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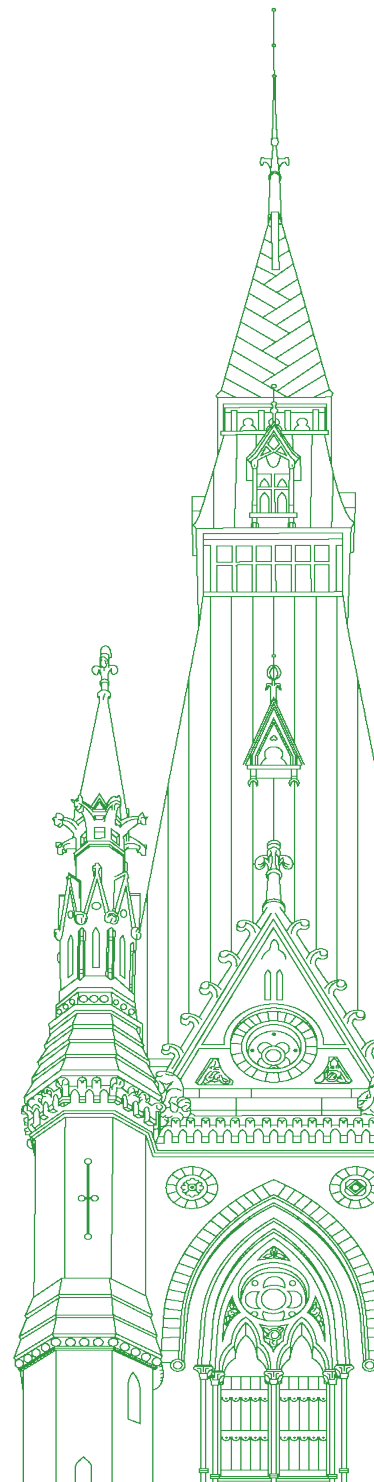
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Friday, April 24, 2020



Chair: Mr. Sean Casey

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

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• (1105)

[English]

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

Good morning to those in the west and good afternoon to those in the east. Welcome, everyone, to meeting number five of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Pursuant to the orders of reference of March 24, April 11 and April 20, 2020, the committee is meeting for the purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters related to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you know, today's meeting is taking place by video conference. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

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

First, interpretation in this video conference will work very much as in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. Before speaking, please wait and I will recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can either click on the microphone icon to activate your mike or you can hold down the space bar while you are speaking. When you release the bar, your mike will mute itself, just like a walkie-talkie or the mikes we're accustomed to when we meet in person.

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. Should members need to request the floor outside of their designated time for questions, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order.

If a member wishes to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member, they should use the "raise hand" function. This will signal to me your interest to speak. In order to do so, you should click on "participants" on the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you will see next to your name that you can click "raise hand".

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute, and as you've already heard, the use of headsets is strongly encouraged. If you have a mi-

crophone on your headset that hangs down, please make sure it's not rubbing on your shirt during your questioning time.

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

Before we get started, could everyone click on their screen in the top right-hand corner to ensure they are on gallery view? With this view you should be able to see all the participants in a grid view. It will ensure that all video participants can see one another.

With that, we are ready to begin.

I would like to welcome our first panel of witnesses. We have Graham Flack, deputy minister; Lori MacDonald, senior associate deputy minister of ESDC and chief operating officer for Service Canada; and Benoît Robidoux, associate deputy minister.

We will proceed with the usual 10-minute period for opening remarks, followed by rounds of questions.

Will you be delivering the remarks, Mr. Flack?

• (1110)

Mr. Graham Flack (Deputy Minister, Employment and Social Development, Department of Employment and Social Development): I propose to waive the remarks to allow the committee more time to ask questions. There are just a couple of things I want to say in opening.

First of all, in a very difficult week for those of us from Nova Scotia, I want to acknowledge how tough what we've been through has been on our families back home.

It's a Friday today. At ESDC we would call that day 40 of the week of March 16. We've been through quite a run.

Because I know members have often asked these questions, I'll give you the latest statistics on the CERB as of last night. Some 7.12 million Canadians have applied for the CERB. That's over one-third of Canada's labour force. About \$22.3 billion in benefits have been paid out. Because some people are now on their second cycle, a total of 9.65 million individual claims have been made, and 9.51 million of those 9.65 million claims have already been paid.

[Translation]

I will be happy to answer your questions now. I will not use the 10 minutes I was given, I prefer to leave the time for you to ask questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Flack.

[English]

We're now ready to proceed with the rounds of questions, beginning with the Conservatives. I understand that Ms. Dancho is going to lead off.

Welcome to the committee. The floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the department officials for being on the call today to answer some of our important questions.

I just want to start with some concerns that I have regarding a recent call hosted by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, and a number of other Liberal parliamentary secretaries. Yesterday they sent out a notice that MPs were allowed to ask questions on an official call with officials. It was going to be a great opportunity for members of the opposition to ask questions on a new \$9-billion announcement for student supports, which was made the day prior. As opposition members, we were quite eager to do this.

Unfortunately, I was on the call for about an hour, and the NDP and Green members were given two to three rounds for each MP to ask questions. In fact, an NDP staffer was given two rounds of questions, yet not a single Conservative MP was called upon to ask any questions.

This is quite alarming to me. I was very prepared to ask questions, particularly considering that two weeks prior, we had another one of these calls, and I was not called upon in that call either. Even more worrisome was that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment was informed the day before that I would be leading the questions for the Conservatives.

I'm just wondering if the officials can comment on the viability of a virtual Parliament if opposition members are not able to do their jobs and ask questions.

Mr. Graham Flack: I think that would be something we would consider out of our scope to comment on as officials. We are here to answer your questions, and I'm happy to say that Benoît Robidoux is on the line. Benoît has actually spearheaded our work around the student benefit and would be happy, if the honourable member wishes, to walk you through the details of the benefit and answer any questions you have.

Do you want Benoît to do an overview first, or do you want to proceed to detailed questions? He could do a short overview if that would help.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Yes, it would be great to be able to ask those questions, but I just want to flag for you and underline that if we're going to be doing this virtual Parliament—and the opposition Conservatives have raised this concern—this technology or what have you is just not allowing us to do our jobs.

I was quite alarmed that even though they were informed, they didn't call on me once. In fact, they gave a staffer more opportunity than a member of Parliament. It's great for my NDP and Green colleagues. I'm glad they were able to ask questions, but I'm sure they would agree that the Conservatives deserve an opportunity as well. I just really want to flag that for officials. I know you're all working very hard to provide these services, but it was very concerning to me.

Could they comment specifically on a couple of things about the program? Could they define “national service”? Would they be able to define what that means?

• (1115)

Mr. Graham Flack: Benoît, do you want to jump in?

Mr. Benoît Robidoux (Associate Deputy Minister, Employment and Social Development, Department of Employment and Social Development): I'm not sure I understood the question correctly. I just heard “nationally”.

Could you repeat the question, please?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Sure.

The government's announcement regarding the Canada student service grant mentions that it will help them gain valuable work experience and skills. It's for young people to help in their communities. It's for students who choose to do national service and serve their communities. The new student grant will provide up to \$5,000 for education.

What is national service? How is that defined? Does that go by province for essential services? Who is deciding which volunteer opportunities are a national service, and which ones get the go-ahead and which don't? How is that going to be determined for this grant?

Mr. Benoît Robidoux: That's a very good question. As we speak, we are in fact designing this new program. It will be directed, as you just said, to national service and volunteering. Again, what was decided is that the reward will be up to \$5,000, but it could be lower too.

All of that remains to be designed and set up. Again, we believe we could use a platform that we will launch, which we call “I want to help”, to connect not-for-profit organizations with youth who want to volunteer, to create that matching and to create that program.

To be honest, many of these details need to be defined. To your question, I think we'll have to wait a bit more to get into the level of detail you are asking for.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: When can we anticipate that this legislation will be tabled?

Mr. Benoît Robidoux: It will not be legislation. It will be a grant program, but the details—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm sorry. I meant the legislation for the \$1,250 monthly grants. I'm jumping around a bit, but it's the other part of the announcement that does require legislation. When will that be available for parliamentarians to scrutinize and to ask questions about?

Mr. Benoît Robidoux: It's hard for me to tell you when exactly. I worked on it all morning. I will work on it after this call, and it will be available as soon as possible. We're working to have it as soon as possible—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I can understand, and I know you're working very hard.

As you know, students have been waiting for over six weeks now, and our official opposition has raised the alarm. I, Dan Albas and a number of others have written two letters to Minister Qualtrough about services for students and have not received a single response from the minister. You can understand that the people we represent and—particularly in my position as the shadow minister for diversity and inclusion and youth—students are counting on us to get these answers, and we're not receiving any of those details. I need a little more from you regarding even an approximate timeline—

Mr. Graham Flack: I can give you a couple of answers that could help.

The first is that, based on labour force survey data, 43% of Canadian students of the slightly over two million students in Canada over 15 with income over \$5,000 would have been working in February. A very significant portion of post-secondary students are eligible for the CERB, and are applying for the CERB, because they would have ceased working as a result of measures due to COVID.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Yes, we recognize that.

Mr. Graham Flack: The second point is with regard to the new benefit we're putting in place. The government has made a commitment that it will be retroactive to May 1. This is not unlike the launch of the CERB itself. These benefits are being launched in record time, but we want to ensure that the launch date is not tied to when people can get the resources retroactively. It would be retroactive to May 1, but it will take us weeks, and Minister Qualtrough is pushing us hard towards a mid-May launch.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's great—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Flack, and thank you, Ms. Dancho. That's your time.

Next we have Ms. Young for six minutes, please.

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

It's great seeing everyone virtually for this very important discussion.

I first want to thank our officials for joining us today and all the public servants who have been working so hard over the past number of weeks to get these programs up and running. What has been accomplished is quite remarkable, so thank you for that.

My question is about calls I've received in my constituency from expectant mothers who have contacted us about the status of their maternity benefits if they are currently receiving the CERB. Some were planning on going on mat leave in June, and others in September. They've been told by Service Canada representatives that if they go on CERB they will be ineligible for their earned benefits

unless they have an additional 600 hours banked before they take that leave, which isn't possible.

Can you clarify this for the committee?

• (1120)

Mr. Graham Flack: Maternity leave and other special leave benefits continue as they were originally structured. That is the required number of hours, and they operate within the current EI system. The government has signalled that if individuals are already on maternity leave, for example, and come off maternity leave during the period when the CERB benefit is in place, they would be eligible for the CERB. However, if an individual does not have enough hours under the currently structured EI rules, they still need to receive sufficient hours to qualify for the benefit. That is something that Minister Qualtrough has said she is looking at.

Ms. Kate Young: Thank you.

I think it's pretty apparent that there is no way that many of these women can get the hours, so it's important that we find a way around this. It's important to keep refining these programs, and I appreciate your hard work.

I'd like to share my time, if that's okay, with my colleague Han Dong who I think is on the line. I'm hoping he will be able to ask a question with the remaining time I have.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Young.

Hang on a second, Han. I see that Mr. Vaughan has raised his hand.

Did you have a point of order, Mr. Vaughan, or did you just hit the wrong button there?

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.): This is in response to the concerns about the parliamentary secretary and critic calls, and the order of speaking. We're all feeling in the dark on this one. Zoom etiquette or group etiquette sometimes isn't always well explained or well executed.

I want to apologize, first of all, to MP Dancho for not having her recognized, or for not being given opportunities to question. Those questions come in on a raised-hand basis. We don't assign questions to people. In future, we'll be very attentive to this and make sure that we canvass so that there are no unanswered questions; I apologize.

On the issue of an NDP staffer sitting in for a parliamentary individual, I believe the individual in question was on another committee and couldn't be in two places at the same time. We allow for those sorts of accommodations in the same way that we have a member of the Green Party here today who has asked to speak. I hope we can find ways in these extraordinary times to include as many voices and questions to make sure that Canadians from all corners of the country are served.

Hopefully, we can find a way to be courteous and extend those privileges. I don't think they should be extended to staff members, necessarily, but I do believe that in a committee setting like this, where we have visitors, being as generous as we can is something that serves all of us, and all of our constituents, in the best way possible.

The Chair: We'll go over to you, Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Good morning, or good afternoon, to my colleagues on the committee.

I want to thank the staff for today's call and for answering some questions.

I have a question about international students. We all know the contribution that they are making to our economy and our institutions—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Dong. Ms. Kusie has her hand up.

Is that on a point of order, Ms. Kusie?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Yes, it is, Chair.

I just wanted to ensure that Ms. Dancho was getting the response she needed. I appreciated the parliamentary secretary jumping in to address that. That's all.

Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

It's back to you, Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: Okay.

We know the contribution that international students are making to our economy and our institutions. In my riding, at Seneca College 200 students have stepped forward to join the front-line health workers. The majority of them are international students.

I want to applaud the government for their decision exempting international students from border closure and for including them in the CERB, but in the recent announcement about the CESB, I noticed they were the only group not included. I would like some explanation with regard to the inconsistency of this policy-making.

My follow-up question is to ask whether the government or the ministry is considering doing something to support international students who have been affected by COVID-19.

Thank you.

• (1125)

Mr. Benoît Robidoux: You're right that international students in Canada are eligible for the CERB and that they will not be eligible, as of now, based on the design, for the Canada emergency student benefit. I have to say that there are other differences between the two benefits. For example, Canadians abroad will not be eligible for the CERB, but Canadian students studying abroad will be eligible for the Canada emergency student benefit. There is that kind of misalignment between the two. Again, the intent here was to cover all Canadian students, including those abroad, but the decision that was taken was to not cover international students studying in

Canada. If other countries did the same as us, then obviously they would be covered indirectly.

As you mentioned, the government has allowed them to work more than 20 hours in the essential services sector, which is a plus for them for sure, but you're right about the fact that they are not, at this point, eligible for the benefit.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dong.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot now has the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Good afternoon.

Mr. Flack, I must tell you that what happened in Nova Scotia has saddened us at all. We express our solidarity with you.

I would like to go back to the statistics you gave us about the CERB. It can already be said that 7.1 million applications have been submitted since the start of the current crisis, which was not very long ago. We feel that the number of workers affected by the crisis may well increase and reach one third of all workers.

Since the CERB was established and made more flexible because a number of workers were affected by the crisis, we have succeeded in reaching a good number of those workers, including those who had no access to employment insurance. That is positive. However, these benefits last only for so long and will come to an end.

Employment insurance benefits, both regular and special, have been blended with the CERB for 16 weeks. There will be another one afterwards.

Since we can already predict that the current situation will not be fully resolved quickly and that people will be losing their jobs for good, it is important to ask some questions immediately. What do you see in the future? Even before the crisis, the entire employment insurance program needed to be reviewed, something that had not been done for years. Do you see yourself looking at the issue seriously? We know how precious a protection plan is in circumstances like these. However, the plan should have been broader. The CERB is already pointing out the weaknesses in the system.

I would like to ask another question. Ms. Young talked about maternity leave. Are you looking at that issue? We are pleased that the CERB has been made more flexible for seasonal workers, given that their return to work will be delayed, if it happens at all. However, people working in some sectors are wondering what will happen if there is no return to work in the fall. They are wondering about the number of weeks they will need to be eligible for employment insurance.

• (1130)

Mr. Graham Flack: Thank you for your questions. If I may, I will answer the second question first.

It is true that we have made changes to allow access to the CERB not only for seasonal workers, but also for all those receiving employment insurance benefits who have not received benefits since December 29, or will no longer be receiving them in the coming weeks, as you mentioned.

It is also true that there is uncertainty about the next phase for those who would normally have accumulated weeks of work during the summer but who will not be able to do so because there is no work. The government is presently considering what it is going to do about that.

To answer your first question, we are working on three phases at the same time. The first is to manage the crisis. Employment insurance applications are flooding in. For days on end, we have seen the volume of applications exceed 30 times the daily normal. Let me give you the latest figures so that you can understand the scope of the situation. On some days, we have received more than 200,000 applications for employment insurance. Yesterday, there were 26,000. That is still a high number, but, in the last week, it has slowed down a lot. That sign may interest you. In a word, the first phase was to provide everyone with equal benefits at the same time as we were processing a volume of applications that is unprecedented in the history of our programs in Canada.

As for the second phase, of course, we are hoping that reopening the economy will allow people to return to work, but some may well have lost their eligibility for employment insurance. So we then have to find ways of putting those people back into the system. It is not an easy task, especially since we may well have millions to include in the employment insurance system. Work is being done in that regard.

The third phase is being done in parallel. This is to consider changes in our approach when the time comes to help people in difficulty. We are working on that as well.

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

[English]

Now we have Ms. Kwan, for six minutes, please.

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

To all the officials, thank you for your work and for being here today.

From my perspective, the CERB program remains complicated, as are the other programs, for that matter. We have to go through a process of determining whether a person is qualified. If the government had adopted what the NDP proposed, a universal direct payment, we wouldn't actually be in the situation where a whole bunch of people are left out and stuck.

To that end, I would like to ask the following question.

I have a number of constituents in different sets of scenarios. One constituent had to leave work voluntarily, or actually quit, because of experiencing harassment. As a result of quitting, the individual does not qualify for CERB. In another situation, another constituent had to quit work because of having flu-like symptoms. He was never tested for COVID, but he had flu-like symptoms. He

was worried his employer would not give him sick leave, and he had no choice but to leave work because he was worried that he would potentially infect others.

I have endless situations such as that, and everybody who is caught up in that situation is worried that if they apply for CERB, somehow they might be penalized down the road, because under the government's requirements you cannot apply for CERB and be eligible if you have quit your job.

To the officials, on this question, is the government working to fix this issue so that people can in fact, under those circumstances, still apply and be qualified without penalty?

• (1135)

Mr. Graham Flack: You are right. There is a condition in the CERB that parallels the employment insurance system such that individuals can't quit their jobs without cause and receive the benefit. This isn't a change. This is a continuation of the normal practice we have in place.

Under the EI system, we do have a redress mechanism, because there could be cases where an individual quit because the individual was facing harassment. You gave some examples. Under the redress system, we will allow the EI claim if the individual quit for justifiable reasons. Thus, for people applying through the EI system for CERB, we have a redress mechanism that we can use to assess the types of cases you're talking about in terms of whether it would be permitted.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: You know the problem, though, with that. In fact, in the case of the person facing harassment, they are in the system being assessed. In the meantime, there is no income and they are desperate. They're in a desperate situation to get support, so yes, there is a redress process, which takes time, so people are still caught out.

I have another constituent scenario on the issue of maternity leave. She was 23 weeks pregnant, with 17 weeks before she would go on maternity leave. After waiting for weeks for her EI application, she called the EI agent and was told she would receive half the \$2,000 CERB amount. When she questioned this, the agent said, and I quote, "No mistake, you are pregnant." She was then told there was a clause in CERB stating that if you receive maternity benefits, you are not eligible and would be put on regular EI. Then at the time that she called and made the application, she would not be receiving EI for another 12 weeks. Therefore, this individual is out of work right now, without support.

We have all these kinds of problems within the system. I'm pretty sure I'm not the only MP who has received these examples and heard about these challenges and been asked to provide answers, which we cannot.

I don't know what the government is doing to fix these kinds of issues for people who are in dire situations right now, who need assistance and cannot get it.

Mr. Graham Flack: As I indicated in response to an earlier question, if an individual has not received enough hours to qualify for maternity leave, those special benefits—maternity leave, compassionate care leave and other care leave—continue under the current EI system, although the government has indicated that it's looking at what it could do to change that.

In terms of the specific cases you've raised, we're happy to look into them. We've heard about cases similar to that. We're working on workarounds within the system to allow us to expeditiously process those cases for the individuals who are caught between the two systems. We have redeployed 3,000 additional processing agents towards these efforts. They had put all their efforts into getting new people into claim at the front end and are now working hard to get to these other cases that you're talking about.

• (1140)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: For the purposes of MP offices—

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Kwan. Mr. Vis has a point of order. You will have another minute when he's done.

Mr. Vis, please.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] who have lost their jobs. This is my digital way of showing support for MP Kwan and the questions she's raising for the expectant mothers who have been contacting my office at large, who are falling between the cracks.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, you have another minute.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

On this issue, is there a contact number that could be provided to the committee chair so we could all receive it? We have the general numbers for MPs to call, but I have to tell you, for my office, for my staff phoning that number, it's like winning the lottery to get a call through in a timely fashion.

I want to move on to another area, the Canada emergency student benefit. Will the CESB be excluded from income threshold calculations for the RAP or the RAP-PD, the repayment assistance plan or the repayment assistance plan for borrowers with a permanent disability?

Likewise the government announced it would double the grant assistance for the coming 2020-21 year. Will CESB or CERB be excluded from the income calculation for grant assistance?

Mr. Graham Flack: Benoît.

Mr. Benoît Robidoux: Yes, they will.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On the question of people who are engaged in an immigration process, often the issue is tied to their income. If they receive the CESB, will they be penalized for the immigration process, or would that be exempt?

Mr. Benoît Robidoux: I'm not in a position to answer your question on the immigration process because it's not in my zone of responsibility or the department's. I think you have to redirect this question to the immigration department.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Robidoux.

Thank you, colleagues.

We are expecting Minister Qualtrough in eight minutes. I would suggest that we suspend to allow her to get situated, and we'll be back to you shortly with the minister. Thanks, everyone.

• (1140)

(Pause)

• (1150)

The Chair: We are back in session.

Mr. Vis had raised his hand.

Mr. Vis, if you raised your hand before we suspended, I apologize. I only saw it after we suspended. If you have a point of order, please go ahead.

Mr. Brad Vis: I won't belabour the point, but a number of members at the committee would have really appreciated asking even one quick question of the officials. I would hope this committee use all of the time allotted to it, even for just a quick round, and I would ask the chair to consider such flexibility moving forward.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: That's an entirely fair request, and I'm sorry for not noticing your hand ahead of time. Had I done so, I absolutely would have exercised my discretion to do that. I will in the future.

Thanks for raising this.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you.

The Chair: We're pleased to welcome the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion.

Welcome, Minister. You have a 10-minute opening statement, followed by questions. The floor is yours.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion): Thank you very much, and thank you to all committee members for being here.

I am pleased to join you today to give you an update on measures taken to address the COVID-19 pandemic as they pertain to my portfolio.

Thank you for permitting me to participate by telephone. I've been having some challenges integrating my accessibility software with virtual meeting software, which means I can't always read what's on my screen when I'm in a meeting. It's sometimes doable, but not when I need to manage documents and participate meaningfully, so thank you very much.

I'm accompanied here today by the ESDC officials you have already been hearing from. I understand Graham, Lori and Benoît are with us.

[Translation]

Before I begin, I would like to thank the committee for its study on the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Your work is essential in our democratic process.

[English]

It has been some time now that Canadians have been adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic gripping our country and the world. During that time, Service Canada and CRA employees have expended a monumental effort to respond to this crisis.

To give you a sense of the scope of this effort, we need to look no further than the 13.4 million payments made to date under EI and the Canada emergency response benefit. This figure is a reflection of the real need of Canadians during this time and our staff's dedication to public service and our country.

[Translation]

Let me tell you a little more about the Canada emergency response benefit.

The CERB was created to assist Canadians in unprecedented circumstances. Our employment insurance program was really not designed to respond to a global pandemic. It does not cover all the situations that our workers are facing during this public health crisis.

Service Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency therefore formed a team and, in a few weeks, they developed and implemented a simple, quick approach to applications. They are now quickly and efficiently paying out the Canada emergency response benefits to Canadians each day.

[English]

For eligible Canadian workers, the CERB provides temporary income support of \$500 a week for up to 16 weeks. It applies to workers who have stopped working for reasons related to COVID-19. It also supports working parents who are staying home to care for children because of school and day care closures.

However, when we launched the benefit on April 6, some Canadian workers expressed concern about eligibility. We listened and on April 15 made it more inclusive.

Now, workers, including the self-employed, can earn up to \$1,000 per month while collecting the benefit. The benefit also now applies to workers who've recently exhausted their EI regular benefit payments and are unable to start working again because of COVID-19. This helps many seasonal workers, including fishers and those in the tourism industry, who may not have their usual seasonal work to return to as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

I understand that some Canadian workers who are eligible for the CERB and who are going on maternity leave in a few weeks or months have questions with regard to how their claims have been processed. We are in the process of reconciling these cases and will make sure that no one is disadvantaged and that everyone has access to their proper maternity benefit entitlements when they need them.

Before going on, I'll quickly share the latest CERB numbers. As of April 23, we have received 9.65 million applications from 7.12 million people. We have processed 9.51 million of these applications which, by my math, equals about 98.5% of applications having been processed. The total amount of payments made is \$22.4 billion.

I mentioned seasonal workers, and I'd like now to speak about temporary foreign workers and Canada's food supply. Temporary foreign workers have been integral to Canada's food production since the 1960s.

For example, last year approximately 60,000 temporary foreign workers came to Canada to work in agriculture and food-processing jobs, but the COVID-19 pandemic has made it harder to bring in the workers needed to meet Canada's food security needs. In response, we have implemented emergency changes to the temporary foreign worker program to make it easier and faster for employers to hire and retain these workers.

In the meantime, we're also working closely with provinces and territories, employers, foreign governments and other stakeholders to safeguard the health of workers and of all Canadians. This includes regulatory amendments, which came into force on April 20 and which are now being enforced through inspections by Service Canada compliance officers.

● (1155)

[Translation]

It is also true that, although temporary foreign workers are an integral part of our economy, many Canadians are now without work. I would like to assure members of the committee that there are still jobs for Canadians who want to work in the agriculture and agri-food sector. With our partners, we are currently trying to find ways to better communicate these employment possibilities to Canadians.

[English]

I'll have a word now about students and youth.

Our government is committed to providing targeted support for individuals and vulnerable groups, such as students. That is why we announced comprehensive support for post-secondary students and recent graduates, representing an investment of approximately \$9 billion.

Young people are facing a serious set of challenges in this difficult time, be it interrupted studies, reduced work opportunities, or disruptions to summer co-op or internship plans. Many of Canada's post-secondary students are worried about how they will be able to afford tuition, food and rent if they can't find summer work. That's why our government is introducing a four-month Canada emergency student benefit. Students who are not eligible for the CERB and meet the criteria for this new benefit will be able to apply to receive \$1,250 per month between May and August. Students with disabilities and students with dependants could receive an additional \$500 per month. This benefit is designed to reach the vast majority of existing and newly graduated post-secondary students.

In addition, we are expanding eligibility for the Canada student loans program for September. We are also doubling the value of Canada student grants and increasing the cap on Canada student loans from \$210 to \$350 per week of study.

[Translation]

I understand that many young Canadians will be anxious about their job prospects this summer and that they will be looking for opportunities in healthy and safe work environments. The temporary changes that we recently announced to the Canada summer jobs program are only the beginning.

[English]

Earlier this week, we announced that we will expand existing federal employment programs to create up to 76,000 jobs, placements and other training opportunities to help students find employment and develop valuable skills this summer and over the coming months. This includes expanding the student work placement program by creating more paid work placements across critical service sectors like health care, food and agri-food, retail and e-commerce.

We're also introducing flexibilities to the youth employment and skills strategy, creating placements for young Canadians in critical sectors, such as community service.

We're investing in bringing important wraparound services online through the support for student learning program, and services like mentoring and tutoring for vulnerable young people to make sure they are not further marginalized by COVID-19.

We believe these measures and others made as part of Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan will help young people weather the negative economic impacts of the pandemic while ensuring their health and safety.

Finally, I'd like to speak about what our government is doing to address the concerns of persons with disabilities during this pandemic.

We recognize that some groups are significantly and disproportionately impacted by this crisis. For some Canadians with disabilities, underlying medical conditions put them at greater risk of serious complications related to COVID-19. Others face discrimination and barriers in accessing information, social services and health care.

On April 10, I released a statement outlining our government's unequivocal commitment to the rights of every citizen and the value of every life, including the right to equal access to medical treatment and care. This is in keeping with our commitment to Nothing Without Us and in line with the principles and objectives of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Accessible Canada Act.

In addition, in this same spirit and to support Canadians with disabilities, we established the COVID-19 disability advisory group. This group is offering advice to the government on real-time, lived experiences of persons with disabilities during this crisis. Areas of particular focus are equality of access to health care and support, access to information and communications, mental health and social isolation, and employment and income support.

● (1200)

[Translation]

My Cabinet colleagues and I are ready to take other steps to protect Canadians and the economy. This means continuing to support workers and businesses now and in the coming transition back to the normal operation of the economy, as soon as that happens.

[English]

I'd now be happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Do you have a point of order, Mr. Turnbull?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): It's just a small technical request. I know that we experienced this on the other committee I'm on as well. When the translation and interpretation is happening, the volume is still high when the person is speaking and it's often hard to hear. I would just humbly request that maybe the interpretation be louder than the speaker's voice at the time that translation is coming through. I think it would improve the quality for all of us to hear when we're speaking about accessibility. I just think it's important that we make sure everyone can hear clearly.

Thank you, Minister, for your comments and opening remarks.

The Chair: We'll now proceed with questions, beginning with the Conservatives.

Mr. Albas, go ahead for six minutes, sir.

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

Thank you for your presence, Minister.

Minister, since mid-March Conservatives, such as me and other shadow ministers, have sent you six letters, and it seems we are getting zero response. Is this how you want to conduct your office?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I know that you have sent numerous letters over the past weeks. As things are moving and changing very rapidly, I know that we've made an effort. I know my parliamentary secretary has been offering personal telephone conversations with you to capture your input. We've had two committees of the whole at which we were both there personally. There have been opportunities to ask questions through technical briefings through my department. There's certainly been no intended effort not to respond. I know there's a daily parliamentary call at 4:30 p.m., through which we gather information. I think my team is really well equipped to answer questions.

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, I only have so much time, so I'd like you just to answer the question in the time that's given.

Minister, your parliamentary secretary has not. I'm still waiting. The questions were asked three teleconferences ago on the technical briefing for answers, so this is not happening.

Let me just say this. One, I hope that you believe there's an ethical argument to be made that you have to be responsible to Parliament. There's also a practical argument. If you're not sending me timely answers to my inquiries, then I will tell every Conservative MP to then ask your department their own questions. That will make it inefficient for your office and for mine.

I just want your commitment right now to provide answers on a timely basis. Yes or no?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: You do have that commitment, absolutely, and I apologize because I thought we were getting you timely information. That will be remedied immediately.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you.

Minister, expectant parents are being told by Service Canada that they can't access the CERB. Instead, they must apply for early parental leaves. They are being told this is a requirement in the CERB.

Is this a requirement in your understanding?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I apologize, Mr. Albas. The operator said I was muted and I missed the middle part of your question. Can you please ask it again?

Mr. Dan Albas: Sure. Expectant parents who are applying for the CERB are being told that they must apply for early parental benefits instead. They are being told this is a requirement.

Is this a requirement, Minister?

• (1205)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: This is absolutely not a requirement. Mothers who are expecting and who are eligible for the CERB can receive the benefit even if they expect to start maternity benefits at some point.

No, that is not a requirement.

Mr. Dan Albas: It says right here in a letter that this committee has received from a Canadian that says, "There is a little question on the application for E.I./ the CERB application that asks 'Are you pregnant?' Of course I checked the 'yes' box. I am pregnant." Am I worthless as a worker because I am pregnant?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I can tell you why that question was asked, Mr. Albas. We ask that question so that we can anticipate, from a "back-end system" point of view, whether somebody is going to be moved onto a different benefit stream, but that does not in any way impact their eligibility for all of these benefits.

As I said in my opening remarks, I know that we've had some systemic challenges, but I will reiterate my assurances that nobody is going to be disadvantaged by anything that may or may not be happening, and pregnant women—

Mr. Dan Albas: In the letter as well, Minister—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Albas. Ms. Kusie has a point of order.

Mr. Dan Albas: Excuse me, Mr. Chair. I have the time and I appreciate I only have a brief amount of time.

The Chair: One of your colleagues has raised a point of order, Mr. Albas.

Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Yes, I just wanted to ask, please, if Mr. Albas could have 20 seconds added to his time, considering that he had to repeat the question as a result of the technical difficulty with the minister.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Yes, in the same letter, Minister, it says right here that she went to a representative and he said to her, "There is a clause in the CERB that states if you will be receiving maternity benefits, you are not eligible for the \$2000 a month and will be put immediately on regular E.I. benefits."

Minister, you're telling us one thing and your officials at Service Canada are telling constituents differently. Did you apply a—

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I understand.

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, I'm not done.

Did you apply a gender-based analysis plus on the CERB, and are you determined that you are going to fix this sooner than later?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Well, we're absolutely determined that this will be fixed for sure.

Let me say that I understand from what that letter is saying that somebody can't be on both maternity benefits and the CERB, but they are eligible for both, and they can sequentially be on the CERB and then flip to maternity benefits, so it is—

Mr. Dan Albas: We are also getting other reports, Minister, where people are being told they have to take their maternity leave early and they do not qualify for the CERB.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Well, that should not be the case and you have my commitment to make sure that isn't the case.

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, in the House on April 11, you said, "in order to change the criteria to include groups of individuals who are not working but who have not stopped working for CERB, legislative changes would be required."

Now, a few days later you announced that people who hadn't lost their jobs would be covered without a legislative change. I have asked your office repeatedly for an explanation and I have gotten zero response.

How are you covering people who didn't lose their job to COVID when the eligibility criteria in the legislation we passed clearly states it's a requirement?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thanks for that question. It's very important. I tried clearly to make the distinction in the House last Saturday between some changes that would require legislation and some that could be done through regulation. Changing the language of "ceased working" to "not working" would require a legislative change, but there are changes that we could make by regulation.

After that time, we got a legal opinion and were advised that we could do this particular change through a broad interpretation of the law, which I'm happy to walk you through. You know we are in an emergency situation. We found a way to do what was being asked of us by Canadians and by the opposition.

We're giving Canadians more support and we are confident that we had the authority, so the legislation—

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, a legal opinion is just a legal opinion until it's checked by a court. We shouldn't have to have the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations determine whether or not you're in violation. I do hope that if you need legislative changes, you take it up at the next opportunity.

Now, in this announcement, your government said that seasonal workers would not be covered by the CERB, except that is not really—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Albas. That's your time. You're over by a minute—

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hopefully, I will get another round.

The Chair: You will indeed.

Mr. Long, please, for the Liberals; you have six minutes.

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

Good afternoon from sunny Saint John—Rothesay to all my colleagues and my friends. It's wonderful to be back at HUMA and it's wonderful to see everybody again.

First off, Minister, I want to thank you for coming to HUMA today and answering our questions. I sincerely want to thank you, on behalf of my constituents in Saint John—Rothesay, for our govern-

ment's and for your department's rollout in particular on the CERB. Obviously, there are those naysayers who would say that the program has been rushed and poorly thought out. I've never seen a program that has been this extraordinary to get money out to Canadians so quickly, so seamlessly, in really the crisis of a generation.

I want to thank you first and foremost for the CERB. When I heard about the Canada emergency response benefit, CERB, I didn't realize that I'd certainly be referring to it and dreaming about it every night. But there are still some things that we need to talk about. We need to fine-tune and tweak some things.

My first question is about the disincentive to work with respect to the CERB. I certainly have some employers in my riding who are starting to ramp back up. I thank God that New Brunswick is leading the country right now, with our sixth straight day of no cases. We're starting to ramp forward. But some employers in the riding are starting to talk to their employees about coming back, and unfortunately they've dealt with some employees saying, "Well, I'm still on the CERB. I don't really want to come back to work right now."

I want to see how we can tighten that up. For example, I would like you to explain how the recent changes, which are good changes to the CERB, allowing people to earn up to \$1,000 to continue receiving the benefit and our government's proposed employee top-up for essential workers, will help ensure that the CERB is not the disincentive to honest work.

● (1210)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I agree with you that the implementation and delivery of this massive benefit in such a timely and efficient way is really testament to the hard work of our public servants. I'm so proud of how they're delivering for fellow Canadians.

We know that the CERB, in giving a monthly payment of \$2,000, has had the unintended consequence, to your point, of disincentivizing work in some circumstances. We have tried—you mentioned the two examples I was going to give, so I will elaborate on them—to incentivize working, or to being able to continue working, by adding...and, I would say, in response to a lot of what was raised by opposition and Canadians and organizations and employers. By allowing Canadians to earn up to \$1,000 and still be in receipt of the CERB means that \$1,000 in most provinces is about, I think, if my math is correct, a half-time position at minimum wage. They're allowing people to still work and earn \$1,000.

Remember, that \$1,000 is flexible. It's not tied to the number of hours or what you earn. You can earn it in a day, you can earn it through a contract, or you can earn it by working a certain number of hours. By recognizing at the same time, on the other end of that, in doing that \$1,000 limit...we also need to ensure that people who are working very hard, which would include most people in essential services, aren't earning less by working full time than those receiving the \$2,000 on the CERB and earning the \$1,000 max.

That was the reason behind our essential workers top-up. That's why we're working with provinces to deliver an employment income top-up for essential workers making under a certain amount of money.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Minister, for the response. Time is precious, so I'm going to go right into my next question.

With respect to the disability advisory group, there are some groups of Canadians who will be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. I'm pleased our government is taking significant steps to help vulnerable persons during these difficult times. For some with disabilities, their underlying medical conditions put them at greater risk. In addition, many still face discrimination and barriers in accessing information, social services and health care. For others, the need for self-isolation and physical distancing creates additional challenges. Can you tell this committee what steps our government is taking to support Canadians with disabilities during this incredibly challenging time for them?

• (1215)

The Chair: A short answer, if you could, Minister.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: We established our disability advisory committee. We issued a statement reassuring everyone of their right to equal access to health care. We are working with provincial/territorial ministers responsible for disability. My colleague, the Minister of Health, and I have written the letter to P/T health ministers outlining some of the issues being faced by people with disabilities in our health care systems. You'll see in our student measures that we have an increase to the student benefit for students with disabilities. We know the GST credit will disproportionately favour people with disabilities.

We are doing a lot and we're trying to put a disability lens on everything we do to make sure this group of Canadians are included and see themselves in our response.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Louise Chabot: Good afternoon, Madam Minister. Thank you for joining us.

You have talked about the CERB, but I am going to turn to the Canada summer jobs program. An extension has been granted, which was welcome, because the financial year has to close. However, we have heard that it is supposed to create 76,000 jobs, in addition to the 40,000 jobs that we already have difficulty filling.

How do you intend to do that?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: The Canada summer jobs program creates about 70,000 jobs for young Canadians. Yesterday, we announced additional investments to add 76,000 jobs for those young people. We are developing employment programs for young Canadians and we will expand them to ensure that young people can find jobs that provide them with appropriate experience for their careers.

We are aware that young Canadians do not know what they will be doing this summer. So we would like to let them know that we support them and that we are there for them. These programs, and the Canada emergency response benefit for students will help them gain good experiences during the summer.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Going back to Canada summer jobs program, without the 76,000 additional jobs you are talking about, we had to do a no-cost exercise, because, despite the expansion of the measures, we had the same budget. Each member of Parliament had to work with priority lists, including those that we added, while keeping exactly the same budget.

Which program will the 76,000 new jobs come from, and how will they be funded?

• (1220)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you for your question.

Yes, indeed, we asked members of Parliament for a lot in the Canada summer jobs program. We wanted to respond to the crisis situation and to provide jobs linked to essential services.

[*English*]

There are jobs in the youth employment strategy and the work-integrated learning program.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Flack, have I left any programs out?

Mr. Graham Flack: Yes, there is the program on which MPs have done a wonderful job, as some employers' needs have changed. The department has a series of programs to place people in direct jobs involving other departments. That is what the minister spoke of earlier. We want to invest another \$50 million to place students in the health and agricultural sectors and to help them gain experience with Canadian businesses. So it's a series of programs, in addition to the ones you talked about. These programs were delivered by other departments.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you.

Ms. Louise Chabot: You mentioned an additional \$50 million in programs related to health and agriculture. These employment sectors are under provincial jurisdiction. As you know, agricultural work is very important. Furthermore, some seasonal foreign workers have not yet arrived in the country.

At home in Quebec, the provincial government has launched a program to attract young people to agriculture. Will tourism, for example, be part of it? Will it be helpful and beneficial to provincial efforts, or will it hamper them?

The Chair: Could I ask you to give a brief answer, please.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: That is precisely why we are working with the provinces and territories on the issue of wage boosts for essential workers. We want the provinces to be able to decide what is essential in their jurisdictions. I know that, in Quebec, agriculture is truly essential.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, for six minutes, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Minister. I appreciate the work being done with the CERB. It remains, though, from the NDP's perspective, that it would have been far better if the government had gone forward with a universal direct payment. We would not be in this complicated situation, where so many people are falling through the gaps and are stuck and cannot get access to support in a dire situation.

That said, I have a question for you on people who do not qualify right now.

As it stands, based on the current eligibility rules for the CERB, it would appear that single parents who are no longer receiving vital spousal or child support payments due to an ex-partner's income being affected by COVID-19 are not eligible. This leaves single parents scrambling without funds, and, of course, children are without the support they need.

Will people who receive spousal or child maintenance become eligible to receive the CERB, and will you allow this change to take place?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you for that question. It's something I've been thinking a lot about as we've been looking at groups, in particular vulnerable groups.

For the group of women you're talking about—and I say this knowing that women are disproportionately in this situation—while they would have received, most likely because of low income, the additional goods and services tax credit we had, and while they are going to be receiving an additional increase through the Canada child benefit per child, that falls short of replacing income they would have had through spousal support payments.

I am looking into this. Although spousal support payments aren't technically considered employment income, it is something I'm turning my mind to because of the particular vulnerability of this group.

• (1225)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Minister. I hope that changes will be made because, as it stands right now, I have a number of constituents who are in this dire situation. It is not only people who are supposed to be receiving spousal support or child maintenance who are in a desperate situation. In fact, the ex-partners who want to ensure that their ex-spouses and children are provided support are

equally anxious, because they are no longer in the position to provide that maintenance. I hope that we'll hear some good news. I would be happy to work with the office to address this issue, Minister.

I'd like to move on to another area, which is migrant workers and undocumented workers. We have a situation where now with COVID-19 many people's work permits have expired, and they are unable to have them processed and addressed through IRCC in a timely fashion. Consequently, they're not eligible for the CERB, because you have to have a valid SIN in order to be eligible. Will your government look at providing the CERB to those with an expired SIN so that they can get the critical support they need during this time?

For the undocumented workers, the people who are here in Canada, if they're forced to go out to work in an unsafe environment and therefore not flattening the curve or engaging in social distancing and so on, that creates all kinds of problems for all of us. The government can address that issue with the workers' individual tax number, ITN, so you can be sure that they are people who are supposed to be working and that they have an ITN. Is that something your government can address?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I'd certainly like to follow up with you on that particular point, especially the second part of your question.

As you're well aware, the way CERB eligibility works is you have to have a valid social insurance number. It's troubling me, and I've been trying to figure out a way.... Because of another system in government having backlogs, i.e. people aren't getting their social insurance numbers renewed or up to date, this might preclude eligibility in this case. I'm working with IRCC colleagues on that. I don't know, Graham, if you have an update, because I know we were looking into what we could do in that situation.

Mr. Graham Flack: We'll follow up, Minister.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Sorry, Ms. Kwan, I'm not avoiding your question. I just want to make sure we have the most up-to-date information for you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'll be happy—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Kwan, you're out of time.

You can finish that comment. Go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would be happy to work with the officials, Minister, on this issue. A quick fix for that is to simply allow for the people with the expired SIN to collect the CERB.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Next we go back to the Conservatives for five minutes. We go to Mr. Albas again.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you again, Minister, for being here today.

Minister, following up on my earlier line of questions, I asked specifically about the CERB, which your officials have said about one third of the labour force is receiving right now. Did the CERB go through a gender-based plus analysis?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: We have been looking at every measure to see how it disproportionately impacts a number of groups, including women and girls. I guess I'm waffling a bit by saying that everything has gone through so quickly that I'd like to make sure that the rigour was put to it, but perhaps, Graham, you could answer for us.

Mr. Dan Albas: I'd like to ask you a follow-up question on what you just said, Minister.

Would you be willing, if a gender-based analysis was done, to please submit it to this committee as well as to the Status of Women?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Yes, absolutely. I'll issue it with what information we have for you.

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, you said you clearly believe that you have the authority to make a regulatory workaround despite what the Canada emergency response benefit act says in regard to the eligibility, as in "ceases working for reasons related to COVID-19".

You say you have a legal opinion. Are you prepared to share this legal opinion with this committee as well as with the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations?

• (1230)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I think I'll have to get back to you on the process side of that. I know that we have gotten advice from—

Mr. Dan Albas: If you're confident in it, Minister, then—

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Can I finish? This is a very important answer.

We got legal advice from Justice that, by taking a broad interpretation of the first emergency legislation, we could make this regulatory change, but I need to figure that out. I apologize.

Mr. Dan Albas: If it's good enough for your government, Minister, I would hope it would be good enough for this committee, so I do hope you will commit to doing that. I'll ask you at the end to see if you've changed your mind.

In this announcement, going back to what you originally said about seasonal workers, your government said that seasonal workers would not be covered by the CERB, except that really wasn't the case. Instead, you extended the CERB to people whose EI had run out. This covers many seasonal workers, but I've heard from countless seasonal workers who are not EI eligible but who believe they are CERB eligible. Many have applied, believing they qualify. Why did you state seasonal workers are not eligible?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: The eligibility criteria are that if you made \$5,000 in the past year and you've stopped working, or you've earned under \$1,000.... The EI seasonal worker piece has to do with people whose claims have been exhausted or ended since, I think, December 29 or January 1. Seasonal workers are a specific subset of EI exhaustees.

I apologize—I'm not sure the exact reference you're making—but I think I was talking to people in seasonal jobs, so somebody

who as a matter of course would go back to a specific seasonal job as opposed to the EI subset of seasonal workers.

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, the government not being clear on these things is a real problem. You have an opportunity to magnify your voice, your government's voice, to all members of Parliament. That's why I'd expect you to be clear when these things are announced, particularly when it's in front of a microphone.

Minister, in the House both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Families stated that students would be eligible for the CERB as long as they made \$5,000 in the last year. What they neglected to say—exactly what you referenced—is that those students also needed to lose their job due to COVID-19. We know there are students who heard those words and applied for the benefit, thinking themselves eligible.

What will you do to address the students who have mistakenly applied after hearing the Prime Minister's statements, who clearly should fall under the CESB and not the CERB?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: First of all, if people applied for the CERB in good faith, there is no significant consequence except that they may be asked at some point to pay that money back. If they are eligible for the CESB, they can apply for that, and we will work with them to see what benefit stream they should have been in.

To be clear, we know that 43% or 45% of students were working in February and we anticipated a number of students being eligible for the CERB going into the March 15 to April 1 timeline. So it doesn't surprise me that a lot of students did lose their jobs because of COVID-19 and—

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, by saying this, are you not telling people that they should just simply apply and roll the dice when it comes to whether or not they'll get to keep it? Because right now you're telling students that they only qualify for \$1,250, or if they have dependants or a disability it's \$1,750.

Are you not, by saying this right now in that kind of way, just encouraging people to roll the dice?

The Chair: Just a short answer, Minister. We're out of time.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I am expecting Canadians to be honest. I am expecting Canadian students in particular to understand that as part of a broader package of measures we've put in place for them, which includes an income support piece, but also access to increased grant support, access to a service bursary for volunteer or community service.

Mr. Dan Albas: You have a responsibility to *[Inaudible—Editor]* fairly with the Canadian public.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Albas.

Mr. Turnbull, you have five minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to Minister Qualtrough for being on the call today. I really appreciate the work that you and your department are doing. I know there is a real commitment to ensuring that all vulnerable groups are assisted at this time.

I know that when the CERB was rolled out, we prioritized speed and my constituents in particular expressed a lot of gratitude for how quickly they could apply and were able to get cheques. I've never seen government move so fast, so I am significantly impressed by that.

I am a relatively new MP in the Liberal caucus. I know that our members advocated for small changes to essentially accommodate other people within these measures and that those responses have been made, so thank you for all that work you and your team have done.

I have a couple of questions. I want to go back to the disabilities. I have numerous constituents who have disabilities and have expressed concerns that their provincial and territorial benefits in particular might be clawed back, even though they qualify for the CERB.

I wonder whether the disability advisory group will be working on that, and if you could give us an update on how the work with provinces and territories might be unfolding.

• (1235)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I am personally very seized with that issue and have raised it with my provincial, territorial and ministerial colleagues. I have written to them on this specific issue as recently as yesterday or the day before.

The disability advisory committee has raised concerns that there are situations in many provinces whereby entitlement to disability support benefits allows a certain income threshold, and that certain income threshold may be beyond the \$5,000 that we require for CERB, so somebody may be entitled both to their provincial disability support and be eligible for CERB because they lost that employment income.

Some provinces like British Columbia have waived any kind of clawback so that people can get both of these kinds of benefits. Other provinces have decided to claw it back at a 50% rate, and other provinces are clawing it back entirely. This is a concern because the treatment is different across the country—but that's the reality of a federation. We're raising it at a bunch of different levels

are working with PT governments to ensure that the most money possible gets directly into the hands of the people who need it.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's great. It's really good news for me to hear.

I also want to ask you about Canada summer jobs. We know the vital role that program has been playing in supporting young people in getting employment. I know there were lots of requests to update that program and for it to have some added flexibility, specifically around connecting those young people to jobs with community groups and essential services.

Could you give us an update on the recent measures that have essentially made that program more flexible at this time?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: The world didn't look the way it looks today when the first intake happened for Canada summer jobs back in January. Employers expressed interest in having young people work for them, and now they may or may not be able to offer that experience. Some employers didn't ask for young people who could really benefit them now, whether it be pop-up groups that are providing essential services in communities or organizations that asked for one person but really need two.

We tried to amend the Canada summer jobs program to respond to the reality on the ground for communities. We changed some of the criteria. For example, before private and public sector jobs were supported at 50% of the salary; now they are supported at 100%, as they were for non-profits. We are allowing part-time work whereas before it was full-time. We have extended the period during which students can work. It was until the end of summer; now it's until the end of next February.

We've done a number of things to help communities and give employers flexibility, and also to give MPs a chance to help us understand what's going on in their communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Thank you, Minister.

We'll go back to the Conservatives for five minutes; Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Raquel Dancho would like to go if possible.

The Chair: Ms. Dancho, please.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

Hello, Minister.

Thank you for being here today on a call.

I was interested in your government's release on the \$9 billion in student subsidies the Prime Minister announced a few days ago.

Regarding the supports for students, you said it was “a reflection of the central role they will play in ensuring that Canada emerges from these challenges stronger than ever.” I was very encouraged to hear your belief in the student population contributing to this response. I was an undergraduate not too long ago, and I can tell you I certainly would have appreciated the opportunity to contribute to this relief effort.

I also appreciated seeing in the media lately that you acknowledged that the agriculture and agri-food sectors are experiencing significant employment shortages, which, as I'm sure you know, threaten the food security of our country. I'm sure your constituents, my constituents, everyone's constituents have told us they're alarmed about the shortage of food on the shelves and the increases in prices, and we know how this ties into labour shortages on farms.

I'm also sure you've heard about the Conservative proposal to create a Canada summer jobs program specifically for agriculture to mobilize our healthiest, most able-bodied young people to work on farms and fill these critical shortages.

You have said that your plan will provide “Canadians and businesses in all sectors across the country with the help they need to get through the current challenge and position them for success as we emerge from the crisis.” With that being said—which seems like a reasonable response, and you strike me as a very reasonable person—it seems that you would be supportive of the initiative we announced. We would like to hear from the government about it. Can you comment on whether you will be supporting it?

• (1240)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you for your question and thoughtfulness. I draw your attention first to a campaign that we launched a couple of days ago called the “step up to the plate—help feed Canadians campaign”; it's directing young people to employment opportunities in agriculture. We've also tried to get the message out to MPs that Canada summer jobs is of course open to farmers and other agriculture sector employers. We also have a program with Agriculture Canada that's being enhanced to directly place young people in agri-food and agriculture sector jobs.

As much as I absolutely share the intent of your program, I'm not sure we need a separate CSJ stream to meet that objective.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate the former announcements you made. We're not hearing from farmers that this is going to be enough to meet the needs they require to secure our food supply chain.

I did want to mention my concern about the program that you did announce, providing students with \$1,250. I know that's going to be critical for many students, but we know in reality that it may incentivize students not to seek opportunities, and I think you would agree that your government needs to be doing everything it possibly can to motivate our youngest, our best and our brightest to get out there and contribute, as you said. It would seem like a normal conclusion to think that if you can focus a lot of your attention and your cabinet decisions on getting these students to work in agriculture—more so than you're already doing, so we start hearing positive feedback from farmers—that would be incredibly helpful and make straightforward sense.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I hear you. Our youth definitely want to contribute and are interested in serving and in working. I take your advice, and I will take it back to the cabinet table.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's great.

Chair, how many minutes do I have?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay. Thanks.

Minister, I wanted to flag with you that earlier I mentioned to your officials that I'd had a very unfortunate experience with your parliamentary secretary's call yesterday about the \$9-billion in supports. I had been on the call for an hour, and he had been informed ahead of time that I was going to be asking questions, and yet my NDP and Green colleagues were able to ask two to three questions each—even a staffer was asked a couple of questions several times—and yet they did not call on the Conservatives. That was the second call like this hosted by your parliamentary secretary, where I have not been called on for questions. Dan Albas and I have written you several letters, and we haven't heard back from you.

I did appreciate the apology from your colleague Adam Vaughan, but I wanted you to be aware that it's quite alarming to me, as the official critic for youth for all Canadians, that I have been unable until now to ask you or your parliamentary secretary any questions. I wanted to make sure you're aware that there's been a disappointing response to us as Conservatives who want to have an opportunity to ask those questions.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you for letting me know. I apologize if that was your experience, and I'll make sure it doesn't happen again.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much, Minister. All the best.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

Next, back to the Liberals. Mr. Vaughan, you have five minutes, please.

• (1245)

Mr. Adam Vaughan: If you could tell me when there's two minutes left, I'd like to share my time with a member of the Green Party to make sure their perspective is added to our conversation today.

To the minister, I would like a quick yes or no to a couple of questions. Your department and your ministry are working on maternity and paternity fixes to CERB and working on how to accommodate international students. Work is under way to address some of the deficiencies that seniors are facing, and other work to address the issue of child maintenance and spouses who are relying on that but have lost it, and some tweaks are still to come for workers in the seasonal industries.

The department has been working on all these ongoing projects for a number of days if not weeks now.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Thank you. One more yes there.

Second, is work already under way on structuring a recovery from the pandemic?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: The answer to that is yes, and has been since the beginning. We have tried to put measures in place that will best position us as a country, post the public health crisis, to come out of the economic crisis equally quickly. A lot of the measures we've taken have been targeted at setting up businesses and individuals to be best positioned to recover as quickly as possible.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Would it be helpful for this committee to start to think about those recovery steps as well, so we get ahead of the curve, as opposed to responding with legislation in real time?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: The more brains we put on this the better, so absolutely.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: On the stackability of the benefits, I respect the fact that there are provincial jurisdictions here, but are we working with the provinces to make sure that the benefits we put on the table are stackable with existing provincial benefits?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: As I said, we sure are. We've had different levels of success, and different provinces are taking different actions. B.C., as I said, is just waiving it, and it's completely stackable. Ontario, on the other hand, is doing a 50% clawback, and I understand they're redirecting the money their clawing back into other income support measures for people who are on other types of support that aren't necessarily eligible for CERB. Different provinces are taking different approaches.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Finally, indigenous youth and other equity-seeking groups, particularly in the black and African Canadian communities, often get pushed out of the way so that stronger equity groups get to the front of the line. What are we doing to make sure that those who often are the most marginalized don't get displaced as other equity-seeking groups use their power to get to the front of the line or their experience with programs to get to the front of the line?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: We have many voices around our table, and yours is one of them. Certainly at cabinet, we regularly ensure that these perspectives are.... Whether it's desegregated data that we need as we look to see who is being impacted by this crisis, or we need to see how the GST credit impacts different groups of Canadians differently, there's been a concerted effort, as has been the case for years in our government, to turn our minds to different subsets and different kinds of intersectional realities within the population. You're not just someone with a disability; you're someone who is a woman with a disability. We're really mindful of this.

I don't know if there's anything in particular the department would like to add on the—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Actually, I have only a little bit of time.

Lastly, on the Canada summer jobs issue, I recognize that rural Canada issues—

The Chair: You're inside of two minutes to go, Mr. Vaughan. You asked me to remind you.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Okay, I'll leave that comment for another day then.

I'll submit to the Green Party.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Manly. You have about a minute and a half, and welcome.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak, Adam.

I'm wondering, Minister, if there's some flexibility that could be built into this program for the CERB. I have a couple of constituents. One went on medical leave last year for surgery. She spent eight months off work, so she didn't make \$5,000 last year, but then came back to work and lost her job because of COVID-19. I have another person who left her job because her father had congestive heart failure. She left her job to be able to take care of her father, and she was just getting ready to start work again, but because she had quite her job to help her dad, she's not eligible for the CERB either.

I'm wondering if there's some kind of flexibility that could be built into the system so that these different circumstances could be taken into consideration for people.

• (1250)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Those are two very specific fact patterns, and my heart goes out, in particular, to the second one. Let me see if I can get back to you with specific answers on those two fact patterns, but to some extent, the legislation that created this benefit has the parameters that it does. I'm not sure that the response will be positive, but let me see, moving forward, what I can do with those particular kinds of situations.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Manly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

I'd like to come back to the new programs announced for students, including the Canada student emergency benefit. I don't know if you have heard the comments about the new jobs being announced in certain sectors of the economy.

While helping students is beneficial, how will we reconcile this new aid with student employment needs?

In other words, given the programs in place, will students still be attracted to minimum wage jobs? Won't we do the opposite of what we wanted to do?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: We worked closely with student organizations to develop these measures. They asked us for assistance, not only in the form of a benefit, but also as loans and grants. They asked us to create employment and volunteer opportunities because young people want to work and serve their communities. That's why we made a number of announcements yesterday about all of these measures.

So it is not just about the benefit. If it were, what you are saying could turn out to be true. However, people have asked us to create these opportunities and these jobs, because they want this experience, and if they cannot work, they want to serve their community. That is why we established the Canada student service grant.

Those who have volunteered for a certain number of hours over the summer will be eligible to receive a Government of Canada grant of \$1,000, \$3,000 or \$5,000 at the end of the summer.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Despite your answers, it is important for us to have all the details.

Please consider our remarks on the fear about the harmonization we would like in several sectors. Coordination with the provinces is key, and these programs should improve the current employment situation and not cut anyone off.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I understand exactly what you are saying.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I have one more question...

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, I am sorry, but your time is up.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Don't be sorry.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Minister, I would like to address the Canada summer jobs program. While there are changes to address the COVID-19 crisis and organizations can now have 100% of the funding for the positions, the global funding for all of our ridings has not increased.

In my riding of Vancouver East, even in the best of times, more than half of the organizations are recommended for funding, but there's no money available to support their work in support of students. In this instance, only about a third of the organizations may be able to get some resources; the vast majority of them would not. I hope you will look at that issue and ensure that there's an increase in budget in order to support the work of students on the ground.

The other issue I want to bring up is that, for the student benefit that was just announced, the Prime Minister used the deadline of December graduation for students to qualify for it. I have a constituent who wrote immediately. She graduated in November as opposed to December 2019, and now she is out.

There are these nuanced situations, and that is hugely problematic. I hope there can be flexibility with respect to that.

Perhaps I can get a quick response from you, Minister.

• (1255)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you.

Let's work together on that flexibility. The benefit itself will be legislated so there's an opportunity to build flexibilities into a number of the decisions.

I will say that the biggest challenge for a lot of us on all these programs has been the reality of having to set thresholds. When you put a line in the sand, someone's on one side of it, and someone's on the other side of it. Trying to quickly deliver a program with nuance

or graduated complexities becomes tough. I do hear you, and we can certainly work together on making it as flexible as possible in the time we have.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Just on that, Minister, wouldn't it make more sense to go with a universal direct payment, because then you wouldn't have these nuanced problems for all of the programs? That would make it so much easier for your officials and for the government and, most important of all, it would make it so much better for the people who are in need. I would be happy to work with you in light of the situation we're faced with.

Likewise, Canadians who are overseas do not have access to this program because they have to actually be here in Canada. If they are trying to continue their studies abroad, they will not be able to get the support. When they are abroad, they may well be in the situation where they cannot get employment because of COVID-19. I want to bring that to your attention as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Would you like me to respond?

The Chair: You could give a quick response, Minister.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: On that last particular issue, I just want to highlight that we hear you. We're looking at building in flexibility for students who are Canadians citizens or permanent residents and who are abroad to still have access to it this summer.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

To all of my colleagues, thank you for being so respectful of the clock. We were able to get in two full rounds, which was our goal.

Minister, we very much thank you and your officials for making yourselves available as soon as this process got up and running. We very much appreciate that.

Colleagues, we are about to adjourn. We do not yet have confirmation of when we will be meeting again, because three more committees have been added to the roster, which is quite a drain on the parliamentary resources. The last tentative schedule I saw had us meeting on Wednesday, but please don't take that as gospel.

I would ask each of you to think about the future conduct of business, to make sure that you communicate amongst yourselves, because in advance of any meeting, I do propose an informal telephone conference with the vice-chairs, representatives from the NDP and the Bloc, to plan our next course of business. If you could give that some thought, then hopefully we could be as efficient in our next meetings as we were in this one.

So unless there is anything further...

I see Ms. Kusie's hand up.

Ms. Kusie, I recognize you.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to indicate that unanimous consent was not received for Mr. Manley to be subbed in. We certainly recognize him as an individual from a party that does not have official status within the House. If he is going to be given the consideration to be put on standby, then we would also ask for other independent members of Parliament to be given that consideration as well.

Certainly, while I recognize that these virtual meetings are not conventional, we should follow, as closely as possible, the conventions that we follow when we meet in person. This, of course, would include unanimous consent on the subbing in.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

Ms. Kwan, on this point?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On this point, from the NDP's perspective, if an independent member—from the Green Party, in this instance—is able to share time with another committee member, we don't have a problem with that. I'll just leave it at that,

Mr. Chair, I do have a separate point, though, if I may. During the committee meeting, I did ask officials, when they were before us, to provide MPs with contact information in order to directly follow up with them on individual cases. They said that's something they would do. I wonder if you can undertake to get that information from the officials and share it with all of the committee members.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Mr. Turnbull and then Mr. Albas.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: To my understanding, unanimous consent is not required for MPs to give up their time. I think it's up to each individual MP as to whether they choose to voluntarily give up a portion of their time. That's what I understood happened today.

Could someone maybe just clarify that? I don't know if that's a question for the clerk.

The Chair: Does the clerk care to respond to that?

After that, we'll go to Mr. Albas and Mr. Vaughan.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-France Lafleur): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Normally, yes, the time belongs to the member. The member can share his or her time with another member if he or she wishes to do so, yes.

The Chair: Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: My point, Mr. Chair, would be that a number of independents may want to come to different committees. I think it's just proper to ask for unanimous consent. If someone is not subbed in, I have no issue.... Raquel Dancho subbed in today, and we followed the proper process. At every meeting I've been at, the chair usually asks at the beginning if there is unanimous consent to have a member who is not an official member of the committee speak.

To me, that's just a good thing for us to ensure. Quite honestly, if it happens that several different independent members want to come in, then we have to start drawing the line on these things.

I would just hope that you would canvass people and seek that consent to have someone who is not subbed in, who may be an associate member just by virtue of being a member of Parliament, participate if the committee wills it.

The Chair: Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: On the point of getting direct numbers to MPs to troubleshoot constituency issues, I hope this doesn't mean we're going to be distributing the numbers for deputy ministers and heads of Crown corporations. There are some issues there that we have to be respectful of the Privy Council and governmental rules around, but I do support, of course, getting that mechanism in place.

I would also suggest, though, that for some of these things, such as for the CMHC, just as I can't call up the CBC and ask what story they're running tonight, I can't call up the CMHC, even as a parliamentary secretary, and ask, "Where is grant A or grant B?" They're a Crown corporation and there are legal requirements as to how we approach Crown corporations.

I totally respect the concern that has been raised about the critic calls and the way in which parliamentary secretaries respond. I totally understand that and totally support getting good information back and forth as quickly as possible. That's our job as parliamentary secretaries. However, if you could forward some of those calls to the deputy ministers or Crown corporations through the parliamentary secretary, we can then push that through the cabinet process to get you as quick and direct a response as possible. Even as Liberal members of Parliament, we have rules that we have to live by, and we need to respect those rules, especially at times such as this.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I just want to reiterate my understanding that the rules stipulate that independents are welcome to join meetings and any of the members can share their time. Certainly the Conservative Party is welcome to share their time with any other members who join.

I also want to point out that other committees have adopted this practice. The Green Party has sat in; Elizabeth May has been at every PROC meeting so far since that committee reconvened, and members have chosen to share their time. I think all of us at this time want every member of Parliament to have an equal voice. That is part of parliamentary privilege.

Thank you.

• (1305)

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

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

Again, on this point as well, in the previous Parliament we've had situations where I shared my time with a Bloc member, for example, who was not an official member of the committee. Therefore, if committee members wish to share time with another member, I do believe it will be up to us to facilitate that. I do think it's important to ensure that different people have the opportunity to speak if there are members willing to share time with them.

That said, on the question around information, we all heard on the committee when I asked the question of the officials to provide the contact information. Of course, it would be up to the official's office what contact number they would provide to MPs' offices. The point is this: The issues we are raising are not necessarily policy decisions that should go to a parliamentary secretary or a minister, and so on, but rather the logistics of the application of the program and the problems we experience as MPs with our constituents. Our constituents have a multitude of issues, and in trying to navigate the situation, we often don't have that information and they are in a grey area in trying to get to a resolution.

As a case in point, when I raised the example of my constituents having to quit their jobs because of various situations, the response was, "Well, there's an appeal process." Be that as it may, as it stands right now, those individuals are not getting the support they need, so having an official look into that situation would help the constituents greatly.

That is my point. I hope we can endeavour to get that information, not just for this committee but also for all 338 members of Parliament.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Mr. Dong, please.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Chair.

I have two points to raise.

First of all, I want to recognize that we are in the middle of COVID-19, which is a world pandemic and something that nobody in our generation has experienced. Given the seriousness of this event, I have to say, as I think I've heard from other colleagues, that I've been receiving a reasonable amount of information. I just want to get on the record that I appreciate the fact that the government has done a good job on a daily basis in providing information about all these new programs that have been introduced in the last few weeks.

Secondly, I want to congratulate all members of the committee. We've actually held our first virtual Zoom meeting as a committee. I want to give a lot of thanks and recognize all of the work that the clerks, the staff and the chair have done to make this a very smooth operation today, with very few technical glitches and—

The Chair: We're now over time, Mr. Dong, so you might want to go easy on that.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you very much to the clerk and staff for facilitating this. Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Chabot.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I commend the interpreters and the clerk for their efforts in terms of this meeting's proceedings, and the help we received from the IT centre for connecting and testing.

In the first part, we asked questions of the minister. Sometimes we were told that it was being discussed or that the answer was forthcoming.

Mr. Chair, if I am not mistaken, according to the standing orders, we can receive written answers to the questions we have asked. If possible, I would like to get written answers to questions that have not been answered. This might be worthwhile as we move forward.

I also want to talk about speaking time given to a member of the Green Party. I was surprised at that. I had understood that we would discuss it today or at a future meeting. Anyway, it is not a big deal, but everyone has to agree. We should really think about the time currently allotted, which varies from party to party. The Liberal Party and the Conservative Party have more time than the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. We need to look into this if we want to give an unrecognized party the right to speak.

There is also the question of the associate membership of committees. I feel that it is a matter for each party's governance. My understanding is that we have to inform the clerk when we want to share our time.

See you next time. I will stay online, but I won't speak anymore.

● (1310)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Mr. Vis is on the speakers list.

Just a reminder, folks, we're now probably pressing the patience and goodwill of the House of Commons folks who need to go through this exercise on three occasions today.

Mr. Vis, the floor is yours.

Mr. Brad Vis: I'd like to thank everyone for a very well-run meeting.

I'll just start with a quick comment. I appreciated all the questions I heard today regarding the eligibility of the programs and how we're responding to the immediate needs of Canadians, but I would be remiss if I didn't raise the point that we have also, as a Parliament, agreed to spend basically more money at a single point in time than ever in the history of Canada.

I was wondering, if it is the will of the committee, if we could get some preliminary numbers from the department about how public dollars are being allocated through the respective departments our committee oversees, and if that information might be available to us for further scrutiny moving forward in this committee process.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Thank you to everyone. Thank you to the minister, to the witnesses, and to my colleagues.

The vice-chairs can expect a call fairly soon, once we know what the path forward looks like, but for now we're past time. I therefore declare the meeting adjourned.

Thank you so much.

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