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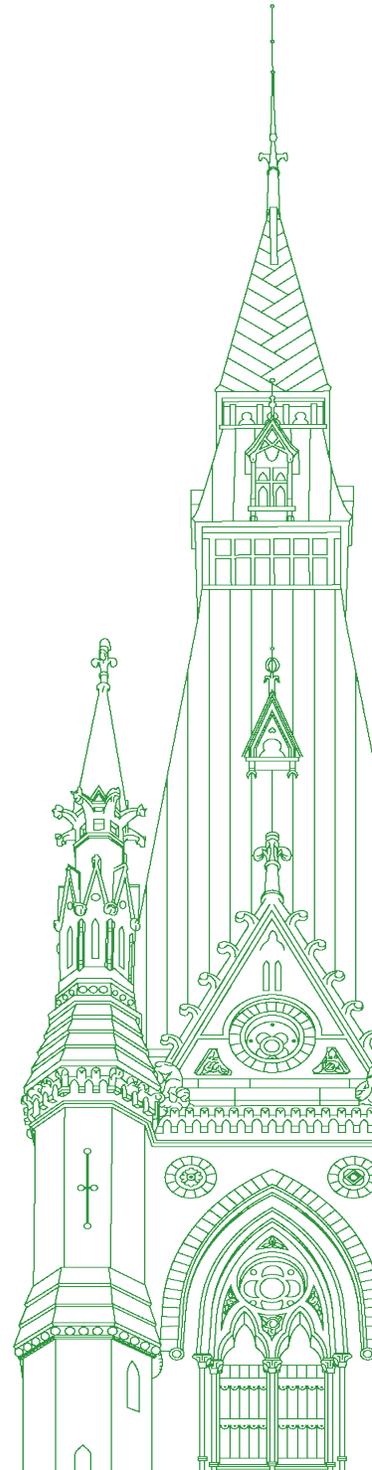
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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey

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

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• (1405)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 15 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 April 11, 2020 and May 26, 2020, this committee is resuming its study of the government response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on May 26, 2020, the committee may continue to sit virtually until Monday, September 21, 2020 to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters.

Certain limitations on the virtual committee meetings held until now are now removed. As just mentioned, the committee is now able to consider other matters, and, in addition to receiving evidence, the committee may also consider motions, as we normally do. As stipulated in the latest order of reference from the House, all motions shall be decided by a recorded vote.

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.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, please click on the microphone to activate your mike.

Before I get started, and this is especially for the witnesses who intend to present in both official languages, please ensure that the language channel you are speaking on is turned on at the time you are speaking. If you switch from English to French, please also switch the channel from English to French. It helps with the translation.

I would now like to thank the witnesses for joining us today. With us today we have, from the Canadian Labour Congress, Hassan Yussuff, president, and Emily Norgang, economist, social and economic policy. From the Christian Labour Association of Canada, we have Wayne Prins, executive director.

Mr. Yussuff, please proceed with your opening remarks. You have 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff (President, Canadian Labour Congress): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. Thank you for

the opportunity to appear before you today. It's a pleasure to join you, even though it's remotely.

The Canadian Labour Congress is the largest central labour body in the country. It brings together more than 50 national and international unions in Canada, as well as 12 provincial and territorial federations of labour and 100 labour councils across the country. The CLC speaks on issues of national importance for three million unionized men and women. It also advocates on behalf of all working people in this country.

Committee members have received a copy of the CLC brief on labour priorities for the economic recovery.

The coronavirus pandemic and economic shutdown have been devastating for millions of working people. As you know, low-income workers, especially women and vulnerable workers, have disproportionately lost jobs and earnings in the crisis.

I will speak to some priority areas for the CLC and Canada's unions.

On unemployment benefits, first, I want to commend the government and public service workers for quickly designing and implementing the Canada emergency response benefit, known as CERB. The employment insurance program was not equipped to handle the extraordinary spike in jobless claims. A simple unemployment benefit that allowed automated claims processing was needed. The CERB has generally worked well, but both unions and employers have urged the federal government to allow supplemental unemployment benefit payments on top of the CERB.

SUB plans were negotiated by unions and employers in anticipation of layoffs. We therefore urge the federal government to extend the CERB beyond the 16 weeks. Many low-paid, part-time and casual workers, as well as the self-employed receiving CERB benefits, are ineligible for EI under existing rules. At the same time, the EI regular sickness benefits should be simplified and streamlined so that the claims processing can be fully automated. The eligibility threshold should therefore be lowered and a higher replacement rate introduced.

Turning to long-term care, the Canadian Armed Forces' reports on long-term care homes in Ontario and Quebec show what unions have been saying for years: Many long-term care homes are in crisis. The needless cost of lives and shameful treatment of residents at many long-term care homes are unacceptable.

This situation was created by years of provincial budget cuts, increased private for-profit ownership of long-term care homes, and health care staff shortages due to low wages, few benefits, excessive workloads, unsafe working conditions and a lack of full-time hours. Of course, the provinces and territories are responsible for delivering health care services. However, Canada desperately needs high, uniform national standards for long-term care.

The CLC urges the federal government to work with the provinces and territories to remove private for-profit business from the long-term care sector. Long-term care must be brought fully into the public health system and regulated under the Canada Health Act. Residents must be guaranteed high-quality care, with proper staffing and health and safety protections for workers. As well, essential work done by long-term care employees must be properly valued. If we are going to address the staffing problems and shortcomings in residential care, workers need permanent increases in wages and benefits, and improvements in working conditions.

I again commend the federal government for allocating up to \$3 billion to assist the provinces and territories in boosting wages for low-income essential workers. These wage increases must be made permanent, and, in my view, they should also apply to low-paid migrant workers ensuring the security of Canada's food supply.

Canada's public transit systems are also in crisis. Efficient, accessible and reliable public transit systems are essential to the economic recovery of working people. However, a 90% drop in ridership in some cities has meant a drastic drop in fares and billions in lost revenues. As transit authorities reduce services, thousands of transit workers have been laid off, with thousands more anticipated to be laid off.

Transit employees who are still on the job face serious health risks. Most transit vehicles and maintenance facilities have not been adequately retrofitted, and many workers lack sufficient personal protective equipment, or PPE.

● (1410)

In our view, the federal government should collaborate with the provincial and territorial governments to develop a federal relief package for public transit systems and intercity bus service networks, and provide capital expenditures dedicated to retrofitting transit vehicles and purchasing PPE for transit workers.

Ensuring workplace health and safety is vital for returning to work. Paid sick leave for workers is essential in combatting COVID-19. I want to commend, of course, the government, and the NDP in particular, for putting this on the agenda.

It is important that employers consult with workers, their unions, and health and safety representatives about how to make sure these safety plans and COVID-19 controls will work. Workers must be engaged through their health and safety committees in assessing workplace hazards related to COVID-19 and developing a re-

sponse. This is an important part of good health and safety practices and must be included in workplace COVID-19 safety planning. We also need to expand support for workers dealing with mental health challenges arising from health risks, loss of loved ones, isolation, financial stress, and depression and anxiety.

On pharmacare, before the pandemic, about 10% of Canadians, or 3.7 million, could not afford the medications they needed. Now more Canadians cannot afford their medications, and millions of workers have lost their jobs and no longer have workplace drug coverage. During the pandemic, seniors on fixed incomes are struggling to pay for their medications, as they can only get refills month by month, as opposed to every three months, as it was prior to the pandemic.

We therefore urge the government to accelerate the implementation of universal public pharmacare as outlined in the Hoskins report. In conjunction with the provinces, the government should of course move to immediately provide everyone in Canada with access to a list of essential medications, covering approximately half of all prescriptions. This is consistent with the recommendations of the Hoskins report but represents an acceleration of the proposed timelines.

Turning to pension and retirement security, layoffs and lost earnings will have a lasting impact on the retirement security of many working Canadians. In March, the government reduced the minimum amount that must be withdrawn from registered retirement income funds for 2020. In May, the government also announced one-time financial assistance for seniors eligible for old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. The government also suspended insolvency funding for federally regulated pension plans. We welcome these steps.

The CLC is also urging the government to work with provincial counterparts to amend the Canada pension plan. This will also be needed to safeguard the CPP retirement benefits of contributors whose earnings have been affected by the economic shutdown and unemployment crisis. In our view, this should take the form of amending the CPP's drop-out and drop-in provisions, which partially protect the retirement benefit entitlement of contributors against a period of low or zero earnings.

In the absence of such extraordinary measures, the CPP retirement benefit of hundreds of thousands of Canadians will be permanently reduced, with potential lifetime losses to individuals in the thousands of dollars. Also, if insolvencies begin to rise, we would like to see, of course, the federal government protect pensions by taking over the administration of stranded pension plans.

Finally, on the green economy, just transition and infrastructure investments, in our view, this crisis presents a unique opportunity to kick-start economic growth and create thousands of good jobs for women and men by investing in social infrastructure like day cares, schools, libraries and hospitals, as well as green infrastructure and related projects, such as renewable energy, home and building retrofits, and public transit.

Governments can further ensure that projects benefit local communities, women, indigenous peoples and marginalized groups by mandating community benefit agreements on federally funded infrastructure projects. These investments would not only help us meet our climate targets, but also generate thousands of decent jobs across the country.

To assist in the process, the government should fully engage unions and working people in the government's economic advisory committee providing guidance on recovery planning.

Committee members, that concludes my opening remarks. Thank you very kindly for your attention. I'll take any questions you may have.

• (1415)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Yussuff.

Next, we have Wayne Prins, executive director of the Christian Labour Association of Canada. You have 10 minutes, Mr. Prins.

Mr. Wayne Prins (Executive Director, Christian Labour Association of Canada): Thank you.

Good day, everyone. I really appreciate the opportunity to meet with you today.

CLAC is a national union founded on the belief that people, businesses and work communities flourish when workplaces are based on co-operation and mutual respect. We believe that co-operation and partnership between labour and management create more positive work communities and better outcomes for everyone.

CLAC was established in 1952 and is today one of the largest independent multisectoral unions in Canada, with over 60,000 members working in a wide range of sectors and industries, including construction, health care, retail, transportation, manufacturing, food processing and others. Internationally, CLAC is an affiliated member of the World Organisation of Workers, for which I currently serve as president. The World Organisation of Workers collectively represents 1.5 million workers throughout much of the world.

We remain independent of traditional labour bodies in Canada, such as the Canadian Labour Congress, which you have already heard from. We have a great deal of respect for the traditional labour establishment, and in many instances we have come to work in collaboration with their affiliated members on ground-level initiatives. That we are not a member of the labour establishment

speaks primarily to a different perspective regarding the nature and role of a union in a workplace, as well as worker choice and union accountability. However, in many respects, the day-to-day work of our unions is similar, and certainly we face the same challenges in today's environment.

I'd like to commend all parties for coming together and supporting a quick and effective response to the COVID-19 crisis. Key among the programs are the emergency response benefit and the emergency wage subsidy. The emergency response benefit has been extraordinarily successful in helping millions of Canadians through the worst of this crisis, and the emergency wage subsidy, particularly significant because it is a 75% subsidy, has literally saved thousands of Canadian businesses and kept millions of Canadians gainfully employed. While these programs will need some adjustments going forward, they will remain critically important for months to come, supporting workers and employers as we rebuild the economy.

I want to speak to a national crisis that, in the midst of this COVID-19 crisis, has taken centre stage in the Canadian conscience.

CLAC represents nearly 10,000 members working on the front lines of health care and long-term care in Ontario, Alberta and B.C. Grace Manor of Holland Christian Homes, which was one of the homes mentioned in the national media last week, is represented by CLAC. These workers are caring for our nation's seniors with amazing dedication and commitment. If you've spent time with them, you know how they love the residents and work desperately hard to care for them in such a way that keeps them comfortable and preserves their dignity.

They work in an environment that is exceedingly challenging and for money that often falls short of a living wage. The workers use every possible minute of their shift to provide hands-on care for the residents, yet the system drowns them in needless paperwork and documentation, which takes time away from the residents. The expectations and burdens of care have been steadily increasing, yet the rate of funding has steadily declined. As a result, the working conditions are so challenging that finding qualified staff is very difficult. Worker shortages are common and caregiver burnout is on the rise.

All of this betrays an appalling indifference as a society to the care of our seniors. The sector has been neglected by governments across the country for decades. In fact, CLAC, along with others, has been ringing alarm bells on this issue for over 30 years. I understand that this sector is primarily in provincial jurisdiction, but we now understand the issue as a national crisis. There's a moral imperative for all stakeholders to get together and find solutions to the crisis now. The federal government can play a helpful role in this, starting with establishing a national standard of care for our seniors. This could be achieved by a nationally orchestrated study of best practices that have resulted in superior outcomes.

With all that has been said recently, I want to take this opportunity to honour the service of the workers in this sector. We are not upset that the military released its report on the homes in Ontario. In fact, it may finally be the catalyst for meaningful change. However, for us, it is deeply distressing to see the front-line workers in long-term care shouldering the weight of public outrage when, in fact, the guilt belongs elsewhere. The workers remain the heroes in this equation, and the burden is on the rest of us, starting with our political leaders, to fix it.

● (1420)

Lastly, I want to talk about the construction industry and work in the skilled trades. CLAC represents over 40,000 skilled tradespeople working in construction and skilled trades. Notably, CLAC represents about half of the construction and contracted maintenance workforce in Alberta's oil sands, as well as about half of the workforce building the clean energy megaproject in northern B.C., called the Site C dam. We will build much of the LNG Canada project in Kitimat, and when the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project ramps up to full activity later this year, over 60% of that workforce will be CLAC members.

We are very proud to be building much of the infrastructure in our natural resource sector, which ultimately propels the entire Canadian economy.

Through this crisis, construction activity has been an economic lifeline for many Canadians. While the majority of the economy has been shut down, governments across the country declared much of construction work essential. This affirms what we in the industry talk about as parity of esteem, which is that education in the skilled trades is as noble as any other form of education, and work in the skilled trades is as important as any other in the country.

It's important to understand that the construction workforce in Canada is comprised of three main groups: the traditional building trade unions, CLAC and other alternative unions, and the non-union or open shop. Each of these groups enjoys a significant share of the market in Canada, and just as Canadians are well served by the competition among political parties, we are also well served by the competition among the players in the construction landscape.

I say all of that because there is an important link to what comes next in the economic recovery from COVID-19. As we saw just this morning with the Prime Minister's announcement regarding municipalities, a key response to stimulate economic growth and activity will be major investments in public infrastructure.

The federal government alone will spend billions of dollars on construction projects, and so will your provincial and municipal counterparts. In many cases, particularly on large projects, funding will come from multiple levels of government. In all cases, it is incumbent upon governments to ensure that this money is spent both efficiently and in such a way that it's used to the greatest benefit of the community in which it is spent. This idea has given rise to the use of community benefit agreements, a contractual tool used to ensure that these benefits are realized.

CLAC, of course, endorses the use of community benefit agreements when they are used properly. By "properly" I mean that they identify the desired community benefits and then set in place the conditions and resources necessary to achieve them without losing the benefits of fair and open competition for the work among all players in the construction industry.

Sometimes community benefit agreements are used to limit access to the work to only one group of labour. For example, the Government of British Columbia has entered a community benefit agreement with the B.C. building trade unions. This means that on designated projects paid for by all citizens of B.C., only members of the building trade unions are permitted to perform the work. The City of Toronto has done the same thing with the Ontario building trades.

Evidence suggests that where community benefit agreements are used in this restrictive way, the cost of public projects increases by 20% to 25%. Imagine 20% to 25% on the billions of dollars of infrastructure money that will be spent across this country over the next decade. This is a critically important issue. Fair and open tendering of public infrastructure, whether under the auspices of a community benefit agreement or not, is the best approach and the approach the federal government should demand of every infrastructure dollar spent on behalf of Canadians.

I will leave my opening comments at that, and I look forward to answering questions from the committee.

Thank you.

● (1425)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Prins.

Now we are going to questions, starting with Mr. Vis, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I'll be splitting my time today with MP Jansen.

Mr. Prins, I will outline to the committee that my mother was a shop steward, a low-paid shop steward, at Bethesda Christian Association for probably over 20 years. Thank you for appearing today.

Like many other Canadians, I'm very concerned about what I have been hearing about the long-term care facilities, in Ontario and Quebec specifically. Do you believe not-for-profit private care faces the same funding challenges that for-profit private care has?

Mr. Wayne Prins: Yes. Generally, the funding problem is across the board. Certainly there are different nuances, and if you look at the industry as a whole, there is a wide range of not-for-profit and for-profit in public facilities. I'm not aware of any evidence that shows any direct correlation between outcomes and what type of home it is. The issues, particularly the problematic type of experiences we're hearing more about recently, have more to do with across-the-board funding shortages, where there has been a general neglect and simply not providing the funding necessary to any of the homes to keep that level of standards where it should be.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you. That's very important testimony for this committee.

Can you briefly touch upon the plight of hotel workers right now? I know in British Columbia many of them might be on the wage subsidy right now, but when the international events at the convention centre in Vancouver dry up in the fall, what's facing these workers?

Mr. Wayne Prins: To refer to it as a "plight" is absolutely accurate. Workers across the country will experience different rates of return to some type of normal, but workers in the hospitality sector, particularly the hotel workers, are going to be suffering from low levels of activity in that sector for many months. What's going to be necessary there are prolonged considerations for the assistance programs from government, for wage subsidies, but also other forms of assistance, so that these people can pay their bills. In many cases, they're simply not going to be returning to work for a long time yet.

When you think about even our own activities, my activities and those of everyone on the median today, and the number of days we are not spending in hotels where we normally would, there's a direct correlation between our activities and the activity that causes work in that sector. Some of us might start to spend time in hotels in the next month or two, but more than likely we won't return to a normal rate of activity for many months. For as many months as we're delayed, that's how long these workers are going to need support.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay.

Could I get one very quick response? Going back to long-term care facilities in Quebec and Ontario specifically, and the lack of funding that you and the other witness outlined, is there not enough oversight of these facilities going on right now at the provincial level of government?

• (1430)

Mr. Wayne Prins: It's hard to say there isn't enough oversight. There had been a relaxation of some of the enforcement.

People are asking questions right now about how it could possibly have come to this. There are issues with regulation and there are issues with oversight, but most of the problems we are seeing manifested in residents' experience are simply rooted in a lack of funding to allow staff to have the time and resources necessary to

care for residents the way they should be and the way they want to be.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you.

I'll be turning the remainder of my time to MP Jansen now.

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

Mr. Prins, I thought Mr. Yussuff's suggestion of making everything public was a bit of oversimplification of the challenges that long-term care facilities are facing. I know here in my area we have a for-profit long-term care facility that's run like a cruise ship. It's fantastic. They actually had to disallow health workers from their health region from coming in because they had only two sets of gloves and two masks to use for the week.

Minister Tassi's [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] answer if this was acceptable. Do you think that's acceptable?

Mr. Wayne Prins: Sorry, could you clarify?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: They don't have enough PPE, yet they're sent into home care.

Mr. Wayne Prins: No, it's absolutely not acceptable. Of all the issues we're facing in that sector, PPE is a critical one. You can only imagine the distress of these workers going right to the front lines, in direct contact with contagion, with an inadequate supply of PPE. It's unimaginable.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Would you consider it an oversimplification to suggest that if you make it all public, that would actually solve the problem?

It doesn't appear that this is a single problem.

The Chair: Give a short answer, please, Mr. Prins.

Mr. Wayne Prins: Of course, that's an oversimplification. There are plenty of non-public facilities that do an outstanding job. If you even think about the ways these homes are structured, many of them are affiliated with a cultural or faith-based background. When we even think about where we want to spend our last days, that's....

The sector is well served by a diversity of options; the issue lies elsewhere.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Prins.

Thank you, Mrs. Jansen.

Next we'll go to Mr. Turnbull for six minutes, please.

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

Thanks to both our witnesses for appearing today. I really appreciate you and your leadership.

Mr. Yussuff, I'm going to start with you. I have a few questions for you, and then we'll see if we can get over to Mr. Prins as well.

Mr. Yussuff, I want to thank you for your leadership, but I also want to reference a really important document that the Canadian Labour Congress produced around May 13 of this year, which outlined labour's vision for economic recovery.

I think that document references the need for applying a gender and racial lens to our economic recovery. It talks specifically about being focused on an inclusive recovery process and a real commitment to reducing inequality across Canada as we reopen and eventually recover in a responsible and fulsome fashion.

Can you elaborate on these priorities? I'm particularly interested in whether you think that community benefit agreements are a part of that, but I would also welcome any of your general comments about how we can further address or reduce inequality.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: Thank you very much for your question.

In our view, based on the evidence we have seen on public projects and public investment, there's no question that community benefits have been an incredible driver for dealing with income inequality, but equally in dealing with the diversity of those who sometimes may not have the opportunity to become part of that sector.

It's not only for the workers who might get an apprenticeship, or a woman who might get an apprenticeship, but it's also for those small businesses that are trying to leverage an opportunity to access the business at the same time as these projects are operating.

The reality, of course, is that community benefits have been an enormous driver in dealing with inequality, providing access to many workers who would not have an opportunity—especially young people, women and aboriginal people—to get an apprenticeship program and, given the duration of these projects, not only to start an apprenticeship program, but also to complete the program in the process of those investments.

I think it's critical. These are government investments and, to a large extent, we have seen, with the evidence that we've been able to look at, that workers in those communities can benefit enormously from community benefits being attached to those projects. Equally, in the places where money is invested—and this is taxpayers' money—we have seen new opportunities for people who quite often have not had that option before. It is critical to maintain a way to measure how that benefit has significantly impacted and benefited the community at large, but equally who has benefited in the community specifically.

Racialized workers, aboriginal workers and women workers are the ones to target, the ones the help should go to. It's important to get both the employer and the project management to document how the community benefit has shown progress in bringing into the sector groups that may not have had the opportunity prior to that.

• (1435)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you for that.

That's wonderful, and I really support the community benefit agreements.

The report I was just referring to, "Labour's Vision for Economic Recovery", also highlights the importance of child care and even goes as far as recommending a child care secretariat.

Could you expand on this point to help us understand why, from your perspective, labour organizations you represent want a broad and well-funded quality child care? Why is this so important to Canada's economic recovery?

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: I started out by saying that certain groups of course have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic so far. We know for a fact that women are bearing most of the burden of the child-rearing responsibility. Those who have been in the workforce and who have been locked down for this entire period, of course, are struggling with that reality.

We believe that if we really want to reboot the economy, this is going to be a critical component of that rebooting. We need to make sure that parents are able to put their kids in proper care as they go back to work. If there's an absence of that, they're not going to go back to work. As I speak to you today, women are more than half of the workforce, but, equally so, families in general rely upon child care to ensure that they can all go to work. If we don't have an adequate child care component in the reopening of the economy, I think we're going to see a disproportionate re-engagement of those who are not going to get there.

We believe the child care sector is a critical part. We also know from history, in terms of the Quebec child care system, that the system actually pays for itself over time by that investment. We need to work with the provinces and with municipal governments to ensure that, as we are reopening the economy, child care is going to be a critical component. We believe the business community supports this idea.

As a matter of fact, with Goldy Hyder and the Business Council, we co-authored an article you'll see published sometime this week, calling on the federal government to work with provinces and territories, but also with municipal governments, and take steps to ensure that child care will be a critical component as we reboot the economy and, critical to that, to recognize the disproportionate responsibility that women are taking on in this recovery period. We don't want to burden them further by not having child care, and we want to make sure the funding and support are there for them going forward.

I want to thank the government for whatever they're doing. We're going to continue to push to make sure this happens as we enter into the recovery.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Yussuff and Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Yussuff, we're now going to go to Madam Chabot, but I have a note that the interpreters are having a bit of a hard time picking you up. Could you hold your mike a bit closer? It will make it easier for interpretation.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: Wonderful. I'll try that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

President Yussuff, thank you for your testimony. I have a thousand questions for you.

From the outset, I must say I agree with you on some things. For example, investing in quality flagship public services is necessary for economic recovery. That is part of the solution. We have the same opinion on that, and that is also often the case with regard to certain struggles we have to wage.

My question will focus more specifically on pension funds. I don't know if you have the full picture, but what's happening is quite disturbing. As you mentioned, the economic recovery is not happening evenly across the board. Some companies are already moving to creditor protection, and there may be more bankruptcies than we thought.

With regard to pension funds, until the government decides to amend the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, do you think it could at least do something to protect workers?

• (1440)

[*English*]

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: Yes, of course. I really want to thank you for the question. This is an area that worries workers a lot, especially with the reality that some companies might be insolvent during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Minister Morneau has made some incredible improvements to the solvency issues that our pension plans are going to be faced with—trying to get recognition of that reality. Equally, I highlighted today in our brief that it's quite likely some pension plans might suffer insolvency during this period.

In that regard, what we're saying is quite possible. The federal government could come up with a scheme to take over a plan should it become orphaned, in consultation with the workers and the employer, to decide how to manage that plan during the insolvency period to bring it back to life.

There are also other worries, of course. If a company should go bankrupt, the remaining assets of that company are not prioritized to go to workers. We have been calling for some time now that the workers should be first in line for the bankrupt assets to fund their pension. These were promises made by the employer. These are diverted wages. More importantly, employers should not be released from their responsibility during a bankruptcy period.

We also believe, at the same time, that it's quite important to do as Ontario has done. They have an insurance scheme. When a com-

pany goes bankrupt and the pension plan is completely orphaned, the insurance scheme is there to give the workers a degree of protection. Most recently we saw this with the workers from Sears. That company went bankrupt. The workers in Ontario fared better than workers outside of Ontario because of the pension insurance scheme that the Ontario government had in place.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Is the pension protection mechanism in place in Ontario a formal program, or is it a trust, as many unions and retirees have, as we know, tried to have established and recognized? Is the Ontario mechanism different from this type of trust or not? That is not clear.

[*English*]

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: If your pension plan is registered in Ontario, then you automatically are part of the insurance scheme. You have to pay a premium because your pension plan is registered in Ontario. Should your pension plan become insolvent and it's not fully funded, the insurance scheme is there to alleviate some—not all, but some—of the challenges the workers might face in regard to their pension.

With any pension plan registered in Ontario, it's automatic. They have to register no matter if their plan is a subsidiary of any other registration across the country at the provincial level. It's critical for plans that are registered in Ontario. They automatically have to be part of the insurance scheme.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

I have another question on the whole area of health care, since there is a lot of talk about what happened in our long-term care homes. You didn't talk about it in your brief, but there's a question that is bothering me.

We know the money is in Ottawa, which transfers it to the provinces. However, everything related to health, social services, societal program choices, employee compensation and education standards falls under provincial jurisdiction. In order to take action on health, the provinces need the Canada Health Transfer to be increased. Do you agree with this and, if you do, by how much should it be increased?

• (1445)

[*English*]

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: The transfer payments for health care have been going on and have been the source of tension between the provinces and territories and the federal government for quite some time.

The reality here, I think, is that the provinces also have some responsibility. A lot of the underfunding has come from the provinces and territories choosing to shortchange long-term care and to not adequately fund it to the degree that could have prevented some of the deaths and more importantly, of course, the shortages in the wages the workers are paid in this sector.

I think it's critical to recognize that provinces have chosen—and I'm not here to simply excuse them—to cut taxes and reduce the amount of money they have to fund these services. At the end of the day, what we are seeing here is stuff we have been saying in the labour movement for decades. The reality is that you have staff who are inadequately paid, who have to work at three or four jobs to make ends meet, and they're working in long-term care. Many of them make just about minimum wage.

Had it not been for the federal government commitment to give a special boost to pay for these workers.... Most provinces are saying that once that funding is gone, they are not going to continue to maintain that special payment they are making to workers, even though we know these workers are highly under-represented. There is no question the federal government can increase the health transfers to the provinces, but what guarantee do we have that the provinces are going to spend it on long-term care? What commitment do we have from the provinces that they will enforce the rules to make sure the services these seniors receive are adequate?

More important, we have advocated and said that if we take the profit out of it, that means every penny you give to a long-term care facility would be invested in the long-term care facility and would not simply be siphoned off to pay shareholders. I think this is the fundamental issue if you know that most of the businesses that are operating long-term care are not doing so out of the kindness of their hearts but are doing so because they want to make money out of the service.

We think if you took the profit motivation out of our health care system, you could invest all that money to ensure the system was better off for the people who were receiving the care and make sure the workers could be paid and the staffing would be adequate to ensure this did not happen again.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Yussuff.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Ms. Chabot.

Ms. Louise Chabot: In conclusion—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but you have already had eight minutes. It was a long answer.

[English]

Mr. Duvall, welcome to the committee. You have six minutes.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Thank you.

I appreciate our guests coming today and making their statements. It really helps.

I have a question for Mr. Yussuff.

You referred to the supplementary unemployment benefit. This is a negotiated item between the employee and the employer that ac-

tually is being costed to the employees on their hourly wages. The benefit kicks in when people are laid off and they are eligible for unemployment insurance.

We understand now that many people who were laid off prior to March 14 are eligible to collect this and are on normal EI, but the next batch of workers, who were laid off after March 15, have to go on CERB, which is a lower benefit than their regular EI and they're not eligible now for their supplementary benefit. This has really caused an inequity and has put some financial stresses on working families.

Do you believe that this rule the government has imposed should be stopped and that workers should be allowed to collect their negotiated benefit when they are on CERB?

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: I have two answers for you, and I may be correcting myself or somebody will correct me over time.

My understanding is that the department has allowed people who are on CERB to get \$1,000 from their supplementary plan. That's what they have allowed workers who are going to work and getting CERB to earn.

My understanding is, at least, that for clarity purposes, those who are getting the wage subsidy can have their supplementary plan top them up from their wage subsidy to their full salary as intended.

That should be the norm, of course. The CERB was brought in, of course, to try to streamline the process to get benefits quickly. The rules only allowed for workers to earn up to \$1,000.

We've been urging the government to continue to make improvements so that workers who are paying into their supplementary plan should be able to access that. You're absolutely correct that would have been the norm if they were on employment benefits. Of course that's not fully allowed 100% if they're getting the CERB right now.

They can get up to \$1,000, as we understand it, working with the department, and similarly, up to the difference between their wage subsidy and their full salary under the supplemental plan currently.

● (1450)

Mr. Scott Duvall: Thank you. There seems to be some miscommunication there. Some of the unions that I've been talking to about getting to collect up to \$1,000 have been told that they cannot collect their SUB up to that \$1,000. I will take that up with the minister. I just needed your input on that.

Mr. Yussuff, another good point you brought up was about bankruptcies and protection for workers. Right now a lot of workers, unions, businesses and analysts across the country are raising the alarm over potential bankruptcies due to COVID-19. Our government has said that they made some changes in legislation about a year ago; however, if companies go into bankruptcy, employees can lose thousands of dollars in severance payments and termination payments. They lose their health care benefits, and they take a huge reduction in their pension plans. That can happen.

Do you think the laws under the bankruptcy protection act are adequate to protect the workers, even with the changes the government has recently announced?

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: No. I think the changes obviously are positive and are long overdue, but the reality is that if a company were to go bankrupt, with the current rules as they are, the workers' pension plan would not see the remaining assets of that company go to fund the unfunded liability of that pension plan. This is wrong.

Workers are not like investors. We go to work every single day. We make a commitment. We perform our jobs accordingly. When the company goes bankrupt, we should not be left to take the risk simply because the creditors are somehow given superpriority and workers are told to wait in line. We've been advocating on this for decades and saying that the law should change.

Fundamentally, of course, this is an important aspect of reforms that need to happen. We know that some companies will fail during this pandemic, and we're hoping that the pension plan will be better and will be solvent. So far, what we're seeing in the evidence about how pension plans are faring seems reasonable, but at the end of the day, if a pension plan was in trouble before the pandemic, this problem of the pandemic will just make it that much worse.

We think workers should be prioritized. The bankruptcy and insolvency laws in this country do not serve workers to the full extent that they could. Changes need to be made.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Do you believe, Mr. Yussuff, that the government should be working on these changes immediately to protect workers as this may happen going into the future?

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: Absolutely so. There is no reason to have workers starting to panic about the fact that their pension plan could be in trouble, that their company could be in even further trouble and whether or not they're going to remain in their employment at the end of the day. It's a lot of stress. As you know, when you spend a lifetime working, you expect at the end of the day to ensure that you're not worrying about whether your pension is going to be there. Workers should not have to be put in this situation currently.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Yussuff.

Thank you, Mr. Duvall.

We're going to Mr. Albas for five minutes, please.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Prins, I'm going to start with you.

In our last meeting, we did have the building trades come in. They talked about a number of things, including community benefit agreements. You've spoken about my home province of British Columbia. Can you elaborate a bit further as to what you believe has worked well under it?

You didn't say that they were a tool that should be cast away, but it's about how and who can participate in them. Can you elaborate a bit on the experience of British Columbia and what that has done?

Mr. Wayne Prins: Why we say we support community benefit agreements is that, as we heard earlier, there are a lot of good community benefits to pursue in the spending of public money. To use a contractual tool like a community benefit agreement to interfere with the normal dynamic of a competitive marketplace by saying to that market, "Here are the benefits that we want to pursue within this community, and we as the government select only this group to pursue it with", in our view is just a wrong-headed manipulation of the market.

The things you gain and benefit from a competitive dynamic in a marketplace should be preserved, even as we have identified the benefits that we want to see within that community. Then you use that community benefit agreement to ensure that this list—whatever you want on that list—is achieved by the end of that project.

• (1455)

Mr. Dan Albas: In these community benefit agreements, if there is a proviso that we want a certain number of apprentices, that we would like to see involvement of first nation communities or particularly marginalized groups or persons with disabilities, you would be in favour of that as long as the community benefit agreement was open to anyone to bid on. Is that correct?

Mr. Wayne Prins: Absolutely.

If you look to your province, you'll be familiar with the replacement of the Pattullo Bridge. It's a massive infrastructure project. All of those things you referred to are objectives for the community on that project, which is absolutely great. No one can argue with whether that's a good desire. The problem is that it has been kind of packaged in a restrictive exclusive agreement that prevents a whole bunch of British Columbians.... Actually, the vast majority of construction workers in British Columbia who are not members of the building trades are not welcome to work on that project.

From a public policy perspective, what's equally alarming is the fact that you artificially inflate the cost of these projects by massive amounts of numbers, and all that means is—

Mr. Dan Albas: As someone who is concerned for the taxpayer, you've raised the point that taxpayers will be paying more.

Quite honestly, if these CBAs are not allowing non-unionized members, or unions such as yours to not participate, what does that do to your members? Does that put them in a position where they have to go further away to other jurisdictions that don't have these CBAs, or do they join the unions that have the monopoly?

Mr. Wayne Prins: Every worker is left to their own choice. Some will join the union; some will look for work elsewhere.

I should note that the agreement in B.C. is the subject of a lawsuit alleging, among other things, that depriving workers of the choice of which union to represent them is a breach of the freedom of association, which is a cornerstone of Canadian labour law. That's playing itself out.

Of course I'm concerned about the choice and opportunity for our members. I'm equally concerned about the value that the taxpayers get for the money they spend. It's not that they're going to spend more overall; it's just that they're going to receive far less infrastructure. Governments will still spend \$10 billion; they will just have way fewer pieces of infrastructure to show for it.

Mr. Dan Albas: Yes, I appreciate that.

The building trades also talked about their support for the development of Canada's potential in terms of pipeline access to be able to export our products to the world. Where is your union on this?

Mr. Wayne Prins: We, of course, support a shift toward a greener economy and everything to do with a more sustainable environmental impact on our lives. However, Canada is a resource-based economy. It is not wise to pretend that it's anything else, and so—

Mr. Dan Albas: I appreciate that. I'm sorry, I only have so much time—

The Chair: —and you've used it all up.

Thank you, Mr. Albas. Thank you, Mr. Prins.

We will go over to Mr. Dong for five minutes, please.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

First I want to thank the panellists for taking time out of their busy schedules to join us today.

I've been listening carefully to the presentations and the Qs and As. It's very helpful.

Mr. Yussuff, I heard you commenting on different government programs to fight COVID-19, namely the CERB, the wage subsidy and also the student benefit. I want to hear a bit more about your views on each of them.

First, on the CERB, in your view, how did the CERB help protect workers to keep them safe during this stressful time?

• (1500)

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: As you know, none of us chose to shut the economy down to prevent the spread of the virus. It was the result of a decision made by our government. I think we had to find a way to quickly get benefits to workers. The creation of the CERB and the portal the public sector workers were able to develop to deliver that at such a speed was actually monumental for the country. We owe them and the government a debt of gratitude for how quickly this was developed.

The reality is that the CERB is a unique benefit. It is not where some workers, if they were able to collect EI, would be. Some may be higher and some may be lower, but the reality is that it struck a

balance. I think the millions of workers who are getting it today are very honoured that you give them a monthly amount that they can rely upon to meet their needs.

As the economy continues to reopen, we're going to have to find a way to deal with this benefit and the challenges that might come at the end. As you know, not all workers will be going back to work in the short term, so the CERB has served a really useful purpose. I think everybody needs to be complimented for the work done and the support given. There were also some adjustments brought to the program to allow people to work and for those who are taking the risk and going to work to earn an amount above the CERB. I think that's been good. We may still have to make some changes as we go forward.

On the wage subsidy program, the expansion to cover 75% of wages up to a threshold of \$800-something per week has been a good decision. It has made sure that at the end of the day most employees can stay attached to their workplace with their employer rather than being laid off. We've seen a number of companies reverse their initial decision to lay off their workers. They could keep their workers on the payroll. The government has expanded the wage subsidy program to stay open until the fall, and we're going to continue to encourage some of the employers who are currently in that program to maintain those workers on their payroll because it's better for workers to have the attachment and equally the security of knowing that they still have a job. They're not completely laid off from their employment and they might be going back to work.

Mr. Han Dong: Sorry for interrupting—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but just a second, Mr. Dong.

Mr. Yussuff, it was so much easier for the interpreters when you held the mike close.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: I apologize.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Chair. I hope that time is not taken out of my five minutes.

Just on the WSIB, we've heard previously that there were concerns about some of these jobs not coming back after COVID. Do you share the same concern? How is CEWS going to help in that situation? It might be helpful or it might not. Also, what are you doing to prepare your membership in case that is a concern, that some of these jobs are not coming back?

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: It's a fact that some of these jobs will not be coming back. I don't think we need to dispute that. The reality is how we continue to support workers so they're not simply relying on social assistance to pay their bills or rent or whatever their family needs might be. We have to figure that out and we have to do it properly, because there's no other work for them to go to in the short term. We're going to have to figure out how we maintain the program.

The reality is that as businesses are starting to reopen, we'll quickly see how many workers are going back. We certainly are aware. We are talking to, for instance, the hospitality sector, which was talked about earlier in this session. It's not likely to come back with a significant number of workers going back to their jobs any time soon until people feel safe enough to want to go into a hotel or to get onto an airplane to travel. We have to take that into consideration.

I think these programs are going to need to be maintained until sometime in the future to ensure that the workers have some degree of earnings so they can continue to pay their bills.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: That's it?

The Chair: I'm very sorry, but we are past the hour.

Mr. Yussuff and Mr. Prins, thank you so much for being here with us today and for being so patient and comprehensive in your responses. It is greatly appreciated and will aid our work.

We are going to suspend for a few minutes while we allow Mr. Prins and Mr. Yussuff to be on their way and to welcome the next panel of witnesses.

• (1505) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1515)

The Chair: We are back in session.

We would like to thank our witnesses for joining us today and for their patience as we get all of the technology adjusted.

We have with us, from Unifor, Jerry Dias, president. From the United Steelworkers, we have Ken Neumann, national director, and Dominic Lemieux, director, District 5.

Mr. Dias, please proceed with your opening statement. You have 10 minutes, but you don't need to use them all.

Mr. Jerry Dias (President, Unifor): Good luck with that.

Good afternoon, honourable Chair, members of the committee, and Dominic and Ken.

My name is Jerry Dias. I'm the national president of Unifor, Canada's largest trade union in the private sector. Unifor represents 315,000 members across the country who are working in nearly every industrial sector, including health and long-term care, retail, passenger transit, food processing, utilities, logistics and many others on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is a pleasure to be addressing all of you, despite having to do so remotely. I hope you have all been managing to stay safe and healthy during these difficult times. On behalf of Unifor, I sincerely appreciate the invitation to share our views on the federal government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and I hope what I share here will go some way towards advancing this committee's work.

We are in the midst of an unprecedented public health and economic crisis that is being felt across the entire globe. There have been 5.8 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide, with

approximately 360,000 deaths, including nearly 7,000 here in Canada. With 7,000 Canadian lives lost and families in mourning, losses of this magnitude are simply beyond comprehension.

Unifor is proud to be a Canadian union. Every inch of our organization is dedicated to ensuring that the livelihoods, jobs and health of workers in Canada are protected. From our vantage point, the crisis has revealed many of the underlying flaws and weaknesses in our country's labour market institutions.

For example, early on in this crisis, it became blindingly clear that our unemployment insurance wasn't going to cut it. Decades of cutbacks and terrible rule changes all but guaranteed that this vital program wasn't equipped to deal with a sharp increase in unemployment.

For one, the system simply couldn't handle the flood of claims as workers were laid off in the millions, but more than that, many workers just simply didn't qualify. On a good day, less than half of unemployed Canadians actually qualify—42%, to be exact—for an insurance system they all pay into. If you can imagine it, those with low incomes, including the precariously employed, benefit less from the program than those who are financially well off.

EI has become a needlessly complicated program that punishes workers for being unemployed, denying them benefits, clawing back earnings and replacing only a small amount for them to live on. Then a crisis like this hits and the systems seizes. To their credit, the federal government quickly realized that they had to change tack. They created the Canada emergency response benefit program. The CERB is a simpler program to administer and provides income support to far more workers in need than EI would have. Still, the gaps remain.

A couple of weeks ago, I spoke to the House finance committee and shared my frustration that hundreds of thousands of workers are denied supplementary unemployment benefits under the CERB. This is money set aside by employers that would normally top up unemployment benefits, but which cannot be paid out under the current rules of the CERB program.

To call this restriction absurd would be an understatement. Unifor has launched a national campaign to fix it. I strongly encourage this committee to join us in calling on ministers Morneau and Qualtrough to address this loophole in the CERB program. This is the immediate challenge.

The bigger challenge is that of developing a more inclusive, equitable and responsive EI system once and for all, an EI system that is one part of a basic guaranteed floor of income support for those in need. Over the coming months, our EI system will once again be tested. Millions will see CERB claims expire and will look to re-enter the EI rolls. Many won't be eligible. We need to make immediate changes to the EI program to ensure CERB claimants aren't left to fend for themselves. If we don't do this, we risk a second wave of economic panic as people find it impossible to make ends meet and then default on their bills. This is not something the economy can handle at this time, especially as provinces continue to ramp up their reopening efforts.

The Canada emergency wage subsidy is another important tool to help bring workers back onto payrolls. However, recent reports indicate that only 10% of the \$76 billion set aside for the program has been spent. Clearly, employers have been reluctant to apply for the program, which we also know anecdotally from the experiences of our own members. Some of the large employers we negotiate with have been dragging their feet on applying for the wage subsidy. In other cases, however, the program simply does not provide enough of an incentive for employers to apply.

• (1520)

By the time applications opened in late April, many employers had already laid off workers by the hundreds of thousands. It was simply too late. Now employers are looking at the cost of bringing workers back under the subsidy and wondering why they should pay health insurance premiums, pension contributions and payroll taxes out of pocket just to keep workers on paid leave.

There have also been problems with eligibility. Employers in the broader public sector, including our members in universities, colleges and municipal transit authorities, are not eligible even though they have expressed interest in the program. Finance Canada recently issued a call for feedback on the program, and Unifor has urged the government to revamp the program by expanding eligibility and covering workers' health insurance premiums and other non-taxable contributions.

All told, our income security policies in Canada need a major rethink. This obviously includes EI and the wage subsidy program, but our understanding of income insecurity has to extend well beyond that. This crisis has shone a spotlight on the low pay and increasingly precarious working conditions many workers have been forced to bear over the last few decades. It has also brought into clear view the gendered pay divisions of care and service work and how deeply undervalued this work is.

Unifor would like to see continued progress on implementing deep and lasting labour law standards reform, including a new federal minimum wage of at least \$15 an hour and permanent paid sick days amongst other changes. The provinces must follow suit.

We recognize too that income security has as much to do with employment as it does with other affordability issues such as housing and rent, transit and mobility, drug coverage and child care. These matter as much to a seamless economic restart plan today as they do to a developing vision for a better, fairer Canada tomorrow. This is not a time for Canada to think small. This is a time to bring our best ideas to the table, ideas such as universal pharmacare, uni-

versal child care, a four-day work week, ideas like these that enable us to reverse course on rising job market precariousness. These are ideas that Unifor will be raising in more detail over the coming weeks as we unveil a comprehensive framework for Canada's economic recovery.

If anything, this pandemic has shown us that lack of government investments and dependency on global markets for essential goods and services can only backfire during a time of crisis. Whether it is for PPE, food or critical products like zero-emission vehicles, we need to rebuild our domestic supply chain strategically to strengthen the economy, protect the environment and stabilize jobs. This means a more active, dynamic and engaged government, a government working in the public interest, a government that is willing to be an active economic player, one that is ready to roll up its sleeves and chart a path to generate economic activity and good jobs, and not simply slash taxes, sign terrible trade deals and then hope that private industry comes to the pump.

Workers in Canada deserve better than that. Let's use this crisis as an opportunity to change how we approach industrial development, one that puts workers in Canada first. Unifor stands ready to help.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

• (1525)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dias.

Next we're going to go to the United Steelworkers.

Mr. Neumann, I'm advised that your sound quality isn't great. Let's start with you, and I think you indicated that if we are having trouble with interpretation, Mr. Lemieux also has a copy of your remarks. Let's see how we get along. I may have to interrupt you if we stumble on translation.

You have the floor, Mr. Neumann.

Mr. Ken Neumann (National Director for Canada, National Office, United Steelworkers): Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Ken Neumann, the national director of the Steelworkers. With me is Dominic Lemieux, our Quebec director. We will take five minutes each.

I want to thank the committee for the invitation to speak with you today. We have spoken to the finance committee on the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and we are happy to deliver a message to this committee as well.

Like so many Canadians, our members are deeply impacted by the current situation. Steelworker members work in every sector of the economy. They are front-line health care workers, industrial, forestry and manufacturing workers, miners, security guards and university workers. Each of these sectors has been affected in different ways, from mass layoffs for some, to the desperate scramble for PPE by our members on the front line, to say nothing of the horrors faced by our members who work in long-term care.

The medieval conditions our elders have been subjected to are nothing new. COVID-19 merely exposed what happens when long-term care is left out of the country's strategy for universal health care. We believe this situation has to change and the federal government should take charge by including long-term care in the Canada Health Act.

Just last week our members of the basic steel production met via Zoom to focus on what must happen to ensure a secure future for an industry that was once owned in Canada by Canadian companies but now is entirely foreign-owned. Some of our steel plants are shuttered or close to it while infrastructure like bridges is being built—

• (1530)

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Neumann. It looks like we are unable to provide interpretation with sound of that quality. Is it still an option to hand your script to Mr. Lemieux?

Mr. Ken Neumann: Sure. I'm fine with Mr. Lemieux taking it.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Dominic Lemieux (Director, District 5 - Québec, United Steelworkers): Good afternoon, everyone.

I'll take it from here, but you should know that Mr. Neumann's notes are in English and that my mother tongue is French.

First, I would like to thank you for hosting the United Steelworkers at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today, I will address two specific situations that affect our members. A number of USW members have met with you over the past two years on Parliament Hill to discuss the protection of pensions and benefits in times of bankruptcy. In fact, we have met with more than 225 members of Parliament and senators on Parliament Hill in Ottawa to bring this situation to your attention.

Over the past few years, our retirees have experienced literal horror stories when their companies sought the protection of the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act or went bankrupt. We need only think of what happened to Atlas Stainless Steels in Sorel-Tracy a few years ago, or Sears Canada in Mabe, Montreal, or the White Birch Paper plant in Quebec City, and, more recently, a company on the North Shore—

The Chair: Excuse-me, Mr. Lemieux.

Can you check to see if you are on the French channel?

We'll get better interpretation if you are on the French channel.

Mr. Dominic Lemieux: I am on the French channel. I could close it, maybe that would make things easier.

The Chair: No, please stay on the French channel.

[*English*]

Madam Clerk, am I asking the wrong question?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-France Lafleur): I've been told that maybe the microphone is on the wrong side.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemieux, your microphone may not be on the right side. We could hear you well earlier, but we're having a hard time hearing you now.

Mr. Dominic Lemieux: I'll try another headset.

Can you hear me better now?

The Clerk: Yes, we hear you much better.

The Chair: You may continue, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Dominic Lemieux: Recently, on Quebec's North Shore, there was the situation of Cliffs Resources, a company that went bankrupt and left many of our retirees without drug coverage, but more importantly, with a truncated pension. I can tell you that when a retiree has their pension cut by more than 20%, their life changes a lot.

In the 2018 federal budget, the government said, "All Canadians deserve more peace of mind when it comes to their retirement and companies must act in good faith towards their employees". I believe that good faith on the part of corporations alone is not enough. I think the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act should be changed. I'll explain.

It's true now more than ever—we know that there are companies that are at financial risk because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are going to be bankruptcies. Because of the financial shock and the underfunding of some pension plans, we are concerned about the pensions negotiated over time for Canadian workers, but especially for retirees. More than ever, this highlights the need for reform of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to protect the pensions and benefits of Canadian workers.

Very often, the interests of workers and retirees come last, after those of banks, insurance companies, municipalities, and even school boards. We are not asking to be the first on the list of creditors in the event of bankruptcy, we certainly do not want to hinder the possible recovery of a business that would come under the protection of the law, but we still want the opportunity to be considered before the banks, before the insurance companies, before the municipalities and before the school boards.

Real people, who have to feed themselves, pay their rent and take care of themselves, have to come before the banks. When an 85-year-old pensioner, for example, learns that his pension is going to be cut by 20% or 21%, it's very difficult to adjust. It would be much easier for Canada's major banks, insurance companies, municipalities, and even school boards to get through the situation with a loss rather than penalizing retirees.

In the last session of Parliament, the United Steelworkers supported two private members' bills and one Senate bill that would do just that. As a result, the House has already had a chance to debate but not vote on these bills. We hope that you will finally move forward, given the need to reform this legislation to protect Canadian pensioners.

The second point I would like to discuss with you more specifically concerns tourism, hotels and restaurants. I would like to draw your attention to the plight of workers in this industry.

In Quebec, the United Steelworkers represent nearly 4,000 workers in the hotel and restaurant sector, 90% of whom have lost their jobs. For the moment, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit has helped workers in emergency situations, but you know that experts predict that it will take between 18 and 24 months before this sector recovers. This is an industry that was already experiencing severe labour shortages. We must support workers in this industry so that it can rely on a skilled workforce during the restart, and workers must be there in sufficient numbers when the industry recovers.

It is often during the summer that people accumulate hours to qualify for employment insurance benefits and receive these benefits in the off-peak periods. This summer, there will be no international tourism in Canada. There will be no cruise ships. There will be no weddings. In many cases, workers will not be able to work enough hours to be able to reapply for employment insurance. This year, it will be an off-season for a large majority of hotel and restaurant workers.

What happens at the end of the CERB? We need to think now about what will happen when the CERB is over. I think there are two options: extending CERB or changing the qualifying period for employment insurance benefits.

• (1535)

I know you're currently considering the situation of those who work in fisheries. We think the same protections should be extended to those in the hotel and restaurant sector. This is important to think about. What will happen to the tourism and restaurant industry without those workers?

I'm sure you'll have the best interests of workers at heart as you look for ways to emerge from the crisis.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Now we will proceed with questions, beginning with Mr. Waugh for six minutes.

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

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Pardon me, Mr. Chair. I just want to check whether the remaining time will be divided equally among the parties.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm going to share my time with Mr.—

The Chair: Just a second, Mr. Waugh.

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, do you have a point of order?

Ms. Louise Chabot: I'm not sure that's what you'd call it, but let's say I do.

I just want to make sure, Mr. Chair, that the time we have left for questions will be divided equally among the four of us.

The Chair: I'm going to try to give each of you six minutes.

• (1540)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Waugh, go ahead, please; you have the floor.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to share my time with Regina—Lewvan MP, Mr. Steinley.

I don't have any questions for Mr. Neumann or Mr. Lemieux. I'll start with Mr. Dias.

Mr. Dias, I was part of your union for some 40 years. I'm a broadcaster, and then in 2015 I was elected as a member of Parliament. The committee that was created about a year and a half ago by the government to dole out \$595 million as a media bailout is just starting to get formed. They named a committee chair about a month ago. Is Unifor on this five-person committee?

Mr. Jerry Dias: We were a part of the original committee that determined the criteria. We had a journalist who had spent most of his time with the Toronto Sun as our representative on the committee. As you are well aware, the committee that put together the rules had Unifor, as well as representatives from all segments of the industry.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes, I'm aware of that.

Was there a conflict of interest that Unifor, representing so many media outlets in this country, would have a big say where the \$595 million is to go? To me, that's a conflict.

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Okay, we have a point of order. Just hang on a second, Mr. Dias.

Ms. Kate Young: Mr. Chair, I am questioning the relevance of this line of questioning. What does it have to do with what we're discussing today and—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It does, very much so.

Ms. Kate Young: —[*Inaudible—Editor*] of COVID-19.

The Chair: Thank you for that point of order, Ms. Young.

Without hearing from the other side on this, I'm inclined to agree with them. The composition of a committee that determines where funds go is highly relevant to what we're studying.

Go ahead, Mr. Dias.

Mr. Jerry Dias: I welcome the question. I'm used to answering the questions of people who know very little of what they're talking about, and obviously, that's where that question came from.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Not really.

Mr. Jerry Dias: Excuse me, I'm speaking. I listened to you.

The bottom line is that you know that the work of the original committee was to put a structure in place. The role of that committee was not to determine who got what, and I think you know that. The bottom line is this: Did Unifor have a role in determining who gets any of the money? The answer is no.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's all I wanted to know from you.

When I get phone calls from every newspaper in the country that still say they are waiting for some of their money a year and a half later, and who continue to lay off employees and continue to ask their Unifor members to take 5%, 10% or 15% off their wages, that is an issue for me. That should be an issue for you. This committee hasn't even got started yet.

Mr. Jerry Dias: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Every newspaper in this country has cut staff while waiting for this committee to get up and going.

What are you doing about this, representing the newspapers?

Mr. Jerry Dias: I'm doing a heck of a lot more than you have done as a member of Parliament. The simple reality is, your party, your newspapers—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You talk about me.

Mr. Jerry Dias: Excuse me—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You know I was a member of your organization for 40 years.

Mr. Jerry Dias: Not as a journalist. You were a member of the CEP for all those years

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I was also a member of Unifor at CTV.

Mr. Jerry Dias: Good for you. How long ago was that?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You should look it up. You have my \$1500—

Mr. Jerry Dias: Listen, I'm used to dealing with—

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): On a point of order—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Four years ago, I left.

The Chair: Hang on a second, Mr. Dias. Hang on a second, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.): I can't hear either one of them. Could they please stop talking over each other?

The Chair: Okay, Mr.—

Mr. Jerry Dias: Does he have an intelligent question for me?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I am wondering what Unifor is doing for its employees.

Mr. Jerry Dias: We are doing everything we can to push the government. You will find that I'm working very closely with the industry, trying to find a way to get the federal government to tax Google and Facebook in order to stop the carnage of the industry.

I have to say that at least you can have this conversation with the government. The previous Conservative government wouldn't even answer the phone.

So look, my friend, do you have an intelligent question for me?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I do.

Last week, Postmedia laid off 40 employees. The union said they wouldn't agree to the salary reduction and that's why the company laid off the 40 employees.

• (1545)

Mr. Jerry Dias: I think you will find out that there was a solution in play. The layoffs that were announced in Toronto were cancelled, and I fully expect that the layoffs announced out west will also be cancelled.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Well, that's good.

Mr. Jerry Dias: By the way, the majority of the layoffs came from the non-union newspapers. What did you do for them?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: What are you doing for small—

Mr. Jerry Dias: What did you do for them?

I'm doing everything I can, by the way. At least I'm having a voice.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: We're talking. I'm asking the Minister of Canadian Heritage every week about this: What is he doing for the small newspapers that might not even be eligible for the \$595 million from the bailout?

I also get those calls. What would you do—?

Mr. Jerry Dias: By the way, they should be saved. There have been 250 small newspapers that have closed in the last 10 years, and I will argue that the Conservative government did next to nothing.

You are right. The federal Liberals need to get money quickly into the pockets of the newspapers in order to fund the journalists. The 2019 money hasn't come down yet and neither has the 2020....

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes, in a year and a half.

Mr. Jerry Dias: The bottom line is, you should speak to your friends who are running the newspapers and find out what they're doing.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's all I have time for, Chair.

It now goes to the member for Regina—Lewvan.

The Chair: He has left you a minute, Mr. Steinley.

Go ahead.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): I want to ask Mr. Diaz and Mr. Neumann a question.

Good afternoon, gentlemen. I represent a large portion of the Evraz workers, and refinery workers out in the Co-op Refinery and Evraz mill.

Mr. Neumann, I'm not sure if your mike will work well enough to answer this.

What I would like to know is this. During the last campaign, you were on a couple of radio shows out west talking about new green technologies for the Evraz steelworkers so they could have new employment and different options with the steel mill. Time after time while doorknocking, union members have asked me to ask you about the following today.

How can you say that you're supporting your local membership when you have been supporting parties that are anti-pipeline, and pipelines are what the Evraz steelworkers do well? I'm proud to represent them. I'm proud to support them. I'm hoping we can work together to get pipelines built in this country with good Canadian steel and to keep these men and women working in the jobs they want to work in for now and a long time into the future.

The Chair: Mr. Neumann, he used his full one minute for a question, but you can answer it.

Very briefly, please.

Mr. Ken Neumann: First of all, let me be straight. The fact of the matter is that we fight for our steelworkers across the country no matter where they are. We were at the forefront to make sure that the tariffs were removed. You've never heard us say that we're opposed to pipelines. We want pipelines built. We want our bridges built as well.

The fact is that we want Canadian steel to be included in procurement measures. The fact is, we're the ones who stand up for the workers, be they at Evraz or Tenaris, or any other steelworkers across the country. Going back two previous governments, why is it that the Montreal bridge and the Vancouver bridge were built with Chinese steel? That's what you should be focusing on in making sure that you preserve the jobs. We're going to continue to fight for pipelines.

Mr. Warren Steinley: One hundred per cent, Mr. Neumann. I'll just need your help with that as well, please.

The Chair: Thank you, both.

Mr. Long, for six minutes, please

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rochesay, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For our witnesses today, I have the privilege of asking these questions from Saint John, New Brunswick, which has a very strong labour movement and a history of union activism.

Mr. Dias, I want to thank you for joining us today to share your thoughts, insights, expertise and, of course, the questions and concerns of the 315,000 Unifor members across this country. I have the privilege of working with Unifor leadership like Erin Howell Sharpe, Adam Costain, Trevor Young, Grant Charlton, Tamara Davidson-Kelly, Tammy Moore, Martin Melanson and Tom Clarkson.

I'm not here to take potshots at unions. I'm not here to attack unions. I have questions for you.

Mr. Dias, here's my first question. During your appearance before the finance committee on May 21, you noted that provincial governments across the country have undermined several hard-won labour law reforms in recent years, including the right to paid sick leave. Last week, the Prime Minister announced that our federal government will work with provincial and territorial governments in order to ensure that all workers in Canada have access to at least 10 paid sick days in the course of a year should they need them.

How would you and your members like to see federal and provincial governments approach this issue?

• (1550)

Mr. Jerry Dias: That was a great question, because the federal government is going to have to provide much leadership on this issue, given that there are very few provincial governments that will.

On the 10 paid sick days, I think it's importance is clear during this pandemic. If you take a look at the recent elections in Ontario and Alberta, you see that the first thing those governments did was to walk backwards on labour law reform. They froze minimum wages. They cancelled paid sick days.

Now here we are in a pandemic, and who's being punished? Health care workers and workers in long-term care facilities and grocery store workers, many of those workers who need it today more than ever. I'm pleased to see that Jagmeet Singh raised that and it was adopted by both the federal NDP and the federal Liberals.

It's going to be this type of collaboration, but like I said, it's going to have to start with the federal government. It can't just be during the pandemic; it should be permanent. Then, obviously, it's something that's going to have to be discussed with a variety of provincial governments, based on collective agreements, workers, and provincial jurisdiction versus federal jurisdiction. It's a very welcome announcement and is showing leadership during a time when it's most needed.

Mr. Wayne Long: I will comment that certainly in New Brunswick we're having challenges with Premier Blaine Higgs and his support for these same sick days.

I would now like to take the time to thank you for the answers and then share my time with MP Kate Young.

Ms. Kate Young: Thank you, MP Long. I really appreciate this.

I would like to thank all of our witnesses for appearing today.

Mr. Dias, I'm from London. As you well know, London has been hard hit in our manufacturing sector over the years, but the incredible work that Canadian manufacturers have done just in the last three months in retooling and changing very quickly to produce personal protective equipment has been quite remarkable. It shows how we can all work together in a very short period of time.

What do you see as the long-term use of the manufacturing sector when it comes to protective equipment? Is this the way of the future?

Mr. Jerry Dias: It is absolutely the way of the future.

First of all, this pandemic showed us how ill-prepared we were as a nation—and are—to take care of ourselves. We outsourced all of our personal protective equipment. At the end of the day, we were left scrambling for the vital resources to take care of ourselves.

I'm always fascinated when I listen to the arguments of those who are saying that the manufacturing sector is dead in Canada. Frankly, as a result of the free trade deal that was signed 25 plus years ago, we've lost over half a million manufacturing jobs here in the province of Ontario. I'm fascinated that while everybody talks about the gig economy, the transformation and getting away from manufacturing, who was it that stepped up to the pump during the pandemic? It was the food industry. It was the auto parts industry. I can look at Bombardier in Thunder Bay. I can start to walk through the Hiram Walkers of the world. The manufacturing sector stepped up and transformed to provide some of the basics we need.

If we're going to have a strategy as we come out of the pandemic, it's clear that we're going to have to take a look at where the jobs really are and what it takes to have a stable economy. It's going to mean that the government is going to have to concentrate on a strong manufacturing sector. It's the only way to keep people employed. It's the only way, frankly, for us to stabilize our economy.

Ms. Kate Young: I also want to commend Unifor for your women's advocacy program, but, as you know, women are hardest hit through this pandemic.

Mr. Jerry Dias: They are more than ever.

Ms. Kate Young: What do you see as your role moving forward?

Mr. Jerry Dias: We have over 350 women's advocates in a variety of Unifor workplaces across the country. I personally sit on the board of directors for Halton Women's Place, which has women's shelters, and I know that the shelters today are running at over 100% capacity. As a matter of fact, it's gotten to the point where we've had to rent hotel rooms and different stuff in order to keep women safe.

If you take a look at the pandemic, you'll see that it really has exposed some of the structural problems we have here in Canada, because women, I would argue, are disproportionately impacted by this pandemic, as it relates to who is affected and who is working in essential services. It really shows the structural imbalances and the barriers to women. Women still make about 72% of what men make.

This is probably the best time I could even think of for a national child care strategy in this country, because if we're going to have true equality, we have to eliminate the barriers, because, as progressive as men claim to be, women still bear the burden of work in the household as it relates to child rearing.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you—

Mr. Jerry Dias: Therefore, child care is a good start.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dias.

Thank you, Ms. Young.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you may go ahead. You have six minutes.

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

I'd like to start by welcoming the representatives of the leading labour organizations we met with today, including Unifor, the United Steelworkers and the Canadian Labour Congress. I want to make a quick comment. I don't think any economic recovery or endeavour aimed at helping society is possible without the support of the major unions. Thank you for your contribution.

I wasn't too amused by the Conservatives' questions, so I hope it doesn't happen again. I can ask you all of my questions.

Today, when the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic was meeting, I asked, not once, but three times, whether the CERB was going to be extended. I think that's important. Not all businesses are going to open up again, and not all employees are going to return to their old jobs. Some businesses will take a while to get going again.

We talked about the tourism, hospitality and hotel sectors. If I understood correctly, that's a key issue for you, as well, as is a comprehensive review of the employment insurance program going forward.

Would anyone care to comment?

Mr. Dominic Lemieux: I'll start with the hotel, restaurant and tourism sectors. It is definitely essential, in our view, to protect those workers. Even though many of them aren't seasonal workers, the summer months account for the bulk of their hours to qualify for employment insurance. As everyone knows, things will be much quieter in the tourism sector this summer.

That's why we are calling on the government to extend the CERB or use the hours worked last year to determine employment insurance eligibility. Those are two things we are recommending to help those workers. I repeat, 90% of them experienced a loss of employment as a direct result of the pandemic.

Ms. Louise Chabot: That's absolutely right. Your point is well taken.

As you know, through private members' bills, our party has advocated for the protection of pension funds in the event of bankruptcy. You've always made similar recommendations, but especially at election time.

What would reprioritizing pension fund creditors mean to pensioners?

Mr. Dominic Lemieux: I'll give you a concrete example. Let's say a business goes bankrupt with a \$10-million deficit in pension fund obligations. Banks would be paid before workers, as would insurance companies, municipalities and school boards. If 500 people were already retired, that would mean they would lose up to 20% of their pension benefits, which is a lot to them.

Consider an 88-year-old retiree who receives a small annuity of \$800 from her pension fund. If the company goes bankrupt, that retiree could lose \$200 of her \$800 annuity every month. That would be devastating to her. She can't get that money back, unlike banks. No Canadian bank, insurance company or municipality would be at risk of going bankrupt because it couldn't recover a missing \$10 million from a pension fund.

Let's use the example of Mabe, an appliance company in Montreal that went under. The employees lost a big chunk of their pensions. It's not true that the city of Montreal would have gone bankrupt had it been paid after the pensioners or school boards.

What we are asking for is protection for those pensioners. They are often among the least fortunate in society, especially those who are older. They aren't able to start over and rejoin the workforce to earn a bit of money so they can make ends meet. As we see it, that protection is paramount.

The idea is not to hurt companies who file for protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. On the contrary, we want to contribute to their recovery. Banks, however, rake in \$10 billion in profits every year. It makes no sense for banks, insurance companies, municipalities and school boards to be paid before pensioners. We are asking that pensioners be given higher priority on the list of creditors. We aren't saying that they should be first on the list, but they should be ahead of banks and big insurance companies.

• (1600)

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

I gather, then, that it's definitely going to take a change in legislation, as we were hoping for. Until then, however, isn't there some interim solution we can work on, some effort we can make to protect people's nest eggs?

Mr. Dominic Lemieux: Some provinces have special funds, but not Quebec. One thing that would help all Canadians would be to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. That would be quick and easy. It's the only way to protect affected pensioners in the short term.

In normal times, businesses go bankrupt, but in times of crisis, many more will. That's why amending Canada's Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act is imperative.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot and Mr. Lemieux.

[English]

The final questioner for the evening is Mr. Duvall.

You have the floor for six minutes, sir.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Thank you.

I want to thank our witnesses for coming in today. I certainly respect and appreciate all the work they do for Canadian workers and all the supports they give.

Mr. Dias and Mr. Neumann both mentioned in their statements the amount of SUB money, supplementary unemployment benefits. I know it's a negotiated benefit and that Unifor has done a great campaign along with the steelworkers in trying to get this corrected.

I was told at an earlier session that people are allowed to collect SUB while on CERB, up to \$1,000. Were you aware of that?

Mr. Jerry Dias: There can be, of course, a top-up of CERB of up to \$1,000. However, they were very specific in the last communication on May 8 that no SUB could be used, period.

Here's how ridiculous the ruling is. Generally workers would end up on EI to a maximum of \$573.00 a week. In the auto industry, for example, we have workers who, over and above that, are topped up anywhere between \$400 and \$600 a week. If I'm a skilled tradesperson with a \$2,400-a-month top-up, \$1,000 doesn't do it, if I qualify.

What I really can't get my head around is why the government would stop corporations from paying a contractual obligation. We've had, for example, Ford, General Motors and Chrysler reach out to the federal government to say that they don't understand, that they want to pay, and that it's their contractual obligation. The government's argument was that somehow by allowing SUB to be paid on top of CERB, it would push companies to lay people off to push some of the cost onto federal government.

The fact of the matter is that telling the companies they don't have to pay anything is an incentive to lay people off, because now there's no cost at all, including the payment of the SUB.

It's a foolish strategy.

Mr. Scott Duvall: I agree.

Mr. Neumann, are you aware of the \$1,000 that we're now being told you can collect in SUB payments when you're on CERB?

Mr. Ken Neumann: Yes, that was a recent announcement.

Let me just begin by saying that I apologize that the microphone didn't work for the translation.

I submitted my submission and comments. I hope you had a chance to review them.

We're no different from Unifor. We're in the same situation.

We go to the bargaining table, and we set aside this money, the SUB plans, that we've been encouraged to negotiate. That money has been there. It's been there collectively. It's no different when we negotiate pension plans. That's money that comes out of the package and that is put there for the workers to use when they are in need.

We can't think of a time of greater need than now.

We had early indications that the government was going to allow the SUB to go through, but obviously that's gone sideways on us. I think as Jerry just said, the \$1,000 doesn't really get you to what you need if you're in that higher-wage income, if you're a tradesman. We have it in the steel industry and whatnot. We're in the same boat.

It's a ridiculous thing. The government can fix it and they need to fix it. One thousand dollars just doesn't do it.

When there was a commitment initially that they would use the SUB funds.

Those are funds that everybody, in good faith, went to the bargaining table and signed on the dotted line for so they would be there for the benefit of workers when required.

• (1605)

Mr. Scott Duvall: I thank you for that.

Mr. Lemieux, you mentioned the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, and I know that you guys have done some great work.

My understanding is that the government feels that the changes made to it a year and a half ago were adequate.

Do you feel that going forward we're going to see a spike in bankruptcies? People are going to be at risk of losing not only their pensions but also thousands and thousands of dollars in termination pay, in severance payments, and in their health care benefits.

Do you believe the government should be acting now to change legislation to protect workers? How essential is it to do that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dominic Lemieux: Yes, we certainly expect to see bankruptcies caused by the pandemic.

In 2020, it's inconceivable that, in Canada, the interests of banks and insurance companies take precedence over the interests of retirees.

We need only look to the income tax returns retirees file every year, as compared with the huge profits Canadian banks report every single year.

I think it's high time that the government put people before Canadian banks and insurance companies. After all, we are talking about

retirees who were the backbone of the country, men and women who worked hard for many years. Changing that piece of federal legislation is paramount, especially during the pandemic.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Duvall: Again, I thank you.

I know we're running out of time, but I just want to thank Mr. Dias, Mr. Neumann and Mr. Lemieux for all the work they do.

We have to get to the bottom of the SUB payments. I can't understand why the government wants to take away taxable income on something that doesn't cost them a dime.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Duvall.

Thank you very much to our witnesses. Thanks for your patience with the technological challenges.

Folks, if you wish to supplement your answers in any way, if you were a bit shortchanged on time, it's always an option, to the extent that you haven't done so already, for you to provide further information in writing to the committee. It will be considered, just as your thoughtful testimony has been today.

Thank you—

Mr. Brad Vis: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Vis, go ahead.

Mr. Brad Vis: This is mostly for the committee members. It's really unfortunate. There's a lot of important stuff to discuss in these meetings, and I think it took about 20 minutes to get going in the second round. These are big national organizations that deserve to have a voice at this committee. Whether we agree with them or not, everyone needs to be heard.

I'm wondering what assurances you can give us committee members, moving forward, that some of these technological issues will be addressed. From what I understand, other parliamentary committees aren't facing the same technological challenges that we've been facing on a number of occasions now.

We all want to do our jobs effectively, sir.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Be assured that we are doing our best, and I'm not sure that I agree with your premise that it's only us. We're doing better than we did at the outset, but we still have mountains to climb.

Again, thank you, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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