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# Standing Committee on Finance

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Chair: The Honourable Wayne Easter





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• (1410)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.)):** I will call the meeting to order. I thank everyone for coming on this new system we're working on for the House of Commons at the moment.

Welcome to meeting number 20 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. Pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, March 24, the committee is meeting to examine the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today's meeting, as you're well aware, is taking place by video conference, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The website will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

In order to facilitate the work of our interpreters, I'd like to outline a few rules for us to follow. Interpretation in this video conference will work very much as it does in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either "Floor", "English" or "French".

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you're 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're speaking. When you release the space bar, the mike will shut off, something like a walkie-talkie.

Should members need to request the floor outside of their designated time for questions, they should activate their mike and state they have a point of order and I will pick up on that.

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

Beyond that, speak slowly and clearly. It's a lot better for interpretation. Your mike should be on mute when you're not speaking.

With that, I will welcome all the witnesses. Thank you for coming to this panel. Your input is very important to us.

We'll start with Cécile Arbaud from Dans la rue.

**Ms. Cécile Arbaud (Executive Director, Dans la rue):** Hello. My name is Cécile Arbaud.

[Translation]

I am the executive director of Dans la rue in Montreal. Founded 31 years ago, Dans la rue helps more than 1,000 homeless young people a year. I'm really interested in youth homelessness. Dans la rue actively supports the Jeunes+ coalition, which was created in 2019, to prevent youth homelessness in Quebec. I sit on its steering committee, and I also sit on the boards of directors of two Canadian organizations that work at the national level to fight youth homelessness: the Coalition Vers un chez-soi, also known as A Way Home Canada, and the Changer de direction network of centres of excellence, better known as the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab.

Through youth outreach, research, knowledge mobilization and collective impacts, all these actors and dozens of others across Canada are seeking to prevent and reduce the social aberration of still having dozens of young people a year who are homeless, who are in great psychological distress and who have many barriers to overcome, preventing them from pursuing their development, their studies, their attachment to employment and their ability to lead independent and rewarding lives.

My area of experience is more with homeless youth. That being said, I am also a member of the board of directors of the Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal, RAPSIM, which brings together 100 Montreal homelessness organizations, so I am quite familiar with the homelessness scene in Montreal. I won't be speaking on behalf of all these organizations today, but I will try to speak on behalf of people who are homeless and young people who are homeless.

The COVID-19 crisis highlights the right of all to have a roof over their heads. More than that, it highlights the extent of what will be needed to end homelessness, because it exacerbates the difficulties experienced by young people. I will give a few examples of what is happening right now, particularly among young people. This doesn't apply only to young people, but young people have specific characteristics. Many young people who had jobs have lost them. Many young people have, it has to be said, lost somewhat formal income, such as street begging. I won't go into details, but the inability to beg on the street is a loss of income for some young people. Few young people have previously declared income that would allow them to access the Canada emergency benefit. Access to housing assistance programs is closed. Access to private housing is virtually impossible. The issue of release from prison is unresolved. Some of the young people who come to our emergency shelter have been out of prison for a short period of time.

The majority of programs aimed at getting out of homelessness and empowering youth are closed or discontinued. I'm talking about school and employability programs. Administrative and legal processes are lagging behind. People who are homeless, particularly youth, are getting tickets for gathering together or failing to respect social distancing on the street. This is very counterproductive, and it will add a burden to their shoulders when they have to contest these tickets. Moreover, they won't be able to pay them because, in Montreal in this case, they are getting \$1,546, while the Canada emergency response benefit is giving \$2,000. It doesn't make any sense. Mental health follow-ups are much more complicated. In addition, young people feel excluded. They have no place to stay, and they are kicked out of different places. Isolation is very difficult to live with, and the level of anxiety is very high.

Access to and use of drugs is less safe. Drugs are of poorer quality, posing a serious risk in the pre-existing opioid crisis. In addition, access to therapies is currently very limited. No new patients are being taken. Young people who have children of their own find themselves confined to the home, often in a difficult marital situation, or they have not developed all the necessary parenting skills. We are often a little worried about them. Telephone interventions provide only limited support. Finally, one of the major sources of youth homelessness is leaving child and youth protection centres or youth centres, as we say in Quebec. For the moment, all exits are obviously suspended, which could stop the tap of homelessness, although we still see some young people running away from youth centres. In the meantime, those who are stuck and who do not leave can't prepare their exit. As a result, we are in danger of seeing the rate of homelessness increase.

These examples demonstrate the breadth and complexity of the measures needed to help youth move out of homelessness. The young people we continue to see on the streets—because we have kept emergency services—are the most disadvantaged. They were already living in an emergency situation, and now they are even more so. Emergency solutions are no longer enough for responding to even more difficult situations and to an almost certain increase in precariousness and homelessness. We will have to act very quickly, with a long-term vision, to help all the people concerned, meaning all the people who are homeless, who are going to be homeless or who are in a very precarious situation.

In my opinion, several things need to be done. First of all, we must facilitate access to housing and staying in housing. That means all sorts of things, but, in short, we must prevent people from being evicted because they can't write a cheque. It's often said that people are one paycheque away from homelessness, and we really have to be careful about that. We must also make it easier to support people when they leave institutions. I am thinking of prisons, in particular. We should also think about providing people with a decent income, even a guaranteed minimum income. Furthermore, we must increase psychological and psychiatric assistance and follow-up services at home, as well as adapt psychosocial services to the context of the pandemic to ensure their continuity.

For young people in particular, there is a need to increase and strengthen prevention, which must also take place earlier, in families, schools and when leaving a youth protection centre. It is also necessary to increase and strengthen support for self-reliance so

that young people can develop and maintain good mental and physical health, and have access to education and employment programs to lead more independent and rewarding lives.

Thank you.

• (1415)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Cécile.

We'll turn now to the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain. We have Véronique Laflamme.

**Ms. Véronique Laflamme (Spokesperson, Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain):** Hi, everyone.

[*Translation*]

My name is Véronique Laflamme. Today, I am representing the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain, FRAPRU, which is a Quebec-wide group of housing committees, tenants' associations and citizens' committees from various regions of Quebec.

We have 140 groups in Quebec, 30 of which are active groups that work daily with tenants, mainly low- and modest-income tenants, and with people who want to start social housing projects. Our groups support these projects, and provide support and services to tenants, particularly vulnerable tenants. In the context of the current pandemic, our groups receive many calls from tenants who are worried about losing their homes or who have reached the threshold of being able to pay.

FRAPRU is a group that promotes the right to housing, a right to which Canada committed itself as a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, but also by recently adopting, last June, Bill C-97, which included the recognition of the right to housing.

I would point out that the right to housing includes protection against eviction and a criterion relating to the ability to pay, which every home must meet, and that it must be implemented progressively, not regressively, using the maximum available resources.

The current pandemic highlights the interrelation between the right to adequate income, the right to health, the right to food and the right to housing. The particular consequences of the lack of decent housing for the homeless in particular have just been clearly highlighted by the person who spoke before me, but the consequences for seniors are also revealed by the current situation. It is important to remember that there are many seniors who are not in public institutions, but rather in rooming houses or in poor housing situations.

FRAPRU's main concern in the current pandemic is therefore to avoid mass evictions after the end of the health emergency. In most provinces and in Quebec, there is a moratorium on tenant evictions during the health emergency. Unfortunately, in most cases, this will disappear at the end of the pandemic. Since tenants' ability to pay is affected, we fear a wave of mass evictions, particularly because of the lack of employment insurance for many low-income workers, despite the income assistance provided by the Canada emergency response benefit.

We are concerned that many people will not be able to pay their rent and that they will be even more precarious after the pandemic, not to mention those who will not be able to return to work or low-income households that do not qualify for these programs. I am thinking in particular of low-income retirees and people on social assistance who have to pay more for food because of the closure of resources that often allow them to have access to some free food. These people will become more vulnerable and will have a harder time paying their rent because of the pandemic and the end of various services.

So our main concern is to avoid evictions during the pandemic, but we're also thinking about what will happen afterwards. We are well aware that this is a provincial jurisdiction, but it remains a concern that the federal government must have, given its commitments to housing rights.

Our other concern has to do with the ability to pay. The Canadian government has been able to take action on the income side, particularly through the benefit programs that have been announced but, as I was saying, we don't think that will be enough, for a number of reasons. It isn't yet the case in all Quebec cities, but in several Canadian cities, the \$2,000 is close to the amount charged for rent—it's important to remember that. In Toronto and Vancouver, but also in Montreal, many tenants are already paying \$1,500 or more in rent. Therefore, additional resources are needed. Later on, I will suggest some measures that could be implemented by the federal government.

At the same time, I would point out that tenants are all the more vulnerable to eviction because hundreds of thousands of them were already in core housing need at the time of the last census. In fact, 1.7 million tenant households in Canada were paying more than the standard of 30% of their income for housing, and 800,000 tenant households in Canada, including 195,000 in Quebec, were spending more than half of their income on housing.

• (1420)

This prevents them from meeting their other basic needs.

Food banks were already highlighting the impact of the lack of affordable housing on the increased demand for food assistance. These situations are exacerbated by the current pandemic. There was a pre-existing housing crisis in Quebec and in several Canadian cities because of the scarcity of affordable rental housing, but especially because of the high cost of housing, which was already leading to the exclusion of many tenants from their neighbourhoods. Finally, there was also a context of real estate speculation, which is still present and will unfortunately not disappear with the pandemic.

The major problem in Canada is the lack of alternatives for all these tenants. At FRAPRU, we have often highlighted the fact that this crisis has been caused by the lack of social housing and the federal government's withdrawal from housing outside the private market, whether it be low-rent housing, co-ops or non-profit organizations. According to the OECD, Canada ranks 16th in terms of its percentage of social housing. Social housing accounts for 4% of Canada's housing stock.

As Ms. Arbaud said, in this case social housing is inaccessible to many, making many tenants even more vulnerable to eviction. They have nowhere else to go, which leads to more homelessness.

In the current context, bearing in mind that Quebec's areas of jurisdiction must be respected, the demands we are making of the federal government are not the same as those we are making of the Quebec government. First of all, we are talking about a contingency fund. Yesterday, the government announced assistance measures of this type, including loans for commercial rents. We believe that this requires a contingency fund and not just interest-free loans, because we must avoid increasing debt. It takes special grants and then perhaps interest-free loans for tenants.

In Canada, particularly in Ontario, there is already such a fund to help people who, for one reason or another, can't pay their rent. It could be set up by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which already manages mortgage loans.

Then there is the funding of emergency rent supplement programs. Rent supplement programs have been federally subsidized in the past. They can be managed by the provinces, which have infrastructure. These programs need to be funded quickly to help people stay in their homes with financial assistance.

At the same time, funds must be made available now to rehabilitate the social housing that Ottawa has funded in the past. This would make it possible to quickly rehouse people who can no longer afford to pay their current rent. Because of underfunding by the federal government, 300 social housing units are shuttered in Montreal alone. Renovating these units would not take as long as building new ones.

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Laflamme, I don't want to interrupt, but we are substantially over time, so sum up, if you could, as quickly as possible.

[Translation]

**Ms. Véronique Laflamme:** Okay.

With regard to homelessness, FRAPRU has taken the requests of the Réseau solidarité itinérance du Québec. The goal is to prepare for a second wave of the pandemic by releasing additional funds, if necessary, and by making the sums from the federal-provincial agreement under A Way Home available quickly.

I will conclude by saying that we already want to prepare for the post-pandemic period. We must invest in social housing quickly, which the federal government was not doing. This is an opportunity to invest massively in this public infrastructure that belongs to the communities, particularly by making the money from the national strategy in Quebec available quickly to help us deal with this housing crisis that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Thank you.

• (1425)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Laflamme.

I have next the Lookout Society and Shayne Williams.

**Mr. Shayne Williams (Chief Executive Officer, Lookout Housing and Health Society):** Thank you very much.

Lookout Housing and Health Society has been working to end homelessness and increase the health of vulnerable people in British Columbia since 1971.

We provide housing and a range of support services to adults with little income and who have few, if any, housing and support options. Because the people we serve have challenges meeting their basic needs and goals, we place minimal barriers between them and our services.

We started in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and we are now one of the largest shelter and housing providers in the province, providing services in 15 communities across Metro Vancouver, Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island, as well as offering provincial services through our Mood Disorders Association of British Columbia arm.

We currently have about 900 staff. They serve more than 2,800 people daily in our shelters, housing, outreach health and support services. We support people who cope with multiple barriers, including mental health problems, substance use, poverty, chronic illness and trauma.

For COVID-19, Lookout has partnered with BC Housing, Vancouver Coastal Health and the City of Vancouver to open the emergency response centre located in the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre. It has appropriately spaced cots and bathrooms available for people who need to self-isolate and has social distancing parameters.

In the last couple of weeks in March, we started a phased move-in with a maximum of 79 beds. As of this morning, there are 51 people staying at the Roundhouse Centre.

We're also currently working with two other communities to provide a second and third emergency response centre, partnering with BC Housing, two local municipal governments—New Westminster and Abbotsford—the Fraser Health Authority and a local church. They are scheduled to open in the next two to three weeks. These sites will also be used as shelter expansion and overflow for medical services in emergency rooms. They will allow for social distancing in an effort to try to keep people well and bolster their immune systems before COVID hits the vulnerable population that we serve.

Unfortunately, these centres are necessary due to our housing crisis and the lack of social housing, and they are also temporary. It's due to the pandemic nature that they have been opened.

Lookout serves vulnerable populations, and our goal is to prevent illness. It's always a high priority for us. We follow best practices established by local health authorities for potential outbreaks of any kind at any time. Our policies include universal precautions and a pandemic plan, and it covers all forms of contagion. We work with our suppliers to have up-to-date cleaning supplies and procedures and we use innovative products to help reduce bacteria at our sites.

Over the last few months, our focus has really been on increasing the immune systems of vulnerable people and creating that trust and connection to local health care when and if people fall ill and become COVID-positive.

For this work, we're following the guidance of the WHO, the CDC and the local health authorities in increasing our cleaning protocols and using PPE effectively but also sparingly, since we're having a very difficult time in accessing a regular supply. Obviously, we are promoting handwashing and educating about its importance, and we are enforcing social distancing and relieving our sites of congestion as much as possible.

We thank Reaching Home and the federal government for the COVID response in dollars. We've been a recipient of a lot of that support financially, and we thank the Province of British Columbia for the emergency funding that has helped us purchase some of the PPE and create some of these new connections for folks.

Right now, our staff team is our number one resource, so finding ways to protect them and keep them safe and to provide relief and celebrate their successes and essential service in our province is really important work that we need to focus in on, I think nationally.

Thank goodness for the community groups and organizations that have been donating homemade masks, cleaning supplies, food and other items, because procurement of these types of things is getting really difficult.

Overall, I think the national housing and poverty strategies, as well as this response, have been very good at a federal level, but through this pandemic and beyond, we need better access to health care that focuses on trauma recovery and concern for the wellness of those who are socially isolating, and more so for the folks that Lookout serves on a day-to-day basis in dealing with previous trauma amidst the pandemic, combined with the opioid crisis, the local housing crisis and really a national housing crisis.

• (1430)

Dental care has also been an area of concern, where people fall into addictions That has a profound impact on their health, and so we need a federal dental program, and easier access and implementation of the CMHC funds for housing. It has been incredibly difficult to build housing even with the national housing strategy. The scope is very limited, and it's tough to access. A lot of further work on drug policy is needed in this country to keep people safe who are mired in addiction.

There was some work on pandemic prescribing, and I applaud the federal government for taking those steps. The issue needs more attention. We need to be focusing to ensure that the most vulnerable people have a level of wellness that allows them the best opportunity to overcome the challenges they face, and we see a myriad of challenges. As long as trauma and physical health are impacting folks, they're not going forward in their journey to wellness.

Thanks for the time today.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Shayne. I want to get back to you on the PPE later.

With Mortgage Professionals Canada, we have Paul Taylor, president and CEO, and Elaine Taylor, chair.

Go ahead, Paul.

**Mr. Paul Taylor (President and Chief Executive Officer, Head Office, Mortgage Professionals Canada):** Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the members of the committee. On behalf of the over 12,000 members of Mortgage Professionals Canada, thank you for providing us with the opportunity to take part in the discussions today.

I am Paul Taylor, president and CEO of Mortgage Professionals Canada, and as Mr. Easter has just stated, with me is Elaine Taylor—no relation—vice-president of sales at MCAP Financial Corporation, but also currently serving as chair of Mortgage Professionals Canada's board.

For an initial context for our remarks today, I'd like to remind the committee of MPC's membership composition. We are a professional association promoting mortgage broker-originated mortgages. By head count, mortgage brokers and agents across Canada make up the largest component of our membership. However, almost all Canadian banks and mortgage lenders that originate mortgages through independent agents and brokers also belong to our association. Additionally, all three mortgage insurers in Canada are also members. Because of the diverse nature of our members' businesses and their respective role in fulfilling broker-originated mortgages, MPC has a thorough understanding of the marketplace impact of any changes to mortgage finance and funding costs, securi-

tization and liquidity, underwriting criteria and lending guidelines, and changing consumer behaviours.

With the context and the stated framework of the discussion today being the impact of COVID-19 on housing and homelessness, we will probably comment primarily on measures implemented to ensure continued liquidity in the marketplace and on the individual income continuation programs, and business continuity and wage subsidy programs created over the course of the last four to six weeks, both of which we consider critical to ensuring the continued security of housing for millions of Canadians.

Real estate purchase and sale transactions have diminished dramatically in some regions of the country. Home purchases and sale transactions are usually about a one-to-eight week process and at the beginning of the calls for social distancing and isolation as a best practice, our industry wrestled with changes in process to complete the transactions that were under way.

At the time, home inspectors couldn't gain access to properties to estimate values and many legal professions were unable to permit electronic signing for title registry changes, both traditionally necessary functions for mortgage funding to be completed.

Fortunately, most of those challenges were dealt with in a collaborative fashion, with lenders, mortgage insurers, realtors and mortgage brokers all working towards the best outcome compromises to ensure no one was stuck between the sale of their previous home and obtaining legal possession of their next, but we are now experiencing a significant reduction of new business activity, like many industry segments in Canada. This is placing significant financial strain on businesses and on individual Canadians' ability to meet their financial obligations. Once the transactions in the current business pipeline are finalized, we anticipate many of our members will have little opportunity to generate income, both through the remainder of the lockdown and for a period of time following the acceptable resumption of business.

I'd now like to pass the mike to Elaine.

• (1435)

**Ms. Elaine Taylor (Chair of the Board of Directors, Head Office, Mortgage Professionals Canada):** Thank you.

The landscape presents many challenges for our lender and insurer members. Their products depend upon the ability of Canadians to manage their debt obligations smoothly. With a government order for businesses to close, many borrowers' ability to meet these obligations had been seriously impacted, due to their loss of income. This generally means that those most affected require more access to credit at a time when investment capital becomes scarce. With the risk of defaults rising, investing in mortgages or any consumer debt product becomes less appealing without additional risk premiums in the form of higher interest rates.

With these challenges in mind, the federal government and related agencies implemented a number of changes to assist the financial landscape at both the macro and micro levels. The reintroduction of the insured mortgage purchase program, with its newly increased limit of \$150 billion, provided much needed access to capital for banks and other lenders. Additionally, the reduction of the domestic stability buffer also added \$300 billion in liquidity to banks to be able to support struggling businesses through additional extensions of credit. The reductions to the Bank of Canada benchmark rate also occurred during this time. We're supportive of all these changes and the speed with which these mechanisms were brought to bear.

As an industry, we are reassured by the timely and coordinated macroeconomic support brought forward. Ensuring liquidity and capital adequacy is critical in these uncertain times. It provides confidence to lenders that their continuing cost of capital will be reasonable and accessible, allowing them to continue to support Canadian businesses' and consumers' needs for affordable credit access.

One suggestion we make for OSFI to consider, following the same thought process as the already-implemented reduction in the domestic stability buffer, is to reduce the capital requirements for mortgage insurers. This would allow them to reduce their required premiums, making access to the insured mortgage purchase program and other programs easier for lenders and borrowers.

With funding for credit assured, the next consideration is Canadians' ability to manage their credit obligations. For the individual Canadians most affected by job or significant income loss, many of our members included, we also wish to compliment the government for the speed with which the emergency support programs have been introduced. The Canadian emergency response benefit, in particular, should be acknowledged as a tremendous showing of financial support in record time, providing a much-needed cash lifeline for many families.

We are also complimentary of other programs that we can discuss in more detail during the question and answer period.

For the most part, while no program can be tailored to meet the needs of all circumstances, the supports offered as emergency assistance are well considered, given our circumstances and the requirement for swift support. That said, we anticipate many individuals will suffer significant long-term economic loss due to the outbreak and business interruptions caused by COVID-19. We anticipate some of the least fortunate, owners and renters alike, will possibly find themselves unable to afford to stay in their homes. We would recommend examining the possibility of introducing additional insured mortgage products into the marketplace to assist. We also

suggest that some federal funding be set aside to provide the additional support that municipalities, NGOs and charitable organizations will need to assist these individuals in the coming months and years.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to share our professional opinions today, and we welcome your questions.

• (1440)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Paul and Elaine.

We'll turn now to the Siloam Mission and Jim Bell, CEO.

**Mr. Jim Bell (Chief Executive Officer, Siloam Mission):** Thank you to the committee this afternoon for this opportunity.

I'd like to start by saying that I hope you're all well and healthy during these very trying times. It's a pleasure to meet some of you, even through these methods this afternoon.

I will also speak today about the challenges COVID-19 poses to our sector and those experiencing homelessness. I'm sure you will hear some common threads with what you've already heard from the previous witnesses.

First I'll give you just a brief explanation about Siloam Mission. We're the largest service provider for those experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg. Siloam has been serving the community here for over 32 years. To give you further context, we run an overnight shelter with 110 beds that are full basically every night, with some people redirected to other nearby shelters. We have a daytime drop-in. We serve approximately 500 meals, three times a day, 365 days a year. If you do the math, that's over 500,000 meals per year. We also offer health care, including 10 professional services, clothing, work experience programs, mental health counselling, and one-on-one supports to help people regain and maintain housing and get back into the job market as well.

We recently added a social enterprise laundry, giving full-time work to guests at our shelter who want to re-enter the workforce. That started in October and we're very pleased to see the impact that it's having. Not only are these people being paid, but to see the change in their self-esteem and, I would say, overall dignity is really encouraging. In our next project, we'll be adding recovery-based housing units to our facility, which we were recently awarded based on an RFP submission.



As we all know, poverty and homelessness are complex under normal circumstances. The situation we now face with COVID has created new challenges and, I think it's safe to say, added pressure to day-to-day existing challenges, from fundraising to delivery of the services that I had mentioned a moment ago. We know that food, shelter, physical health and mental health are deeply inter-linked and make up the essentials for survival.

The current directives around COVID-19—and we hear this a lot and practise it a lot, and I know you do as well because we follow your lead—are to self-isolate and just stay home. Unfortunately, doing those things is not possible for those who don't have a place to call their own. That's one of the challenges. The onus is therefore put on places like Siloam Mission, and on organizations that I've listened carefully to here this afternoon as well, and others here locally, places already working at full capacity, to alter services to better protect an already vulnerable population.

In many cases, those experiencing homelessness are already among the most vulnerable to illness and health emergencies. Health care among those who live on the streets is vulnerable every day, no question about it. They are more likely to have underlying medical conditions and to have a history of poor nutrition, health care and hygiene. Add to this the inability to isolate, poor access to proper hygiene tools and the environment of a homeless shelter and you have an extremely, extremely vulnerable group.

I would say, as we look forward, that much has already been done among the providers in Manitoba and federally to protect our community. We are extremely fortunate that we have not yet seen an outbreak in our homeless community. Every day we are so grateful here at Siloam. Yes, we hear of positive cases in our city and province and across our nation, but fortunately within our shelter we're not aware of a positive case as of yet, and we're very grateful for that. We also know that each new day is a new risk, and I can't imagine the potential horrors if we were to see an outbreak. These most vulnerable members of our society must be included in public policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and just as important, included in recovery efforts when the pandemic subsides, and—I know I share this sentiment with all of you—we hope the pandemic subsides sooner than later.

• (1445)

I want to respect everyone's time. In my last minute or two, I will speak about the future impacts of COVID-19. The facts and figures that have already been shown paint a sombre picture of what lies ahead for Canada's business sector and economy. I pay attention to those numbers every day. As a charity, we're certainly not immune, and if anything, may be more vulnerable as we brace ourselves for a long season of reduced charitable giving. We know that as the economics of this go forward, non-profits and charitable organizations are going to be significantly impacted, and we are bracing for that. To give you some scale, at Siloam Mission we rely on about 90% private donations.

Not only do we expect those private donations to drop sharply in an economic fallout from COVID, but we also know to expect an increase in demand for services. I noted the previous speaker mentioned that people aren't going to be able to stay in their own homes because of the challenges, but where are they going to go? Some

might end up in shelters such as Siloam and other places across the country. There will be people living on the brink before this crisis who will find themselves at our doors, whether it be for meals, a place to stay or to get back on their feet.

Briefly, to close, while we know the pressures on government are already immense to help people across this economic spectrum, we also see the need in our community growing and it's safe to assume that it's not going to stop. I think I can speak for communities across our wonderful country when I say that. Agencies serving the homeless population are facing a drop in donations, and at the same time, it's the greatest service delivery challenge we know we've ever faced here.

Please take note of this: We know from past studies that our services, from health care to shelter to counselling, translate into government savings, most notably in the form of reduced emergency room visits and police interaction. We have studies that if I had more time I would share with you.

We hope that, as we weather this pandemic and work together toward recovery on the other side, our governments will invest in the work being done amongst our most vulnerable citizens.

My last comment to all of you would be that I believe investment in this work will literally save lives and it will go a tremendous distance as we help people to transition back into health, into homes and into jobs.

Once again, thank you for your time. It's a real privilege to participate with all of you today.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Bell.

We'll turn, then, to United Way Centraide Canada and Mr. Dan Clement, who is the president and CEO.

**Mr. Dan Clement (President and Chief Executive Officer, United Way Centraide Canada):** Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here with you.

To start, I just want to recognize and thank the federal government, all of the MPs and Canada's federal civil servants for the critically important work you are all doing to support Canadians through this pandemic. I want you to know that we very much appreciate all that you are doing.

I also want to recognize and thank the government for the new and important investments of over \$200 million in the Reaching Home program, as well as support for women's shelters and sexual assault centres. That's very important.

As you know, I am representing United Way Centraide Canada. We are Canada's largest non-governmental funder of vital community services, focused on eliminating poverty and also providing the supports to vulnerable Canadians that they need to build sustainable livelihoods. Across Canada we support about 3,000 community organizations and about 5,600 different programs. We invest about \$40 million annually in housing and homelessness supports, as well as domestic violence issues.

We're also very active in our communities across Canada in supporting a COVID response.

As has already been said this afternoon, we know the pandemic is affecting all Canadians, but I think we also know that it's going to have an even more profound impact on our most vulnerable Canadians, in particular, the homeless and the precariously housed.

I thought what I would do is share a little bit of the experience we're seeing on the ground, from coast to coast, from community organizations and our United Way Centraide partners that are supporting them.

To start, the good right now is the additional funding that was provided, which is extremely important. It's flexible. It's allowing our communities to adapt and respond. I want to recognize the importance of that.

Equally, perhaps, the challenge is that the COVID-19 implications are not really short term. They're not just today; I think this will be in front of us for the next six to 18 months until such time as we get a vaccine. That tells us that the additional funding, however critical, may not be enough for what's in front of us not just in the immediate term but in the months to come.

I think you've heard a little bit of this already, but I'll reiterate a few things regarding the challenges and how communities are responding in particular around homelessness.

Food is a significant issue. As the meal programs have changed, our homeless populations and our community service providers have had to find new ways to provide safe access to food.

The challenges of supporting people dealing with mental illness are significant. They are even more profound in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis we're facing.

We know and we're hearing that domestic violence calls are up. Families are under stress financially and through isolation.

We know that our shelters are full. It's been referenced, but you know our emergency shelter system was not designed for social isolation. Our existing shelters are facing a challenge. That's requiring us to find new spaces, spaces that can accommodate social distancing, and also to create spaces for those who test positive so that they can be isolated. The shelter system wasn't designed for this, but we're having to adapt all across the country.

The issue of personal hygiene is a significant one as homeless individuals don't have the same access to public facilities to take care of their personal hygiene needs. There are United Way Centraide organizations that have had to literally buy porta-potties in order to contribute and support communities in a crisis. I never thought that would be the case, but we are doing that just as part of the response. I think we need to highlight that.

There is also a new demand. People who are leaving incarceration without a plan for housing are showing up in the shelter system.

Another thing I would highlight as an important challenge is we have to protect our front-line workers in the shelters. There is a tremendous need for health and cleaning products and for personal protective equipment. All are in short supply. It's incredibly important that we work hard to support our front-line workers to make sure they have access to what they need to deliver care to the communities.

Those are all things that our amazing community organizations are working hard to address. We should be proud of how hard they are working to support the most vulnerable Canadians.

● (1450)

We also have to think about not just today, but about what could be coming at us. That is the potential problem of the new homeless and new homelessness. We know that social distancing and isolation are pushing the precariously housed into homelessness. We know that eviction prevention programs are really good right now—they're great—but we can foresee a wave of evictions coming due to the economic hardship that people are facing, and the inability to pay rent in the future. This is really important as we think about not just today, but what's in front of us.

What's needed? I'd like to highlight a few things.

First is the recognition that housing is a fundamental human right, and a fundamental right for Canadians. It's something that Canada recognized in legislation last year. The reality is that people cannot build a sustainable livelihood without safe, secure and affordable housing. It has to be part of our conversation.

We had a homelessness and housing affordability crisis before COVID. The COVID crisis is really just showing the significant gaps we have in our safety net.

For us, thinking short term is important. Let's also take the time to think in the longer term. I think you've heard some of that this afternoon.

I'll share with you a couple of ideas as part of my final remarks.

Fundamentally, what we have to do is make sure we keep Canadians housed. This means adequate income support to keep Canadians housed through the immediate crisis, but also into the future. We also know that low-income workers are at greatest risk of losing their jobs due to the economic shock. They are also the most precariously housed and are facing low vacancy rates and, as a result, high rents.

Here are a couple of ideas for all of us to consider.

We have CERB. What about a CERB rental support top-up? We have Canadians who qualify for this benefit. It's not necessarily enough to pay both basic needs and rent, but we could easily implement a top-up. You could think about this as 30% to 50% of the average rental cost in a market, to top up those benefits so that people can significantly reduce the impact of evictions in the future.

For those who don't qualify for CERB, we could think about an emergency rent benefit program, which would essentially help low-income Canadians avoid depleting all of their assets and then ultimately depending on social assistance.

We also have the beginnings of the implementation of the Canada housing benefit. Certainly, something we could look toward would be accelerated implementation.

My final comment would be that we need to really make a commitment to supportive housing. We have a significant need for investment in supportive housing, and for the federal government to be a contributor and to help build the thousands of supportive housing units that we're going to need to support the most challenged in terms of homelessness. I think that is part of our long-term solution. It's something that we advocate and support, and we hope that many others will as well.

With those remarks, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Also, thank you for all of your leadership. Finally, thanks to all of the front-line community organizations that are doing great work supporting our communities today.

● (1455)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Clement.

I'll turn to the West Neighbourhood House and Maureen Fair, executive director.

**Ms. Maureen Fair (Executive Director, West Neighbourhood House):** *Bonjour* and thank you for inviting me to your panel today. In particular, I thank our Davenport MP, Julie Dzerowicz.

I want to share some other thanks and four suggestions for a more pandemic-proof infrastructure for low-income Canadians. One recommendation concerns income tax and three recommendations concern affordable housing.

First, let me explain that West Neighbourhood House, formerly known as St. Christopher House, is a multiservice not-for-profit charitable organization serving diverse communities in downtown Toronto, from preschoolers to homeless adults to seniors. I'll give a shout-out to Dan, because we're also, as he knows, an active member of United Way Greater Toronto, which has been a fantastic leader in this COVID crisis downtown.

To be clear, despite our name as a house, at this time we are not a housing provider.

The federal government has many ways to help in this immediate crisis and to pandemic-proof the future socio-economic infrastructure of our country, especially for low-income people.

First, you have helped enormously already with the bold, swift and generous Canada emergency response benefit. The announcement provided immediate mental relief to millions of newly unemployed, extremely stressed Canadians. The CERB is instrumental in helping people cover the high fixed costs of rent or mortgages, keeping their housing stabilized. The last thing Canada needed in this pandemic was to have thousands more people becoming homeless, and that was a real risk.

Thank you also for your continued responsiveness, iterating the design of the CERB as you take into consideration low-income workers in the gig economy and the informal economy, as well as the now highly valued, but still underpaid, front-line workers in essential services such as personal support workers and staff in homeless services. It's important that there are supports in place for each segment of Canada's diverse labour force.

CERB or “COVID cash” will also help keep the money flowing in local economies. I'm sure many of you share my deep concern about the viability of small businesses, particularly along the main streets and retail strips that contribute so much to the character of our neighbourhoods and towns across Canada. The CERB is really a tremendous and historic public policy achievement. I offer my sincere thanks and congratulations to everyone who contributed to this idea.

Building on the innovative thinking and the responsiveness of the CERB, I have several suggestions for the federal government to pandemic-proof infrastructure for low-income people going forward.

My first recommendation is to implement automatic income tax filing for low-income people. The pandemic has highlighted the value of this, as most volunteer income tax clinics closed because of the pandemic. John Stapleton and others have made a very good case that the government already has the information needed to get low-income people access to important tax-related benefits. Part of an improved infrastructure for low-income people would include more financial problem-solving services, and we are working with Prosper Canada and others on specific proposals for that.

Secondly, Canada needs to rethink the range of housing options available to lower-income people. The housing situation wasn't working before, and now the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted even more how the lack of affordable housing affects us all. One way to put this very crassly is this: It's in everyone's personal interest that homeless and very poor people are not filling our hospitals because of being exposed to COVID-19 in overcrowded shelters, rooming and boarding homes, or tent encampments.

The future well-being of Canada is linked at least in part to a more inclusive housing system for low-income Canadians, and I would recommend that it would have the following three features at a minimum.

First, give public and not-for-profit charitable housing providers the exclusive role of taking care of the housing needs of lower-income Canadians. They have the long view, the mandate and the obligation to hold community assets such as affordable housing for perpetuity. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that landlords have significant influence over the well-being of their tenants or residents. For vulnerable people, landlords are sometimes their lifeline. Not-for-profit charities are mission-focused and accountable to community governance, so they are well positioned to maximize their resources to keep vulnerable occupants safe.

Second, provide not-for-profit charitable housing providers with the grants—not loans—needed to build or purchase housing. Let's not spend taxpayer or donor dollars on financing costs. Saving on financing costs frees up public and donated money to invest in more affordable housing over time.

• (1500)

Third, preserve existing affordable housing by providing an incentive to private landlords to sell their buildings to not-for-profit charitable organizations. The federal government could forgive capital gains tax and/or capital cost allowance payback if a private sector landlord sold a multi-unit residential building to a non-profit.

Yes, this is a cost to government in forgone revenue, but it is cheaper, significantly cheaper, than constructing new affordable housing. Clearly, both are needed.

There are thousands of relatively affordable rental units in small apartment buildings in neighbourhoods and towns across the country. Many are owned by families or small operators, but very vulnerable to being bought up by REITs and multinational operators.

We have done an analysis of this public policy option with our consultant, Jill Black, based on previous work developed by long-time housing experts Steve Pomeroy and Marion Steele. I'd be happy to forward that information to anybody.

To recap, thank you for taking the bold step of providing COVID cash, the CERB. Please pandemic-proof the infrastructure for low-income Canadians with income tax auto-filing and a public or not-for-profit housing system for them.

Thank you for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Maureen.

We'll turn to questions now. In order to get in as many questions as possible, I'm going to move the first round to five minutes and the second round to four minutes. We'll try to get 12 questions in.

We'll start with Ms. Vecchio.

• (1505)

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Thank you very much.

I'll start with Jim Bell.

Thank you very much for sharing everything with us. I have looked at some of the pandemic funding that's coming out. We have \$157.5 million coming out of the Reaching Home program, Canada's homelessness strategy directives. We know that approximately 46% of that is now going to some of these communities that are known as “designated communities”.

Do you happen to fall under that, where you would receive a portion of this funding that's coming through as part of the Reaching Home initiative?

**Mr. Jim Bell:** The short answer is yes, but we don't know as yet. We're not aware of the amount that our organization or others are getting. In fairness, I would expect that we're going to know that in the next week or so. I'm involved in conversations daily, or every second day, from the Reaching Home entity here in Winnipeg, called “End Homelessness Winnipeg”.

I would expect there will be dollars coming our way shortly from the Reaching Home program, and we're very grateful.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Excellent.

Part of my role is women and gender equality. I'm looking at Canada's women's shelters. I know with the networks, they do not have all the different shelters.

In regard to the networks you're referring to that will be doing the Reaching Home in those communities, do you know if they will be able to reach all the necessary communities in your geographical area?

**Mr. Jim Bell:** I believe so. I believe End Homelessness Winnipeg is doing a good job of trying to reach out to all organizations, including the ones you're talking about.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Excellent.

Shayne, looking at the same thing, both you and Jim were talking about some of the social enterprise, the fact that a lot of times it's revenues that are coming into these types of organizations that allow for the types of critical services that are necessary. What are you finding when it comes to the reduction of revenue, and how are you addressing that issue?

**Mr. Shayne Williams:** We're actually seeing a reduction of revenue in small pieces of what Lookout Society does: the social enterprising side of things, some of the addiction recovery where we do not have our regular health referrals because people aren't being moved from location to location right now, in an effort to try to contain folks.

For the overall organization, because of the emergency response centres, we're seeing a great increase. Therefore, we have taken employees from failing programs at the moment. We've put those on pause, which is unfortunate because they have huge social benefit, but in this day and time, our staffing is our number one resource and we're redeploying people into the emergency resource centres across the region.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Excellent.

Jim, how about you? Could you mention the revenues that you have? As I said, I know that in Barrie, Ontario, and out in Edmonton, Alberta, they have a lot of structures where their social enterprise is paying for these programs. What are you finding in Winnipeg?

**Mr. Jim Bell:** Our social enterprise per se is relatively new. We started it in October. We see it as something that already has tremendous momentum here at Siloam. We're speaking to government agencies and seeking their input in terms of what could be next.

To give you an idea of it, we started a social enterprise laundry. It's all about putting back to work the people who are experiencing homelessness. We're paying them. Let me also tell you first-hand that, yes, there's a financial impact to them, but the self-esteem piece, the dignity piece in terms of getting people back to work, and the help they receive with housing and some of the other supports are critical to this whole matrix.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I'll be honest; although he's not up on this thing right now, I could see Pierre Poilievre clapping, because we

do know that the dignity that comes from one working is very, very important. Thanks for adding that.

I want to switch it over to you, Paul Taylor. We talk a lot about making sure things are getting built. Part of the issue we're having right now with COVID-19 is the restrictions in terms of new builds not being able to be built. Here in Ontario, permits are not able to be granted. When we're talking about the existing stock and wanting to grow more, what do you think are some of the steps we need to take to be prepared for this?

**Mr. Paul Taylor:** That's a very good question. I think in normal times, I would have approached that response with a red-tape reduction and an expediting of processes to make sure that permits could be issued more quickly. Currently, considering just the safety of the individuals who will be creating those buildings and be on the construction sites, I would want to put that first and foremost.

I might recommend, actually, because there will be a reduction in the issuance of some of those permits, that now might be a really good time for municipalities to take a look at their own processes and streamline them. Everybody else is adopting technology, as we are now, to find other ways to get things done without necessarily incurring all of the travel expenses, as just one additional benefit here. Perhaps they could do the same. But definitely, the time from project to groundbreaking, just because of permits, is quite a consideration today.

• (1510)

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you to all.

Paul, you wouldn't be suggesting that we get to results rather than process....

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** That's a very good suggestion.

We'll turn now to Ms. Koutrakis, then Mr. Ste-Marie, then Mr. Julian.

Annie, you're up.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin, I would like to thank all our witnesses for taking the time to appear before the finance committee today. Now more than ever, Canadians facing homelessness and precarious living conditions are exceptionally vulnerable due to the spread of COVID-19. Ensuring that these individuals have safe and continued access to essential resources and supports is one of our government's top priorities. We are all incredibly grateful to you for the selfless work you do in this area and for your input and perspectives on how our programs are being delivered and are directly supporting Canadians facing homelessness. Thank you, and I look forward to our discussion this afternoon.

I have two questions. One is for Madam Arbaud and the other is for Mr. Clement. In the interest of time, I will say both.

[Translation]

Ms. Arbaud, the economic action plan contains a number of measures that address the problems of homelessness and, indirectly, housing. For instance, income replacement measures, such as the Canada emergency response benefit, will provide shelter for some recipients. Other measures, such as funding for the A Way Home program, specifically address these issues.

Do you think it's better to address homelessness and housing issues through specialized programs, rather than generalized measures such as the CERB?

[English]

To Mr. Clement, although this is not entirely related to homelessness and housing, while you are here I would like to discuss the \$9 million in additional funding for the new horizons program that is being delivered through United Way Centraide.

It is critical to identify vulnerable seniors facing isolation or poverty as particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Could you provide some details on how that funding is being distributed to meet the needs of vulnerable seniors, especially those facing poverty and precarious living conditions? What priorities or criteria are in mind, and has a plan been put in place to ensure consistent distribution standards?

[Translation]

**Ms. Cécile Arbaud:** To answer your question, I would say that they are both important: both assistance to individuals and assistance to the organizations that are going to help those individuals.

[English]

As I mentioned earlier, there are actually a lot of things to be addressed around homelessness. It's not only having revenue and a home. As Shayne Williams and Jim Bell were talking about, it's also addressing mental health.

It's addressing addiction. It's addressing recovery, trauma recovery. It's addressing also the situation of a young person who never went to school, who was bullied at school, who is really behind and really wants to go back to school. All these issues have to be dealt with at the same time. It's really important that they have the support of people who can help them.

Yes, sure, the revenue side is really important, because when we see people living on welfare, which in Quebec is \$648 a month, how can they do that? You can't even find a room for that amount, let alone the food and everything. Both programs are really important.

• (1515)

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** The second question was to Mr. Clement of the United Way Centraide.

**Mr. Dan Clement:** It's a great question. It was around the new horizons for seniors program and the \$9 million that the federal government is mobilizing in support of vulnerable seniors.

First of all, thank you for that contribution to Canadians. It's incredibly important today.

We all know that our seniors are the most at risk and vulnerable as a result of COVID-19. We know that means isolating at home and taking significant precautions. We also know that our most vulnerable seniors often are those who were using things such as community support programs and day programs for physical and social activities. That's where they were accessing nutritious food supports. Those programs have had to close because of social isolation, so the very infrastructure that was supporting our seniors isn't there. That means we have to actually bring those supports to them and our most vulnerable. That's really important. Not the least of that are things such as food.

I would name one more issue. If you think about meals on wheels programs, those are also often supported by volunteers who are seniors and at risk. Not only are some of the programs having to close because of social isolation, but some of the volunteers who have been supporting them have had to isolate. Therefore, it's a bit of a double whammy.

To answer your question about the methodology for distribution, we've been asked to make sure that those dollars are supporting all parts of Canada. The first thing we did was make sure there is a minimal viable amount of money that can go to communities across Canada. We also used a population distribution model. Where the seniors are and the distribution of seniors was used to then inform each region of the country in terms of their allotment of those dollars. Those dollars are being deployed through local United Way Centraide organizations, our 79 member organizations that serve all regions and all communities in Canada. They are accountable organizations with expertise on the ground, with community relationships and strong senior support relationships, that are going to be delivering that funding to community support and senior-serving organizations—

**The Chair:** We will have to end it there, Dan, or we will not get the rest of the questions in.

We will turn to Mr. Ste-Marie, then Mr. Julian and then Mr. Morantz.

Go ahead, Gabriel.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome all the witnesses, and I sincerely thank them for their testimony.

Ms. Laflamme, could you explain to the members of the committee the difference between affordable housing and social housing? Then, could you explain to us again the suggestions for measures that could be implemented by the federal government?

You mentioned a contingency fund where grants could be administered by CMHC. You also talked about the importance of refinancing social housing; you gave the example of the 300 shuttered units in Montreal. You also mentioned the rent supplement.

Please explain the difference between affordable and social housing and then the measures you are recommending.

**Ms. Véronique Laflamme:** Good afternoon.

The difference between social housing and affordable housing is very important. Social housing is housing that does not belong to the private market. It therefore belongs to society or communities. Public housing often belongs to municipalities or the government, or non-profit organizations and housing cooperatives. There are three forms of social housing in Canada, which in the past were funded directly by the federal government, before it was withdrawn in 1994.

Under current provincial programs, there are different formulas that are still funded and others that are less so. Since the withdrawal of the federal government, there is no longer any low-income housing or public housing. This is housing that is very much in line with the needs of low-income people, particularly tenants who are seniors, many of whom currently live in low-income housing.

In the national housing strategy, the government talks about affordable housing, which can be anything and everything. It can include housing that can be rented for \$2,000 a month, according to the rates set by the various programs.

At the moment, there is no definition of affordable housing. Depending on the various initiatives of the national housing strategy, it may be based on a percentage of income or a percentage of the median rent in the area, which often results in very expensive and unaffordable housing for the average core housing need renter, which includes 1.2 million Canadians. If memory serves me correctly, the median income of these Canadian households is about \$18,000, and in Quebec it's even a little less. Therefore, they can't afford most of the private rental housing that has been built under the national housing strategy.

That's why we're calling for investments to be focused on social housing, in order to get out of this wave of real estate speculation, which is excluding people from city centres. We think that the only way to produce housing with guaranteed occupancy and not to encourage real estate speculation is to get out of the private housing market and to build more housing outside the private market in various forms, whether it is co-operative, non-profit or public housing.

With regard to your second question, in the economic situation we're facing, we need that kind of infrastructure, among other things, to encourage the local economy. In Quebec, a number of studies have been done on the financial benefits in the local economy, but I'll save those arguments for another discussion, perhaps.

You're probably going to be interested in what we're recommending, Mr. Ste-Marie. I learned this morning that there are also shuttered housing units in Joliette. That said, it is mainly in Montreal that there are federally funded housing units that are now shuttered because they need to be renovated. Of course, they are everywhere in Canada. They can be renovated quickly. We think that would be a concrete measure to take, and it would not prevent investment in the development of new social housing. Such a measure would, at the very least, make these units available to people who need them. In Quebec, 40,000 people are waiting for public housing or low-rent housing. We believe that we cannot do without these

300 housing units that are currently shuttered and that are still, for the most part, under federal responsibility.

The second measure we are asking for is a contingency fund. This is what other groups across Canada are asking for as well, and there are all kinds of petitions going around. We think this could easily be implemented on the CMHC side. It could be complementary to income support measures for people whose income is not enough to pay their rent, even with the \$2,000. We know that there are people who are suffering further income losses because of the pandemic.

At FRAPRU, we do not recommend a private rent supplement; we prefer social housing. However, in the current circumstances, people need quick support, and rent supplements can be a way to keep tenants in their homes. Because the federal government has funded such programs in the past, this is manageable. In Quebec, there is already a program in place that would send a clear signal to the provinces to help tenants, for example.

• (1520)

The last measure does not pertain to homelessness, but has more to do with the medium term. Plans for the recovery phase should include investments in social housing. That way, we won't find ourselves in a worse situation after the pandemic than we were in before the pandemic, in terms of the housing and homelessness crisis facing cities big and small across Canada and Quebec.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We will have to end it there.

We will now turn to Mr. Julian and then to Mr. Morantz.

Peter.

• (1525)

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

Thanks to our witnesses for being here today. This is a very important panel, and we shout out to all of the shelter and supportive housing workers across the country who are putting their lives at risk in providing vital supports at shelters and in supportive housing. These people are Canadian heroes. That's why the NDP caucus has been calling for a courage bonus. It's to ensure that those front-line workers receive appropriate levels of financial support at this critical time.

I'd like to address my first questions to Mr. Williams.

Shayne, thank you for being here. I really appreciate your being available for this panel. I want to ask you a couple of questions.

First, what would Lookout need right away to deal with COVID-19?

Second, to what extent does opening the CERB to make it a universal benefit to people who are left out.... Seniors, students and people who are unemployed are all left out of the CERB. If we made it universal, as Jagmeet Singh has proposed and as it is already structured to be, what kind of difference would that make for the people you are working with?

Third, coming out of this crisis, a number of our witnesses have talked about the importance of not going back to the way we were before. You flagged in your presentation a national dental program—and national pharmacare is something that many people have stressed—and starting to build housing again, social, co-operative and affordable housing. How important is it to have a game plan coming out of this crisis so that we don't go back to a normal that had so much inequality?

**Mr. Shayne Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Julian. I appreciate the questions.

As to your first question on the immediate need, Lookout and other service providers across the country, like my peers on the call today, are looking for a myriad of ways to help people socially isolate, whether they're symptomatic or COVID-positive, in places that get them off the streets. There is co-operation with municipal governments and provincial governments to identify places, and then COVID Reaching Home dollars help operate places like the Roundhouse, the local gymnasium here in New Westminster and the church in Abbotsford. These are places where folks can come, and as we're going to inevitably see folks get diagnosed, they will have a spectrum of places where they can self-isolate and have their own bathrooms.

We've escalated a few different ideas to the province, and we're hopeful that we'll get some federal support for RVs, hotels and university dorms to have an inventory of places that would be suitable for that spectrum and relieve our health friends in their emergency response in emergency rooms so they can reserve their hospital interventions for folks who are COVID-positive and require ventilation and hospital expertise. The ones who can socially isolate and get well on their own could move into other places, and we can be kind of creative around that. That's an immediate need outside of the stuff in my presentation, such as PPE, best practices and cleaning, those types of things.

As for the CERB, we're seeing different folks accessing our shelter continually, and now there seems to be more seniors and students—folks who won't be able to access the CERB. Opening that up could be a massive prevention tool for individuals. It's a huge cost to government, I realize, but I think that it's putting the shingles on the roof rather than trying to mop the rainwater off the floor. This prevention tool would have an incredible long-term impact and would keep people out of the cycle of homelessness. We know that every additional day that somebody is homeless, it's more and more difficult to make the journey back to wellness. We want to prevent folks from becoming homeless or facing barriers, and I think that's a really smart approach to this crisis.

As for not going back, we're putting investments in and we're going to see a healthier community as a result of this pandemic. Hopefully the virus is not going to go through the shelters like wildfire and we're not going to see a huge loss of folks. That's the

risk at this point. For the ones who are not in that situation, I think the nutritional value, the connection to health care, the relationship with non-profits and the fact that they're not being exposed on the streets right now are going to have a profound impact on their access to health care in the future and their ability to be well.

We absolutely have to put mechanisms in place like pharmacare and a national dental program, make a true investment in social and affordable housing, as our peers have said, and invest in getting current housing out of the hands of for-profit entities and into the hands of non-profits. The speakers today have articulated a lot of that stuff, and I think it's very necessary to have a plan coming out of this.

• (1530)

**The Chair:** Thank you both.

While we're with you, Mr. Williams, you mentioned PPE earlier, personal protective equipment, and that there were problems. What we hear from the national side is that there's availability. Is there a distribution problem? What is happening? Why is PPE not getting out from the supplies? We're hearing there are supplies. There are planeloads coming in. Jason Kenney had some and distributed them. How come they're not getting down to the ground? What do we need to do there?

**Mr. Shayne Williams:** We have about 100 different programs across three different health authorities, as well as B.C. Housing, which is our housing entity here in the province of British Columbia. They're all great supports, trying to do the best thing and asking for inventory and what we need for PPE.

We're not an organization that's going to require N95 masks or that type of thing, but having just your regular disposable masks or cloth masks, goggles, hand sanitizer, gloves, those kinds of things, are all super important in what we do in sheltering and providing food for folks.

With the sheer volume of people and sites we have, our PPE requests are quite great, so we put those requests to our funders and we get a response saying, "We can't get as much as you need. We can only give you pieces of that." We're then put into the situation of working with suppliers and volunteers. We have a great immigrant program here locally that's made cloth masks for us for a small donation towards materials, so we're cobbling it together. I'm telling you that's a full-time job plus at this point, for the one person trying to pull it together.



Recently, B.C. Housing announced here in the Downtown East-side that there would be a distribution centre to procure community donations and then spread that out to non-profits. I think it has started. We're starting to see a little more support, but our PPE asks have largely gone unaddressed. If it weren't for that full-time worker, our local connections and great champions in the community, we would probably be in a much worse situation.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's something we have to put a flag on, definitely.

We'll turn to four-minute rounds and try to get everybody in—Mr. Morantz, Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. Cooper and Mr. McLeod.

Marty, you're up.

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

My questions are for Jim Bell.

We only have a short period of time. I just want to thank you for all the great work that you and Siloam do in Winnipeg. I got to know the organization personally when I was on city council. I toured the facility. It's truly an incredible work in progress, so I thank you for all that you're doing.

You mentioned in your opening statement that you wished you had more time, so I think I'm just going to let you take this time as that “more time”. Perhaps you could touch on what you think is going to happen in the aftermath of COVID.

In your comments, I would like you to just address more fully the concept of dignity in work—the program that you talked about—how important that is in breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness, and also the crunch between reductions in charitable donations and people on the brink, which will increase demand for your services.

With that, I'm going to cede my time to you.

**Mr. Jim Bell:** Thank you for the questions. I will make the best use of the time to answer parts A and B of that.

Right now, as with everybody here participating in this call, it's all hands on deck. Every day is a risk in terms of trying to implement best practices. We've had to make some changes operationally in terms of how we serve people meals and social distancing of beds, and the like.

We're paying attention to that, but—to your question—we're also paying attention to COVID's aftermath. What's it going to look like? I pay attention to numbers. Did I read right that there are up to six million people in the EI queue? That's the number I've recently been reading.

• (1535)

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Jim Bell:** I'm anal about numbers. I have a finance background, so I pay attention to the numbers.

To give you some scope very quickly, our plan here at Siloam before COVID hit, and even while it exists, is that we're opening.... Right outside my building right now, I could show you a new building expansion. It's a paradox, where it's sited, because we're going

to have space available for all the services I've described to you in the coming months. We'd be opening at the end of May, had COVID not come upon us. I say that it's a paradox. We're grateful for the space, but it also tells you the need. We need the room because the needs continue to expand, and COVID is going to put more pressure on that. We're going to have more beds in addition to the 110 we have right now.

We responded to an RFP recently. We've been awarded, based on the need, an increased number of supportive recovery beds for people coming out of addiction recovery. We have room in our current building after we make the move, so we're paying attention to that and we're expanding on our social enterprise. With all those things, given that we expect donor fallout, we're going to need resources, and I would love to work with government to show a business case to say, “Look, here is what we need. Hold us accountable and here are the outputs you can expect.”

You made a comment about the dignity and self-esteem of people. By investing in people who have been down and out, with hardship leading to homelessness, I can tell you first-hand that people want to work. They want to be trained or retrained so that they can get back into their own place and back into the job market. We have stories and experiences. When people come through the front door of Siloam, they will come back and share their experience because they came out ahead when they came out the other door. I trust it's the same for some of the organizations that are on the phone today.

The last comment I would make is that as we pay attention to the post-COVID future, the need is going to go up. We anticipate that our donor contributions and other revenue contributions are going to go down, and therein lies the rub. We know that we can work together with the community to expand upon the services, but we're going to need your help. We're going to need the help of government, and in return for that, I know we can provide you with some comfort in terms of the metrics to say, “Here is how many people are going back into housing; here is how many people are going back to work as a result of job training; here is how many people have participated in health care and are being taken care of for whatever illness they might have.”

We don't want to be irresponsible when we say this, because we're dealing with it with all hands on deck today, but with my leadership team, we're saying, “Okay, when we come out of this—and we are going to come out of this collectively, as a nation—here are going to be some of the challenges.” I hope we can have another opportunity to talk about things like that, and I hope it's in the short term rather than the long term.

I trust that answers your question. I could really go on, but thank you for the opportunity.

**The Chair:** You're right on time, Jim, and there certainly will be opportunities to talk about the long term, I'm sure, after we get through this.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** Thank you, Jim.

**The Chair:** Ms. Dzerowicz is next, and then Mr. Cooper.

Go ahead, Ms. Dzerowicz.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** Okay. I just want to say a huge thanks to everyone for the very thoughtful presentations. I also want to lend my thanks for your absolutely heroic work, not only during this pandemic but ongoing. Thank you so much for all your efforts.

One of the key things we've learned, at least in hearing you today, is that all the issues we had before are only exacerbated and really present themselves so clearly to us today. I want to direct my questions to Ms. Fair from West Neighbourhood House, just because I have only a short period of time. I will maybe end off with Mr. Clement if I have a minute left.

First, I want to say thanks to you for all your wonderful efforts in the Davenport community, and I wouldn't say just Davenport but broadly in Toronto as well. You've been a true champion for our community, not only around homelessness and housing but also for our seniors community and for our community in general.

You've proposed a number of excellent ideas. The first one was around income tax filing. This has been an area I've been very worried about. We have thousands of seniors, and many of them do not speak English, since 43% of the Davenport riding come from another country. I just want you to elaborate a little bit. You talked about automatic income tax filing. How would that work? Would you see it as the Canada Revenue Agency just taking last year's financial figures, or how would it work? Could you give a couple more details?

• (1540)

**Ms. Maureen Fair:** John Stapleton has written a paper about this. It's on the Open Policy Ontario website. He has a checklist of all the questions that need to be filled in for income tax, and the government actually has the information for almost every single item there already. That's usually through the submission of T4s, T4As or, for seniors, from ESDC, GIS and old age security.

If we could overcome the privacy rules on this, which are, frankly, a little bit silly, there could be a flow of data to fill those income tax forms and get those benefits out. That's it in a nutshell.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Perfect. Could you do me a favour and formally submit that to the committee, please, just so that it can be part of our formal deliberations?

You've also made a number of recommendations around housing, which were very helpful. This question may be for Mr. Bell, as well, who talked a bit about the ongoing discussions we're going to need to have.

I like to say that in every crisis there's an opportunity before us. We have introduced the national housing strategy. We have introduced the poverty reduction strategy. We've taken a number of huge steps to try to address the housing issue, the homelessness issue and the poverty issue in our country. The opportunity that is before us...

We have a better understanding of what's happening right now and some of our vulnerabilities.

You've presented a number of ideas, Maureen, around things that we could be incorporating or adding to the efforts we are already making right now, so I want to ask this. You mentioned an analysis that was done around your CERB recommendation to provide an incentive to private landlords. Please submit that to us.

I only have 30 seconds left, but maybe you could talk a little more to us. Do you see the recommendations that you've made as fitting in well with the national housing strategy, or is it in addition to what we have already proposed?

**Ms. Maureen Fair:** I would suggest that COVID has raised some concerns that would show that the national housing strategy needs to now be turned into a system, an affordable housing system, and there are different components of it. I think it's a natural progression from the very good start of the national housing strategy, but as others have mentioned, there are still a lot of glitches with the national housing strategy, relying heavily on not-for-profits to finance construction, and the private sector projects only having 10- or 15-year affordability terms. We think there's a way now to take the good stuff out of the national housing strategy and turn it into a system.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Great. Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, all.

We'll turn now to Mr. Cooper, then to Mr. McLeod, and then we'll try to give time for one question each to Mr. Poilievre and Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll direct my questions to Mr. Bell.

We know that private charitable organizations, community groups and religious organizations are on the front lines, playing an integral role in helping Canadians get through this crisis. Certainly, Siloam Mission in Winnipeg is no exception.

You noted in your submission that 90% of the revenues generated by Siloam come from private donations. You spoke about what is anticipated to be a sharp decline in charitable giving. What measures do you think the federal government could take to encourage charitable giving at this time? Would you support, for example, increasing the charitable tax credit temporarily to encourage those Canadians who can afford to give to do so? What are your thoughts?

• (1545)

**Mr. Jim Bell:** I have not given it that much thought, but on the surface I like your idea, even if that is a temporary measure, because certainly it would create some incentive for people. We know there will be challenges within households with what I would call “disposable income”, but if that were a consideration, I believe that would be worthy, even in the short term. I would see that as part of a partnership between the federal government and the agencies, like Siloam and others participating on the phone here and across the country, whereby we could continue.

At Siloam, given the fact that 90% of our dollars are from donors, we think we need to be good stewards with every dollar so that we can stretch them to the best of our ability. I think a partnership that would include a measure like that with the federal government would perhaps get donor communities to continue giving. I also think that in addition to being able to adopt measures like that, we need to be in a position as organizations to show the impact they are having. That's why I said in my earlier comments that whatever measures could be done or put into place, including the one you just suggested, should show the impact they are having.

We talked a lot about housing today. It starts with housing, but you need the supports. That's where those operational dollars come into play so much. They say, “Okay, John Doe, you have a place now, but you must have the supports.” He must have the ability to attend job training to rehone his skills or learn a new skill.

Our biggest fear, quite frankly, is that if the 90% should plummet significantly, we have no choice but to cut back services. That would be a sad day, not only for non-profit organizations but for the hospitals and the places that serve our communities that will continue to be overloaded by people showing up at emergency rooms and elsewhere who are battling addictions and mental health issues.

It's complicated, but the simplest way I can explain it to you is if that method and other methods.... I think the Reaching Home initiative is tremendous, but I'd like to see it get more legs. Siloam has participated in the national housing co-investment fund. It's great, but it needs to gain more momentum. We should see what's working and what's not, and redirect the dollars into areas where they are needed for those who are working on the ground.

We would be a very worthy participant in trying to trade ideas. I don't want to get ahead of myself, because I think all of us on this conference call today are speaking the same language, but accountability needs to be put in place by all of us. If you were to increase the non-refundable tax credits around charitable donations and if the national housing strategy were to expand, get more aggressive or redirect, I would expect that in return you would need to see results.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** We are out of time, Mr. Cooper.

Thank you, both.

We will now go to Mr. McLeod.

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

Thank you to the presenters. It is a very interesting discussion today. Housing is a very important issue in my riding. It's probably one of the biggest issues we are challenged with.

I'm the MP for the Northwest Territories. In the north so far we've been very fortunate that COVID-19 has had very little presence in our communities, especially our smaller communities, because not only do these communities have limited health resources, but with our overcrowding problem, it can be almost impossible for many to practice physical distancing within their own homes.

I have two questions.

First, would you agree that this pandemic has proven the need for greater support in addressing the social determinants of health, like housing? I know that nobody here has talked about the north or remote or indigenous communities, but I want your opinion on that.

Second, I'm hearing a lot of suggestions about building houses as part of economic recovery, because it's going to create jobs in every community we build houses in. Can you talk about those two things?

I'm just going to throw it out to whoever is interested in responding. Maybe all of you can respond, if we have the time.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Who wants to go first?

**Mr. Jim Bell:** I suppose I've already said enough, but—

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Jim.

**Mr. Jim Bell:** Thank you for the questions.

The first question was about whether the pandemic has increased awareness of the need for housing in communities. I can tell you that here in Winnipeg, the simple answer is yes. It already existed. There was already work being done by our organization and others, in consultation with End Homelessness Winnipeg, to try to determine where the costs are and who's going to operate these houses in working with landlords and all those things, but this pandemic has just increased the need.

Further to the question, I will tell you that I know there's a significant piece about the indigenous community that was just mentioned. It should be known that 50% or 60% of the people who are having meals at Siloam on a daily basis are of indigenous backgrounds and come from the north. They are seeking housing. We're working with End Homelessness Winnipeg. I know I keep mentioning End Homelessness Winnipeg, and they're going to love the promotion I'm giving them here today. They are officially an indigenous organization, so they're working very closely with that issue, but they're also feeling the pressures of the need for housing within the indigenous community.

Simply put, this pandemic has just put us all on alert in terms of how much more critical the housing situation is. I have to say again that it's more than just the bricks and mortar of the houses. We have to have the supports in place. That is where I hope the federal government, in the next two or three or four months, or whatever your guess is for when this is going to end, will show a willingness to listen from an operating perspective and say, "Yes, there's a need for housing, but how about the operations to help people as they train for jobs and deal with mental illness and deal with addiction and those types of things?" Those things are escalating.

**The Chair:** We'll have to end that round there. Sorry, Michael.

We'll take one quick question from Mr. Poilievre and one quick question from Mr. Fragiskatos.

Pierre, go ahead.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC):** I heard some of the witnesses mention the idea of a permanent universal basic income. When this idea originated, it was that the basic income would replace a whole series of complicated government programs with one simple payment to the end-user.

Is that the approach that the witnesses would take to a universal income? If so, what programs, other than simple social assistance payments, would you see replaced by a universal basic income?

**The Chair:** Who wants to take that one on?

Go ahead, Véronique.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Yes.

**Ms. Véronique Laflamme:** Great.

The FRAPRU isn't in favour of a guaranteed minimum income. We think that, under the current system, it could actually weaken the social safety net.

As we can see from the current situation, the social safety net is crucial, even though some programs weren't sufficient at the time of the pandemic, like employment insurance. We don't think it's a good idea to go down that road, precisely because we worry that it would weaken the social safety net, thereby making social programs less accessible.

We don't recommend that the federal government implement such a measure because it could erode existing programs. Instead, we think it's important to adjust programming, employment insurance and social housing, in particular. The flaws in the employment insurance program have become apparent in recent weeks.

• (1555)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Thank you.

Would any other witnesses care to answer that question?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, both.

Pierre, we don't have more time. We'll just get Peter in with one question and then we're done. We're over our time now.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you may have one question.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If Mr. Poilievre is advocating for basic income, we do live in unprecedented times indeed.

To the witnesses, the question I have is on the response in the immediate sense to COVID-19 in relation to homelessness. I'm sure you may already know that the Edmonton EXPO Centre has been taken out, with 500,000 square feet used by the city now, and the space is basically split in half. On one side are medical services and beds for individuals with COVID-19 who are experiencing symptoms and need somewhere to self-isolate. The other side of the facility serves as a drop-in. From 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., there's temporary storage space available for those who need it, with meals and shower and washroom access available. Five hundred people a day have been using it.

Do you have any thoughts—and this is open to whoever wishes to raise a hand first—on whether this can serve as a model to deal with COVID-19 and the challenges it poses for homeless populations in the immediate, very short term?

**The Chair:** Maureen Fair will take it.

Go ahead, Maureen, and we'll have to wrap up with that.

**Ms. Maureen Fair:** The partial answer is that I think it's one of the ways, but I'm really impressed with the City of Toronto's taking over hotels. This has afforded a bunch of homeless people the chance to have their own room, their own bathroom and to self-isolate with a TV. It's way safer and it's a really wonderful model.

Are we going to evict them at the end of the COVID pandemic? That's a future discussion.

**The Chair:** I know we always run out of time. It has been a very challenging and interesting panel in terms of where we can go from here, with some good ideas coming out that we will all pass up the line through our various portfolios.

With that, I want to thank all the witnesses for appearing on this new way of doing things during these trying times.

Thank you all.

We will suspend for a few minutes and come back to start our next panel.

• (1555)

(Pause)

• (1610)

**The Chair:** I'm not going to go through a lot of the formalities we have when we start a meeting. I will just call the meeting to order, to save time.

It is meeting number 20 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. We're operating under the order of reference of Tuesday, March 24, to look at the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would ask the witnesses—

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Mr. Chairman, I'm just checking to see whether the NWT Association of Communities has signed on.

**The Chair:** Is the Northwest Territories Association of Communities on yet? Mayor Napier, I can see you but I can't hear you. We'll start with the other witnesses and come back to you later.

I would ask the witnesses to try to keep their presentations to about five minutes. We always run out of time, and there are six witnesses.

We're starting with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

Mary Robinson, go ahead.

**Ms. Mary Robinson (President, Canadian Federation of Agriculture):** Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and speak to the difficult realities that farmers and food supply chains across Canada are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These next days and weeks are essential if we are to ensure Canada's domestic food supply is secure both now and into the future.

My name is Mary Robinson and I farm on a sixth-generation family farm in P.E.I. I'm also president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. Today I'm joined by CFA's assistant executive director, Scott Ross.

The CFA is Canada's largest general farm organization, providing a unified national voice for the 200,000 farm families across Canada. Whether through travel restrictions, social distancing or closure of critical businesses, food systems around the world are being challenged by these new operating conditions. This global uncertainty highlights the importance of a well-functioning supply of affordable and nutritious Canadian food, a critical factor in good public health. This must be the leading priority behind the direct public health impacts of COVID-19.

Canadians have always been able to depend on farmers to grow food. Today, Canadian farmers need immediate help from our federal government to continue fulfilling that responsibility. Without it, Canadian consumers could see a decrease in the amount and variety of food at their local grocery stores, as well as higher prices in the months ahead. I applaud the collaborative efforts of all levels of government in mobilizing their resources to protect Canadians' health, demonstrating what can be accomplished in the face of urgent challenges when we work together.

There is no shortage of issues Canadian farms and supply chain partners are facing. Our first concern is the labour shortage impacting farms and food processing. We welcome many of the measures taken to date. However, continued logistical challenges will likely see many Canadian farmers still short on critical labour needs. This extends to processors and other key buyers of agricultural products, who continue to experience disruptions and reduced capacity.

The second concern is the increasing unexpected costs COVID-19 is placing on Canadian farmers. Supply chain disruptions, like plant closures in livestock, already see farmers having to hold on to livestock where they can or face immediate animal welfare challenges and the prospect of depopulation where they cannot. Regardless, this equates to additional expenses and reduced production. Meanwhile, shifts in the retail and food service landscape have seen markets evaporate overnight, leaving farmers with few options, if any. These challenges are eroding the confidence they need to invest in planting a crop and maintaining livestock herds, decisions that must be made now and directly affect the availability and affordability of foods later this year.

A domestic supply is the one source of food we truly can depend on. This year, more than ever in my lifetime, we will need Canadian farmers to produce food and set our country up to best weather this storm.

The CFA is calling for an emergency preparedness plan that gives farmers confidence to overcome these challenges, targeting investments in a number of key areas.

The first is a flexible and responsive emergency fund giving farmers and food businesses confidence that there will be expedient financial support to help them address unforeseen challenges.

The second is enhancement to Canada's BRM suite to address immediate financial constraints through AgriInvest and provide confidence that farmers will receive adequate support from AgriStability if they do see significant losses this year.

The third is prioritizing access to PPE, second only to health, to ensure all agri-food workers feel safe coming to work.

Finally, further measures are needed to encourage Canadians to work on farms and in Canada's food-processing plants.

Canadian farmers are resilient, hard-working people who take pride in the fact that every day they feed Canadians. If government invests now in mitigation and preparedness, it will ensure our food system is secure and our grocery stores continue to be well stocked with safe and affordable food, while preventing far more costly issues down the road and positioning the agri-food sector to help drive Canada's economic recovery and prevent long-term reductions in Canada's capacity to produce food.

- (1615)

I thank you all for your time and welcome any questions you may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Cleanfarms, with Barry Friesen.

**Mr. Barry Friesen (General Manager, Cleanfarms):** Thank you very much for the opportunity to address the members of the House of Commons finance committee.

My name is Barry Friesen and I'm the general manager of Cleanfarms. I've had the fortune of living in four provinces from coast to coast, from B.C. to Prince Edward Island to Nova Scotia, and now Ontario. My first job was on a farm, so I'm very proud to be talking about this.

I'll start by mentioning that I've worked in agriculture now permanently for 10 years. I've never been prouder to work in the industry and with farmers, and with people like Mary and Martin, who are in this for the long haul.

Cleanfarms is a Canadian non-profit steward organization created and funded by the Canadian crop protection industry, comprising agriculture manufacturers, retailers and growers. We work across the agricultural value chain to recover waste from Canadian farms: plastic packaging such as jugs, barrels and totes; large plastic grain storage bags and silage wrap; seed, pesticide and fertilizer bags; and twine. We are one of the many industries that support Canadian farmers. Our work also contributes to a growing circular economy for plastics and helps maintain the health and well-being of the rural environment.

I've been asked to speak about how Cleanfarms is managing operations within the challenges of the government's response to the COVID-19 restrictions. For context, the ag and agri-food industry contributes over \$100 billion annually to Canada's GDP. At the same time, it promotes food security here and worldwide and employs 2.3 million people. Managing issues beyond industry's control, whether in weather or politics, is the norm, but as you've already heard, COVID is pushing way past business as usual and many farmers are being forced to make unthinkable decisions.

Over many years, ag has proven itself as a leader in innovation, and growers place huge investments in their businesses. At the same time, this industry is focused on sustainability and protecting land, air and water, because if it isn't, Canadian ag won't exist. This is a lifelong commitment, and it's where plastics and Cleanfarms come in.

Plastics are vital tools for farmers. From plastic packaging crates to plastic jugs and totes to plastic film wraps that safeguard crops after harvest, plastics protect Canadian agriculture. Cleanfarms

helps farmers recycle this packaging and promotes a circular economy in ag. Effective packaging is especially valuable when the supply chain is under pressure, as with the recent rail disruptions and now with COVID.

For example, while we're discussing the impact of COVID today, thousands of tonnes of grains worth millions of dollars remain securely stored on farmers' fields in grain bags. Grain bags are those long plastic tubes you see across the Prairies. For some growers, grain bags can be the difference between survival and disaster, and when they can't be used anymore, Cleanfarms collects them for recycling back into new products. This is just one example of the sustainable systems that are in place now to mitigate disruptions and promote food security during and after COVID.

Right now ag retailers across the country are working to make sure farmers have what they need to begin planting. In these challenging times, this may mean delivering products like crop inputs to farms ahead of schedule to avoid the impacts of transportation disruption. This is possible because these materials, pesticides and fertilizers are safely stored in plastic packaging.

We need to think of the recycling phase as well, where COVID is also having an impact. We're working closely with staff at over 1,600 collection sites across Canada, helping them put in place physical distancing precautions that are so important to ensuring growers can safely return their empty containers for recycling. COVID is adding cost and new pressures to these operations.

At the same time, domestic and international recycling supply chains are slowing down and entering crisis mode. Recycling plants were facing pressure before COVID and are closing for the health and safety of their workers, creating stockpiles of plastics that can't currently be recycled into the economy and turned into new products. There's a huge investment in this industry, and we don't want to turn the clock back to 2008, when investments were lost and we had to rebuild essentially from the ground up.

Despite COVID-19, Cleanfarms teams are still at work with our ag partners trying to figure out how to recover more plastics and other materials so they remain a valuable part of our economy. We need to support the ag supply chain so we can manage these plastics to protect the environment. To do this, we need to support the industries that enable Canada to be self-sufficient, competitive and sustainable. We must protect jobs and the environment, reduce food waste and promote food security. Our partners are doing all of this in the face of COVID, and we will do our part, recycling the plastic products and packaging that are so vital to ag productivity.

- (1620)

In closing, I'd like to thank the government for the support that is being directed to agriculture communities to enable them to continue with the essential work they do, and I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to share these additional concerns and comments with you today.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Barry.

We'll turn to Mr. Derek Nighbor from Forest Products Association of Canada.

**Mr. Derek Nighbor (President and Chief Executive Officer, Forest Products Association of Canada):** Thank you for the opportunity to share perspectives from Canada's forest sector and its workers.

FPAC represents Canada's wood, pulp, paper and wood bio-products manufacturers. We're a \$73-billion annual industry, directly employing some 230,000 Canadians across over 600 communities.

FPAC is grateful for the Government of Canada's and provincial governments' recognition of the essential nature of our sector, our products, our supply chain and our workforce.

Rarely have Canada's forest products been of such high profile. From a 241% increase in the demand for toilet paper to the need for sanitary wipes and paper towels and pulp that goes into protective masks and hospital gowns, wood pellets, biofuels to green energy that feeds heating systems in provincial power grids, we've embraced our role as an essential provider. Our workers and partners along the supply chain have been incredible. Mary talked a bit about that. We can't say thank you enough to our mill workers, our further manufacturers, truck drivers, railroaders, retailers...I could go on.

Given the moments of protectionism we've seen in recent weeks, I'm also proud that we have this sustainable and valuable natural resource right here at home so we can provide for Canadians.

Despite the current headwinds, I must say that our sector is quite optimistic about the future, but there's no doubt that the next two to three quarters are going to be brutal.

That said, we are looking to 2021 and beyond, and we view our sector as having an opportunity to be one of the bright lights in Canada's economic recovery, especially in our rural and northern communities. Wood products are increasingly becoming the building material of choice. They come from a renewable source and from among the best-managed forests in the world. Our wood waste isn't wood waste at all. Wood chips from our sawmills are being turned into everything from toilet paper to bioplastics. Paper

towels are being turned into biofuels. It's our contribution to a more circular and lower-carbon economy.

Our industry is not looking for a bailout. What we're looking for is bolstered cash flow supports to keep our businesses operating through these difficult next two to three quarters. Remember, we're an industry that hit our low point in the market in 2018, and 2019 was difficult. About \$3.6 billion of Canadian industry softwood lumber duties are sitting in a U.S. bank account now, and we can't wait to get that.

Across the country, over the next 36 months, we have hundreds of millions of dollars in shovel-ready projects, ready to go, that will further improve environmental performance, drive economic growth, and sustain jobs in northern and rural communities, where there are often few options, or in some cases where we're the biggest game in town.

The rest of 2020 is going to be about survival.

Thus far, well-intended federal programs like the wage subsidy program are leaving a large majority of players in our sector and our workers behind, and the effectiveness and speed at which we need liquidity supports remains a big question mark.

This is what we're facing. Lumber markets have collapsed, with a nearly 40% decline in prices in recent weeks, leading to the temporary closures of dozens of sawmills. At last count, we were at 39 sawmill closures across the country, and this has put thousands out of work.

As well, some of those essential products that I talked about earlier are made possible because of Canada's pulp mills, but with sawmills going down, our pulp mills are starting to suffer. They can't get the chips they need to make their in-demand products, so some of them are starting to announce downtime as well.

In addition, with offices closed, stores closed, advertising revenues down and schools out, our newsprint and paper markets are collapsing around us as well.

Despite falling markets, with increased supports there is an opportunity to keep more of our mills operating and more of our people working. Right now, most sawmills in Canada have come out of their winter harvests and our log yards are pretty full, so it would be great to process more of our log inventories. This is where an improved wage subsidy program would be of interest.

We're a highly integrated sector. Our sawmills are our industry's heartbeat. We need to find a way now to keep our sawmills operating so chips can continue to feed our pulp and paper mills. If we don't have chips flowing, our industry's biggest artery is cut off, and thousands more will be out of work.

Here are a couple of proposed fixes on the wage subsidy side.

Many of our companies have multiple segments and mills, and they just don't meet the criterion of a business with a 30% revenue decline. If there were a measure to consider a mill-by-mill approach or a more segmented approach, thousands more people could continue to work.

We're also a proponent of a sliding-scale approach. We found the 75% threshold to be very generous and of great interest, but we'd be equally interested for our companies facing a 10% or 15% decline to maybe qualify for a 40% or 50% subsidy. That creativity would be a big help to us as well.

- (1625)

Wage subsidies aren't a magic bullet. Our biggest issue—and I think it's similar for our friends in agriculture—is about liquidity: managing increased operating costs, working through falling prices and markets, and making our credit payments. We've just not seen the evidence yet that the BCAP out of EDC is going to deliver what we need.

We need supports now that move with speed and ease in the face of markets that are falling off a cliff, measures that are not going to force companies to provide more security. Many just don't have the flexibility to do that. We need measures that are responsive to the reality of the crisis, and we need our lenders to be prepared to take more risks than our main street banks.

We have a few other ideas. I'll defer those, maybe, to the Q and A portion. I have a couple of suggestions around worker supports that we're working on with our friends at USW and Unifor. I'll defer those to the Q and A as well.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Derek.

Now we will turn to Mayor Napier from the Northwest Territories Association of Communities.

**Ms. Lynn Napier (Mayor of Fort Smith, Northwest Territories Association of Communities):** Thank you so much for the opportunity to present to all of you regarding the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I'm Lynn Napier, the mayor of Fort Smith and president of the Northwest Territories Association of Communities. We proudly represent 33 communities of the Northwest Territories that vary in size from 52 to 21,000. Our members are both indigenous communities and traditional municipalities, but all are northern and remote to varying degrees.

We have been fortunate enough to present to this committee in the past and have highlighted our four main federal priorities as infrastructure, climate change, housing and broadband. The current pandemic has really highlighted the importance of these priorities

and how much they impact on the resilience of northern communities.

We've been very pleased to hear of the programs announced to date to mitigate the economic impacts on both individuals and businesses. Further, the more recently announced health and social services support for northern communities was very welcome. When our territorial government, residents and businesses are doing better economically, so are our communities. Despite the support program's name, little or none is actually going to local communities. We are, however, going to need additional programs to support local governments.

As you know, local governments are relied upon to keep essential services running. We have 33 communities that deliver water, sewer and landfill services; provide fire protection, planning and building services, as well as transit and recreation services; and protect our most vulnerable populations.

We're working tirelessly to ensure that we maintain these services, but we are also very concerned. COVID-19 has led to not only many additional tasks for communities; it is also compromising their ability to raise revenues, whether they are taxes or user fees. This poses a particular challenge because of the small size of our communities, especially when they cannot legally carry a deficit budget. We're going to require particular support from the territorial and federal governments.

I would like to highlight some unique areas of challenge in the north that make us particularly vulnerable to the virus and to its impacts.

We have a large cohort of vulnerable populations, including those on income support, the homeless and those with mental health and addiction challenges. Well in excess of 50% of our housing is overcrowded and insufficient.

The last month of self-isolation has really highlighted the inadequate broadband connectivity in our communities and proven a barrier to education, working from home, telehealth and participation in the digital economy on an unprecedented level.

The lack of proximity to health care services as a result of our communities' remoteness is making community leadership very anxious. This is further compounded by the fact that we are over 50% indigenous, which is a particular risk factor with respect to COVID-19.

We are already seeing significant impacts on our two main industries: the mining and oil and gas industry, and tourism. Last but not least, our existing supply chain issues are only likely to become worse.



Our communities will require support for the immediate response to COVID-19. The funding should be provided as quickly as possible. Community governments are already experiencing significant impacts. To get this funding out the door as quickly as possible, it should be allocated-based and distributed on a base-plus basis.

Direct municipal financial impacts will also need to be addressed as well, whether they relate to reduction in tax revenues, user fees or additional costs. We hear estimates that one in four businesses may not survive the pandemic. That would mean a significant loss of tax revenue. Closed recreational facilities cannot generate user fees. Without these financial supports, communities will be forced to reduce services even more, or those that can will have to raise taxes at a time of economic instability. With northerners already subject to a very high cost of living even before COVID-19, this will have a significant impact and may put some residents into insolvency or force them to leave.

With respect to planning for the critical economic stimulus recovery phase, I am pleased to let you know that local governments are agile enough to be important partners. We commissioned a report by The Conference Board of Canada's centre for the north, which clearly demonstrated that community governments' expenditures have the largest impact on the NWT economy. For example, local government expenditures generate 13 jobs per \$1 million expended, while territorial and federal projects generate seven and six jobs per \$1 million respectively. Local governments are absolutely the best bang for the buck.

• (1630)

The expansion of the gas tax fund with a continued allocation-based distribution across Canada on a base-plus basis is the best way to get stimulus dollars to our communities.

Also, although housing funding is not funded to communities, it is incumbent upon us to highlight the critical importance of increasing the funding for housing in the Northwest Territories. This not only will serve as an economic stimulus, but will also address many of the social determinants of health in the communities and, in the long run, make communities more resilient.

We would be very pleased to provide advice on how best to design the various funding programs for the greatest effectiveness in the north. We're best positioned to help various programs navigate the challenges in the north. We ask that you not wait to contact us until there's little or no uptake on a program. We do it so much that we even have a brochure on it.

We wish to thank you for the invitation to present to you this afternoon. We hope that you continue to consult with us, with the Government of the Northwest Territories, our sister organizations across Canada and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Thank you.

• (1635)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Mayor.

I'll turn to UPA and Mr. Caron.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Caron (First Vice-President, Union des producteurs agricoles):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, thank you for inviting the Union des producteurs agricoles to comment on the COVID-19 pandemic and the agricultural challenges it has created, specifically in rural and remote communities.

Agriculture is the main economic activity in rural areas. Together with the agri-food sector, agriculture contributes more than \$112 billion to Canada's economy every year and is responsible for one in eight jobs. Agricultural production alone generates annual revenues of more than \$60 billion. What's more, Canadian farmers invest nearly \$8 billion in their businesses every year.

Hundreds of communities all over the country depend on agriculture to promote land use, sustain local services and support the operation of schools and other public services. Without agriculture, Canada would be uninhabitable.

Canadian farmers now have to compete with countries whose social, environmental and health standards are significantly lower than ours. We also have to compete with farmers who receive greater government assistance than we do, in the United States, in particular, and it's becoming harder and harder for us to remain competitive in that context.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major crisis on an unprecedented scale, and the agricultural sector is not unscathed. Plant and animal production have been hit hard. The market upheaval has forced each and every farmer to take on enormous risks just to keep production going. We are pressing ahead into the unknown.

AgriStability, AgriInvest and AgriRecovery, the government's risk management programs for farming businesses, are not designed for a situation like this. We need to know now whether the government is going to be there, as we take huge financial risks to keep production going.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture, or CFA, made a series of recommendations, which Ms. Robinson talked about earlier. The CFA is calling on the government to create an emergency fund for the agri-food sector and to restore the AgriStability program to 2013 levels prior to the funding cuts. The CFA is also recommending an enhancement of the AgriInvest program in 2020. The Canadian government has to make it clear to farmers that it will be there if the situation gets even worse in the coming months.

To support the future of rural communities, land use and food chain continuity, the Canadian government has to restore business risk management program funding to what it was before the 2013 budget cuts. The COVID-19 pandemic is shining a light on an urgent problem in the agri-food sector, which is the result of years of withdrawal by the federal government.

In times of crisis, Canada's food security hinges on the ability of the country's farmers to feed the population. The prevailing health crisis is putting a strain on farmers around the world. It's tough to predict where inventory levels and food prices will be in the months ahead. Which vegetables will we be able to import, and how much will they cost?

Not sending a clear message to Canada's agri-food sector now is akin to putting the population at great risk.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thanks very much, Mr. Caron.

Before I forget, Mary, the CFA likely sent your emergency proposal to the minister. If you could also send that proposal through the clerk of the finance committee, we'll distribute it to our members also. It would be a document we could use.

We will turn now to the Ville de Senneterre and Mayor Matte.

• (1640)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Maurice Matte (Mayor, Ville de Senneterre):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on behalf of Quebec's municipalities.

To start, I'd like to point out that I had trouble getting connected for the meeting. In a pandemic, when everyone is in isolation, the importance of a strong Internet network in every region and municipality across the country becomes very apparent.

Senneterre is located in northeastern Quebec, in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region. With a population of 1,300, it spans a vast area of 16,512 km<sup>2</sup>, making it one of Canada's biggest municipalities. Forestry is the main economic activity. As a central town, it's a major urban hub in rural Quebec. Offering government, business and industry-related services, the municipality serves a number of small surrounding communities, or buttress communities, as we call them.

The town is also located in a major indigenous region, where 8% of the population is indigenous. The region is home to three indigenous communities: Cree, Atikamekw and Algonquin. With the current crisis, everyone seems to have forgotten the crisis we were dealing with in January and February, the rail crisis stemming from unresolved indigenous issues. We must not close our minds to that reality.

The Abitibi-Témiscamingue region depends on mining, forestry, agriculture and tourism. As you can imagine, these four economic drivers have been hit hard by the current situation. The crisis's impact on Quebec's municipal community and on small communities has been severe, especially for remote rural communities, which very often revolve around a single industry. In our municipality, it's forestry, so we feel it's important that any economic recovery plans include opening the border to support forestry. Our plants are still operating today because we need chips, but tomorrow, we'll need to ship lumber to various markets, especially the U.S., which buys the bulk of what we produce. The border must be opened without restriction to the lumber trade.

Senneterre is home to 21 outfitters, most of which serve European and American customers. I can tell you that we don't expect any Americans to come up for bear hunting or fishing this year. Outfitters will probably have a tougher time. Clearly, we need to support our tourism industry with significant and targeted assistance, especially for outfitters.

As far as the role of municipalities is concerned, thus far, their primary focus has been emergency management and they've taken steps to provide some relief for property tax payments. When it comes to supporting individuals and businesses, municipalities will be there to help them get back on their feet. Nevertheless, much is expected of the higher levels of government, namely, provincial and federal authorities. That means there are certain expectations as regards support for individuals and businesses, expectations that the programs put in place have in part satisfied.

The Union des municipalités du Québec is currently working on a municipal economic recovery plan, which it will submit to the provincial government. Some of the measures will also be submitted to the federal government, including the municipal water infrastructure fund, or FIMEAU in French for short. Roughly 50 of the projects that the provincial government has approved are being looked at by federal public servants. In many cases, it's just a matter of rubber-stamping the proposals. It's important that these projects get under way quickly or at least that they be ready to go for the recovery phase.

The gas tax fund is another priority for the Union des municipalités du Québec. Not only does the fund need to be enhanced, but it also needs to be adjusted for broader use. It should allow for community-level projects, not just major infrastructure projects such as water and sewer work. It's also necessary to repair municipal garages and fire stations. The fund needs to be adjusted and enhanced.

• (1645)

Furthermore, we need to put our young people to work. In April, it's no longer realistic to stick to the work placement and summer job programs put forth in January. We need to allow for a broader use of youth summer job funding. In Quebec City, a major shift towards a decentralized public service is happening, something the federal government should seriously consider.

[English]

Small is beautiful.

[Translation]

The government should consider delivering local and economic development services in Quebec's regions. Doing that would put more people to work in offices and require more employment services in Quebec's regions. The government needs to explore ways to decentralize the public service to bring it closer to the people it serves.

I had a few other points to make, but I'll probably get a chance to come back to them during the question and answer period. I think my five minutes are already up.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor.

I'll give the order of questions. I think we can go to regular rounds of six minutes.

Mr. Généreux will be up first, then Mr. McLeod, Mr. Ste-Marie and Mr. Julian.

Mr. Généreux, we'll go with a six-minute round. Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you as well to all the witnesses.

[*English*]

Thank you very much, everyone, for being there.

I'm going to go right to Jean-Maurice.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for being here. Your comments were very informative. Has the Union des municipalités du Québec, or UMQ, estimated the potential tax losses? Will the UMQ ask the federal government outright for compensation for the losses?

**Mr. Jean-Maurice Matte:** The UMQ updates its information daily with the reports that come in from the municipalities. Today, from one caucus to another, we're doing the rounds, consulting urban centres, local municipalities, regional towns and big cities. In the next few days, we should have a clear picture of the impact COVID-19 is having on municipal taxes. That said, it won't be until next year that we can truly measure the full impact of the crisis at the municipal level.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Do you expect a significant number of businesses to close in your region?

**Mr. Jean-Maurice Matte:** We anticipate potential closures in the service sector. The economic development authorities are in the process of assessing that. We're in the midst of the crisis, so everyone is trying to get their own sense of the situation right now. The mining sector is going to start up again, the forestry sector is in a downturn, and things will be very tough for the agricultural sector. In terms of the tourism sector, it won't be on people's minds this year.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Very well. Thank you.

Now I'm going to turn to farming. This is for Mr. Caron and Ms. Bouffard.

I'm from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, and as you probably know, it's very much a farming region. It's home to many small farms as well as very big farms, some of which are among the largest in Quebec, in fact.

A lot of people have talked to me about the \$40,000 in assistance available to businesses in Quebec. Many small farms aren't eligible

because they are set up as partnerships, or *sociétés en nom collectif*, as they are known in Quebec.

Do you have a specific request for the government on that front?

**Mr. Martin Caron:** That's a good question, Mr. Généreux.

We just sent a letter to the federal government asking it to make some adjustments, given that a number of farm businesses don't meet the program criteria you just mentioned. Fixing that as soon as possible would make a real difference because farms need quick access to liquidity.

• (1650)

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** That's what I hear a lot. For about two weeks now, farmers have had to dump milk. I raised the issue in the House of Commons on the weekend, but the minister wasn't there.

I know your office and the minister's have been in contact about the dumping of milk. Do you see a solution for the short term?

We are also hearing from consumers that they're only allowed to buy so much milk at the grocery store, so there is a major dichotomy. On the one hand, farmers are discarding millions of litres of milk produced in Quebec, and on the other, consumers are being told they can't buy as much as they would like.

What do you have to say about that?

**Mr. Martin Caron:** I think you're making an observation. It's something that has our attention. Of course, there's always a problem when it comes to dairy processing and processing plants. We have to figure out quickly how to even things out. We are going to need the federal government's help to support the entire chain, from producers to processors.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Mr. Caron, the Quebec government announced its support, \$100 per week for work in the fields, in addition to the \$250 per week now available to workers receiving the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB.

Do you think that's good news for farmers? If so, do you think it will be possible to have that in place by Monday? It's seeding time, and vegetable growers need the help desperately.

**Mr. Martin Caron:** It seems to be good news, but it's important to make sure the criteria are tailored to the problems farmers are dealing with on the ground.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Since you brought up criteria, Mr. Caron, I'd like to talk about the rules and potential pitfalls the farming community has to deal with—the red tape in Ottawa and the assortment of regulations. People tell me that it would be good to relax certain rules, not to diminish product quality, of course, but rather to speed up the process of getting products to market. The idea is to be as self-sufficient as possible when it comes to food, especially in Quebec, which promotes buy local efforts.

Where do you stand on that?

**Mr. Martin Caron:** I'd say that a relaxing of the rules is clearly needed. For example, the government announced that employers of temporary foreign workers would receive \$1,500 to cover isolation-related expenses, and people are wondering whether that assistance is retroactive. We are being told that it is, but we've seen people whose applications have been denied. That needs to be fixed immediately.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Do you think it should be retroactive to when the crisis began, in other words, March 15, as opposed to January 1?

**Mr. Martin Caron:** Yes. People had to incur costs to apply certain measures, so I would say any initiative that puts cash in the hands of farmers is welcome. That's on top of the business risk management programs. We've long been calling on the government to enhance the AgriStability program.

[English]

**The Chair:** Sorry, but we'll have to end it there, Bernard. You got in a lot of questions in a short time, and that's the way we like to see them.

If anybody else wants in on some of these questions, raise your hand, and I may see you.

We'll turn now Mr. McLeod.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Thank you, and thank you to all the presenters today. I really appreciate the discussion.

I want to pay a special welcome to somebody from the Northwest Territories, Mayor Napier from the Northwest Territories Association of Communities. I really enjoyed your presentation. I thought it was very informative and very well presented.

I wanted to ask, Mayor Napier, for your point of view about the different aspects of the federal emergency response plan being presented. We've had quite a few. We've had programs that were announced for the unemployed and programs for companies that saw lost revenue. We saw loan programs for small businesses and non-profits. We saw an indigenous business fund set up for indigenous governments and indigenous community corporations. We announced On the Land programs in the Northwest Territories, and I see people out there at their cabins and setting up tents all over the place. Then this week we announced a northern COVID-19 package, and we announced an indigenous community support.

Can you tell us how that's being received in the communities? Maybe you could tell us where the federal response could be improved.

That's my first question, and I have one more.

• (1655)

**Ms. Lynn Napier:** Thank you. It's great to hear from you as well.

The funding measures that have come out already have been very well received. All of the supports that are going towards the territorial government and to the On the Land program—which is an amazing measure that's been put out to allow people not only to self-isolate but also to go back to traditional practices for food security—are very well received across the territory.

What we're looking at now is that while money has gone out to airlines, we know that it's not enough, and airlines are critical to our entire territory. The impact of COVID-19 on airlines has been devastating, and there are communities across the north that we can get to only by air. We rely on airlines for medical travel, for food security, really for everything, and right now that's the only way we can even get testing for COVID into the smaller communities. We know that's a really urgent issue facing the north and probably rural communities all across Canada, especially for territories like Nunavut, where there are no roads that lead there at all.

We know that is a major impact. As well, we are coming now into breakup season, so we're losing the ice road access to many communities, and that's already affecting our supply chains. The impact we have seen on the supply chain in the past two months is only going to become worse.

We know that any money that's going to come into the area for construction or for supplies, for this season especially, will need to come soon, so that we can use those funds across the territory. There is a very limited window for getting to the different communities, so if there are any programs to help with economic stimulus, such as construction or housing, which is one of our federal platforms in the territory, we're going to need the money quickly so that we can get those projects going.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** I have one more question for you. I want to talk about the economic recovery that you talked about. What kind of measures will the NWT communities want to see from the federal government when it comes to that recovery phase, when the worst of this is behind us?

I heard you say housing construction is an economic stimulus. I totally agree. Are there other things? What do you think needs to be in place?

**Ms. Lynn Napier:** I think housing, absolutely, is number one. As well, small businesses across the territory do not have the same resiliency that you would see with the larger box stores you have in the south. For municipalities, an increase to the gas tax or even a doubling of the gas tax certainly would be beneficial.

In my own community of 2,500 people, the financial impact in the past two months has meant increased spending and loss of revenue, which has cost our municipality about \$180,000. That's very significant for our community, and for smaller communities across the north the impact is going to be just as great.

Across the territory, all of our schools have shut down. They're going to online education. We don't have broadband in all of the communities, and even in my community, where we do have broadband, it's not throughout the whole community.

We need broadband across Canada. We need housing. We need infrastructure. We need money for the municipalities.

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll have to end that round there. Thank you both very much.

We turn now to Mr. Ste-Marie, who will be followed by Mr. Julian and Mr. Lloyd.

Go ahead, Gabriel.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome all the witnesses and thank them for their presentations.

In particular, I'd like to thank Mr. Matte, who highlighted a number of critical issues. We've taken careful note of them, so rest assured that we will push for measures to be implemented.

My first questions are for Mr. Caron.

Mr. Caron, thank you for being here. During your presentation, you talked about the problems facing the agricultural sector. Can you describe them in greater detail and tell us how the current support program falls short? You said it wasn't designed to deal with a situation like the COVID-19 crisis.

Why is it so urgent to take action?

**Mr. Martin Caron:** First of all, those programs were put in place to deal with weather-related issues and market declines. When they occur, it's usually over a long period of time. In this case, however, the drops in the market have been very swift.

The programs can't respond quickly, and that's why we called for a special fund that would provide support quickly. The problem we are dealing with is a liquidity problem. Farm businesses need money.

The programs don't necessarily cover the costs associated with the pandemic and market declines.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you.

In your presentation, you mentioned the AgriStability program and the need to make it better.

Could you briefly explain what needs to be done?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Martin, could you speak a little more slowly and into the mike? The translators are having a little difficulty.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Caron:** As far as the "Agri" suite of programs is concerned, we asked for a 15% increase, a return to what it was. We also asked for a 5% deposit with respect to AgriInvest. The program shouldn't require farmers to make a deposit in terms of matching. Naturally, an emergency fund needs to be created, as Ms. Robinson, of the CFA, mentioned earlier. That's a crucial piece.

Right now, the entire chain is in trouble. Farmers have to hold on to their livestock—be it hogs or cattle—keeping the animals on their farms because the slaughterhouses aren't operating. There's a serious break in the supply chain.

It's important to understand something. When consumers go out to eat, they order sirloin and steak, but when they eat at home, they want ground beef.

There's an imbalance, and dairy and pork production are just two examples of where it's being felt.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you.

Mr. G n reux brought up milk production. Some groups are recommending that the credit capacity of the Canadian Dairy Commission be increased.

Where do you stand on that?

**Mr. Martin Caron:** I think all the options should be on the table. It could be something that allows for a longer view to some degree. I think a plan is what's needed, and the federal government will have to be a part of those agreements.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** I see.

You want to see an increase in the advance payments program. What are you looking for exactly?

**Mr. Martin Caron:** When you apply for the program, a report is necessary in order to receive an increase. I will tell you all that does is draw things out. It doesn't get money to farm businesses quickly or directly.

Programs that provide liquidity support are what's needed. The \$40,000 program that was proposed is promising. It may be worthwhile to recommend increasing the amounts.

Farmers need support, especially vegetable and horticultural growers. These businesses need labour support, above all.

• (1705)

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Your message is loud and clear. Thank you.

**Mr. Martin Caron:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bernard G n reux:** Mr. Chair, can I ask a question? I can take his time, if he doesn't want it.

**The Chair:** Sorry, I didn't have my mute off.

While we're on that same line of thought, I will turn to Mary.

Mary, you mentioned the emergency program that you were proposing, an emergency fund. Do you want to expand on that and on what it would mean? Perhaps it's equally important that not many people understand the whole food security issue for the country. This isn't just about farmers earning a livelihood and an income; the very essence and bottom line of this is food security for Canada. Perhaps you could expand on that.

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** Thank you, Wayne.

I'd like to build on what Martin has shared with us. The AgriInvest stimulus we've asked for would be 5%, based on allowable net sales from 2018. The reason for our suggestion is that it's a very simple mechanism that would give a quick injection of cash to producers straight across all commodities in the country. We thought that would be the cleanest way to get a stimulus to farmers to help them address some of these extraordinary costs.

The second part of our ask was that we would increase AgriStability coverage, and that would mean returning the coverage rate to 85% and removing the reference margin limit. Now, AgriStability is typically used to address large declines in margins. What we've seen is subscription to this program drop off because it's become very ineffective. I believe it was the Conservative government that cut it back 15%, so now if you're going to trigger an AgriStability payment, you're in very rough shape financially. It comes much later, 16 months after the fact, and it's really not that effective as a safety net program. That's why we've asked for AgriInvest to be reinstated to what it was before.

We've also asked for improved access to capital. We know all of these offers to Farm Credit Canada have been made. They represent only about 30% of the lending within our sector, so we'd like to see CALA expanded to other lending agencies in Canada.

The emergency fund that we mentioned is really a statement of confidence by government to Canadian producers. We've heard from other presenters that we're competing against American producers who definitely know they have the confidence of their president. They've seen over \$30 billion given to them. What we need is for our government to step up, much as they have with health, and say that we need to ensure that our domestic food supply is secure this year. We need to make sure that the producers who are investing hundreds of million of dollars right now have the confidence to do that. If we don't have that kind of financial backstop from the federal government, we are going to see a reduction in the amount of food planted and the number of animals raised this year. We will see it hit all of us, and it will definitely result in food shortages, a decrease in the variety of food and an increase in the cost of food.

We've been careful to not raise panic and alarm about this in the press, but I can tell you that in Prince Edward Island and straight across the country, I'm hearing about upwards of a 25% reduction in potato planting. I'm understanding that in the Holland Marsh and that entire area, which is really the vegetable basket of Toronto where 90% of the produce comes from in the middle of summer, they're looking at a 10% to 40% reduction in their planting.

This is going to have a direct impact, because producers right now do not feel that the government has put anything meaningful in place that they can take to the bank so that if something happens on their farm due to COVID-19 and they're unable to harvest, they're going to be covered. It makes more sense for them not to make the investment.

**The Chair:** We'll have to end it there.

We turn now to Mr. Julian and then to Mr. Lloyd and then Ms. Koutrakis.

Go ahead, Peter.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to our witnesses for being here. You represent very important sectors, and we certainly appreciate your time today and hope that your families are safe and healthy.

I'd like to start with Mr. Nighbor. The Forest Products Association of Canada represents a very important industry. You've written the government, I understand, about the mill-by-mill approach in terms of the wage subsidy, which should be easy to fit within the

regulatory framework, and also about the sliding-scale approach as well. I'd like you to tell us what response you've received on that, because these are two very thoughtful approaches that can make a difference for mills across the country.

Second, perhaps you can go into the discussions you've had with unionized workers around USW and Unifor and what suggestions those discussions have led to in terms of how we can help provide support during this crisis.

• (1710)

**Mr. Derek Nighbor:** Thanks for the opportunity.

The wage subsidy piece has been top of the list with Unifor and USW in our conversations, just in terms of getting more of our companies in. As to the reasons that we're not fitting, there are a couple of things. The March 2019 comparison was when we were at our low point in lumber commodity markets. We came off a real high in 2017, got hit with softwood lumber, and things started to slide late in 2018. That was not a great benchmark for us. The January-February 2020 adjustment as an average didn't work either, because we were still not quite out of that point yet. Our margins are very thin and we're also selling in U.S. dollars. Our revenues get a bit of an artificial bump with the U.S. dollar, with the Canadian dollar going down, so we just couldn't fit into this model.

To be fair to the finance minister, we've shared these new approaches just in the last couple of days. We were looking forward to last Saturday's legislation and we took a few days to try to find our way. We do think there's an opportunity in the regulatory framework, so we'll do our best to push there. It's only been a couple of days, to be fair to Minister Morneau and his team.

As I said, that's not a magic bullet. We have massive cash flow issues that we have to deal with. Really, the wage subsidy will help us get a number of mills up and running, get some more people working and get that chip flow going to the pulp mills. We have three pulp mills that are either... One is down and two are going down, but their order sheets are pretty full, so there's a demand for their products and we'd like to keep those pulp mills moving.

On the worker side, I learned two things in this process. The first is around what's called a SUB, or a supplementary unemployment benefit. Because we're a commodity sector, prior to March 15 a lot of companies in our sector that were in temporary shutdowns would try to keep a lot of our employees whole. They might go on EI, and then we'd top them up with SUB. It could be \$200 to \$300 a week on top of the \$573 under EI.

On March 15, we kicked into the CERB, and I think I get why this happened: It was the ease of getting this thing up and running and cash out the door. Then the maximum benefit moved from \$573 to \$500. As well, our ability to do that \$200 to \$300 top-up was taken away from us. Right now it's still not fixed. It's been in Minister Qualtrough's office for about a week. We've had a couple of tries. I know they're busy, but we still haven't had word back.

That measure to top up and help our workers during this transition is on industry's dime, and we'd like the flexibility to use it again.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you very much.

I've spoken to the minister. The minister has the powers and has said that she will put them into place as part of our parliamentary agreement last Saturday. The SUB is not a barrier. It's just a question of the government having the will to keep their commitment. The commitment they made to us is that the SUB will be reactivated.

[*Translation*]

My next questions are for Mr. Caron and Ms. Robinson. I'd like to discuss the business risk management programs and Farm Credit Canada.

Our agriculture critic, Alistair MacGregor, has already called for a comprehensive review of the business risk management programs and the effectiveness of Farm Credit Canada.

Do you think a review is imperative, just like the emergency fund? Both of you mentioned the importance of taking immediate action.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Who wants to go first?

We will go to Mr. Caron and then Ms. Robinson.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Caron:** That's a very good question.

It is urgent to make adjustments when it comes to AgriStability. Ms. Robinson mentioned that producers use that program and that things must be taken a bit further. Regarding the agri-invest program, that is a key element that helps quickly provide operating funds for businesses, so that they can, among other things, deal with the conditions we are experiencing. If that program was enhanced by 5%, it would be important not to require the normally required contribution from producers to have access to the money. Those are elements to consider.

I will let Ms. Robinson answer the emergency funding question.

• (1715)

[*English*]

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** I apologize. I couldn't hear the question because I had the interpreter, as well as Mr. Julian, speaking at the same volume.

Is there any way I could have the interpreter repeat the question for me?

**The Chair:** It's related to AgriStability, AgriInvest and business risk management.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Yes, and the importance of moving very quickly on that. Alistair MacGregor has called for a very quick and important improvement to those programs.

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** Because of our seasons, the urgency is dire. The AgriInvest tool is an easy way to quickly get money out there, and then to have an announcement that AgriStability has been brought up to meet our requests would give producers the confidence that AgriStability will be there for them further down the road if they run into trouble.

The emergency fund goes beyond that. It's specifically about the impacts on a farm. We're seeing right now that our beef farmers are unable to send their animals to slaughter because of all these impacts of COVID, and we understand that a union is pushing to shut down the plant. They're having to hold on to animals longer, so the Canadian Cattlemen's Association has put in a request for a set-aside program that would be the same as for BSE.

There are many specific examples within this. AgriRecovery, we understand, is going to be modified so that we can access it for COVID-related losses, but the emergency fund is kind of an umbrella fund beyond that. I know the clerk got a copy of our plan, and she will be sharing it with all of you if she hasn't already. If you have any questions, please be sure to reach out to us after the fact.

**The Chair:** Scott, do you have anything you want to add?

**Mr. Scott Ross (Assistant Executive Director, Canadian Federation of Agriculture):** Yes, sir. I think Mary covered it very well.

I think the urgency of the BRM program enhancement speaks directly to the fact that farmers are making plans and decisions right as we speak. Those tools are needed to provide them with confidence so that we don't see those shortages and price increases that she referenced in her earlier response.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're out time, Peter.

To Mr. Nighbor at the Forest Products Association, if you could send us a copy of that note that you sent to Minister Qualtrough, it would be helpful.

Turning now to five-minute rounds, we will start with Mr. Dane Lloyd and then move on to Ms. Koutrakis.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Nighbor. We were talking about rural and remote communities and we know sawmills are predominantly located in rural communities. My concern is this: You've noted the pulp sector has [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], and I think we can guess why. Toilet paper consumption has gone up dramatically, but the use of toilet paper has probably not gone up dramatically. We're seeing huge stockpiles in people's houses.

Do you believe that in the near future there's going to be a serious drop in demand for pulp products when people don't need to go to the store to buy toilet paper anymore because they have so much?

**Mr. Derek Nighbor:** That's a good question. Yes, there was a surge in toilet paper, but in tissue markets there were paper towels, sanitary wipes.... I think there was maybe more of a surge on the wipes. Toilet paper is a bit of an anomaly. That was a 241% shift. I think if you talk to the toilet paper manufacturers, they'll say they expect to see a significant dip in the weeks and months ahead.

As for the other product areas, not at all. If you think about sanitary wipes and paper towels, you'll see the demand is going to be pretty strong for those, so the prospects for our pulp mills are pretty good. Our biggest issue is that they need that consistent flow of chips to operate, especially in B.C. I mentioned almost 40 mills were down. Twenty-four of those mills are in British Columbia, so the impact in western Canada has been more significant at this time, but if this drags on, I'll be increasingly concerned about capacity issues in the east as well.

● (1720)

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Absolutely. One of those mills is in my riding, as you know. About 60 people were laid off. Can you describe to us in more detail why the current lack of a segmented approach...?

We know a lot of these industries are integrated—pulp mills, lumber mills—so they can't demonstrate a 30% loss in revenue. Can you explain that further, and why it's important for the government to adopt a segmented approach so that we can get people back to work in our rural communities and our mills?

**Mr. Derek Nighbor:** Yes, and if we went down 30% even in the heyday, we'd be in big trouble, just based on our margins, so that number is not part of our vocabulary.

Your community is an interesting one. The mill in your community was acquired by a slightly larger company some time ago. They then fold that mill into the larger company's revenue picture.

For that mill in your community, for SpruceLand, if we can look at that mill's financial picture and make it fit outside the parent company, it would create an opportunity. If we can't do that, given the unique.... Forestry is not alone in this challenge in fitting to this 15% or 30% threshold. Maybe if you get 10%, the subsidy is a bit less. Those are a couple of fixes.

I'm encouraged to hear—and this confirms what we were starting to hear in the last day or so—that there could be an opportunity to

implement this fix within the existing regulatory framework. We'll be doing that follow-up with the minister's office on Monday.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** That's positive to hear. Thank you.

To Cleanfarms, for many of us I think this pandemic has reiterated or reinforced the importance of plastics for medical devices such as N95 masks and endotracheal tubes. In your work with agriculture, could you enlighten us about the consequences to our food sector in light of COVID-19 if we had no plastics right now for your particular industry?

**Mr. Barry Friesen:** If plastics were to disappear, it would be tremendously detrimental to the food sector.

We commend the fact that people are interested in getting plastic out of the waste stream, the lakes, the rivers, the streams and the oceans, but the way to do this, we think, is through programs like ours. It's by putting extended responsibility on industry to be in charge of plastics management, as opposed to putting blanket bans on materials. As you said, if plastics were no longer available, there would be a tremendous impact.

I go back to my first job. There were four of us. We baled 11,000 bales of hay in P.E.I. in a six-week period. With the use of plastics, that can be done now by one person in a matter of days. It's tremendous how much plastics technology has improved agriculture today.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Mr. Friesen, could you outline what these consequences would be? I think everyone wants to know. Can you give us some real-life examples?

**Mr. Barry Friesen:** The real-life examples would be that in some cases the price of food would go way up if we were to lose the ability to use plastics in agriculture, from store to material to production to hay bale wrap. All hay used in the dairy industry is now wrapped in plastic.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** No, I mean in your industry. What role is plastic playing in protecting the food supply in Canada during COVID?

**Mr. Barry Friesen:** It's tremendous. The same practices as before COVID are being used today. We have these materials here to use, but the challenge we're facing right now is that recycling plants are being shut down and we're not going to be able to collect a lot of these materials, so it's very difficult.

COVID isn't having a direct impact on agriculture yet in the use of plastics. Those technologies are still available. The problem is going to be if we can't collect it, if we can't manage it. We're going to have to burn or bury this material. That's probably going to be the biggest impact as well.

● (1725)

**The Chair:** We'll have to end it there. Thank you both.



Before I turn to Ms. Koutrakis, for members on the committee, we do need to decide what we're doing next week. I'm going to throw this out to you now, and we'll meet for five minutes when this panel is over.

I was thinking that for the first panel next week, maybe we need just a general session for those folks who have been falling through the cracks on our themes, such as Food Processors of Canada. We could have perhaps the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and others. That would be panel one.

Panel two could be workers, students and the unemployed. Panel three could be the manufacturing sector. Panel four could be municipalities, provinces and territories. I'm not married to these panels; it's just something for members to think about it for a quick five-minute go-around when we're done with the witnesses.

We will go to Ms. Koutrakis and then to Mr. Morantz.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to echo my colleagues in thanking our witnesses for their time today. Our government's measures are working to ensure that whether you live in the city, the suburbs, the country or in the north, you will receive support in these challenging times. Your input is incredibly valuable as we develop and adapt our supports for those living in rural and remote communities.

[*Translation*]

My question is for Mr. Matte, the mayor of Senneterre.

Since you are the mayor of a remote town, I would like to hear your opinion on the execution of various announced programs. The government gave priority to quickness and ease of access for Canadians who are looking to obtain support. For example, the Canada emergency response benefit enables people to apply online or over the telephone thanks to a toll-free automated system.

In that context, could you tell us about your citizens' experience in terms of accessing federal assistance programs?

How simple and direct is that process for Senneterre citizens?

**Mr. Jean-Maurice Matte:** I don't need to go very far to find examples and I will talk about my home specifically. My son has received the CERB.

We looked forward to a measure being announced, and once that measure was implemented, things went quickly. Regarding the CERB, I have a concrete example because the beneficiary lives in my home. That is good news.

For businesses, as soon as measures are announced, we relay them to our economic development services. Currently, none of our businesses have been able to use the federal measures, but their file is under review. So I cannot speak to the effectiveness of those measures. We have teams taking care of those files. They are not really at the municipal level because those are rather territorial economic development services. We can measure the effectiveness of measures over the next few days and weeks.

However, I can tell you that needs on the ground are huge.

The CERB is good news and it seems to be effective. The financial assistance for businesses will be measured in due course. All that is combined with financial assistance from the Government of Quebec. They should not be taken cumulatively, and we must make sure that measures will truly help the recovery of businesses, but not necessarily of those that were already struggling. We have teams that are currently analyzing all that.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Can you describe the situation on the ground in your community?

What are the problems? Are they specific?

**Mr. Jean-Maurice Matte:** There are too few cases in Abitibi-Témiscamingue. We currently have 140 cases, which is a fairly reasonable number. Cases are confined to one municipality, as three-quarters of them are in Rouyn-Noranda.

In my municipality, we now estimate the financial losses at \$243,000, both in income and in expenditures. Those are the effects of the crisis in our municipality. Moreover, 320 jobs have been lost.

We are lucky because our two significant forestry industries are still operational. However, all the businesses that provide services and support to major companies have stopped working.

So we are talking about 320 jobs and \$243,000 in revenue loss estimated to this date. Obviously, efforts are significant. All this is happening while the confinement is in place. In addition, the sanitary crisis is happening after the railway crisis. We are a major railway centre. People are less patient when crises take place one after the other.

• (1730)

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Does that also include indigenous communities?

**Mr. Jean-Maurice Matte:** I think that Algonquin communities are having a bit more trouble. There are six communities in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and one community in the Outaouais region. I believe it is more difficult for those communities. They have really closed their communities, both in terms of entries and exits.

When it comes to aboriginals living in the city, services are no longer being provided. There is no longer a soup kitchen. There is no more school or help with homework. So services have been interrupted, and all that should start back up again after the crisis.

[*English*]

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Mr. Chair, I don't have any other—

**The Chair:** You can have a very quick question, Annie.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** I don't have one. I can share my time with someone who's not on the list.

**The Chair:** Okay. That's great. Then we will go on to Mr. Morantz and then to Mr. Fraser.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** If I get a chance...I'll wait.

**The Chair:** Okay, yes. Did you have something right there, Elizabeth, on that round?

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** Yes, if I could.

**The Chair:** Go ahead. Throw one question in, and then we'll go to Marty and then Sean.

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** Thank you. I'm so pleased that we're focusing on agriculture. It's a big hole right now. I think we need to identify food security in this pandemic as an issue we're not paying sufficient attention to.

I wanted to throw this over to Mary Robinson. I think she was the one who mentioned we need to create opportunities for young people to work on-farm. I'm having trouble with Service Canada right now on the summer jobs program to identify that agricultural work could be one of the upcoming Canada summer jobs. I wonder if she has any comment.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Elizabeth.

Go ahead, Mary.

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** Elizabeth, you've delved into an area where I'm going to ask Scott Ross if he can help me. I'm not that well versed on the Canada summer jobs program. I'm wondering if Scott might be able to help me out.

**Mr. Scott Ross:** Yes, sure, Mary.

What we have heard on the Canada summer jobs program is that agricultural employers, as essential industries, can still access and apply, at this date, for the Canada summer jobs program.

One of the challenges we've heard identified, however, is that no new funding or spaces have been made available in the program, so for agricultural employers to get applicants, it would require another business or industry to be bumped off the list. Certainly we're very pleased to see that this recognition has been given, and we hope to see youth coming out to farms.

I think there is a broader set of challenges, though, around agricultural employment and bringing youth in, and it extends beyond that program. Much of it speaks to the challenges at this point in time in attracting Canadians, writ large, to farms; and that speaks to remote locations. We all understand the consistent message and recognize the importance of staying home, but it certainly creates a challenging set of decisions for Canadians when they are looking to leave their homes and go to work on a farm. More than anything, I think, when we look at the CERB and the incentives that are provided, there is a real, challenging case to be made to see someone forgo those benefits to work on farms at this time.

One of the key issues we've been highlighting is the need to look at creating an incentive that would allow Canadians to access those benefits while working on-farm out of recognition of the essential nature of our food supply and the fact that we need all hands on deck when it comes to working on-farm at this moment.

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll have to leave it there. Thank you all three.

We'll turn to Mr. Morantz and then Mr. Fraser.

• (1735)

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Robinson, I want to ask you about the carbon tax.

I recently had a call with the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities. They expressed concerns about the carbon tax. They also noted that it was increased, as was the initial plan, on April 1, in the middle of this crisis. They tell us that they estimate that the carbon tax will add roughly \$2.38 per acre on an average Saskatchewan grain farm, and there are probably similar numbers in my home province of Manitoba.

I'm a city boy, so I'm just learning about agriculture. I had never heard of grain drying before I got elected for the first time to Parliament in October. It's a new thing for me, but I understand that agriculture is a very energy-intensive business, and it's a critical business for the reasons you've outlined.

We don't want to see panic. We don't want to see our grocery store shelves empty. You've outlined a plan, but I'm wondering whether you would consider including in your plan a call for the federal government.... By the way, there are also the downstream costs of the carbon tax. It's not just the tax itself. It's the cost of transporting and trucking and the input costs on fertilizer. It permeates the entire industry in a substantive way.

I'm just wondering, given that you represent this sector, which I think you said has something like 20,000 members....

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** It's 200,000.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** Sorry, it's 200,000 members. That's a lot of members. Would your organization support calling for a pause on the carbon tax until we get out of this mess we're all in?

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** In our request, we would go beyond having a pause. With regard to the carbon tax on farms, if you have a look at the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, APAS—the president is Todd Lewis—you'll see they've done some fantastic number-crunching. They came out with numbers showing that the carbon tax will mean an \$8,000 loss per farm family.

What they're being taxed on, as you rightly point out, are activities that are not optional. If you're going to grow grain and you're going to store it and send it to market, if you don't dry the moisture out of it, it will simply rot in storage. It's not something that's optional. It's not as though you're going to increase efficiencies. There's been a lot of work done on efficiencies. It's just simply that the tax is wrong for agriculture. It needs to be removed entirely. We would support a pause or we would support just removing it completely. That would be even better.

I want to point out that you make the great point that agriculture is critical. Not only is it critical for our food security, but it's also going to be a key player in how we recover from all this. When we come out and the dust settles on COVID, agriculture and agri-food are going to be one huge opportunity for return on investment. Anything we spend right now or put in the hands of farmers is really going to pay off in spades when we're through this.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** Thank you.

Could you repeat what you just said, exactly, word for word, again?

No, I'm just joking.

**The Chair:** We heard it, Marty. It's on the record.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** Well, I want to make sure everybody on the committee heard it loud and clear.

I do want to ask you another question—

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** Can I add something? I just want to point out that, as you say, you're a city kid and I'm a country kid, and I think what a lot of people don't understand about agriculture is that it's a lot like the stock market, in that when you go to buy or sell something on the stock market, you have what the market tells you and you can't shift that. When all of those grain farmers, all of the canola farmers, the beef guys, and everybody across the board goes to market with their product, they're told what they're going to be paid. They have no way to change that. When we see all of these additional taxes and costs with COVID and the carbon tax added on, it just takes away from families.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** It goes right to the bottom line.

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** Yes.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** I have one more quick question, if I may, just to switch topics, and it's one that I really hope you can answer.

**The Chair:** It has to be a quick one, Marty.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** On the CEBA, we've had a lot of reports that credit unions aren't geared up, in many cases, to deliver it. I'm just wondering if you've been hearing from any of your 200,000 members who have been trying to get access to the \$40,000 interest-free loan with the \$10,000 forgivable piece, and whether they've been having trouble accessing it through their local credit unions.

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** I haven't heard specifically on credit unions, but Scott may have.

We have heard for sure that in Quebec in particular—and Martin spoke to this—because of their corporate structure within those farms, they're unable to tap into that money. They don't have the employment figure, that box 14. They don't have a number in there that gets them to qualify for it.

Scott, do you have anything on the CEBA and whether people can access it through their credit union?

• (1740)

**Mr. Scott Ross:** I haven't heard that specifically, but I can speak to the importance of sole proprietorships, joint partnerships and use of dividends as ways of compensating farm owners and operators. They all seem to preclude a lot of agricultural operations from being able to access the CEBA.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** Those are my questions, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you all there.

I would say, though, that on the FCC— it's come up before—I just checked the figures.

Mary, I think you indicated that only 30% of farmers deal with the FCC. There's roughly \$1.8 billion in deferred loans through FCC as of a couple of days ago.

We'll turn to Mr. Fraser. Then we'll go to one question from Mr. Ste-Marie and one from Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.):** Excellent. Thank you so much to all of our guests for being here with us.

I'll start with the CFA and Ms. Robinson. Thank you for your testimony today. I'm so sorry that you have to be so closely situated to our chair in your ordinary life. He can be a grumpy guy every once in a while.

I want to start on the issue of the [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] during the outset of your remarks.

Sorry, what was that?

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** Sorry. You cut out there. I thought it was my Internet going.

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Oh, my apologies. I'll try to speak slowly so it gets captured.

I want to start on the issue around access to labour to keep farms producing so we can ensure an adequate food supply during this unprecedented time. I'm curious about your perspectives on the measures taken to date for seasonal agricultural workers or migrant workers from abroad, and whether those measures have been helpful and how they could be improved.

Second, what measures do you think would be most effective to actually get Canadians who do not typically work in food production to do so, when they might be looking for work this summer? I believe one of my colleagues on the line—I forget who—mentioned the Canada summer jobs program. There's a part of me that thinks it could be a bit of a romantic summer, in some ways, if Canadians en masse started going back to the land to work the farms.

Practically speaking, in a commercial operation that's going to achieve the kind of volume we need to protect our food security, what could we practically do to enhance the agricultural sector's access to labour, both foreign and Canadian?

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** Thank you so much for this question, Mr. Fraser.

You will have received from the clerk our emergency preparedness document. I think on page 3 of that document we outline some measures that we suggest be taken in regard to the recruitment of agri-food workers to address this labour shortage.

In terms of the work we've seen done on the temporary foreign worker side, it's fantastic that we get access to those people. We're still going through some of the rigmarole to get Guatemala to send people to us. That causes a lot of concern, particularly in Quebec, because they see a lot of workers from Guatemala. The \$1,500 will certainly be used up as we try to finance the isolation requirements for those foreign workers.

Beyond that, we do need to see access to PPE. That's vital so that we can all keep healthy on the farm and keep doing what we need to do. We need to have the sense that those workers are essential. It would really be fantastic if we could have.... We've heard stories of xenophobia, of comments like "Go home" and "Why are you taking jobs from Canadians?" That's just so far from the truth. These people are heroes. We should be celebrating them and thanking them for coming here and for having confidence in us to keep them safe.

Specifically in regard to attracting displaced Canadian workers, you've heard of the "working while on claim" set-up. We have proposed that there be 0% clawback on working while on claim. Government is going to pay people to be on EI or have CERB. If they could have those payments as well as the wage they would earn on-farm or at an agriculture processing facility, then that, we think, would go in the category of hero pay, because ultimately we do need to incentivize people to have the confidence to go and work on farms.

We would also like to see rapid testing available. We think that this would go a long way to ensuring that people on farms are kept safe. When the first tests become available, maybe if the first 20,000 are made available to our health care system, the next 20,000 could be made available to our agri-food system. What's happening in High River, for example, with Cargill, is catastrophic. We're going to get into animals being culled. I don't want to mince words here. There's an animal welfare issue, and it's highly expensive. We just can't turn the tap on and off in animal production.

These are some of the things we're seeing. You'll find more details in our document when you have a look at it.

● (1745)

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** I expect I have time for one more quick question. The chair is nodding, so that's good.

Ms. Robinson, in the limited time that we have, I'd like to go back to what one of our earlier guests mentioned with regard to different consumer habits. For example, people aren't eating out at restaurants and are trying to stock up on groceries. I'm curious to

know whether we have the domestic production capacity to actually be providing the increased sources for these staple foods that people are purchasing at the grocery store. Is there a strategic risk at all that we won't have the ability to produce what Canadians are buying, now that we're seeing a different kind of eating or purchasing habit demonstrating itself?

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** I don't think we have a shortage of capacity to do that. I talked to Todd Lewis the other day, and he assured me that on his farm alone, he has enough flour to feed P.E.I. for at least two years.

Wayne, we'll be in cinnamon rolls for another two years anyhow.

Certainly this shift in consumer patterns has had a huge impact. There's the time lag as the producers and the food chain respond to that. I was thinking about the question asked of Cleanfarms and how plastic is helping. We know that our mushroom growers have dumped hundreds of thousands of mushrooms. Some of that is because their packing facilities aren't set up to pack for retail. Nobody right now wants to be pawing through a bulk mushroom bin to pick out their mushrooms. They're going to get around that. I don't know if you saw the piece about Mike Medeiros in the National Post, which was excellent. It talked about his 20% reduction in production because he saw this drop in the food service business.

The system is responding to it, but I think the best thing we can do in the long run is ensure that producers have the confidence to grow the food. I think we'll be able to process it pretty well here as long as we have that chain working.

**The Chair:** Thanks to all of you for that.

We will try to get in four single questions if we can. We'll go first to Mr. Ste-Marie, then Mr. Julian, Mr. Poilievre and Mr. Fragiskatos.

Go ahead, Gabriel.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Matte, can you tell us about the urgency of ensuring that rural communities have access to the Internet and to the cellular network?

It was important before COVID-19 and, given the current confinement measures, it is now a major public security issue. So I would like to hear your thoughts on it.

**Mr. Jean-Maurice Matte:** We see how important that access is today. We have been talking about it and wishing it to be implemented for such a long time that it is difficult to understand why our regions and municipalities are still not well connected to the Internet today, despite all the efforts of the two levels of government.

Allow me to give you an example. A company wants to come set up in my region. We have been working on this important economic stimulus project for a long time. It involves a \$5-million investment and will enable the creation of 40 jobs. There is no significant issue in the social sphere, as the project has been accepted by the territory's entire population. This is a company that wants to come set up in an isolated area with no Internet access or even a cellular network. However, our region is located 15 minutes from the town of Amos, a big town with 12,000 people. It makes no sense for us not to be better connected to the Internet. The current crisis shows all the importance of our communities and regions being connected to the Internet.

I am not talking about only cities along major highways such as the TransCanadian and the 117. We have to serve all the rural regions. That will enable us to promote economic development projects and to be involved in agriculture in more remote areas. That must be part of the stimulus plan.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, both.

Mr. Julian, please ask a single question so that we can get the two others in.

• (1750)

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Matte and Madam Napier. It's simply about the issue of funding from the federal government to municipalities. We're hearing of the problems that cities both large and small are facing right across the country.

How important is it that an aid package come out immediately to support municipalities, regardless of their size, across the country?

**Ms. Lynn Napier:** It is critically important that funding go to communities. When you look at what levels of government are able to provide to communities, communities are first on the ground with water and sewer services, street cleaning, everything. In our own community, we have four people at our water treatment plant. If two of them get sick, that's half our workforce. We are looking at how to keep providing the services we need to keep going, the expenditures we have. This sounds maybe a little morbid, but the reality is that our ice has been left on at our curling club in case we need to use it as a morgue because we have one space at our morgue.

We have expenses we need to take care of. As I said earlier, we've already spent in excess of about \$180,000 that we're not going to get back.

Looking at the long-term effects, we don't know how long this is going to last. We can't run our municipality in a deficit. Cities, villages, towns across the country are all facing these impacts. The funding programs that have come out for businesses and individuals have been great, but municipalities are being hit pretty hard as well.

**The Chair:** Mr. Matte, do you want to give a quick answer?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Maurice Matte:** Municipalities must feel that the federal government supports their work. This is not even a matter of setting aside additional funding, but, perhaps only of adapting already existing programs.

Earlier, I mentioned the gas tax. The gas tax must be expanded to make it possible to carry out community-based projects. We've also talked about programs for students. Perhaps we will have less need of students working in the tourist industry this summer, but we may need them to carry out municipal or agricultural work.

So the existing programs must be modified and adapted to the crisis to help cities contribute to the stimulus.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

I'll go to a single question from Mr. Poilievre and then the last question will be from Peter.

Go ahead, Pierre.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Thanks very much, Chairman.

The question is for the representative from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. Can you expound more on the cost and harm the carbon tax will cause for farm families? Furthermore, the government keeps talking about all these green jobs the carbon tax is creating. Have your members experienced increased job creation or wealth creation on the farm as a result of the carbon tax?

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Poilievre.

Carbon tax implications on farm are just simply whittling away our bottom line. We are a price-taking part of the economy. We don't have any opportunity to get paid more or pass the costs on that we face. APAS has done some wonderful number crunching. We can get that report to you to help you understand, on a grain farm, what the implications are.

As far as increased job creation is concerned, I certainly haven't had any of our members tell me that they have seen increased job creation on their farms due to the carbon tax.

• (1755)

**The Chair:** Mr. Fragiskatos, you'll wrap it up.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I'm happy to wrap it up, Mr. Chair.

The question is for Mr. Nighbor. Mr Nighbor, how many workers are registered in forestry under the supplemental unemployment benefit in Canada? Would you have even a rough estimate? On that, are you working with other sectors? I know the SUB is particularly important in the auto sector. That's the first thing.

I have a quick last question. You mentioned in your presentation the fact that there are, and I'm quoting you here, "hundreds of...shovel-ready projects, ready to go". Could you go into the spinoff effects that come from forestry and how important of a multiplier that sector is?

**Mr. Derek Nighbor:** On the SUB, I'll get back to you next week. The auto piece I hadn't thought about, so I'll check first with our members in Unifor and the steelworkers, and then I can maybe check in with Flavio or somebody in auto and get a better read. I'll be back to you next week and I'll be happy to share that with the clerk as well.

We have a lot of projects. Our focus in working with our members is on things that are going to drive environmental performance and economic growth, so we're looking at air, water, effluent and then a lot of other innovations. If we can convert some of our paper mills, as that category declines, into other products, that might be more in the bioeconomy space.

There is a lot of transformation that continues to happen. In the last significant downturn, there was a massive billion-dollar black liquor program—some of you might remember—that provided a lot of stimulus to a lot of our pulp mills. We'd like to see a broader stimulus package that's going to support our sector and allow more people to participate.

In the case of that stimulus, it was very narrow. I think if we broadened it to innovation, environmental benefit and economic opportunity, that's going to allow us to not only modernize and build for the future of our sector, but also to create those spinoff jobs through construction and to support local communities.

Based on where we operate, we're mainly in northern and rural communities, so we're already thinking about what our role and responsibility is, as a sector, to be part of Canada's recovery coming out of COVID. We hope to be a big player in the north and in rural communities.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Great. I asked the question because of the spinoff effects and they seem to be very significant indeed. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** On behalf of the committee, I thank all of the witnesses for their presentations. Send us the extra material that a few folks were asked for. Thank you for your suggestions and also your constructive criticism. We appreciate that. This is a moving target. Certainly the government has shown a lot of willingness to modify programs after they come out to ensure that we're doing the best we can for Canadians who face difficulties as a result of COVID-19. Your suggestions are very welcome.

For the committee, I suggested this earlier. We are going to have to find some way to hold a steering committee next week if we can, but I'd suggest, from the list of panels and themes that we talked about previously, that we need a general session where each party sends in their priorities for witnesses. I can think of three already

for that general session. The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities really wanted to be here today. As well, I'd suggest the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and the Food Processors of Canada, and then three or four more.

I would suggest that be the first panel next Thursday. The second one would be workers, students and the unemployed. The first panel on Friday would be municipalities, provinces and territories, and the final panel would be the manufacturing sector. People may have differences of opinion there. I don't know.

Are we in agreement on that or do you have something else to suggest?

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** I would suggest that we need to hear from the hospitality industry. It's very harshly affected. Many of these businesses—hotels across the country, convention centres, restaurants—won't be able to apply for the wage subsidy simply because governments have shut them down because of the proximity issues and the crowding.

This is a sector we haven't heard from yet. I think we need to get them on as soon as possible. I would suggest, even before a general session, we at least get representatives from the hotel industry and other aspects of the hospitality industry to talk about what's going on with them.

• (1800)

**The Chair:** I don't have a problem with that. We had some of them on last week: the tourism association, the hotel association. I am hearing a fair bit from the tourism sector, the smaller hotels.

Does anybody have a problem with, say, switching out municipalities, provinces and territories for next week and going with the hospitality industry?

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** I like that idea. I think it's a good one. I hear a lot about it as well—airlines, travel.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** We absolutely need to have the municipalities next week—of that I have absolutely no doubt. I'm not opposed to having the hospitality industry back a second time, but the municipalities are at a critical stage. Some of them are talking about bankruptcy. Having them is extremely important.

If we're having that general theme, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, both wanted to be on the indigenous panel and weren't able to attend. I think those two organizations need to be part of the general panel. Municipalities absolutely need to be a part. Labour and students, of course, we've had a lot of requests for people to come on.

If we want to meld manufacturing with hospitality or even add an additional panel, I have no objections. I wouldn't want to displace any of what you've laid out already.

**The Chair:** Okay.

If I could just come in for a second, I think the manufacturing sector is probably more long term. It won't matter if it's the next week, because it's on how we kick-start that sector as we start to come out of this. We can put them on the next week and go with....

Go ahead, Pierre.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I think we need to hear from owner-operator businesses that don't have a payroll.

[*Translation*]

Mr. G n reux said a great deal about it. There are a number of companies that are not paying wages because they are small companies that are starting up and need to keep all their money. They are not eligible for the wage subsidy or to the emergency fund because those two programs require businesses to have provided wages over the past few months. That is a major shortcoming of the programs announced by the government. We really want to hear from those business owners because they are the ones going through a crisis right now.

**Mr. Bernard G n reux:** Thank you very much for bringing that up, Mr. Poilievre. That also concerns agricultural businesses. I remind you that cooperatives are not paying wages and that they are not eligible for the \$40,000 loan. That is a very important issue.

Also, when committees invite association representatives—and I do have some experience here—it is always pleasant, but the issue is that they talk in very general terms. This week, I submitted names of Quebec's regional tourist associations. I also submitted names of owners of small hotels of 200 or 300 rooms and other even smaller hotels. Instead of inviting association representatives, it would be a good idea to invite witnesses who are personally experiencing the crisis. Associations are not experiencing the crisis, but rather their members. So it would be important for us to talk directly with members to find out how things are going in their own business.

By the way, I am a business owner myself, and I will have to invest \$250,000 in my company, not to develop it, but to save it. Yet tourist industry people are going through exactly the same thing, and it is probably even worse, as that industry will not restart or will nearly not restart this summer.

• (1805)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I guess the difficulty we have—and I'm willing to hear from others—is that we can't do everything next week. There will be hearings the week after that.

Who is it most urgent to hear from now so that suggestions can be made to the system to try to improve on the programs that are out there? I know there's a willingness to do that—

**Mr. Bernard G n reux:** Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Chair, but entrepreneurs and businessmen who do not have the ability to have the \$40,000 have to be on the committee right away, next week. That's the priority.

**The Chair:** Okay, I hear you. We're talking about owner-operators in that case.

Does anybody else want to add anything?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Mr. Chair, I was just going to agree with Mr. Morantz that hospitality is important. Although we've heard from hotels, we have not heard from restaurants. I've been in touch with many in the constituency, owner-operators who are getting access to the Canada emergency business account. That is working for them, and the Canada emergency response benefit is helping their employees.

Although I know we can always hear from them—and some gaps surely remain—we have not heard from restaurants, so I think that would be of benefit to the committee.

To your point, Wayne—the one you just made—we had an existing schedule. I don't want to see municipalities bumped. Hearing from hospitality next week and putting municipalities off to the following week is fine, but I'm a bit concerned that the more the discussion continues, the more we deviate from the existing set of meetings that we had agreed to—that the full members of the committee had agreed to.

**The Chair:** Can we go with the hospitality industry and include the restaurants in that?

Whatever we do here, we need the witness lists prioritized by each party and delivered to the clerk by Sunday night at six o'clock at the latest, so that he can start making calls on Monday. If we were to agree on the hospitality industry; municipalities, provinces and territories; and owner-operators, the entrepreneurs out there, that would cover a lot of industries. Then, maybe we could draw from the general list for those who have fallen through the cracks.

The general list will open up—

I see Peter putting his hand in the air. Go ahead, Peter.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I mean, we could have a steering committee on Monday morning to work through this, but I think the municipalities, the issues you raised about the unionized workers and students—those are sections that, as Peter mentioned, we had already agreed to. I think we need to catch up on some of these organizations that, as you say, have fallen through the cracks, and manufacturing as well. For these two new elements, we either add them in and do six panels, which I'm open to, or we put off to next week the ones that are new.

The ones that are new are good suggestions. I think the block of four that you suggested makes a lot of sense. That allows us to also be thinking ahead to next week, to the next group of witnesses and the next panel.

**The Chair:** Okay. Are we all on side on the...?

We did hear from the hotel industry, but we certainly haven't heard from the restaurant industry, which also ties in with tourism. I know that. That would be the hospitality industry. Are we going to go with that as number one? Are we okay on that one?

**An hon. member:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Then we'll have the municipalities and provinces, because we are hearing from—

• (1810)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** What day would you propose to have municipalities and provinces?

**The Chair:** It doesn't matter, Thursday or Friday.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Are we going to have time for owner-operators then?

**The Chair:** These are the four I'm thinking about: workers, students and unemployed; hospitality industry; owner-operators; and

municipalities and provinces. We'll have to leave the catch-up until the following week.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Is there a way that we could include at least one representative from the hospitality sector, beyond restaurants?

**The Chair:** I did say that.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Okay, so it wouldn't be just restaurants.

**The Chair:** We'll figure out the order, but it's the hospitality industry; municipalities and provinces; workers, students and the unemployed; and owner-operators, which is fairly broad.

Are we okay on that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Then the next week we'll have to put a session in for those who are falling through the cracks. I know that the food processors, big and small, are really starting to worry. You have the Cargill plant in Alberta. You have a hog plant in Quebec that was shut down. You have Tyson, which slaughters 10,000 hogs a day in the United States, shut down. That's affecting our ability to ship as well. The next week we'll bring in the ones that fall through the cracks.

I'll get that out to people. Keep in mind that it's the hospitality industry; owner-operators; municipalities, provinces and territories; and workers, students and the unemployed. That's the list. We need your prioritized list on each of those by Sunday night at six o'clock.

With that, thank you to all. Have a wonderful weekend. It's been good seeing you the last couple of days.

The meeting is adjourned.









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