will of course be completely dependent on where we are in the pandemic and what the limitations may or may not be.

In terms of bridging gaps for our students, I meet with the student leaders about three times a week, and we are hearing that it's made a big difference in terms of the level of anxiety and the ability to consider continuing their education in the fall.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am going to ask a few questions, then I will give the floor to my colleague Kristina Michaud, from the beautiful riding of Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, which is just as beautiful as yours, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thank you very much to all the witnesses, both from the student association and from Universities Canada. We are talking about an environment that has also been affected by COVID-19, unfortunately.

My question is for Mr. Davidson.

Mr. Davidson, you said at the outset that universities are economic drivers and talent drivers, but I would add that they are also knowledge drivers. Universities, and CEGEPs in Quebec, are key players for the entire next generation. We will continue to count on these young people in the recovery we will need to initiate.

In terms of research, you briefly noted that there has been support for universities conducting research on COVID-19. That is also the case in Quebec, and it was applauded. I hope that basic research is not going unsupported just because of COVID-19, and that we will remember how important it is after the crisis.

I am finally going to ask my question, which is about foreign students. In Quebec, there are 30,000 of them. That is a lot fewer than in Ontario, but it is still a concern. A number of universities are trying to get organized, as are CEGEPs in the regions. In Matane, 40% of the students are foreign students.

Can you share your ideas for action or solutions, or paint us a picture of the situation?

Mr. Paul Davidson: Thank you for your question.

If you will allow me, I am going to give the floor to my colleague Wendy Therrien, who can answer more easily in French than I can.

Ms. Wendy Therrien (Director, External Relations and Research, Universities Canada): Good evening.

Thank you for inviting us to speak with you today.

As for investments in research, we are indeed very pleased to see the investments that have been made. I would also like to highlight the key role that universities continue to play every day in finding both short-term and long-term solutions to major problems in our society. Like you, we hope that the government will make further investments in research.

As for international students, we share the concerns raised by our student colleagues today. We want to ensure that students still in the country will get the chance to return to school in September.

As Mr. Davidson said, we are also concerned that a number of institutions across Canada and Quebec are heavily dependent on international students. Several factors will determine whether they have the opportunity to return to Canada. Because of this uncertainty, we are asking the federal government to work with the provinces to find solutions to make up for lost income due to the closing of borders and the absence of international students in colleges and universities.

• (1740)

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Michaud, you have the floor.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you.

I am going to come back to the Canada emergency student benefit, or CESB, that we talked about earlier. Mr. Mellilo raised some concerns from industry, in Quebec and across Canada. People are afraid that the CESB will be perceived as a disincentive to work. We can see that many have applied. Although fewer jobs will be available this summer, help is needed in the fields. People need students and are afraid they will not try to look for a job.

I was a student myself not so long ago, and I am sure most of them are hard-working and want to get out of lockdown to go to work, because they have bills to pay. However, I am already getting messages from students in my constituency saying that they are looking for the CESB form online because they want to apply already, although the summer season has not quite started yet, at least not where I live. Most jobs are not posted online.

Although the famous CESB is being relatively well received in the network, do you think it could be a disincentive to work?

The Chair: Please provide a short answer, if you can.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: My apologies. To whom was that addressed?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: You may share your comments with us, Mr. Gerrits.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: Thank you.

I cannot speak for every individual student's circumstance. As I answered to Mr. Melillo, I know that there are many students who may be interested in taking these roles, but we are speaking about hundreds of thousands of students who are out of work. Obviously there are going to be some who are not going to be able to find work, including even taking into account the agricultural sector.

Therefore, we do know that there will be some students who are looking for the CESB application link. I have friends who have asked me already, and I also know students who are looking for work or are already employed. I don't think we are setting students up to cheat the system. There is now a declaration as part of the application that asks students to be honest about whether they are able to do this.

Part of this crisis is recognizing that you are looking out for your neighbour, and part of that is taking these programs on good faith. We hope that students will be able to do that. It's part of our civic value. It's part of what we expect of students as citizens and I hope that they will do that.

I apologize if my answer isn't as comprehensive as you might have expected or wanted, but that is what I have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerrits.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

Ms. Kwan, please, for six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

My first question is for Mr. Davidson.

The government has come through with the wage subsidy program, but it doesn't apply to government agencies, municipalities, universities and so on. I'm wondering how that is impacting you. Is that a concern for you?

Mr. Paul Davidson: Yes, and it is a concern for our members right across the country as well. Every sector is facing challenges as a result of the pandemic, and universities have done their level best to keep people whole through to the end of April and through the beginning of May.

As the campuses have been closed over a number of weeks, there are labour issues to be addressed. The wage subsidy would be a very effective tool for our members. I know the intent was to make sure that publicly funded agencies didn't participate in the wage subsidy, but it's important for members of this committee to know that more than half the revenues of the universities are from non-public sources. Universities are now publicly supported, not publicly funded. In some cases, for some institutions, more than 63% of the revenues come from non-government sources. The wage subsidy could be a very valuable tool to help mitigate job loss as we navigate the pandemic.

• (1745)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: What I'm hearing, then, is that you advocate for the government to lift that restriction for universities.

The other question I have related to this is about the research sector. What implications have there been in the research sector with universities and colleges not being eligible for the wage subsidy?

Mr. Paul Davidson: I think as you'll see, in the way the government responded in the first weeks of the pandemic, they were tak-

ing real care to make sure that people who were most affected as individuals were addressed first. The investments that have been made to support research really do support the early career researchers, the graduate students and the post-doctoral fellows to try to keep their salaries whole during the disruption that's happening on campuses.

Two things are happening at once. The universities are ramping up their COVID research, but they're also having to stand down their non-essential or non-urgent research. That carries costs. We've worked with the federal government over the last several weeks to make sure not only that individuals are, to the best possible, kept whole, but also that the surrounding costs, the institutional costs of research, get met to keep as much of the workforce whole and keep the research enterprise ready to go as the economy reopens.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Are you telling me that the matter is now resolved, then?

Mr. Paul Davidson: We're grateful for the initial investments that have been made to support research. There was a rapid response mechanism to advance COVID research. There was a second round of that. There's been a third set of investments in research as well.

However, it's important that the research enterprise remains able to move quickly in these challenging times, so we continue to work with federal officials on a range of elements to support the research enterprise.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If there were an ask you could provide to the government at this point in time, what would that be?

Mr. Paul Davidson: Specifically on the research environment, it's to fund those costs that will help keep the research enterprise ready to go as the economy reopens. There have been terrific investments to advance COVID research and terrific investments to support individual researchers whose work may be disrupted through the pandemic, but we need to keep paying attention to the full costs of research as we move forward.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm going to turn to the student side of the issue.

The student support subsidy came in at less than its \$2,000 counterpart, the CERB. Could our student representatives comment on that?

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: If you ask somebody if they would like more money, I think it's their job to say "yes", but ultimately, when this program was announced, it was announced at that level. When we look at the expenses of the average student, at least between rent, expected tuition contribution, and food, we see that the amount will be satisfactory to get students through those particular living expenses. We do have concerns over regional living costs, which I'm sure you can appreciate.

At this point, our main concern is not necessarily the ability of students to meet expenses. We know that this is a very, very big concern, but there is a concern around equity. A student who is out of work, the same as any other Canadian, gets \$1,250, while the other Canadian gets \$2,000. That's definitely something we would like to see rectified if there were to be another iteration of this program.

• (1750)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's interesting—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: —because the students I'm hearing from in my riding are saying that they need the \$2,000. It's interesting that not all students require that, from what I'm hearing from you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan, and thank you, Mr. Gerrits.

Next we'll go to Mrs. Falk for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I'd like to thank all of our witnesses for their comments.

We know that students and young Canadians, like all Canadians, are facing uncertainties and disruptions due to COVID-19. As the committee evaluates the government's response to this health crisis and looks forward, our students are a very important consideration. The Canada emergency student benefit is providing immediate and necessary financial assistance to students, but we know that the impact of this health crisis will go well beyond an immediate financial need. Ensuring the success of students has to take a long-term approach. The long-term success of students will, in turn, have a positive impact on our economic success.

In the previous Parliament, this committee did a study on experiential learning. In fact, it included contributions from Universities Canada, Durham College and the University of Waterloo. During that study, we heard over and over again that experiential learning was invaluable to ensuring long-term integration into the workforce. Whether it's apprenticeships, co-op programs, work-integrated learning, volunteerism, or internships, these are all opportunities that go beyond a short-term financial opportunity by connecting young Canadians to the workforce.

One government program that has long helped local economies and students find job opportunities is the Canada summer jobs program. During this health crisis, the minister extended the deadline for the program and increased the funding eligibility of private and public sector employers. The downside of these announcements is that they came with no additional funds. In effect, increasing the funds available to these employers so that they can receive up to 100% of the minimum hourly wage for each employee means that there could be only half as many jobs.

As we heard today, Conservatives have also proposed a new program to specifically match students with summer jobs in the agriculture sector. A program of this nature would have an immense impact on my local economy here in Battlefords—Lloydminster, but obviously in other ridings around Canada as well.

This question is for anybody. As we navigate this health crisis and eventually come out on the other side, what role do you see experiential learning playing in ensuring student success?

The Chair: Who would like to try that one?

Ms. Megan Town: I would, Mr. Chair, if I may.

The Chair: Please, Ms. Town, go ahead.

Ms. Megan Town: Thank you.

I think you hit the nail on the head, so to speak, that experiential learning is very important. As a student enrolled in a co-op program myself, I can say that one day in the workplace is certainly worth many hours in the classroom. I think as we consider the gradual reopening of the country, it will be important to consider how students' experiential learning opportunities can or cannot be translated online.

Certainly students work not just in the summer. They also work in the fall and throughout the school year to continue to gain that experience through year-long internships or shorter work placements. Not all student jobs can be conducted in a work-from-home method. As well, student jobs might be the first to be cut from organizations that usually hire student interns. I think it's important to consider how students can be supported as we work to reopen the country, and not just for the immediate term.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Is there anybody else?

Mr. Paul Davidson: Mr. Chairman—

The Chair: We will go to Mr. Davidson and then Ms. Oliver, please.

Mr. Paul Davidson: I'll yield to Ms. Oliver.

The Chair: Ms. Oliver, the floor is yours.

Ms. Meri Kim Oliver: As I mentioned in my opening, experiential learning is critical for students in a college environment. However, I think too often we consider it as a one-way street, that the students are learning from the employer. In our current environment, the one thing we absolutely have to do is focus on the future and the skills that our students are learning by having gone to on-line platforms and the ideas and creativity we are going to depend on from their having gone into that workforce.

Our difficulty right now is finding those matches and the opportunities for students to engage. Not every experiential learning opportunity can be online. We have to find new and safe ways for our students to still have that experience and have the opportunity to share knowledge and ideas with future employers.

• (1755)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Oliver.

I'm sorry, Mr. Davidson; we're out of time for that question.

Thank you, Ms. Falk.

The final questioner for this panel is Ms. Young, please, for five minutes.

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. It's a very interesting discussion on students and how they've been impacted by COVID-19.

I want to start by talking to Mr. Gerrits and Ms. Town. Thank you for appearing.

I read the UCRU statement, and I just want to quote from it. It says that the government's response is "a win for current students, incoming students, and new graduates." I think we can all agree with that.

We heard over the last hour that some of my opposition colleagues seem to think that young Canadians who might apply for these benefits might see this as a disincentive to work.

Ms. Town, I wonder if you could comment on this specific thinking on the part of some members.

Ms. Megan Town: Sure. Thank you very much for the question.

I do not think, and from my colleagues and peers I haven't heard it, that the CESB is a disincentive to work. Many of my peers were disappointed when their job prospects for the summer evaporated in light of the pandemic.

Mr. Gerrits highlighted that the amount provided by the CESB is enough to cover students' living expenses, but it is not enough to ensure that students are able to support themselves through the school terms, paying tuition and their living expenses in the subsequent eight to 12 months. For that reason, I think students would very much appreciate the opportunity to be gainfully employed in a full-time position where they would be making closer to their typical income for the summer months and be more financially secure in their attempts to return to school in the fall.

Ms. Kate Young: Would you agree, though, that to be gainfully employed, you would want to match skills to jobs? I think there's a feeling that a lot of these jobs in the agriculture sector would be a match, but these are very highly skilled jobs.

I wonder if Ms. Town or Mr. Gerrits could comment on whether that would be an appropriate match.

Ms. Megan Town: I have to apologize; I'm not familiar with the types of jobs that are being proposed in the agriculture sector.

I think students would relish the opportunity to learn new skills, and it would be my hope that those could be applied to their field of study.

Ms. Kate Young: Thank you very much.

Ms. Oliver, you mentioned the costs of digital transformation. Paul Davidson, you did as well. I'm hoping that part of the announced funding, the \$9 billion, would go to that.

Ms. Oliver, if you could comment, do you not see that some of what you will be receiving could be used to help with this technical transformation?

Ms. Meri Kim Oliver: Yes, absolutely, it can. It's a mammoth task, though.

I think people misinterpret, thinking that if you can teach a class, you can teach it online. It takes significant work and time for faculty to develop online delivery. It's not as simple as standing in front of the camera and lecturing or just putting up your PowerPoint presentation. There's a huge piece that is also about education of faculty and how to deliver an effective program.

Yes, absolutely, we're grateful for that investment, and we see it as helpful. However, universal design and education of people for that is a mammoth project.

• (1800)

Ms. Kate Young: Mr. Davidson, would you comment?

Mr. Paul Davidson: Thank you for the question. This is a really important piece of work that needs to be tackled, and I think increased investment would be very important now.

In the \$9 billion, it's mostly the CESB that is really welcome investment in work-integrated learning and also volunteer service, but the cost of digital transformation for moving courses wholly online is real. The cost of being able to provide academic supports, child counselling supports and mental health supports is significant.

Also, the benefits are not only to existing students who are in that 18-to-24 demographic. They're also part of the welcome mat to international students, and they attract and retain international students, who are so important, particularly if the borders are closed.

As well, I know that many of you have constituents who have been displaced by this current pandemic. If we have fully integrated online higher education, those folks can sharpen their skills while they're at home. There's a chance for upskilling and re-skilling, which was already a part of the 2019 agenda. We're ready to advance that, but we need government partners to make it happen faster.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davidson and Ms. Young.

I'd like to thank all of the witnesses for being with us and for their presentations today. We have another panel ready to come in, so we're going to suspend for three minutes to allow for the switchover. Your answers and your presentations will be extremely helpful to our work, and we are grateful to you for that.

Thank you. We are suspended.

• (1800)

(Pause)

• (1805)

The Chair: We are now back in session and ready to resume our meeting.

Thank you to our second panel of witnesses for joining us today.

From the Canadian Association for Long Term Care, we have Jodi Hall, chair, and from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, we have Marissa Lennox, chief policy officer.

Ms. Hall, we're going to call on you first for your opening statement. You have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Jodi Hall (Chair, Canadian Association for Long Term Care): I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to present here this evening about what CALTC is, the work that the long-term care sector is doing and how we're responding to the COVID-19 situation in Canada.

My name is Jodi Hall, and I'm here today as the chair of the Canadian Association for Long Term Care.

CALTC is committed to ensuring long-term care for all, and we advocate on behalf of seniors to share knowledge, insight and best practices to ensure that seniors can live and age with dignity. As the leading voice for quality long-term care in Canada, our members deliver publicly funded health care services for seniors across Canada.

To begin, I'll provide an overview of the long-term care sector and the changing demographics in Canada, with current trends.

The most current data indicates that there are over 150,000 long-term care beds across the country and over 1,300 long-term care homes in Canada. The 2016 census data indicated that for the first time in Canadian history, the number of persons over the age of 65 outnumbered those under the age of 14. Population projections show that the gap between the two age groups will continue to widen, with data suggesting that the portion of the Canadian population that is 65 and older will rise by approximately 25% by 2036. The number of seniors 80 years and older is predicted to double between 2011 and 2036.

Our seniors are living longer and are entering long-term care more fragile than ever before, and residents who move into long-term care do so with complex health issues. For example, over 60% of people in long-term care experience advanced forms of dementia, including Alzheimer's; 70% have advanced heart and circulatory diseases; and 58% have advanced hypertension-related conditions.

I want to acknowledge, as I address the issue of COVID-19, the seniors and residents who have passed away as a result of COVID-19. Our hearts are absolutely with the families. I'm sure that you can join me in extending deepest condolences to all of them.

I also want to thank all of the front-line workers who continue to provide compassionate care to Canada's seniors.

We will have a lot of time to review what has been done differently, but I think we will find that the impact of COVID-19 in long-term care homes could have been mitigated if governments had been more proactive in supporting the care sector prior to these outbreaks. Some of the challenges I will be discussing today have been exacerbated by COVID-19, but really they represent systemic issues. In many respects, these systemic issues require support from the federal government, and our members have been raising these issues for many years.

In regard to human resources for health care, we are at a crisis point in Canada with respect to our supply of health workers in the senior care sector. Attracting and retaining individuals in careers of care for Canada's seniors has become increasingly challenging, especially when preparing for a further influx of seniors who will require care for multiple and complex conditions. In my home province of New Brunswick, because of the age of our workforce and the anticipated number of retirements, we're expecting to have a need for over 3,000 care employees, who will need to be hired over the next eight years. For a small province like New Brunswick, that's a very significant number.

Supporting health care aides, continuing care assistants and personal support workers involves structured education and continued

training to support these individuals in providing the highest quality of care. It also requires structured governance models to affirm health care aide credentials, conduct and competency.

We understand that the current health care assistant labour force shortage cannot be solved through the recruitment of international students and nurses alone. However, CALTC believes that recruiting international students and nurses does offer an opportunity in part to address the current supply crisis of trained staff in Canada.

● (1810)

To harness this opportunity, the long-term care sector requires the federal government to support policy changes that are aimed at solving the chronic labour shortage. A health human resource strategy for the long-term care sector must focus on the right number, mix, and geographic distribution of providers as well as the appropriate setting for providers to deliver the services.

CALTC is calling on health ministers across the country to pick up where they left off over 20 years ago when the original health accord was negotiated and work was done on a health human resource strategy. Through the leadership of the federal minister of health, health ministers must recognize that the significant challenges that the long-term care sector faces in supporting our aging population are still present 20 years later. Through the leadership of the federal government, there must be collaboration among the provinces, the territories and the long-term care sector to develop and implement a pan-Canadian health human resources strategy.

With regard to infrastructure, the severity of the COVID-19 outbreak has presented unique challenges for staff in the homes. Containing the spread of infection appears to have been more challenging in older homes. Many older homes still have three- and four-bed wards. They do not have private rooms, which makes it very challenging to implement cohorting plans and isolation measures. Older homes generally have narrow hallways, and often there is only one dining room on a main floor. Both of these configurations make it very hard to keep residents apart.

On April 11, the Public Health Agency of Canada released an interim guidance document on infection prevention and control in long-term care homes. Some of the guidelines, such as restrictions to certain work zones and the use of single rooms for certain types of care, are almost impossible for the majority of homes to follow, given that they were not always built to accommodate single rooms for each resident.

Older long-term care homes—

The Chair: Please start to wrap it up there, Ms. Hall. You're well over time.

Ms. Jodi Hall: Pardon me.

I know that Minister McKenna has noted that there are shovel-ready projects, and we're certainly hoping that in a post-pandemic period, the country will be ready to work with the long-term care sector and allow us to access the infrastructure funding to make that happen.

We know there are systemic challenges that the sector has been grappling with for years, and the lack of support has led to increased challenges during this time.

We strongly urge the federal government to provide assistance in these two critical areas for housing and care, and not just in this time of crisis, but for every day.

Thank you, and I'm very happy to take any questions.

The Chair: You may well get a chance to address some of the things that were in the rest of your statement through the course of questions.

Ms. Lennox, you have five minutes.

Ms. Marissa Lennox (Chief Policy Officer, Canadian Association of Retired Persons): Hi, everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to present in front of you today.

CARP, as many of you may know, is a national not-for-profit, non-partisan organization, with 320,000 members in every province and territory across Canada.

It's also important to distinguish that, while most of our members are retired and enjoy above-average education and income, an overwhelming majority consistently report that CARP represents the interests of all older Canadian across Canada. We believe that all older adults deserve to live in dignity and with respect, regardless of income level, family support or health challenges.

COVID-19 has undermined these fundamental principles of aging well and revealed the lack of planning and preparation that would secure the health and well-being of seniors during a pandemic. CARP has been actively engaged with our membership since the onset of COVID-19 in providing credible and reliable information to older adult populations on our website through programming and via surveys that we conduct to better understand our members' needs and concerns.

We hosted three virtual town hall events, each with a reach of up to 12,500 members, to provide them with a forum to ask their specific questions to trusted experts on matters related to health and finance. These sessions were recorded for television and aired on our media networks across Canada.

We've heard largely from our members, apart from the obvious, that seniors have been negatively impacted by an increase in their cost of living, from grocery premiums and delivery fees and an increase in prescription medication fees to a lack of free or discounted community services, whether that's laundry services, meals at community centres or volunteer tax preparation, all which closed down due to physical distancing restrictions.

In addition, as you know, stock markets have taken a plunge, and many seniors have seen significant declines in their retirement savings. In a survey pre-COVID, the majority of our members had already expressed that they were concerned about outliving their savings in retirement. With the recent economic impacts of COVID-19, these fears have never been more real.

While we understand the government's initial economic response was to quickly address income replacement, several weeks have passed, and there have been no meaningful announcements around addressing the financial concerns of seniors. Retirees, as you know, are ineligible for CERB. While the 25% reduction in the minimum RRIF withdrawal was welcomed, it was not retroactive, and many would rather leave their savings untouched, given current market volatility. Additionally, the \$9 million that was earmarked for seniors and provided to the United Way was met with confusion on how to access it. Our own call centres and those of the United Way's 2-1-1 service have been flooded with calls to better understand how that \$9 million was to be distributed and accessed.

I'd also like to speak to what my colleague from CALTC was speaking about earlier, which was a more urgent piece around how we care for older adults, particularly in congregate settings like long-term care.

If COVID-19 has revealed anything, it's revealed the following: that we warehouse frail and very ill seniors in unsafe situations, which are underfunded and understaffed, often with little or no certified training, and that we expect individuals and their families to pay a significant part of the privilege to be in those facilities. It is unconscionable that of 4,900 deaths in Canada so far from COVID-19, 82% were from a population whom we are duty bound to protect, and we failed them.

This is not the responsibility of the federal government alone, but it is very much the duty of the federal government to make sure it doesn't happen again. If we've learned anything, it's that we didn't have a real plan in place for seniors in long-term care in this kind of pandemic, despite having advance warning from other countries that have seen previous crises of similar scale, like SARS and MERS, and the experience with seasonal flu, which spreads in these settings and claims seniors' lives annually.

These are our most vulnerable residents. We can and we must do better.

Thank you.

• (1815)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lennox.

Now we will proceed with questions, beginning with Ms. Kusie, please, for six minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Ms. Hall and Ms. Lennox, for your very passionate testimonies.

Ms. Hall, I'll start with you.

Provincial governments have increased protections for seniors in long-term care homes throughout the pandemic by limiting visitors, providing staff with personal protective equipment and preventing employees from working at multiple homes. Ms. Lennox, I believe, just alluded to this, but in your opinion, should the federal government have intervened earlier so that these steps would have been taken earlier?

Ms. Jodi Hall: Thank you for the question.

I do think that there was an opportunity for greater collaboration among the levels of government. Some of the challenges that we have noted were exacerbated by the COVID-19 situation, but they are long-term systemic challenges.

Some of the things that were, for example, put forward by the Public Health Agency of Canada simply couldn't be done in many cases because of the shared living space that we have. When you have four-bed wards and very narrow hallways in some of the older buildings, it makes some of the infection control practices incredibly difficult.

Even with the implementation of one employee to one employer and asking everyone to wear masks as they provided care to residents when social distancing couldn't be maintained, access to PPE was a significant challenge for many homes across the country. Federal government assistance could have gone a long way to support that.

• (1820)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Building on that, Ms. Hall, should the federal government have provided greater assistance to ensure that all long-term care facilities had enough personal protective equipment at the start of the pandemic?

Ms. Jodi Hall: Yes, I do think that there were steps that could have been taken that would absolutely have helped, especially at the beginning of the pandemic.

Things have come a long way since the start of this, but at the beginning there were chronic shortages. There were a lot of unanswered questions. There were many questions around access—where to get it, how to purchase it and how to know about the correct quality of the product we needed and the training associated with it. The list goes on in regard to that.

Support from the federal government could have been extremely helpful in providing a much higher level of support to the homes, especially at the beginning of this outbreak.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Ms. Hall

Ms. Lennox, you touched upon the fact that seniors with low incomes and mental health conditions are significantly less likely to have access to critical supports, especially social supports. You mentioned that some supports they rely upon to get groceries, medications and other essential items have not been able to be delivered in this time of pandemic. What can the government do to ensure that these seniors are getting the supports they need?

Ms. Marissa Lennox: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Canada has been providing. It has a range of services that could be adapted for low income seniors. There are specifically two programs that I think could be provided that would support low-income seniors to remain independent in their homes and communities. These include the caregiver recognition benefit, which is a benefit that provides a monthly payment to an informal caregiver, whether that's a family member or a friend who supports that individual with daily personal care support. I know many people who have had to give up full-time employment in order to care for a family member.

The other one is the veterans independence program, which is essentially payments for home and health care services, as you know. I think those are important programs.

When we look at the financial security of seniors, we see that it has really been impacted by COVID-19, so the other thing CARP has advocated is an acceleration of the commitment by the federal government to increase OAS and the CPP survivor benefits for those who are most vulnerable.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

As you've mentioned, I know that for many seniors the cost of living has increased recently due to COVID-19, and the majority of seniors are especially vulnerable to these changes due to their fixed income. You did touch upon this, saying that it's not preferable, but we have put forward policy suggestions, and many seniors are asking the government to allow for a one-time tax exemption of up to a certain amount for seniors who need to withdraw certain amounts from their RRSPs and RRIFs. Would you suggest that the government do this so that seniors can adapt in some regard to the recent increases to their cost of living?

Ms. Marissa Lennox: I completely agree with this. This would impact people under the age of 71 whose RRSP hasn't converted to a RRIF, while eliminating the withholding tax on RRSP withdrawals. What we've said is to allow two years to repay that tax liability. I think that would go a long way towards supporting seniors who are struggling with liquidity at this time. I think it's an important measure, for sure.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Excellent.

I'll finish by asking the same question that I asked Ms. Hall: In your opinion, should the federal government have intervened earlier in long-term care facilities, so that steps that were taken later in the pandemic would have been taken earlier?

The Chair: Give a short answer, please.

Ms. Marissa Lennox: I do. I acknowledge and appreciate the balancing act that the federal government has to respect with regard to its role in Canada's health system. However, in the context of a pandemic like COVID, when the Public Health Agency of Canada has such an important role to play in the coordination of a pan-Canadian response, I think it's reasonable that PHAC would work with provinces and territories to ensure things like an adequate supply of essential products. I think that's one way the federal government could have intervened.

Another thing we've learned is that most of the key products needed for this response are not manufactured in Canada. There was really no stockpiling of critical supplies to respond to any surge. If anything, going forward there's a role for the federal government and provincial governments to work together on a list of essential products and recommended volumes of supplies needed in the event of a surge caused by something like COVID. Had that been in place in advance, it would have allowed for a more agile response on the part of the provinces and might have minimized the need for the federal government to seek supplies internationally.

• (1825)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lennox.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: We could talk more about the failure of the NESS, but that's another committee. Thank you both.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

Next we have Mr. Housefather for six minutes, please.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): I would like to thank both of the witnesses and their organizations for the incredible work they do. From the Liberal side I want to say to all of the victims of COVID-19 in the long-term care facilities and their families that we feel their pain.

My dad is turning 88 on Wednesday. He is in a long-term care facility here in Montreal because two years ago he had a series of falls and my mom could no longer care for him at home. Over the last nine weeks he has not seen his wife, his children or his grandchildren. He is just one person out of the many who are suffering in these facilities, in a way that we cannot even fathom. The families around them are suffering. The home that he's in has COVID-19. On his floor there are a dozen people affected. It's scary. It's scary for all of us.

I also want to thank the long-term care workers who have been doing an awesome job, despite being underpaid and overtaxed in this equation.

I want to mention as well that I come from the province of Quebec, and this is an area of provincial jurisdiction. While the federal government, and all governments, have a role to play in working with one another, it is clear we have to remember that this is primarily an area of provincial jurisdiction. That has to be recognized. The federal government then needs to step up when the provinces

ask for help, and we have to help. Going forward, especially in a pandemic, Canadians don't care what level of government is constitutionally responsible. They just care that the work gets done.

Ms. Hall, briefly, do you believe there should be a committee study, provincially and federally working together, on how to improve matters in long-term care facilities across Canada, and then an accord between the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments whereby we provide money, and the provincial and territorial governments effect the standards we require in return for that money?

Ms. Jodi Hall: Certainly on behalf of CALTC, I would say that we have long stated that there needs to be engagement with the federal government and that work between the provinces and the federal government needs to greatly expand. As we've seen in some of the data I shared earlier, we're in the midst of a tremendous transition in the Canadian population.

We're becoming a much older demographic, and when we look to the circumstances of the individual provinces, I think it's quite fair to say that they have a significant challenge as it relates to funding their health care budgets appropriately, which are often taking up much of the provincial revenues available to them.

We see this as a shared responsibility between the federal government and the provincial governments, but also amongst the sector and long-term care representatives. I think it's a topic that all Canadians care about. Certainly, while I think it was always there, I think we're seeing that as this pandemic has advanced it has become a very central issue.

As to how that can play out, we're absolutely supportive of having a greater understanding and of working together. Because in each province there is a unique approach to long-term care, one of the challenges we have is to get much better access to shared data. Right now, there is not a centralized data approach, but there are opportunities to introduce that. Things like the management information system or the universal usage of an interRAI long-term care system that allows for assessment data to be comparable right across the board would help to inform investments, and there are other types of initiatives to better understand the standard of care that's being delivered.

I think that could be accomplished through a shared strategy between federal and provincial governments. As well, looking at things like a pan-Canadian strategy for health human resources could be critically important, and I think it's the federal government that could lead us through that.

• (1830)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you.

Again, respecting that this falls under provincial jurisdiction and the provinces have to work with us and agree, we cannot impose on provinces. I think this just needs to be understood constitutionally.

Mr. Chair, do I have more than two minutes left? Or do I have only two minutes?

The Chair: You have a little over one minute.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Then I have to pass this on to Mr. Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor, Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Good evening, everyone.

Thank you for being here.

I will finish what Mr. Housefather started to say.

As parliamentary secretary, I represent seniors with the Government of Canada. Thank you very much for all the questions you have asked today.

In many communities, seniors are clearly struggling with isolation, caregiver access and financial security issues as a result of COVID-19. Today, we are all discussing ways to address this.

Two things concern me: mental health and the impact on women. While there are potential measures to address them, they are major challenges that add to problems that have been there for a very long time.

The question is for Ms. Lennox or Ms. Hall.

Do you have any suggestions on what we could do to improve the mental health of seniors and the specific issues facing women?

[*English*]

Ms. Marissa Lennox: I don't speak French fluently, so I didn't understand the question. Is there a translator who can support me with the specific question? I'm sorry about this.

The Chair: You should have—

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I think you should have the translation already.

The Chair: Ms. Hall, are you able to answer the question? We're actually out of time, so I need a short answer anyway.

Ms. Jodi Hall: The short answer is yes. I think there are strategies that we could work on together. Mental health is a critical issue not only for the residents in our homes but also for our workforce. We would very much like to champion developments in that regard. We have a higher percentage of female residents, so certainly there's a host of other issues that can stem from that, and we would be very open to further conversations.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hall.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

I am sorry I ended your time, but I gave you the floor for a lot longer than six minutes.

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies. Thank you for your presentations.

First, let me say that seniors have been hardest hit by the current crisis. In Canada, it is mostly women living alone who have been affected in terms of health, mental health and finances.

I want to talk about the financial situation. My question is for Ms. Lennox. I hope the interpretation issue has been resolved.

Since the beginning of the crisis, there have been demands. We have put in place assistance and emergency measures, which have been well received. We have provided our support to workers and businesses. Yet, even today, we still feel that we have left seniors behind.

We believe that old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits should be increased. Right now, the annual income of people who receive both amounts is \$18,000, which comes out to less than \$2,000 per month.

Ms. Lennox, is this an important issue for you?

• (1835)

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, I believe we have an interpretation problem.

[*English*]

Ms. Lennox, I'm told that your interpretation is not on the English channel. If it was, you would have simultaneous interpretation.

Ms. Marissa Lennox: I just made that change, so I was able to hear—

The Chair: Oh, did you get the question?

Ms. Marissa Lennox: I was able to hear the question, not the preamble, but the question was just with respect to OAS programs being increased.

It's interesting, and you raise an important point. We do hear this a lot from our members, and it's something that has come up quite a lot during COVID. The government established \$2,000 as the minimum that a family could survive on. For those who have lost employment, they established that \$2,000 as the benchmark that a family would need to sustain themselves through COVID-19. However, as you know and as you mentioned, many seniors live on far less than that. CPP, OAS and, in some cases GIS, don't amount to \$2,000 a month, and that's something that I know we've heard, and it's why we're urging the government to follow through on its commitment to increase OAS by 10%, and also the CPP survivor benefit, which we know involves individuals who are the most vulnerable. They're often women who have had low-paying, precarious work and don't have as much CPP as, say, a spouse.

Did I answer your question?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Yes, thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Lennox again.

Unfortunately, the crisis is going to have a major impact on businesses. There will be more bankruptcies. In fact, we regularly ask questions about it. As we know, many workers' savings lie in their pension funds; it is their nest egg.

Do you agree with pension funds being preferred creditors in the event of bankruptcy?

[*English*]

The Chair: Could you hold your microphone as you answer, Ms. Lennox? It's better for interpretation.

Ms. Marissa Lennox: Yes.

Absolutely, we've long advocated for pension protection, particularly for those with corporate-defined benefit pensions. If you're calling for super-priority, I think there are a number of concerns because, as we move forward, we may see a series of bankruptcies, which may put people in...

Am I answering your question directly? I'm sorry, did you try to interject? Okay.

We may see more bankruptcies as a result, and I think the fear is that many pensioners will be left behind, and they are often at the bottom of the barrel when it comes to the distribution of assets at the end.

With respect to retirement plans, one thing I would say emphatically that our members are extremely passionate about is the need to eliminate RRIF withdrawals. Part of the reason is that currently in the COVID era, that requirement increases your tax liability, which is a real problem for many of our members who are looking to maximize their cash and their flexibility in arranging their affairs at the moment. We welcome the reduction of 25% for RRIF withdrawals. This was not applied retroactively, as you know, and many would like to keep their savings untouched at this time.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

Good afternoon, Ms. Hall. My next question is for you.

I heard your association's appeal. Each province will be affected; each will have to take stock, both in terms of housing and human resources. As you know, of course, health, social services and human resources are provincial jurisdictions. I feel each province will have to account for what went well and what was more difficult. Long before COVID-19, the Bloc Québécois was demanding that the provinces be given the capacity to provide adequate healthcare.

Do you agree that health transfers to the provinces should be increased by at least 5%, as the provinces are asking?

• (1840)

[*English*]

The Chair: Please give a short answer, Ms. Hall.

Ms. Jodi Hall: As I mentioned, with the aging demographic that we have, I think the provinces are incredibly challenged to provide the level of services that we know seniors need from a health care perspective. There is a lot of opportunity, I believe, for that shared responsibility approach and for ongoing collaborations. I know that provinces have been asking for additional funding. We believe there is a very strong conversation required for that.

There are many opportunities for collaboration on the development of a pan-Canadian human resource strategy to look at how we can support modern infrastructure developments that best support seniors in care today. I think a multitude of other opportunities can happen when we have the opportunity to sit down and figure out a strategy that best supports seniors across the country.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hall.

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses. My questions will be for Ms. Lennox.

One of the key issues that I know seniors are concerned about is with respect to interruptions to the GIS. Even though the government has extended the deadline for seniors to file their taxes, some will still not likely be able to meet that deadline. Would you then support the government's grandfathering of all seniors receiving GIS automatically for 2020-21?

Ms. Marissa Lennox: Yes, we would. That's something we would absolutely support, particularly for those who are on GIS. They're our most vulnerable. Grandfathering is something that we would fundamentally support, yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The other thing I've asked of the government is to make sure that, for seniors who might be receiving emergency benefits during this COVID period, those benefits not be counted toward their income for the purposes of calculating GIS next year. Can you comment on that, please?

Ms. Marissa Lennox: It's an interesting proposal. I'd not considered it, but it sounds like a very good one. As I said, people on GIS are in the lowest income bracket and could use a number of supports at this time. I think that would be a positive step forward for the government to take, absolutely.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much. There's no question that, as you indicated already, seniors on these fixed incomes are not being recognized by the government as being in need of support during this COVID period. As such, they have not come in with what would be a much simpler approach—namely, a direct universal benefit for all. That would capture seniors, students and everybody else instead of the complicated system we have today. I appreciate your comments on that.

I now want to turn to the long-term care issue that both witnesses touched on. There's no question that throughout this pandemic, the failures of the system for our seniors in long-term care facilities have been highlighted. One of the issues, of course, is that we see a stark difference between the private long-term care facilities versus the not-for-profit long-term care facilities.

To that end, Ms. Lennox, can you comment on whether you would support national standards being established, which you've already spoken to, in a care guarantee? What would that entail?

Ms. Marissa Lennox: Obviously, you raise something that is a very hot topic of debate at the moment. That's in part because of The Star's investigation. This weekend we saw that for-profit nursing homes have four times as many COVID deaths as city-run homes do. In many ways this isn't a surprise. There have been numerous studies around the world comparing for-profit and not-for-profit homes and municipally run homes. Generally the trend is that for-profit homes tend to have poorer performance. You can see why this might be the case given the increased pressure, obviously, to turn a profit. One of the biggest budget line items is staffing. In the absence of clear ratios or number of hours per resident, this is often the first thing that does get cut. Food budgets are another thing we know are absolutely deplorable in these long-term care settings.

However, we do know there are both good and bad examples in private, as well as public, long-term care homes, which speaks to your comment about a national standard. At a minimum, I think part of the go-forward is that we have to ensure that all provincial and territorial jurisdictions align their health workforce in these facilities to be consistent in terms of qualifications, credentials, specialization, and even staff ratios.

Then even when you reflect back on how some of the homes performed, why was it that in B.C., care workers stopped working at multiple homes two weeks before care workers in Ontario and in Quebec did? These are some of the questions that I think really need answering. It's possible that had the federal government stepped in with greater leadership.... I understand the provincial and federal jurisdictional challenges, but had there been some sort of standard in place that ensured best practices, we might have seen a better performance.

• (1845)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Part of establishing a standard that would apply in all provinces and territories could be to bring long-term care under the Canada Health Act.

Ms. Marissa Lennox: I think that's a really important point. If you look at the true definition of long-term care—and every province categorizes it differently—if you require the highest level of institutional long-term care, that is a health service, and, frankly, it should be treated no differently from how a hospital is treated. In

that case, it should be under the Canada Health Act. I think there's real merit to deeming long-term care facilities hospitals under the Canada Health Act, because, as I said, when you look at the characteristics of patients in these facilities, these facilities are really operating as hospitals. Ultimately, that would bring long-term care up to hospital standards, with better infection control and prevention, and nursing and staff training and education standards, and it would become part of the envelope of federal financial transfers under the Canada Health Act. I think that would be great.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much for that.

I would venture to say, actually, on the private versus for-profit long-term facilities, even in British Columbia we notice a significant difference. A lot of our long-term care facilities in British Columbia, previous to a Liberal provincial government taking over, were in fact not-for-profit agencies. They switched over along with the staffing that went into a private approach to it, and even then we saw the difference in terms of the impact for seniors.

Full disclosure: the NDP call for long-term care facilities to be fully in the non-profit regime.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Next we have Ms. Falk.

Go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, Chair.

Just so you know, I will be sharing my time with Ms. Jansen.

I again want to thank all of the witnesses for all of their comments. We do know that COVID-19 has, without a doubt, put a strain on the social services and resources available to support Canadians. As has been mentioned, it has exposed the fragility of many existing resources, and our seniors have certainly been impacted by many of these gaps. During this health crisis, I have had many heartbreaking conversations with constituents who are in desperate situations.

One constituent who called my office was having difficulty getting groceries because of social distancing measures. Because of his disability, he is dependent on getting a ride into a neighbouring town to get groceries. A lot of organizations are filling these gaps for seniors. The government has provided for funding to some of these large national organizations, but the reality is that these national organizations do not have the same reach in rural Canada.

The riding I represent is made up of many small rural communities. The challenges in our rural communities differ greatly from those in urban centres. We know in bigger cities, especially those like Ottawa, it's easy to take for granted Internet access, stable mobile networks or even quick access to grocery stores.

The closure of Service Canada offices has forced Canadians in rural communities to depend on phone and Internet connections that, frankly, aren't very reliable.

I also just want to make a note that this government increased the carbon tax during this health crisis, a tax that unfairly punishes rural Canadians. For seniors on a fixed income, this is one more case of money out of their pocket.

An issue I've been hearing about is pharmacy dispensing fees. I've heard from many seniors in my riding, who live in these small communities and who need to drive into a bigger community to get their prescriptions filled and buy their groceries, etc. Many of these seniors budget their trips to town because it's costly to drive in and do their errands. That said, many seniors usually get their prescriptions filled every three months to save on trips to town and pharmacy dispensing fees.

My question is for CARP.

I'm wondering if you've heard of similar situations like this. I'm going to assume it's not just in Saskatchewan that we're experiencing this.

• (1850)

Ms. Marissa Lennox: No, it's right across the country. A number of the Atlantic provinces have taken steps to go back to 90 days, and Manitoba recently did as well.

I can honestly say, since the Canadian Pharmacists Association came out with that recommendation, we've received countless emails and calls from CARP members who say that these additional costs are unaffordable and unsustainable. They fear having to make additional trips to pharmacies.

Also, keep in mind, many pharmacies don't open during seniors' hours. There are a number of seniors' hours at grocery stores. Say you were to visit Loblaws: The seniors' hours are fairly early. Maybe a pharmacy may not open until 9:00, so they're making additional trips on top of that.

This is part of the out-of-pocket expense I mentioned in the beginning that seniors are being required to incur as a result of COVID. In this case, it's fully attributable to the copayments related to these prescriptions. People are being required to pay three times the amount of copayment, which is significant. With what we know about our members, they are superusers when it comes to prescription medications. Many take, on average, four prescription medications, with some taking more than 10. These costs add up

and they add up quickly. We know the result of this has been that many seniors have had to make very difficult decisions about whether to put food on the table or pay for essential medicine.

We have urged all—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Ms. Lennox, I'm sorry; I'm so short on time. I want to make sure that Ms. Jansen has an opportunity to ask a question as well.

Thank you.

Ms. Marissa Lennox: Okay.

The Chair: You have a little over a minute.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Thank you.

Ms. Hall, a few weeks ago I was alerted to a tragic situation that a young man, Roger Foley, was struggling with. Roger has cerebellar ataxia. He's currently being cared for in a hospital in Ontario. Roger needs an intense amount of care due to his physical limitations, and struggles with very basic things like swallowing and shifting from his bed to a sling. Roger is completely dependent on health care workers for his very life.

When the hospital informed him they were going to transfer him from hospital to a care home due to COVID-19, Roger became incredibly distressed. New caregivers, new routines, new lodgings are all real challenges for the severely disabled. Continuity of care helps them feel they have some semblance of control over their bodily autonomy.

As you can imagine, as the hospital shifted Roger, he began to despair. His new caregivers were not able to adapt easily to his particular needs and tried to force him to agree to procedures that would make his care easier on the nurses—for example, pressuring him to have a G-tube inserted rather than allowing him to eat independently with the help of a nurse.

Is this endemic in long-term care, the idea of putting the efficiencies of care ahead of the needs of the autonomy of a disabled patient, whose life is completely in the hands of the caregiver and has very little capacity to refuse?

The Chair: We're out of time.

Could you keep your answer very short, please?

Ms. Jodi Hall: Okay. That's a hard one to answer with very succinctly.

Obviously, the welfare of an individual resident is absolutely the key priority. I can't speak to the full circumstances of an individual. I'm sorry to hear that has been the experience.

Care for individuals is overseen by physicians, and care is highly regulated, along with the funding that goes to these care homes across the country. They are highly regulated, inspected, licensed, and there's great oversight of the provision of care and the finances provided to these homes for the care of individuals.

I'm sorry to hear about the circumstances. It's difficult to address a specific, individual example, but that is certainly not reflective of a standard of care in long-term care.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hall.

[*Translation*]

The final member to ask questions is Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you.

My question is for Ms. Lennox.

Ms. Lennox, at least three times in your answers, you said that the federal government could have done more, either in terms of engaging with the provinces or in terms of supplying personal protective equipment, and that it did not act quickly enough in that regard.

I have a very simple question for you. Are you aware that health and long-term care fall under provincial and territorial jurisdiction?

• (1855)

[*English*]

Ms. Marissa Lennox: Yes, of course.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: You said that Canada does not produce personal protective equipment and that we depend on China for our supply. Yet we have invested \$2 billion in the private sector to produce personal protective equipment.

Are you aware that some Canadian companies have converted their businesses to supply this required equipment?

[*English*]

Ms. Marissa Lennox: Yes, I do. I'm familiar with that. Thank you to the federal government for that investment of \$2 billion. I remember it well. It was in March.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Then how can you explain that, in less than three months of the crisis, we have converted Canadian companies and supplied equipment to the provinces?

You also mentioned that we have not given more equipment to long-term care facilities. As you know, this is all under provincial jurisdiction. We have provided assistance to the provinces.

How do you know that the provinces have not received the equipment needed from the federal government?

[*English*]

Ms. Marissa Lennox: The purpose of my statement was to really emphasize the need for greater federal and provincial cooperation. I am quite familiar with the fact that provincial and territorial

governments are responsible for the delivery of health care. What I would urge is better cooperation.

With respect to this pandemic, we know there were shortages in long-term care facilities' access to PPE. We know that many health care workers were not equipped with the necessary PPE to keep them safe. The consequence was that this virus spread. Also, many care workers were fearful of showing up at work, and that contributed to chronic staffing shortages right across the country.

My point was really to emphasize the need for better planning and preparation—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I am not talking about the labour shortage, I am talking about the shortage of personal protective equipment, which you mentioned three times.

If the province of Quebec is the hardest-hit province in Canada and the Quebec government has been able to meet healthcare workers' equipment needs, how can you base your comments on other provinces, when Quebec has been able to supply its healthcare facilities with the necessary equipment?

[*English*]

Ms. Marissa Lennox: I think the availability of PPE varied in many provinces. Even testing varied. It kind of depends on the jurisdiction. I'm not making a blanket statement right across the country. I know some provinces had difficulty getting consistent testing across the province, and certainly access to PPE was variable, too. Ontario is, unfortunately, the best example of this problem. Some provinces performed better than others. For example, P.E.I. had no testing capacity in March, and at the end of April could do 2,000 tests per day.

I don't know that I'm answering your question, but I think access to these types of essentials varies depending on the province.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Quebec asked the Canadian military to assist staff in long-term care facilities, and they stepped up quickly.

Do you believe our government would have better handled this crisis had it not respected provincial and territorial jurisdictions? Would the crisis have been better managed if the Prime Minister had decided not to respect provincial and territorial jurisdictions in order to provide direct assistance to Canadians?

[*English*]

Ms. Marissa Lennox: No, certainly not. I respect our Constitution. I respect the difference between the federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions, but I think there is an opportunity for more collaboration, particularly during a pandemic, for the government to work collaboratively with the provinces to ensure that these essential supplies are there.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lennox.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

● (1900)

[*English*]

We have now reached the appointed hour. I would like to say thank you very much to the witnesses for being with us, for your testimony and for answering the questions.

Thank you very much to my colleagues. We will see you, I expect, on Friday.

We're adjourned.

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