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# Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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Chair: The Honourable John McKay





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• (1650)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)):** We'll call the meeting to order.

We do have quorum, and I think it's a mixed meeting. Am I correct about that? There are people in the room this time.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Mark D'Amore):** Yes, that's correct.

**The Chair:** I'm not going to read all the rules.

This is the 19th meeting of the public safety committee of the House of Commons, pursuant to a motion adopted on March 1 and subsequently amended, on the safety and security of passengers required to stay in federally mandated quarantine facilities.

As I say, it's in a hybrid format.

I'm going to welcome the two ministers, Minister Hajdu and Minister Blair. They will introduce their staff as they see fit.

If I may invoke the mercy rule, please make the remarks five minutes or less. We are already an hour and a half behind where we should be, and this is a scheduled three-hour meeting.

With that, may I ask either Minister Blair or Minister Hajdu to proceed, in whatever order they choose?

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** Mr. Chair, the decision was made that I would begin, so I will.

Thank you, honourable committee members, for the kind invitation to join you here today. We appreciate your efforts to review the measures that have been put in place, particularly at our borders, to keep Canadians safe.

I would like to also begin, if I may, Mr. Chair, by expressing my deep concern about the very serious allegations of assault that took place at a quarantine hotel and during a quarantine compliance check. The events that are alleged are criminal in nature. They must be thoroughly investigated. Perpetrators must be held to account. I can assure this committee that I understand that these matters are being investigated by the police of jurisdiction and that our agencies, particularly the RCMP, will provide support in that ongoing investigation as required.

While I can't comment on specific elements of any operation, I am joined today by Commissioner Lucki and President Ossowski, as well as my deputy minister, Rob Stewart, to provide any addi-

tional insight members may require. However, if I may, let me briefly talk about some of the measures that we have put in place.

As you will recall, last March we introduced the mandatory 14-day quarantine period for the country, and recently we have implemented additional measures and testing requirements for travellers arriving in Canada both by land and by air. All of these measures have been implemented in order to slow down the spread of the virus, and we have put these restrictions in place to help prevent further importation of the virus and new variants.

I'll briefly speak about the role that the CBSA plays in these measures. I'm pleased to tell you that since we introduced the requirement for travellers to show proof of a valid pre-arrival COVID-19 test, there has been an overall 59% drop in international travel by air. Of those international travellers arriving by air, Mr. Chair, over 99% have been compliant with the mandatory pre-arrival testing requirement.

I think that bears repeating: 99% have been compliant. I've been involved in the law enforcement business for a long time, and it's a very rare thing to see that level of compliance. I think it's a testament to the commitment that Canadians have made—even those who are travelling for non-essential purposes—to keep themselves and their communities safe.

To be clear, throughout all of our actions, the health and safety and security of Canadians has been our utmost priority. Our temporary border measures have been essential to keeping Canadians safe, and we continue to strongly advise against travel outside of Canada.

CBSA officers in all of these measures have been at the very forefront of Canada's COVID-19 response since the beginning of the pandemic. I believe that they have responded to the challenge, quickly adapted to new border and health measures, and have done, quite frankly, an extraordinary job in helping to keep Canadians safe. They apply over 90 acts and regulations, in addition to all of the provisions of the orders in council established by the government to respond to the pandemic. They share, clearly, our collective commitment to keeping Canadians safe.

They screen all travellers upon entry. They are vigilant, professional and responsive to the needs of Canadians. They collect contact information on behalf of the Public Health Agency of Canada. They confirm the suitability of quarantine plans for each traveller, and before any decision is made to allow a traveller to enter Canada, they review the traveller's unique circumstances, the purposes of the trip and the documents presented.

As designated screening officers, they have the authority to review, challenge and confirm travellers' statements, and when any questions arise regarding a traveller's quarantine plan, they are directed to the Public Health Agency of Canada, which makes the final determination. Once the traveller is then admitted into Canada, the responsibility to monitor and track the individual from a public health perspective falls within the mandate of the Public Health Agency, supported with information and data provided by the CB-SA. This includes all decisions with respect to the pursuit of any enforcement action.

It is important to point out, Mr. Chair, that because quarantine remains one of our most effective measures, the enforcement measures are the responsibility of the police of jurisdiction. Health and enforcement officers are in regular contact with travellers to ensure that they are in compliance with the quarantine orders. We work very closely with provincial, territorial and municipal partners to enforce these measures. The enhanced presence of border services officers and public health officers is effective, and it's helping to ensure that travellers understand their quarantine requirements.

The RCMP work very closely, as well, with the Public Health Agency of Canada. They play a coordination role for all Canadian law enforcement, and they are ensuring that the appropriate police of jurisdiction are provided with the information required to conduct physical verification of compliance with quarantine orders.

• (1655)

Mr. Chair, we will continue to work very collaboratively in upholding these measures. Our quarantine measures, in my opinion, have been the most effective response to protect Canadians from the spread of COVID. We have rigorously enforced them, and they will continue to be in place as long as they are required.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister Blair. I appreciate your being right on five minutes.

With that, we'll move to Minister Hajdu.

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

I have with me today Iain Stewart, who is the president of the Public Health Agency of Canada, and Associate Deputy Minister Harpreet Kochhar, who is the lead on this file.

From very early days, a very important part of Canada's COVID-19 containment strategy has been mandatory quarantine requirements. They're an essential part of our strategy.

Last month, the Government of Canada established additional border measures to quarantine international travellers arriving in Canada by land or air. As of February 22, travellers arriving by air are required to stay in government-authorized accommodation for up to three nights while they await the results of the COVID-19 molecular test they take on arrival.

These accommodations are different from the designated quarantine facilities, which are operated by the Public Health Agency of Canada and are generally used to accommodate symptomatic travellers or those without an appropriate location to quarantine themselves.

The requirement to stay in a government-authorized accommodation or at a designated quarantine facility is an important public health measure, and it is an important component of protecting Canadians from the importation of COVID-19 and the variants.

Our experts and scientists constantly and carefully monitor COVID-19 outbreaks across Canada and indeed the world. We understand the risks, and we're taking this situation seriously. Every public health measure that we have taken is an important approach to protect Canadians from the virus.

Protecting the health and safety of Canadians has been our top priority as we continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Government of Canada has established strict quarantine and travel measures to reduce the importation and spread of COVID-19, and recently the introduction of variants into our country.

We know the virus is changing and shifting. It's very important for our country to be able to monitor how that virus is changing and what additional threat it poses to Canadians. Canada's mandatory quarantine program is an essential part of our COVID-19 strategy.

Canadians have made important sacrifices to tackle COVID-19, including curtailing international travel. We are receiving more vaccines every day, and that is good news. We are at a critical inflection point in our fight against COVID-19, and we need to keep following public health measures and remain vigilant.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has federal employees on site and has increased the number of security personnel at designated quarantine facilities to help provide a safe and secure environment. We are in daily contact to support our partners in delivering the mandatory quarantine sites.

For that reason, Mr. Chair and honourable members, this is not the time to suspend federally mandated quarantine measures.

I want to thank Canadians for the incredible sacrifices they have been making to protect each other from COVID-19, including curtailing non-essential travel.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

Ms. Stubbs, you have six minutes, please.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

To the public safety minister, how is the misconduct of a designated screening officer handled? Is it up to their direct employer? What recourse options are there for Canadians in cases of misconduct or criminal behaviour?

• (1700)

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I'm assuming you're referring to the private security member who was contracted to follow up on these matters, and where there's an allegation this has to be thoroughly investigated. The allegation is of a criminal nature, and the person, if the evidence warrants, would face criminal charges and be held accountable in a criminal court.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Are people complying with federal quarantine measures, given the list of their rights and responsibilities and the limitations of screening officers so Canadians can identify potentially unsafe situations and protect themselves?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** To be very clear, people who are placed in quarantine are not being placed in detention. They're not being arrested, and they're not in custody. They're ordered into isolation to quarantine under the Quarantine Act, and therefore this is not a designation where an individual is arrested. As you probably are aware, under the Constitution and under a significant amount of case law, there is a constitutional requirement to provide a person who is being arrested with information about their rights to retain counsel, etc., but these are not circumstances of custody and detention. Rather, it's quarantine under the Health Act.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Have you confirmed that, every time, Canadians know their rights when they're being directed to a quarantine facility?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** No, Mrs. Stubbs. Perhaps I wasn't clear. These people are not being arrested. They're not stepping into custody. They're not being detained. They're being placed in quarantine under the authority of the Quarantine Act.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** I'm simply asking if Canadians are told their rights when they're being told to go into quarantine facilities.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** No, ma'am. When they're directed into quarantine, they're referred to the Public Health Agency, which places them into quarantine.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Okay. I'll try to find out from someone who knows.

Does your government order risk assessments and ensure the safety and security standards for federally mandated quarantine facilities in order to protect occupants?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** That question is more appropriately directed to the head of the Public Health Agency of Canada who is responsible for those quarantine facilities.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Now that we are at least two weeks past reports of alleged sexual assaults within quarantine facilities and in the course of mandating federal quarantine compliance at home, I think that every Canadian would hope that you know those answers, Minister. That's indeed exactly why you're here.

I'm assuming, then, that you don't know whether or not risk assessments are done. You don't know about the safety and security standards in those facilities. You must not know, then, who signed off on them.

I hope you're getting a handle on the fact that operators have been telling single women not to tell people their location or to leave their doors unlocked, and that there are, in some cases, no locks on the doors within those quarantine facilities at all. It is a

core responsibility of yours to provide safety and security for Canadians when they are simply attempting to follow your rules.

Are screening officers equipped with body cameras for accountability?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Thank you very much.

I just have to go back on one of your points, because what you said is fundamentally incorrect. Subject to the chair, I don't want to take up the member's time unnecessarily, but what she has said is incorrect and I'd like an opportunity to correct her.

**The Chair:** You have that opportunity.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Just to be very clear, the operation of the designated quarantine facilities is entirely under the authority of the Public Health Agency of Canada. I actually have no jurisdiction over those matters. We do provide support and assistance through the RCMP to the Public Health Agency of Canada. In the questions that she asked, she incorrectly suggested that it is a responsibility of Public Safety Canada.

She's just simply misinformed. Her question is more appropriately directed to the Public Health Agency.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Thank you for the condescension.

I do expect, though, that almost every single Canadian would hope that the Minister of Public Safety of this country would avail himself to ensure that Canadians are safe and secure within facilities or at home when trying to comply with rules that the federal government has set.

I'll assume you don't know the answer about whether or not screening officers are equipped with body cameras either. Does your government require enhanced security and background checks of the officers, over and above employer screening?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Again, Mrs. Stubbs, I have to advise you that they are not hired by any agency of the Public Safety portfolio. Your question is more appropriately directed to the Public Health Agency of Canada, who contracts with—

• (1705)

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Here's one for border crossing. One of the alleged victims said she had her passport taken away before being sent to a mandated quarantine facility. Who would have taken her passport and under what authority?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Her first contact coming into the country would have been with CBSA. They would have made inquiries with respect to, first of all, her right of entry and the suitability of her quarantine plan. I don't know the precise circumstances, but I have the benefit of having the president of the CBSA here. If you require that information and if he's able to disclose it, he's available to answer your question.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Stubbs only has 15 seconds.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Great.

Since this crosses multiple jurisdictions, have you asked the RCMP to do a national investigation? Do you have any sense of how many other people have been victimized per the Halton police comments? Have you ordered a review or revision to the training and the screening of officers after reports of sexual assaults of Canadians?

**The Chair:** That may be a very important question, but unfortunately Mrs. Stubbs is out of—

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** I think it's probably the most important question.

**The Chair:** It may be a very important question. Nevertheless, you're out of time.

With that, Madam Khera, you have six minutes, please.

**Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Allow me to first thank both ministers for being here on such short notice. Most importantly, thank you for all the incredible work not only that you do, but certainly all your staff and all the officials have been doing on behalf of all Canadians since the start of this pandemic a year ago.

We're talking about the importance of strong quarantine measures that were announced last month specifically. Even prior to that, we actually had some of the strictest quarantine measures in place since the start of this pandemic back in March.

Minister Hajdu, maybe I can start with you. Can you perhaps talk about why these very strong and specific hotel quarantine measures were implemented in the first place?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you very much, MP Khera.

Through the chair, I'll just say that when the world was alerted to the increase in variants of concern, and in particular the one that began in the U.K., it was clear that we needed to track these variants and we needed to understand not just these variants, but also how the virus was shifting and changing. Of course, when we see explosions of growth in other countries, like the U.K., the U.S. and many other countries—some reported, by the way, and some that don't keep very good track of their numbers—it's important we here in our country understand what variants might be imported that we know of, and in fact, any changes to the virus that could put the work we've done together at risk.

**Ms. Kamal Khera:** Thank you, Minister Hajdu.

Minister Blair or Minister Hajdu, perhaps you can walk us all through the procedure, the step-by-step of when someone decides to enter Canada. I think there might have been some confusion, at

least among Canadians, my constituents and certainly the opposition, regarding which agencies have what responsibilities in terms of assessing and processing travellers at the border, which other jurisdictions are involved.

This morning I was speaking with the Chief of Police in Peel, Chief Nish, and I note they have also been involved at Pearson Airport.

For the sake of clarity, I'm not sure, maybe the both of you can answer and walk us through specifically how the CBSA and the Public Health Agency of Canada officers, along with other jurisdictions, are working together at the border entry points and how their roles differ.

**The Chair:** For a point of clarification, maybe we can start with the Minister of Public Safety, and then go to the Minister of Health, because that seems to be the jurisdictional flow.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll try to be very brief in my response to give my colleague the opportunity to answer the second part of that process.

Every person arriving at Canada's border is subject to screening by the CBSA, which makes a determination as to whether the person has a lawful right of entry into the country. By the way, under the Constitution, all returning Canadians have a right of entry. It also includes permanent residents and indigenous persons. They ensure that people can lawfully enter the country. They also enforce, as I've mentioned, over 90 different pieces of legislation.

Since the implementation of the quarantine measures, we've asked more of our border officers. They make a determination of the reason for travel. There's a very clear criterion that has been established by order in council for essential travel. Essential travellers are exempt, and there are a number of other exemptions that have been put in place by order in council. The CBSA officer determines whether the arriving traveller is required to enter into quarantine. If they are, in fact, by the rules that have been put in place by order in council, that individual is then referred to the Public Health Agency of Canada. They also make a determination on the adequacy of the quarantine plan and they order them into quarantine, because they're designated quarantine officers under the Quarantine Act. They've been designated by PHAC.

We also check now, since January 6, to ensure that they have a COVID test, a negative COVID test obtained within three days of their arrival into Canada in the country of origin from which they departed. That is a requirement before they even board the plane. People who are arriving at our land borders are also subject to either referral to PHAC for testing right at the site, at now 20 different sites across Canada, or if they arrive at any one of the other 97 points of entry, they can be given a self-administered test by the CBSA officials.

We then collect that information, pass it on through PHAC to the police of jurisdiction for follow-up and enforcement.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** You have roughly one minute left.

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

Regarding the hand-off to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there are a number of different routes a passenger might take. If in fact they are symptomatic or they don't have an adequate quarantine plan, they are transferred to a federal quarantine facility where they're supported to isolate, sometimes for the entire duration of their quarantine if their plan is not strong.

What we're trying to protect against in these designated quarantine facilities is the onward transmission of COVID-19, especially for people who are living in very crowded situations, who don't have, for example, a private room in which to isolate within their household or are in a household with very vulnerable people who, in getting COVID-19, might actually die.

With the recent changes, people are asked to stay in a hotel facility, if they're not required to quarantine in a designated quarantine facility, for up to three days while they wait for their negative test. They are supported to do so by the Hotel Association. The Public Health Agency of Canada has a number of supports for travellers.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, we're going to have to leave it there, Madam Khera.

I understand Madam Michaud is having difficulties connecting.

Are we reconnected?

[*Translation*]

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

I am here, but I am using my cellphone. I hope you can hear me well.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Okay.

My thanks to all the witnesses here today and to the minister.

I am very pleased that the committee has agreed to look into this situation, which, it must be said, has been rather chaotic since the beginning.

Before Christmas, there were concerns about people travelling abroad and ignoring health regulations although they were advised to stay home. They were going abroad and could bring the UK variant back to Canada. Quarantine was pretty much unmonitored—one or two automated calls were made to check that people were actually at home. It was very easy to lie.

The government finally listened to reason and decided to impose mandatory hotel quarantine. Although it has been chaotic, I think it is a good measure that is worthwhile to implement. However, there are a number of glitches. It took several weeks from the time the

government announced the quarantine to the time they actually implemented it. Our fears were confirmed: the variant we have heard so much about entered the country.

There must have been discussions between the Department of Health and the Department of Public Safety. Perhaps the two ministers can shed some light on this.

Why did it take so long to implement the mandatory hotel quarantine?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, I can start.

Thanks to the member for, first of all, reminding Canadians that we've been asking Canadians to forgo non-essential travel now for a year. I want to thank Canadians who have complied.

It's been a difficult time for Canadians, many of whom have family overseas and all kinds of different reasons for wanting to travel, but now is not the time for international travel.

The quarantine measures that have been in place for over a year are some of the strongest in the world; in fact, we've had mandatory quarantine in place for a very long time and high compliance rates.

We added an additional layer of protection, as I said, after the variants of concern became better known. First of all, there was the one identified in the U.K. Others were identified in other countries, which has led to vast growth in COVID cases that has led to the virus mutating.

We have always used science and evidence to decide how we should proceed next in our fight with COVID-19, and certainly we heard concerns from the scientific community about, not just the variants of concern that the world had identified, but how the virus might shift and transform in the future.

We're at such a critical stage in our fight with COVID-19, and we are seeing some success with provinces reducing cases. We are seeing success with our vaccination rollout. It became very clear that we could not take any chances when it came to not being able to identify and screen for variants of concern.

I will tell you that 100% of cases that are identified as positive at the border are screened for variants of concern, and we have identified a number of them. This is an important additional layer of protection while we enter into this next phase of vaccination and protection for Canadians.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Unless the minister wants to add something, I will continue.

Telling Canadians not to travel is not enough. The numbers have shown that people have gone abroad anyway. They have brought back the virus and its variants.

You have lumped everyone together. Those who had good reason to go abroad, to care for a loved one, for example, had to comply with the mandatory hotel quarantine. Those who could afford to pay for the hotel quarantine either decided to go anyway or found a way to get around the rules.

Why not just ban non-essential travel?

[*English*]

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I will endeavour to answer that quickly.

First of all, I would remind you that, when the variants first emerged in the United Kingdom, we were among the first countries in the world to take very immediate and strong action to ban all flights from the United Kingdom. Over the ensuing days, we found that the variants had unfortunately spread into other countries, so we imposed an additional layer of security. We required that all people flying into Canada from any place, whether for essential or non-essential travel, must first obtain a negative COVID test before they came to the country.

We've also implemented requirements that they would also then submit to an additional test upon their arrival. As the variants and the concern that Canadians had about the emergence of these variants began to grow, we needed to add additional layers of protection in order to protect Canadians and to stop the spread of these variants. The measures that have been put in place were determined based on the advice that we had received from our public health officials that this was the best way to provide assurance of Canadians' health and safety for arriving non-essential travellers. That's why we've implemented those measures.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** I would like to know why it took so long at first to get access to the phone lines to book a hotel room. People waited up to 24 hours before they could book a room.

Why not have an online reservation system or let people book directly with the hotels? They could have shown proof of reservation when they got to the airport.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** One or the other of you may respond very briefly.

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

I'll turn to Iain Stewart to say a few words about the process of reservations.

**Mr. Iain Stewart (President, Public Health Agency of Canada):** Thank you.

Actually, it is possible to do online booking, although there are a lot of calls when you set up a new line, and we experienced substantial delays. The average call waiting time now is substantially reduced and is under seven minutes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Harris, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

First of all, Madame Hajdu, we've never met before, so I want to welcome you to the committee and say hello.

I have a question for you for starters. Do you regard the measures taken on the land border between the United States and Canada to be reasonable?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Harris, it's nice to meet you virtually as well.

Yes, I do, and I think one indication of that is the deep collaboration we've had with the United States over two administrations now. Both administrations have agreed that non-essential travel should be curtailed as our countries fight COVID-19 and work to reduce the cases of COVID-19 in our communities. We've worked really hard with our American partners.

I will turn to Minister Blair in a moment to speak about that work, because he's been leading the charge, largely to ensure that we can continue the flow of essential workers and goods while also—

• (1720)

**Mr. Jack Harris:** I understand that. Maybe I should interrupt. It was a simple question, and I think you've given the answer that you do indeed regard them as reasonable.

It was a kind of trick question, in a way, because the provision for quarantine regulations under the Quarantine Act says that you can't undertake certain measures unless there's no reasonable alternative.

I'm comparing the measures for the land border measures with the air travel measures, particularly with respect to the hotel quarantine. There's no reasonable alternative to the hotel quarantine, I would have to assume.

If I ask you that, then I will ask you the following question. How is it, then, that it's possible—and we've heard a number of MPs talk about this in the last number of days—for people to bypass this by landing in the U.S. and then taking a bus across the border and all of that? How is it that it's a reasonable alternative to have a land border without a hotel quarantine, but it's not in the case of air travel?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Minister Blair, I think you were jumping in.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I was.

Jack, I'll try to answer this briefly, and I don't mean to interrupt Minister Hajdu.



I would point out that there are 117 land points of entry at which Canadians can currently cross when they're returning from the United States. In addition to returning non-essential travellers, more than 90% of the people who cross at those land border points of entry are truck drivers. They're essential workers; they are bringing essential supplies to and from Canada. It's a very small cohort—in most border locations, fewer than 5%—of the travellers who are coming to that border who are non-essential in nature.

I would also point out that although some of them these border crossings are located in fairly densely populated urban areas, the vast majority of them are quite remote. They are hundreds of kilometres, and in some cases several hundreds of kilometres, from any possibility of a hotel or even PHAC staff at these things.

We've implemented the measures that we believe are appropriate, necessary and effective, given the size of the cohort of people we're dealing with. More than 90% of the people arriving at the airport are non-essential travellers, while a significantly smaller proportion of people at land borders are non-essential. The measures we've put in place, we believe, are the right measures.

I would also point out that at the airports we've limited all international travel to four international airports. They're located in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver—clearly, large urban centres where hotels and PHAC staff are available to manage the measures that have been put in place there.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Basically, Minister, you're saying that the alternative measures that are available at the border are not available at these major airports for incoming traffic. I find it a contradiction, I'm afraid.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** It's quite the opposite. The measures that are available at the major airports are not available in Snowflake, Manitoba. They're not available in Beaver Creek in the Yukon. We've, therefore, had to implement measures that are appropriate to that environment and those circumstances.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** I have another follow-up question, and I wasn't here for your presentation, Minister Blair, because I was told by our whip's office that the committee had been rescheduled to five o'clock as a result of the votes. It's unfortunate if I'm repeating something that has already been answered.

We've been told that the designation of people to a particular hotel and all of those rules are actually determined under the Quarantine Act. Reading from the note here, it says with travellers quarantining in a hotel, the facility is required to safely transport travellers from the airport to the hotel and provide travellers with lodging as set by the Public Health Agency, and also to provide the travellers with necessities and a safe and accessible environment.

I'm wondering, does this mean that you've downloaded the responsibility for safe transport from the airport to the hotels to the hotel owners, and also the safety within the hotels to the hotel owners as well? Is that the case, or is it still the responsibility of CBSA, as quarantine officers, to make sure that travellers safely get to the hotels and that while they're in quarantine, under government obligation, they are protected by the officials of the Canadian government, the quarantine officers or whoever else is appointed for their safety?

• (1725)

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, that question is going to have to go unanswered because Mr. Harris has gone through his six minutes.

Colleagues, we have 25 minutes—

**Mr. Jack Harris:** It's a very important question though, sir, so maybe somebody could answer at some point.

**The Chair:** Yes, I'm sure someone will work it back.

Colleagues, we have 20 minutes left in the time allotted, but we have 25-minutes worth of questions. Unless I see real objection, I propose to do a full second round and go past the time.

With that, I could call on Madam Rempel Garner.

Welcome to the committee. You have five minutes, please.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Minister Hajdu, is the government in possession of data that show that the quarantine hotel program is more effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19 variants than at-home quarantine, coupled with pre- and post-arrival testing?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The quarantine and mandatory quarantine has been an important part of protecting Canadians—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** That's not what I asked.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —from the importation of COVID-19.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Chair, that's not what I asked. I only have five minutes. Is the government in possession of data that show that the quarantine hotel program is more effective at preventing the spread of COVID-19 variants than at-home quarantine, coupled with pre- and post-arrival testing, yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The government has proceeded in this way to make sure that people have a safe place to stay while they receive the results of their tests at the airport. This test is very important, as I've mentioned before. It will, first of all, show if someone is positive for COVID-19—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Chair, through you—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Secondly, it allows—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Chair—

**The Chair:** Madam Rempel Garner, generally speaking I allow the same amount of time to answer the question as to asking the question. You had about 20 seconds to ask the question. Minister Hajdu was right on the 20-second mark, and I anticipate that she'll be able to complete her answer without further interruption.

With that, I'm going to have to restart this clock somehow or other. You have about 10 seconds to answer the question, and I don't know where I am with Ms. Rempel Garner's time.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Mark D'Amore):** Five more minutes.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you.

The new approach allows the government to test all samples for variants of concern. As I mentioned, this is a very critical time in our fight against COVID and those variants of concern, both known and unknown, are important to understand.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Through you, Chair, various charter challenges have asked for data from the federal government showing that the hotel quarantine program is more effective at preventing the spread of COVID-19 variants than at-home quarantine, coupled with pre- and post-arrival testing. Does the minister have those data?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, we have had participation with a number of provinces and territories and other partners to understand various approaches at the border in terms of quarantine and the combination of quarantine and testing. We're continuing that research with partners to understand—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Mr. Chair, am I safe to take that as a no?

**The Chair:** I'm not answering the questions. I'm like the Speaker that way; I don't answer questions.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Through you, Mr. Chair, am I safe to take that as a "no, the data doesn't exist"?

**The Chair:** I can't answer that question, and I don't think I should be answering that question.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister, am I safe to take it that that data doesn't exist?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** No, I don't think that's what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** So, it does exist.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I'm saying is that research is under way internationally on how best to manage international travel—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Does that data exist in Canada?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** As I said, Mr. Chair, it is very important that we understand the addition of variants of concern—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** So, it doesn't exist in Canada.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, as I said, this question of what the most effective combination is between quarantine and testing—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** So, it does exist in Canada.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —is very important to the Government of Canada and, indeed, international governments around the world as we try—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** So, it doesn't exist in Canada.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.):** I have a point of order Mr. Chair.

I'm finding this to be becoming a bit bullying. I think that if the minister's asked a question, she should be given time to answer it.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

On that point of order—

• (1730)

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** I would appreciate that, while she's answering, she can finish her sentence.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

With regard to this particular point of order, I would argue that the woman who experienced sexual assault at the quarantine hotel due to this lack of data would, in fact, be the woman who would have experienced bullying in this situation.

My question is material, and I would like a yes-or-no answer. Out of respect to that victim, a yes-or-no answer is needed.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** The minister will answer the question in the fashion she chooses to answer the question. Whether or not the member is satisfied with the answer is an entirely different matter. She will have the same amount of time to answer the question as was used to ask the question.

With that, Minister, you have about 10 seconds.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thanks.

I will just say this: The data is incomplete internationally. We are, as a world, trying to figure out what the best approach is to prevent the importation of COVID-19, the combination of quarantine and testing. It is under study.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Is that an admission that this was a political decision to discourage March break travel, as opposed to a data-driven decision that shows that the quarantine hotel program would do better at spreading the variants than at-home quarantines?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** No. I think it's inappropriate for the member to put words in my mouth. What I said is exactly what I just said, which is that we take our obligation very seriously to ensure that we are doing everything in our power to prevent the importation of COVID-19, particularly the variants of concern.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Where's the data?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** As I answered previously, the data is incomplete in terms of what combination of measures is needed.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll finish with this: Was a gender-based analysis completed for the hotel quarantine program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, everything we do at the Government of Canada is done with the utmost care for Canadians.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Was a gender-based analysis done for the hotel quarantine program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, the Government of Canada takes its obligations very seriously to protect all Canadians.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** So, a gender-based analysis was not completed for the hotel quarantine program.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, the member, again, is trying to assume that what I am saying confirms her assumption. That is not correct.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Well, was a gender-based analysis completed for this program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, every step of the way, this government has had the protection of Canadians—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Would you say that it's misogynistic to not complete a gender-based analysis for this program that saw sexual assault occur?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, the member opposite should know that this government puts the safety of women and girls at the centre of everything that it does.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Like no locks on the doors and a rape.

Was there a gender-based analysis completed for this program?

**The Chair:** Answer very briefly, Minister, because Ms. Rempel Garner's time is up.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, if the member opposite is implying that—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Where is it?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —anyone is not horrified by the sexual assault of women, then that is simply incorrect.

**The Chair:** With that, we are moving on.

Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Ms. Lambropoulos.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank both ministers, Minister Hajdu and Minister Blair, for being with us today and also for all of the work that they and their teams have been doing since the start of this pandemic.

Minister Blair, two of the things that you mentioned that caught my attention were that you basically said that international travel by air has been down by 59% since these measures have been put into place and that there's an over 99% compliance rate.

Can you give us some more insight as to why you think these new measures have been effective and why you think this was the best way forward?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** With respect to the measures we've put in place, over a year ago we issued travel advisories and urged travellers to avoid non-essential travel. We recognized the risk that represented to Canadians as those travellers returned. Over a year ago, we be-

gan putting very rigorous measures in place. Canadians overwhelmingly listened, but we know that there are some people, for a number of different reasons, who may choose to travel. We also know that under the Constitution, Canadians and permanent residents and indigenous people have a right of re-entry into Canada. The measures we put in place were put in place to respect that right.

At the same time, we have made it very clear that the quarantine measures that we have required non-essential travellers to enter into.... I will tell you that the evidence is overwhelming that those have been the most successful measures. The quarantine coupled with the tracing and testing that have been put in place have been the most effective measures to protect Canadians from the spread of COVID. We continue to add layers of protection. Canadians have listened.

I will share with this committee the fact that when we put in a requirement for people to have a pre-boarding test, and now at land borders before they arrive at the border a negative test obtained within three days, we heard from many people who said that this was too onerous and difficult to do. I think we've all seen some of the media reports of people who have quite proudly defied those requirements. But the reality is that the overwhelming majority of Canadians have respected those requirements and have complied with them, at more than 99%. For those who choose not to, there are appropriate ways to resolve that. Fines are possible, but our goal always has been compliance, not enforcement. I'm very proud to say that the overwhelming majority of Canadians have respected those rules and the reason for those rules, and are in fact complying.

● (1735)

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you. I have to agree with you. The many constituents I spoke to about this issue agreed that this was the way forward. They were happy to see stricter measures taken. Many of them had actually suggested to me months ago that we begin quarantining people in hotels in order to make sure the rates stayed down. So I was very very happy to see that and was advocating for it.

I also saw a few people cancel trips because of this. I know it was effective in making sure that people did not travel during this time if they didn't absolutely need to.

I'd like to ask another question. I know that in a very short period of time, many CBSA officers were hired. I don't know which of you can answer this question, but can anybody on this call answer the question as to whether the right steps were taken in order to make sure that background checks and everything were done, the right people were hired, and this wasn't rushed just because we needed more and more support at the borders?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I can certainly answer that. I'm responsible for CBSA, and I have joining me today the president of CBSA.

CBSA officers who have been answering the call throughout this entire epidemic have done an extraordinary job, in my opinion. We did close down a number of remote and smaller points of entry so that we could concentrate our resources. The change we made on international travel, for example, to concentrate it into four international airports—Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver—was an acknowledgement of the extraordinary amount of work.

I will also tell you that these measures have had an impact on their workload. It has affected the time it takes to process travellers and goods arriving at our border because of the additional measures we have put in place. We've had a number of orders in council that have placed additional requirements on our border service officers. They are all trained and designated, for example, as screening officers under the Quarantine Act. They perform the very important role of protecting Canadians from people coming back into the country to ensure that they're not ill and that they have an appropriate plan. They have the important role of referring individuals who are going into quarantine to the Public Health Agency.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** A point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Kurek, on a point of order.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I would just note that Madam Khera asked a very similar question to a question that Ms. Stubbs asked in her opening round, yet the minister repeatedly said that was PHAC's jurisdiction and refused to answer that question. When a very similar question, although asked in a little bit of a different manner, was asked by a member of the government's party, the minister certainly had lots to say.

I think it's concerning and it sets a troubling precedent about ministers and how they are meant to be held accountable at these committees.

**The Chair:** I agree with you that this is a point of observation, but I'm not sure that it is a point of order.

Thank you.

Madam Michaud.

[Translation]

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

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When the quarantine hotels were identified, were they given clear guidelines as to what price to charge for the rooms or what basic services to offer? We remember the Prime Minister tossing around the infamous \$2,000 figure when it may not have been \$2,000 after all.

I heard the story of a single mother who arrived at the hotel with her children. She had booked her room for \$300 a night, but when she arrived, she was told the price was \$700.

Could hotels set prices arbitrarily? Could they decide how security measures were implemented? What guidelines were given to the hotels?

● (1740)

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** We worked really closely with the Canadian hotel association. In fact, we posted requirements that hotels needed to meet in order to be considered as a facility that we would contract with.

I'll turn to Iain Stewart to speak to some of the specifics on the requirements that hotels needed to meet in order to be considered for the program.

**Mr. Iain Stewart:** Thank you for the question.

We put a slate of criteria on our website that hotels had to meet if they were to be deemed eligible to receive travellers. They have obligations that they have to meet including, as was mentioned earlier, the safe transport of travellers from the airport to the hotel, security on site to ensure the safety of people and also providing the necessities of life, a safe, food and also housing adequate to their needs.

There is a number to call if they have any issues or concerns. We also do spot checks and site inspections regularly to make sure that they are complying with the requirements.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** You have about 30 seconds.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Was the removal of the locks on the room doors a directive from the Public Health Agency or was it arbitrarily decided by the hotels? For example, the woman who was sexually assaulted at the Sheraton Hotel in Montreal could not use the lock on her door.

[English]

**Mr. Iain Stewart:** There are locks on all the doors of the DQFs—the designated quarantine facilities—that PHAC runs. The private sector hotels that we're referring to here had no direction from us at any time to remove locks or security devices of any nature.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Michaud.

Mr. Harris, you have two and a half minutes, please.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Thank you.

I would like to avoid the risk of not getting this question answered. Rotational workers in the offshore industry in Newfoundland work internationally. Many of them are working directly in a quarantine situation in an offshore location, with quarantine before they go to the offshore rig, quarantine on the rig and then quarantine when they come back to Canada.

Why are they not able to be exempted from some of these obligations, so they can come back to Newfoundland and Labrador and be with their families instead of having to go through a hotel?

We have workers coming from Houston, Texas and other parts of Texas to work in our offshore and they are provided with an exemption. Why can't the rotational workers who are also working in the same industry—it's essential work being done—and are already subject to very serious quarantine locations all the way through their work rotation be exempt?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Thank you—

**Mr. Jack Harris:** This is for Minister Hajdu.

The exemptions and exceptions are determined by them. You guys just apply the rules, as I understand.

If I'm wrong, please correct me.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** It's been a collaborative approach, actually. The essential workers list has been developed across government.

It's hard to speak in generic terms. Many workers in a variety of fields are considered essential and therefore are exempt from quarantining in hotel upon arrival at airports. It's hard to speak to the specifics of those particular workers without understanding their nature.

Maybe I can turn to Minister Blair, in case he wants to add anything.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Public Safety did develop the list in defining essential work. That is a determination made by the border services officers at the customs hall on whether the person qualifies for exemption.

Jack, I'm going to agree with you that we put a number of very significant exemption measures in place, but also protection measures for temporary foreign workers. If you want to follow up with me on the specific aspects of those workers, I'll pursue it on your behalf.

**The Chair:** You have roughly 20 seconds.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Thank you, Chair. I can give 20 seconds to someone.

Maybe Mr. Stewart could reflect on this. If the responsibility for security is downloaded to hotels, and you say you didn't mandate that they take the locks off, who made sure they had locks on?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** That 20 seconds has just become two seconds.

I'm going to move on because I'm—

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Mr. Chair, I think that an answer would be in order here.

**The Chair:** I'm sure—

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Agreed, absolutely. There should be an answer.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** There were a lot of answers from Ms. Rempel that went over time.

● (1745)

**The Chair:** No, Ms. Rempel did not go over time.

If I am going to run a clock and try to stay within some semblance of the time allocated, I have to be somewhat arbitrary. I've now had to be arbitrary twice, Mr. Harris.

With that, Mr. Motz is up. You have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Minister Hajdu, you claim that there is a need for hotel quarantines rather than to quarantine at home. You then claim that the data to support that decision is incomplete. Can you table the evidence you do have, although incomplete, to support the determination that hotel quarantining was required rather than quarantining at home?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** No. What I'm saying is that the data is incomplete to determine the best approach at the border to manage COVID-19. We do know that mandatory quarantine has been an essential component of controlling COVID-19 domestically, and we do know that mandatory quarantine has reduced significantly the infiltration of COVID-19. But with the variants of concern, of course, we want to be able to screen those positive cases to understand how the virus is changing and shifting—and it is early days.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** I'm still confused, then. You said the data is incomplete and yet you don't want to present it. And yet, I'm led to understand that there was a federal judicial review done just recently on a suit that came out of Alberta. The Department of Justice lawyers on the government's behalf sent some information back that said that they're not able to release the data used to make these determinations because of cabinet confidences, which means that you do have some data, you're just not telling us. Don't you think that a government that trumpets itself as being transparent would want Canadians to know? Don't you think Canadians want to know the data used to make these important decisions?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, again, Canadians expect us to take strong measures at the border to prevent the importation of COVID-19. Of course, it's important that any Canadian who arrives at the border who is positive or who does not have a quarantine plan that protects the other people in their household has an appropriate place to stay. That's why we have the designated quarantine facilities. The quarantine hotels that we've contracted with the Canadian hotel association are there to help support Canadians to isolate while they await their mandatory tests upon arrival at the border. It is very important that we have the positive tests to run sequencing on so that we can understand how the virus is shifting and changing. We watch for variants of concern that we know and for any changes that we don't know.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Mr. Chair, the minister doesn't have the data or doesn't want to share the data, or isn't telling us the data that they do have.

In the time I have left, I just want to share my own thoughts as well as Canadians' to both of you as ministers.

Canadians believe and I believe that you have failed in your duty to protect Canadians and instead put them at greater risk. You have refused to disclose information explaining the public health benefits, leaving us to conclude that there is no data and no information to support your position on this. You misled Canadians and travellers making them believe they would be in a hotel, but instead they were in an unlocked room with limited water, no food, and under watch of cameras with no security personnel to help them. This was a massive, expensive and dangerous failure. We have victims, only two whom we know of, and if there are two, we know there are a lot more who will now carry this for the rest of their life.

Will you remove the risk to future Canadians and end this mandatory hotel quarantine?

**The Chair:** You have roughly a minute.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Mr. Chair, if I may, let me begin.

I thank the member for his observations, but let me be very clear. The measures that we have put in place have been entirely intended to protect Canadians, and they have been effective in protecting Canadians from the introduction of the virus and its variants—

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** That's because you have never been assaulted.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** —into this country.

The allegations of sexual assault are taken very seriously. I would just remind the member that these issues are being thoroughly investigated by the police of jurisdiction. I think it's probably appropriate to await the outcome of those investigations so that we can talk about the facts.

Both of these terrible events are alleged to have occurred in jurisdictions not under federal authority, so they are being investigated. I might also remind the member that these measures—hotel quarantine just as an example—have been introduced in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and many other countries around the world. Again, those countries, like Canada, are doing their very best to protect people.

Frankly, this is not a matter of politics. It's a matter of the safety and the health of Canadians. That's our priority, and that's what we're doing.

• (1750)

**The Chair:** We're going to have to leave it there, Mr. Motz.

The final question goes to Mr. Iacono for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ministers, thank you for being here today.

Madam Minister, I was recently asked by one of my constituents from Alfred-Pellan whether a child over the age of 18 returning from a trip with their parents could be considered a dependent child, thus being an exception to this hotel isolation rule.

Is this the case?

[*English*]

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

To my colleague, thank you very much.

If the child is travelling with his parents, then, yes, he would be subject to mandatory quarantine as well.

I will turn to Iain Stewart to speak a little bit more about minors who are travelling.

**Mr. Iain Stewart:** Minister, you're completely correct. The minors would be kept with their family, with their parents, and travel with them in that regard.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

Just generally, in response to people who are asking for an exemption from hotel isolation, which is becoming more and more complicated and difficult to manage, could you reiterate the only exceptions that are in place now?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you, and it's a great reminder to tell all Canadians that now is not the time to travel. We've been saying to Canadians for a long time to forgo non-essential travel.

What is essential travel? That is travel that is only required for work. There are very few exemptions to our request, and anybody who pursues non-essential travel will be subject to the mandatory quarantine rules when they arrive back in Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

Minister Blair, we are here today to talk about hotel quarantine for those arriving in the country from abroad. Yet no similar requirement exists for those crossing the border at a land port of entry.

Is there a logistical reason for this?

What measures are being taken to ensure that those crossing the border at a land port of entry will not introduce COVID-19 into the country and pass it on to others?

[English]

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Let me assure you that it's entirely logical if we consider the environment at land borders. We have all international travel concentrated into four large, urban international airports where there are lots of facility resources and staff to manage the measures that the Public Health Agency of Canada has put in place, but we recognize we have 117 land border points of entry. The vast majority of people crossing those borders are essential workers or people moving essential goods.

Under the circumstances of our land borders in some jurisdictions, such as Lacolle just south of Montreal, the Public Health Agency of Canada is present. Everyone entering at Lacolle, for example—and there are 20 other locations in Canada similar to Lacolle—is required to produce a negative test taken within three days of their arrival. They are also subject to enhanced screening. They are ordered into a 14-day quarantine, and they are tested at point of entry to determine whether or not they are negative even as they come into the country.

Those are very rigorous, important and effective measures. We've seen a very high degree of compliance. In fact, compliance with land border measures we've put in place is at 99.5%, so it's very effective. It would be impractical and perhaps even impossible to require people to transit to a hotel from the vast majority of our points of entry where the nearest hotel might be hundreds and hundreds of kilometres away, so we have other measures we've implemented in those places in recognition of the unique environment.

I would simply remind this committee that those measures are working, and we are doing the work necessary to keep Canadians safe.

[Translation]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you, Minister.

I have another question for you.

Quarantine measures in the hotels are often under attack, being compared to measures in prison, even in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Could you set the record straight again on these allegations?

• (1755)

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds, please.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I can take this one, Mr. Chair.

Obviously these are hotels where professional hoteliers are providing the utmost service to regular travellers who travel for other

purposes. The isolation is through the Quarantine Act, which exists to protect Canadians from the domestic spread of disease.

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

Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank the ministers and their colleagues for attending. We are now about to suspend while we prepare for the next two hours of witnesses.

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

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1755)

(Pause)

• (1755)

**The Chair:** Welcome to the witnesses. For some of you, this will be the first time before a parliamentary committee and others, I see, are real veterans before the committee.

Colleagues, this time is scheduled to be two hours but we went about 15 minutes over last time. I need some indication as to whether you wish to go two hours or whether you wish to go an hour and 45 minutes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, an hour and 45 minutes I think should be fine if it's okay with everyone else?

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Motz.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** The motion was for three hours—the ministers for an hour. We started at 4:49 and we ended at about 5:49 so let's do a full two hours with the officials, please, in honour of the motion.

**The Chair:** We started earlier than that.

I am in the hands of the committee. We can go two hours; I'm fine with that. I want to make sure the witnesses are as well.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** How long were the ministers here, because you did extend it?

**The Chair:** Yes, I did extend it. We were supposed to end at 5:45 and we ended at not quite 6. I was clocking it as an hour from 4:45.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** So whatever the full three hours is, if it means shortening this by five, 10 or 15 minutes, whatever it might be, maybe the clerk could double-check the timing.

**The Chair:** Sure. We'll never get through this if we don't get started. Once we're past two rounds of questions, I'll have a time for the members.

With that, and in no particular order, we've asked witnesses to speak for five minutes and then we'll go to questions. We have Dr. Isaac Bogoch, Canada Border Services Agency, Public Health Agency of Canada and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Dr. Bogoch, if you have remarks, for five minutes, you're more than welcome to make them.

• (1800)

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch (Physician and Scientist, Toronto General Hospital and University of Toronto, As an Individual):** I would love to. Thank you so much. Good evening, everybody. My name is Isaac Bogoch. I'm an infectious diseases physician and I'm a scientist based out of the Toronto General Hospital and the University of Toronto. Thank you very much for inviting me to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Obviously the main issue here is to discuss the quarantine hotels, but clearly this is a symptom of a much larger issue, and that's how to protect Canadians from the external introduction of COVID-19 with sound border and travel measures.

Now, this is a rapidly changing environment. We need border policy that will adapt to growing immunity that we get from vaccine scale-up in Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere.

The key here is that the policy today will hopefully look very different from the policy we'll have in the months ahead as we gain population-level immunity and as we have a better understanding of what the true protective effect is of these vaccines for, as an example, the emerging variants of concern that we've heard so much about.

The immediate issue, however, is obviously to discuss these quarantine hotels. It's clear that they are not without harm. We've heard about the disturbing reports of sexual assault. We've heard about logistical issues, costs and loopholes.

It's important to remember that the key goal here is to prevent the importation of COVID-19 and variants of concern that are more transmissible or have the potential to escape immunity. Essentially, it's to buy us time in Canada to vaccinate ourselves.

It's interesting that the Public Health Agency of Canada has instructed all Canadians to avoid all unnecessary international travel since March of 2020. It's been a year.

These most recent prohibitive measures really accomplished two related tasks. They basically dissuaded travel by adding cost and inconvenience, but they also created mechanisms to decrease the likelihood that imported cases of COVID-19 and the variants of concern would spread within Canada.

How helpful is this? How helpful are the quarantine hotels? Emerging data will answer this and address whether we truly are getting incremental benefit from them, and if so, how much.

Of course, this isn't a long-term strategy, so what are the better alternatives? There are ample ways to prevent infection from getting into Canada or a country in general and to ensure that people adhere to quarantine measures. In isolation, none of these is perfect, but bundled together they provide incremental safety.

The big categories are these.

Number one is travel bans. You either prevent people from leaving your country or from coming into your country. That is not an ideal long-term solution.

Number two is testing. We've seen here pre-travel testing and testing on arrival. Those are very effective and helpful.

Number three is home quarantine. You can add to this periodic check-ins by phone or in person, and of course, you can add technology to really ensure that people are staying at home and to track movement.

I'm not saying we should do this; I'm saying this is on the buffet table of options that are available to us.

Then, number four is hotel quarantine. We already know what the problems are with this. It's expensive, it's a tough environment to control, it's logistically challenging—but it's still an option.

There are a few other semi-related items that we should be considering. The measures have to be commensurate with the current and future threats.

The problem is that we don't fully appreciate the full impacts that the variants of concern have. To what extent do they evade immunity? How protective are our current vaccines approved in Canada against them?

We have emerging data suggesting that some of the vaccines, such as the Pfizer vaccine, may provide decent protection against all the major variants of concern. There still are many unanswered questions, however, and we will have more clarity in the weeks and months ahead.

We also should consider that fully vaccinated people pose far less of a threat. The vaccines aren't perfect, but they are really good. It's worthwhile to start the conversations about considering allowing fully vaccinated people to travel without warranty—perhaps if they have negative testing.

There is already behavioural guidance now for vaccinated people in the United States. For example, the CDC says that those who are fully vaccinated don't need to quarantine, if they are exposed to someone with COVID-19 and are asymptomatic. Other countries, such as Cyprus, recently announced that they are allowing fully vaccinated tourists in the near future.



With requiring proof of vaccination at the border there are obviously ethical challenges, but this is likely going to happen in many countries around the world, and even these obvious ethical and equity issues can be imperfectly ameliorated by providing vaccination free of charge at the border. We can also do such things as shorten quarantine periods to seven to 10 days and test at the tail end.

Lastly, I think it's important to recognize that close to 75% of travel across the land border is currently exempt from quarantine regulations, so it's a good idea to prioritize those essential travellers for vaccination.

In sum, it's important to adhere to the precautionary principle in the context of an unknown and potentially devastating threat from the variants of concern: either that they are more transmissible or that they escape immunity, or sometimes that they might even be more deadly.

We'll have a rapidly growing understanding of what threat these variants pose in the coming weeks and of how our vaccine program will fare. Let's look at the available data, which is growing; let's look at the available data from the quarantine hotels. Then we can make value judgements and see whether it's worth continuing this plan in the short term while we simultaneously look for an exit strategy that can heavily rely on testing and perhaps home quarantine, with additional tools and support for better follow-up.

• (1805)

We also have to plan for all of this to change with time as the Canadian and global population level immunity grows.

Thank you for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Bogoch.

Now we will go to the Canada Border Services Agency.

**Mr. Denis Vinette (Vice-President, Travellers Branch, Canada Border Services Agency):** Thank you.

It's a pleasure for us to be here. We had been advised that based on the minister's statement at the opening, we wouldn't need to give an opening monologue, if you will, in terms of our participation today. But Mr. Christiansen and I are very pleased to be here to address any more questions that come our way as they pertain to the border.

I might add that it's been nearly a year. A year ago we established our CBSA border COVID task force, led by Mr. Christiansen, to begin to implement a series of measures that brings us to this day. It's been a series of sequences and steps that have brought a series of new controls at the border, each informed by direction from our colleagues at Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada. Therefore, we've worked diligently to ensure that our officers had the right direction, the right information and the right support to be able to make those day-to-day decisions that are required of them.

I'll leave it at that. We'll be very pleased to support the committee in its work today.

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

Now we will go to the Public Health Agency of Canada and to Dr. Kochhar.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar (Associate Deputy Minister, Public Health Agency of Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start.

Also, thank you to the honourable members.

I'd like to start by echoing the earlier sentiments that were expressed, that the travellers who are in quarantine should feel safe and secure at all times.

[*Translation*]

Today, I am here to speak to you about the border measures that are in place to protect Canadians from COVID-19, and its variants.

Although the Government of Canada recommends against Canadians travelling at this time, anyone who does travel should be aware of the requirements currently in place.

[*English*]

With limited exceptions, persons entering Canada must quarantine for 14 days, starting the day they arrive.

Travellers coming to Canada must submit their travel and contact information and a suitable quarantine plan via the ArriveCAN app before they board their flight or before they cross the Canadian border.

Before boarding a flight to Canada, a traveller must also provide proof of a negative COVID-19 molecular test taken up to 72 hours prior to their flight departing. Alternatively, the traveller can provide proof of a positive test taken 14 to 90 days prior to arrival in Canada.

For travellers who are arriving by land and who are providing proof of a negative test result, the molecular test has to have been taken in the United States.

Travellers arriving in Canada by land or air, with limited exceptions, must also take a COVID-19 molecular test on arrival. In addition, they will be required to take another test towards the end of their 14-day quarantine period.

Also, again with limited exceptions, travellers who arrive by air must pre-book and stay up to three nights in Government of Canada-authorized accommodations while they wait for the results on their arrival test.

[*Translation*]

The cost of the hotel accommodations is at the travellers' expense and includes associated costs for food, security, transportation, and infection prevention and control measures.

[English]

If the traveller receives a negative test result, they can continue to their place of quarantine to finish their quarantine period. If the traveller's result is positive, they will be transferred to a designated quarantine facility, or another suitable location, to complete their 14 days.

Government of Canada employees and also security personnel are stationed at the designated quarantine facilities to ensure that all entry and exit points are secure, controlled and monitored.

Travellers required to stay in one of these facilities are provided with information that outlines the details of the quarantine requirement, which includes a code of conduct and potential fines for non-compliant behaviour.

• (1810)

[Translation]

The Public Health Agency of Canada has recently enhanced its security presence at these quarantine facilities and will continue to make adjustments as needed to ensure the safety of anyone staying in these facilities.

[English]

We are increasing the training of staff who are working at the facilities, and have developed enhanced policies and procedures.

The Public Health Agency of Canada works with the RCMP and provincial and municipal law enforcement to verify compliance with quarantine, isolation and other obligations.

Also, officials provide travellers with information outlining what is required of them during the isolation or quarantine period. Officials then contact travellers throughout this period to remind them of the requirements.

We have also initiated compliance verification visits by third party security companies, which are now under way. If a traveller cannot be reached, or if it seems they are not complying, they are referred to local law enforcement. And there are penalties, Mr. Chair, ranging from up to six months in prison or up to \$750,000.

[Translation]

As we continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, we will continue to evaluate the border measures we have in place to ensure they are effective and minimizing the introduction of new COVID-19 cases.

[English]

I would like to end by emphasizing that now is not the time to travel. The Government of Canada continues to advise against non-essential travel to and from Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Now, finally, on behalf of the RCMP, we have Chief Superintendent Rupa.

**Mr. Sorab Rupa (Chief Superintendent, National Criminal Operations, Contract and Indigenous Policing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

I would just like to make two points.

The RCMP remains in a high state of readiness to respond in the context of the ongoing pandemic. RCMP personnel are continuing their work to uphold public safety and ensure Canadians continue to receive dedicated and professional policing services based on national, provincial, municipal and indigenous priorities.

The RCMP is working in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency and other law enforcement partners to ensure compliance with Quarantine Act requirements for border and self-isolation measures.

The RCMP is also working closely to support the safety and security of the vaccine rollout.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

With that, we'll commence the six-minute round.

Madam Stubbs.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Thanks, Chair.

This is for Ms. Evans at the Public Health Agency.

Last month you were asked for the data and evidence that was used to develop the hotel quarantine rules. Do you have that now?

**Ms. Cindy Evans (Vice-President, Emergency Management, Public Health Agency of Canada):** I believe that undertakings from the previous meeting have been handled by my department. We would be pleased to follow up.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** You'll provide that as soon as you can to our committee, as well.

Has the health minister or the public safety minister ever asked for that data and evidence?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, the information that is being produced as a result of continuous assessment continues to be put together. There are very limited information pieces available right now. As the travellers come in, we are gathering that information as we go.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** For Canadians, what we're trying to get to the bottom of is whether would it be safe to say that there is no complete data or evidence that was in place that led to the policy decision for the quarantine facility rules.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, as we actually started to look at the two things—the variants of concern and any chance of importation of COVID-19 from the countries showing high transmissibility and a higher rate of infectivity—this was the right step to take in terms of making sure we do not introduce any of those variants that could be either highly transmissible or could have a potential of causing a higher death rate.

Based on those things, we are very much in that zone where we have to take some protective measures to protect the health and safety of Canadians. One of the aspects that triggered this was the ability for us to curtail any of the importation of COVID-19 variants.

• (1815)

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** I am hopeful that whatever data and evidence was gathered in order to make the decision to establish the hotel quarantine rule will be provided to our committee.

Prior to recent reports, did anyone in PHAC know that women were told to not lock their doors and to not tell anyone where they were in the facilities? Was PHAC aware before the public reports?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** PHAC has actually worked with the Hotel Association of Canada, which provides the—

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** I'm not talking about the most recent three-day quarantine. I'm talking about the alleged assaults that occurred in the federally mandated facilities not run by the hotels. I'm talking about these instances that occurred where the only role of the hotel was to provide the property. That is why I asked if anyone in PHAC knew about these instances before the public reports.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** That's what I'm trying to explain, Mr. Chair, that, as such, the hotels have their protocol, and the security and safety of the clientele who is in there are the responsibility of the hotel. They have door locks, and they have the right kind of monitoring mechanism also. That's what we rely on in terms of making sure that the clients will be taken care of.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** To the RCMP, were enhanced RCMP clearance checks used to vet and certify private security firms and screening officers prior to their access to quarantine facilities or to homes of Canadians complying with federal quarantine requirements?

**Mr. Sorab Rupa:** Mr. Chair, that was not asked of us. We were not involved in anything to do with the hiring of the private security firms to do any of those compliance checks or the work at the government-approved accommodations or the DQFs.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Is it safe to conclude too, then, that the RCMP wasn't consulted or involved with the planning or the establishment of the quarantine screening officer program?

**Mr. Sorab Rupa:** Mr. Chair, that is correct. The RCMP was not involved in that part of the plan.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** What about security standards and risk assessments of the selected quarantine facilities? Was the RCMP consulted or involved with any of that?

**Mr. Sorab Rupa:** Mr. Chair, as far as I know, we were not involved in the selection of any of these sites, either the DQFs or the government-approved accommodations.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Do you know who does do the security standards and risk assessments?

**Mr. Sorab Rupa:** I do not, Mr. Chair. That is an aspect that we were not involved with.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Are you aware of any more allegations of sexual assaults or other criminal behaviour in the federally mandated quarantine facilities or at homes, and has the public safety minister asked the RCMP to investigate or get involved following the public reports?

**The Chair:** Answer very briefly, please.

**Mr. Sorab Rupa:** Mr. Chair, of course there were two very horrible incidents that occurred in non-RCMP areas where we are not the police of jurisdiction.

Where we are the police of jurisdiction for the designated quarantine facility or the government-approved accommodation in the Vancouver area, we are very much in contact with PHAC, and on a daily basis we do attend those sites. We have had some investigations. Those investigations are ongoing, but they are very minor in nature compared to the two horrific and horrible acts that occurred in other POJs.

**The Chair:** We're going to have to leave it there.

Thank you.

Madame Damoff, you have six minutes, please.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being here today.

Dr. Bogoch, I have a question for you. The government's been saying almost for a year without exception not to travel, yet we still have people who are travelling, and they're looking for exemptions.

Then we have these variants start popping up. These variants are extremely serious, and I'm wondering what you would say to people who still think that they need to travel for non-essential reasons. How important is it also that the government be able to adapt and react quickly to change whatever measures they're putting in place in order to keep Canadians safe?

• (1820)

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** Of course, we heard from the Public Health Agency of Canada about a year ago to avoid all unnecessary travel. It does not get clearer than that. Avoid all unnecessary travel. It's about as obvious as it gets, yet people still chose to travel.

Certainly the variants of concern got in, and certainly they did escape the measures that were taken in place. I still firmly believe that the 14-day quarantine period cushioned us significantly from importing these. We really did get very good—of course not perfect—protection with that policy.

Of course, in the context of an unknown threat, which are the variants of concern.... I can't look anyone in the eye and tell them with a straight face even now exactly what they mean. We're still learning a lot about them. It's important to proceed with the precautionary principle, meaning take it seriously because we don't know how deadly or not these could be. We may as well play it safe. That, of course, means being able to rapidly adapt your policy to an emerging global health threat.

You certainly need that capacity to be swift and nimble to stay two steps ahead of the virus, because we've already seen what happens when you don't.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** That could be not necessarily having a binder full of data to confirm what you're doing. I know countries like Australia and New Zealand—and those are just two examples—have used hotels for quarantine sites.

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** I completely agree. I would imagine that there would be no binder full of data because those data either do not exist or are in the process of being collected, but it would adhere to the standard of what other successful nations have done. It also adheres to the precautionary principle, which many people might remember was written all over the SARS write-ups after the SARS epidemic in 2003-04, because that is the smart and careful approach that we can take to protect Canadians.

You don't need binders of data to drive this because, quite frankly, they don't exist. You adhere to the precautionary principle to protect Canadians.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you, Dr. Bogoch.

I have a question, and I'm not sure who the ideal person is at PHAC to answer this.

All of us agree that sexual violence is unacceptable. It bothers me a great deal to hear the Conservative Party making it a partisan issue somehow because it's not. We all find it abhorrent. One of these did not occur in a hotel. It occurred in my community of Oakville, and the Halton Regional Police Service is investigating, as it should be.

What is PHAC doing in light of these assaults, as well as in light of comments that were made about locks and not telling people where these women are staying? What are you doing to respond to those concerns to ensure that whatever policies are in place are adapted to keep people safe when they're in hotels or in quarantine?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** May I, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** One of the things we mentioned earlier very much is that there are certain criteria that the hotels need to fulfill, which include the security, the care and nurturing, as well as the other components, which they really need to provide. One of them is to make sure that there is proper security in place so that these events don't happen.

It is very unfortunate that that thing happened.

Also, I want to come back to the point that you mentioned earlier in terms of other situations, like when we have contractors go in and actually do the spot checks. As a part of the contract with PHAC, all the employees of the security companies who are em-

ployed, working on this contract, must have a security guard licence—that is important— and a valid police background check, and must sign a non-disclosure agreement. Pursuant to this contract amendment that we had, they must also receive a reliability status clearance within 90 days of the contract agreement.

These are a few of those things that we are trying to really focus on so that these events don't happen at all or have a minimized risk of ever happening again—by making sure that these things are in place.

• (1825)

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I only have 30 seconds left.

Have you been in touch with the hotels to make sure that the security requirements are clear in terms of locking doors and those types of requirements?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Absolutely.

Mr. Chair, what I want to reiterate is that we work very closely with the Hotel Association of Canada, with regular communication and reminding them of the guidelines and the procedures that they should have in place.

We also do the check-ins to make sure that those things are happening, and that is very much happening in real time.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've solved my technical problems.

I thank the witnesses for being here and answering our questions.

I assume the reason the government mandated hotel quarantine is that the Public Health Agency felt that it was more effective than home quarantine in preventing the spread of the virus. Now we realize that people have found a way to get around this rule by going across the land border. That is a fact. The number of travellers at the land border has increased by 11% in the last two weeks. That's what Radio-Canada reported in the last few days.

Why don't we also subject people coming through the land border to the same rule that people coming through the border by air have to follow? I think they are just as likely to spread the virus. I'm not talking about workers. Earlier, the minister talked about workers coming across the border, and they are the majority, that's true. However, people coming back from non-essential travel are coming across the land border. Why aren't they subject to mandatory hotel quarantine as well?

I don't know who is best able to answer that question.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Is that a Canada Border Services question?

It seems like it's equal treatment between the land borders and the air borders. That's probably the thrust of the question.

[Translation]

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo (Vice President, Health Security Infrastructure Branch, Public Health Agency of Canada):** Is Mr. Vinette going to answer the question?

[English]

**Mr. Denis Vinette:** I can certainly answer.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I would like to briefly clarify the data and I will let Ms. Diogo explain the difference between the two models.

Only 7% of people who enter Canada by land are directed to quarantine. Since the coming into force of the new controls, which now require testing and quarantine, the number of people entering the country by land each day who are directed to quarantine has decreased from approximately 1,200 to 1,500 people to only 650 to 800 people. The number is higher for those entering the country by air. Actually, almost 91% of them are directed to quarantine.

The number of people crossing the border by land is increasing. They are mostly truckers transporting goods, which has had no impact on the number of people entering the country by land. In summary, about half of the people crossing the border by land are being directed to quarantine, unlike the number coming into the country by air.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you. It's a change to get a real answer to a question.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

**The Chair:** You have a little less than three minutes.

Mr. Vinette's sound quality is not ideal. I'm open to any suggestions for the interpretation.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Okay.

[English]

**The Chair:** Let's proceed and we'll work out the sound quality as we go along here.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you.

There doesn't seem to have been any clear direction from the Public Health Agency of Canada, or any coordination between the various police forces, in terms of the fines that police officers are supposed to give to people who decide to skip the mandatory hotel quarantine and go straight home. For example, a Toronto police officer fined someone for about \$880, which seems to be much better than the \$2,000 for the quarantine.

Was there a clear policy, or is the amount of the fine given arbitrary and varies by police force? Do we know how many fines were issued? As of yesterday, there was talk of about 15 fines being is-

sued, but do we know if fines were issued to all the people who flouted the rules by going straight home?

• (1830)

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Good evening, my name is Brigitte Diogo and I am able to answer this question.

We work closely with the various police forces involved in enforcing and monitoring the quarantine. We provide them with guidelines and information sessions. The amount of the fine is not discretionary: it is \$3,000 for anyone who does not comply with the order. We will be able to provide the committee with the specific number of fines issued since the order was implemented. The number continues to grow.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** That would be appreciated, thank you.

So are you able to confirm that the 15 fines issued up to yesterday were for \$3,000?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** More than 15 fines have been given so far, because different parts of the law have different types of fines. If we are talking about a fine directly related to the order, however, the amount is \$3,000 and it is not discretionary. Most of the fines issued to date have been just that.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have Mr. Harris for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Thank you, Chair.

I have a question for Dr. Kochhar.

You did say there was an issue with respect to locks. We talked to Mr. Stewart about that before and he said there was no mandate by the Public Health Agency that there should be no locks. But I asked whether there was an mandate that there should be locks. You seemed to say, on the one hand, that this is left up to the hotels, and then you talk about enhanced security.

Could you explain exactly how you ensured that the people were safe in hotels?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** What I'm explaining is that as a hotel policy there are always locks on the doors. There is not a room that does not have a lock on the door. There are different ways to open the door, but that is a standard in—

**Mr. Jack Harris:** I understand that. I've been in hotels; we've all been in hotels. We heard that people were told not to lock their doors or people had non-locked doors. Did you know about this? Did you put a stop to it? What did you do to fix this problem once you heard about it?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Chair, we have been working closely with the Hotel Association of Canada—

**Mr. Jack Harris:** I understand that. What did you do about the lock situation when you heard that people were in unlocked rooms?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** We have given guidance to the Hotel Association to provide—

**Mr. Jack Harris:** The Hotel Association doesn't run the hotels. The Hotel Association is an industry organization. Did you actually tell the hotels—

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** That's what it does.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** —you had contracted that they must do this, or did you go and inspect them or ensure there was proper security there?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, again, this is a regular procedure. We work through the Hotel Association—

**Mr. Jack Harris:** It's a very simple question. Did you and your organization provide any enhanced security as a result of these concerns that were expressed, or was it a situation, as usual, of dealing with an industry association and assuming they followed procedures?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, I would like to re-emphasize the fact that, yes, we work closely with the Hotel Association, but we also make sure our presence in those areas.... The security we have on site is actually briefed on any of these kinds of concerns. That takes place as a normal matter of fact as we go forward.

As we continue to enhance our approach to that, that is a continuous way of working with—

• (1835)

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Do you have security services of your own that are at these quarantine hotels, yes or no?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** We have Public Health Agency of Canada people in there. We also have the security services over there, which are contracted services.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Are they contracted services or your own, not the hotels'?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** It's not the hotels' services.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** It's very hard to get a straight answer, I'm afraid.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Indeed.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** I have no concerns about having proper protection, particularly for the variants of concern. We've had an outbreak in Newfoundland and Labrador. It ran like wildfire. We've had community spread for the first time, so I'm very concerned about that. But I'm also very concerned about the safety of individuals.

Dr. Kochhar, is there any plan to adopt the proposal that Dr. Bogoch said, about making sure all of them—and there appears to be lots of them who are travelling back and forth across the U.S.-Canada border—are going to be given, as a priority, an expectation that they could have a vaccine as soon as possible? Is that part of the plan to protect Canadians?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Again, I would say that we're working closely with an independent body, the NACI, which is the national body on immunization, which actually dictates who the priority groups are. We are working very closely with them to identify if there is a possibility that those essential workers, frontline workers, who are crossing...can be prioritized. But this is something that is in the hands of the provinces and territories. A lot of work is going on in terms of making sure those aspects are brought forward as such.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** The Government of Canada is responsible for the borders, Doctor, and I understand the provinces are dealing with vaccines. If the borders are being controlled by the Canada Border Services and the Government of Canada, surely a mandate for people who are crossing back and forth all the time, potentially bringing in the variants or COVID-19.... There are thousands of them crossing every day in Detroit and Windsor, essential workers working on one side and living on the other. Is there any thought being given, or would you be prepared to promote making sure that essential workers who are travelling back and forth on a regular basis could expect to be given a vaccine as part of the border-crossing initiatives?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, what I can say clearly is these conversations are very live and ongoing. I'm not particularly involved in that component, but there are very much ongoing and alive conversations on that.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Can I urge you to bring to their attention Dr. Bogoch's recommendation here this evening?

It seems to me to be a very simple and logical extension of the types of protections we're talking about here: the quarantine, the hotel quarantine, the 14-day quarantine, only essential workers allowed to go come back and forth. Surely we can ask them to have a little extra protection that is going to protect them and protect the rest of us.

**The Chair:** Mr. Harris now knows that was six minutes and one second.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** I ended with a comment, sir, not a question.

**The Chair:** Yes. That's amazing.

With that, we've completed round one.

Round two is five-minute questions. We're starting off with Mr. Kurek, please.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for making yourselves available here today.

It's my understanding that the Public Health Agency of Canada issues the exemption letters declaring that an individual performs essential work, yet the CBSA has the ability to overturn or make a determination about whether somebody's work is or is not essential.

Can the CBSA clarify whether their agents are, in fact, given that authority?

**Mr. Denis Vinette:** I'd be happy to begin, but my colleague, Mr. Christiansen, can jump in as well.

I think the first thing I need to make sure is very clear is that our officers have very little discretion in the actual decision-making or application of the orders in council as they've been drafted, or the chief public health officer's exemptions that are also in play as it pertains to whether individuals get directed into quarantine or not.

• (1840)

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** If I could follow up on that, you're saying there's very little input that the CBSA had in regard to what these exemptions do or do not look like.

Is training or guidance provided to officers to ensure that they are equipped to properly make these determinations?

**Mr. Denis Vinette:** Yes, absolutely, and I'll ask Mr. Christiansen to jump in.

I will just add that it's very clear that the decisions they render are based on the information presented to them by the traveller at the time they arrive. That is ultimately what leads to the decision by the officer at the port of entry.

Calvin, I'll pass it over to you.

**Mr. Calvin Christiansen (Director General, Travellers Operational Guidance and Support, Travellers Branch, Canada Border Services Agency):** Thank you very much.

There are a couple of things we do any time the orders in council come out. We put together an information package for our border services officers. We go through it with all our regional operations before it's issued, to walk through what the process is and what the exceptions are, to make sure that everyone is delivering from the same page.

What happens on some occasions and what we've seen happen is that when a traveller is coming back into Canada or when a traveller is coming into Canada for the first time, they aren't necessarily always telling the full and whole story to the border services officers, so the border services officers—

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I appreciate that, but I have an example of a constituent who got off an airplane with a co-worker, with virtually the same paperwork, and one ended up having to go into a hotel quarantine and one did not. I think there's a great deal of concern and confusion. This led to multiple points of contact and possible COVID transmission because his wife was going to pick him up from the airport. Therefore, I'm really looking for where the direction comes from to ensure that these rules are applied equitably, clearly and concisely.

Am I understanding that it's the Public Health Agency of Canada that gives packages to CBSA, and then CBSA is responsible for enforcing it?

**Mr. Calvin Christiansen:** What happens is that the order in council is written, and once the order in council is finalized, we go through that order in council and look at the structure of it and what's involved in it. We prepare guidance to give to our officers in the field, with the Public Health Agency of Canada to make sure that we're on the right page and taking the right approach to each of those orders in council. We issue that out to our field operations slightly in advance.

We do really attempt to make sure that we're as consistent as we possibly can be, and these inconsistencies will happen when sometimes the whole story isn't given by one traveller or the other.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** There's an alleged victim who says that her passport was taken away before she was sent to one of these quar-

antine facilities. Who would have taken that passport and under what authority?

**Mr. Calvin Christiansen:** Mr. Chair, the first I heard of a passport being taken away was earlier today, so I'm not particularly familiar with that case and the incident that surrounds it.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** If that information could be provided to the committee, certainly that would be helpful.

Mr. Chair, if there's time, I would ask the Public Health Agency of Canada whether they ever made a recommendation to either the minister or the deputy minister to suggest that the hotel quarantine was a positive step to control the spread of COVID in Canada.

**The Chair:** Very briefly, please.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, if I understand the question correctly, we have been watching, as I mentioned earlier, the variants of concern and the transmissibility. The nature of the transmission and the variants prompted us to look at that as a possible measure to reduce the risk of importing those variants.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** When was that recommendation first made?

**The Chair:** That is, unfortunately, your time.

There is usually some rule about communications between senior members of the civil service and their ministers, but regardless, we're out of time.

With that, Mr. Iacono, you have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank all the speakers here today for coming to answer our questions.

My first question is for Mr. Rupa.

Mr. Rupa, how would you describe the RCMP's involvement in enforcing the Quarantine Act?

Specifically, is it acting as a primary oversight agency or is it playing a supporting role?

• (1845)

[*English*]

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, if I may, the RCMP and the other members of police forces at the local jurisdiction all have been very good partners with the Public Health Agency of Canada in terms of ensuring that there is compliance.

At the front end, we have the CBSA officers working with us, and the Public Health Agency of Canada quarantine officers are at the airport, for example. There's also the ability for us to refer these cases which may be non-compliant to RCMP, which assists us in making sure that they are brought in compliance.

We continue to work in those areas where RCMP has jurisdiction, and maybe my colleague from the RCMP can describe how that happens in terms of the partnership. However, that's what we engage in from the very beginning.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

My next question is for the Canada Border Services Agency officials.

The safety of the Agency's permanent or contracted employees is also an extremely important issue, as they are on the front lines.

Can you tell us about the safety and health protocols for them?

**Mr. Denis Vinette:** Thank you for your question.

Mr. Chair, right from the start of the pandemic, and even before that, we directed our attention to supporting our front-line officers. That began in January 2020, when we started to look at what was happening in China at that time, which then became the great pandemic.

We worked with Health Canada to make sure we had all the necessary occupational health and safety guidelines, protocols and equipment because, as officers who enforce the Quarantine Act, we are examining people and their health at all times. We remember Ebola and H1N1. It was a matter of reviewing what we had, being informed by up-to-date scientific data, and putting in place things like sanitation and masks, and then putting up Plexiglass panels, social distancing, and so on.

So that's always a very important aspect, and we made sure that we worked with our union and the agency's health and safety committee, so we were able to work well together and ensure the health of our officers.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you.

My next question is for the Public Health Agency of Canada.

There have been complaints about how people returning from travel have been treated. The Public Health Agency is certainly conducting checks in their facilities.

What is the process? What do you look for in these checks? What do you do with the information you collect?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Thank you for the question.

Yes, we do follow-up checks, because the hotels have been selected according to specific criteria.

Before the hotels are selected, we do site visits. Once the hotel is selected and posted on our site, we follow up to make sure that the hotel continues to meet the criteria, that they continue to do what they committed to when they submitted their application.

We want to make sure that the hotel continues to meet the requirements. This allows us to determine whether the hotel will remain on the list or be removed.

• (1850)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Michaud, you have for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Diogo, I would like to follow up on what you said earlier. You said that when travellers arrive at an airport and refuse to undergo the mandatory hotel quarantine, they are subject to a \$3,000 fine under the Quarantine Act.

However, in a February 25 article in the *Huffington Post*, the Public Health Agency was quoted as saying that, if people did not follow instructions, they could be fined up to \$750. The fine given at the time by Peel Regional Police was \$880.

Could you confirm whether it was \$3,000 or \$750?

Why was it \$880 in this case?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Thank you for the question.

I can tell you that there have been various cases since the new measures were put in place. The \$875 you're talking about is indeed an amount that applies to a certain section of the act. Unfortunately, I don't have the various sections of the act in front of me. In one particular case, we know that a mistake was made in the amount of the fine imposed. However, with respect to the order in council, the fine is \$3,000.

I must also say that our officers on the ground have to exercise judgment on a case-by-case basis to fully understand the situation before imposing a fine.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you.

Journalists reported that, as of yesterday, some 11,440 hotel rooms had been booked since the mandatory hotel quarantine came into effect.

Do we have any statistics on the number of travellers who have arrived in Canada by air since the quarantine came into effect?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Very briefly, please.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

According to our data, as of 8 March, 12,971 reservations had been made for 17,004 travellers. For some bookings, more than one person occupied the room.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Harris, you have two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Thank you.

I wonder if Mr. Christiansen could answer some questions for me.

I'm concerned about the situation of how a person, once it's determined they need to be quarantined, actually get to the hotel, to their room. Is that done by the Canada Border Services Agency, or are they passed over to another quarantine officer? How is that enforced? What measures are there to make sure that they do proceed to the quarantine and not leave the airport on their own?



**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Mr. Chair, I will take that question. It's a question for the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Part of the criteria the hotels were required to meet is to make arrangements for transportation. When travellers arrive, the Public Health Agency of Canada has officers on the ground to direct travellers. We also require hotels to provide information to us on check-ins and checkouts. Finally, as part of the requirement to enter Canada, travellers are to provide the quarantine plan through the ArriveCAN app or through a web-based process.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** We understand that, but I'm wondering how many people have not made it to the hotel. How many people have either left the airport on their own or somehow been diverted before they ever got to the hotel where they were supposed to stay? You must have numbers on that.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** As has been mentioned previously, the vast majority of travellers have been in compliance with the requirement.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** We understand it's the vast majority, but you said you know that there were 1,000 hotel rooms that were used and that there were 1,704 travellers involved.

I'm asking you another question, which is this: How many people had been fined for not ending up in the quarantine hotel they were assigned to?

• (1855)

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** We can provide that information to the committee. We have provided fines to travellers who have refused to go to the hotel once they have landed in those four cities. We can provide that information.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** I would ask you to supply that information to the committee, Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, that's an undertaking on the part of the Public Health Agency.

With that, we turn to Mr. Van Popta for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us this evening and for sharing your knowledge with us.

We heard in earlier testimony this evening that Canadians have generally been accepting of quarantine restrictions because we all know that we need to keep ourselves and our fellow citizens healthy. I'm not surprised, of course we're all law-abiding citizens. From my knowledge and experience in dealing with many constituents in my riding, I would agree that people generally thought that the at-home restrictions were perfectly reasonable.

My question would be to somebody from CBSA, I think probably, or maybe the RCMP, and it's whether you agree that the home quarantining has been generally accepted and successful. How many lawbreakers did you catch?

Mr. Vinette.

**Mr. Denis Vinette:** Mr. Chair, the CBSA's role as it pertains to ensuring that there's compliance with the OICs and regulations is first and foremost to receive all arriving travellers, whether it be by air or land, conduct the questioning and ensure they have met all of the obligations bestowed upon the entry as directed by the OICs. We then ensure that anyone who is not fully compliant is referred over to the Public Health Agency, either to someone on the ground then and there, or through their national call support centre. We have 117 land ports of entry at which anybody may arrive.

Prior to the most recent rules, we would direct people to quarantine for the 14 days. We capture everyone's information, where they will be quarantining and how to contact them, and that's done in a digital fashion and transmitted over to the Public Health Agency so that they can work with the police partners and themselves to ensure that people are being compliant.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta:** Has there been general compliance from your experience?

**Mr. Denis Vinette:** I would have to turn to my colleague, Madame Diogo, but I have no information to offer on that question.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Thank you.

Yes, Mr. Chair, we have a very high compliance rate on the quarantine requirements.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta:** Good. Thank you.

In comparing ourselves to other countries, in particular the United States, our next-door neighbours, our COVID control, if I could call it that, experience is much better, largely on account of the at-home quarantining.

Like many Canadians, I'm left wondering what is added with the new mandatory hotel quarantine rules. It's a new requirement that does not have the broad acceptance, obviously, that the at-home quarantining has had.

We've all heard many stories of people trying to skirt the rules, or thinking that the rules are unfair, or coming to their hotel only to find that their hotel room isn't ready and having to be left in a waiting room with many other travellers. One of my constituents called me and said they would have felt much safer at home, that would have been a much more successful and safe quarantine.

What are your opinions on that?

Ms. Diogo.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Yes, we continue to assess as we are implementing the measures, and we make adjustments as necessary. The quarantine hotels are there to ensure that when people arrive, they do the tests on arrival. As you know, the international flights are to the four cities. Travellers do their tests, and they are required to wait for the results of their tests before they can continue on their journeys.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta:** I understand that. Thank you.

I'm going to go over to Dr. Bogoch.

It's nice to have you here. It's nice to see you face to face—sort of. Thank you for your very clear testimony earlier on.

You said there are a number of ways that a country like Canada could implement safety rules. You suggested a travel ban, which, of course, is impractical. You also suggested testing, which we do, and we would all agree that that's one of the tools. At-home quarantining has been very successful, but now hotel quarantining has been brought into the loop.

In earlier testimony, it was unclear to me whether there is clear evidence and data available that says that hotel quarantining is better than at-home quarantining. I know that you talked about the precautionary principle, but am I right that there's no clear evidence available from anywhere in the world that says that hotel quarantining is that much better than at-home quarantining?

• (1900)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Dr. Bogoch. Unfortunately, Mr. Van Popta has run through his time, but this is a question that keeps coming up, so I'm going to exercise a little chair discretion here and ask you to answer, especially since you've been very patient for the last two rounds.

Please, answer the question.

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** I'll be brief. Thank you very much.

To my knowledge, there has not been a head-to-head comparison. Of course, we can talk about data, but we can also talk about public health practice in a time of great uncertainty with potentially dangerous variants of concern circulating and about precedents set by other countries. While I can't look you in the eye and tell you with a straight face the true incremental of added safety, I would say that it certainly adheres to fundamental public health principles to add additional layers of safety where you can to protect yourself from an unknown threat, and then rapidly pivot as you gain and gather that data that would really help inform your next best move.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta:** Then, it's really an experiment that we're involved in.

**A voice:** No—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're going to have to come back on that answer.

Mr. Lightbound, you have five minutes please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here tonight.

From the outset, it is clear that the incidents that have been reported in Montreal and Oakville are absolutely disturbing. It is imperative that we get to the bottom of them. I would like to come back later to the investigation conducted by the Public Health Agency of Canada, if time permits.

As for the very principle of mandatory quarantine in hotels, I am surprised to hear the Conservatives advocate less stringent measures at the border tonight and practically oppose mandatory quarantine in government-designated hotels, even though we are seeing the emergence of highly contagious variants throughout the world, for which we have little information, and elementary school chil-

dren in Quebec have been required to wear masks since this week. I find it astounding to hear them suggest tonight that this policy was guided by obscure political motives. We see that countries like Australia, India, New Zealand, Israel, Qatar, South Korea, the Philippines and the United Kingdom have imposed, in one way or another, mandatory quarantine in government-designated hotels. I don't see this as a political move, either here or elsewhere, but rather as an application of the precautionary principle. In my opinion, you can't blame a fireman for putting out a fire with too much water.

Dr. Bogoch, I would like to hear your opinion on this. In your expertise, how does this kind of measure fit into the constellation of measures that need to be implemented to combat COVID-19, in an era when variants are appearing all over the planet?

[*English*]

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** I think it is a very reasonable policy to instill during a period of uncertainty. As you point out, we have to take a precautionary approach. I would say that the variants of concern—a few months ago and to a lesser extent now—pose a significant threat.

When I say “to a lesser extent”, I meant that because we have a greater understanding of what it is they do and the threat that they pose. I would not suggest that we have a full understanding of this, but I think we can use our understanding of this and certainly our understanding of how the vaccines protect us against the variants of concern and the role of variants of concern. We can use that information to help determine what the most appropriate policy is.

In the face of an unknown threat, I think it is very reasonable to take whatever measures you have to protect yourself. We've seen other countries do that rather successfully. We've seen, for example, Australia, New Zealand, many countries in Europe and Israel take the same approach. It's a very reasonable approach and it adheres to the fundamental public health principles.

• (1905)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Joël Lightbound:** That is why I am surprised that the Conservatives are opposed to it in practice. It's certainly not a position they're pushing very hard in Quebec. They're pretty quiet about it.

One of the corollary effects of this measure is the deterrent effect it has on travellers. We know that for a year now, Canadians have been advised to avoid all travel for non-essential reasons.

Mr. Vinette or Ms. Diogo, could you come back to the decrease in the number of passengers since the implementation of this measure last February?

**Mr. Denis Vinette:** Thank you for your question.

Indeed, there has been a fairly significant drop in discretionary or non-essential travel, which we have seen at the border. Following the Prime Minister's announcement, among other things, we also noticed that people who were abroad returned to Canada before the new measures came into effect. If you look at the past week, there has been an 88% reduction in travellers crossing the land and air borders.

That said, we still have the same number of truckers crossing the border to maintain trade. So the drop is really in discretionary travel, both at the land border and the air border.

**Mr. Joël Lightbound:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, do I still have some time left?

[English]

**The Chair:** You have about 30 seconds.

**Mr. Joël Lightbound:** This is maybe for the Public Health Agency and Mr. Kochhar. It was reported that there was an inquiry led by PHAC into the incidents that have been reported.

Where does it stand at this point?

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, he's given you about 10 seconds to answer the question. Can that be answered very briefly, please?

Maybe the best thing to do here is to come back on the question in some manner or another because it is an inquiry into a police investigation.

With that, we've completed the second round. We're now into the third round.

Mr. Motz, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Thank you very much, Chair.

My first question is to Dr. Bogoch.

Quite honestly, I'm quite confused to see your name on this witness list. The motion was very clear. It was for ministers and for officials who were involved in the hotel quarantine debacle.

Were you involved in developing this mandatory quarantine document?

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** I was not.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Thank you.

Chair, I'm actually quite surprised that the Liberal members of this committee are avoiding the issue of why we're here, which is the incidents that occurred, how they occurred and how we can prevent them from happening again.

This is for Dr. Kochhar. In the first hour, we all heard the Minister of Public Safety basically acquiesce his responsibility on the issues. Public Safety placed all of the blame for public safety and security at the feet of PHAC. They basically threw PHAC under the bus.

PHAC then, when questioned, said that when it comes to security, the hotel association is responsible for security.

The Minister of Public Safety says it's all PHAC's responsibility. Then PHAC says it's not theirs really; it actually belongs to the ho-

tel association. Then in questioning from Mr. Harris, ADM Kochhar acknowledged that they actually have government-contracted security people at hotels. This means that the government is, in essence, responsible for the safety and security of people in the required quarantine.

Is that your assessment? Can you confirm that, Dr. Kochhar?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** I will confirm that what we have are Government of Canada employees who are the screening officers and quarantine officers, and security personnel who are contracted and stationed in there.

• (1910)

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Thank you.

That confirms, then, that at the end of the day, it's the Government of Canada that provides the security at these government-required quarantine facilities. It is responsible for the safety and security of Canadians.

Dr. Kochhar, did you or your department receive any direction from the ministers to change the quarantine policy, conditions and rules after the news of the assaults came out on February 24?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Mr. Chair, maybe I can take that question, given that it falls under me.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** I would like to reiterate that the event we are talking about occurred at a designated quarantine facility that is managed by the Public Health Agency of Canada. It was a very unfortunate incident and we are fully co-operating with the police.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** My question directly was, has PHAC been given direction by the ministers to change the rules and conditions? Has there been any direction given since this incident occurred, after the 24th?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Absolutely. The minister has been very clear that we need to follow up, do our own internal review and take any corrective measures as necessary.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Fair enough. It would appear, then, as if there absolutely were corrective measures that were required to be taken and there are some gaps at the front end.

Dr. Kochhar, has there been any end date discussed on this mandatory hotel quarantine?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, as I mentioned earlier, while we are incorporating these changes and continuing to gather data, there hasn't been any specific discussion on any end date. The OIC runs for a specific period of time as the course of the pandemic goes on, but there aren't any active discussions at this point.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Motz, you have about eight seconds.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Actually, I have about 30 seconds from when I started, according to my watch.

The report—

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, the only watch that counts here is mine.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Then I will continue on with my question being as you interrupted me.

**The Chair:** No, you won't.

With that, I'm turning now to Madam Lambropoulos.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Chair, I have a point of order. I wanted to wait until Mr. Motz was done, as I didn't want to interrupt him.

I think it needs to be clear that Dr. Bogoch is here because it was in fact part of the motion that was passed. I added him to the name of witnesses, because I thought it was important to hear from someone independent.

He's here because it was part of a motion that was passed by the committee. I want that to be very clear.

**The Chair:** Well—

**Mr. Glen Motz:** I would like to speak to that, Chair.

The motion actually did not include it. It was at a point afterwards. I would challenge the clerk to find the references to that in our last committee meeting. That is not exactly what happened.

**The Chair:** Well, we have a point of contention between the two of you which is not going to be resolved this evening.

With that, we will have Madam Lambropoulos.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here to continue answering our questions on this issue.

Obviously what happened in Montreal and Oakville is completely unacceptable. Nobody thinks something like that should ever happen. It's completely unfortunate that it happened.

What can the Government of Canada do, and which department would be responsible to make sure that nothing like that ever happens again?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, maybe I'll start and have colleagues jump in from the law enforcement point of view.

As was mentioned earlier, we are making sure that all of our facilities are given complete guidelines, and reiterating the point, making sure that the proper procedures are followed and the security is proper. It's a constant check-in. We also engage in making sure that all of the people who are in the facilities.... We actually reach out through phone calls and in other ways. That also allows us to make sure they are safe and in an overall safe environment.

In reality, what we are trying to do is to make sure that we work together with the hotel association, the security—which we have contracted—as well as the law enforcement, in terms of making sure there is nothing that increases in any way the risk of anybody being exposed to those sorry events which happened earlier.

• (1915)

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you.

I'm sure that is not something that was foreseeable. With regard to the Montreal incident, especially, I don't think that it happened at the hands of anybody who was hired by the government. It was another traveller who had gone into a room and assaulted a woman or made her feel threatened and uncomfortable.

Do you think that anything could have been done beforehand that would have prevented it? I know that you just explained what could be done in the future. Do you think that anything could have been put in place earlier in order to make sure that this kind of incident didn't occur?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Again, as mentioned earlier, this was an unfortunate and unforeseeable event.

The way we have our DQFs, they were supposed to be very much a secure place for travellers to isolate at that point. It's not really something that we envisioned in any way, shape or form.

This is a lesson learned for us and a lesson learned in general to make sure that we are more diligent in terms of making sure that these facilities are secure and have an added layer of security to them.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you.

I'm not sure if this question has already been raised and if it's been answered, because it's a three-hour long meeting, and I may have checked out a couple of times.

I read that people were being told not to mention where they were being located. Is that true? Are people allowed to contact their families and tell them where they are when they are being quarantined? I imagine there are only a few hotels that are listed that they can even be at.

Can you provide any clarity to that?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Brigitte, can you take that one?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Yes, I will take that question.

Guests at the designated quarantine facility have access to Internet and the phone in their room. We do not prohibit travellers from contacting family and indicating their location.

As the Government of Canada, we are very much concerned about the privacy, security and safety of the travellers at our facilities. It is true that we do not advertise the locations of the hotels, but guests who are at the hotels are not prohibited from disclosing where they are. In fact, they are aware of where they are.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** With that, we have Madam Michaud.

You have two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the case of the assault that took place at the Sheraton in Montreal, the victim said that it took 15 to 20 minutes before hotel security came to her assistance.

Interestingly, in Taiwan, a man was fined 3,000 euros for leaving his room for eight seconds. So people are very much under surveillance.

Under the Quarantine Act, the minister may appoint screening officers or quarantine officers.

Are there agents on site in the hotels? If so, how many are there?

If not, have clear guidelines been given to the selected hotels to ensure the safety of travellers during their quarantine?

• (1920)

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Thank you for the question.

The incident you are talking about happened at a quarantine site that is managed by our agency. I can't speak to the details of the incident, but I can tell you that there are quarantine officers, security officers, and other partners, such as the Red Cross and screening officers, on site. So there is a lot of staff on site. That's all I can tell you about this incident.

In this quarantine area, there were many more people present who would have intervened during the incident. However, the police have been given a detailed account of the incident and are dealing with it at this time.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Has there been a lot more screening or quarantine officers since this incident, or was there already a lot at that time?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** The number of staff in a quarantine area really depends on the type of hotel, its configuration and the number of people in it. Certainly, since the incident, we have increased security in the quarantine areas of the four cities where international flights land. We have also done so because there are demonstrations in some cities and—

[English]

**The Chair:** We're going to have to leave the question there.

[Translation]

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Harris, you have two and a half minutes please.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Thank you, Chair.

I have one question, Ms. Diogo, regarding the Sheraton situation. Is there any policy with respect to locks on doors in that facility?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Yes, there are locks on doors at the facility.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Are they required to be locked?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Yes.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Are people are required to stay in their rooms?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** People are required to stay in their rooms.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Okay, thank you for clarifying that.

Dr. Bogoch, since we have you here and you have your expertise, I'd like you to explore a little further the idea of essential workers who are travelling regularly across the border. As has been pointed out, there's been no decrease in the number of them travelling. They're not subject to a hotel quarantine or any quarantine except that which may be regarded by the provinces.

Is the idea of ensuring that a vaccine might be either mandated by the Government of Canada or supplied by the Government of Canada something that you would want to expound on a little bit? It seems to me that this is a weak link in our system that could be easily fixed.

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** I would completely agree with you. We certainly have tightened up the non-essential travel and the risk that that poses in importing COVID-19 and variants of concern into Canada. Of course, there is essential travel. This is low-hanging fruit. We certainly could provide vaccination to the thousands of essential travellers who come over our border every day. It would just reduce the risk of important variants of concern and COVID-19, especially in a time when most of us are not yet vaccinated.

Of course, our border policy will change with time, commensurate with our vaccination and our protection as a country, but currently that is a weak spot.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** There has been some suggestion that this is up to the provinces, but surely the Government of Canada, with its quarantine rules, could make that a condition of entry. Presumably the federal government could provide that service directly itself, if need be.

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** I agree.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Thank you.

I have eight seconds left, but I'll leave that to the chair to use as he sees fit.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I don't propose to give it to Mr. Motz, though.

Mr. Kurek has five minutes.

Madam Khera, do you have the next five minutes for the Liberals?

• (1925)

**Ms. Kamal Khera:** Yes, Chair.

**The Chair:** Okay, good. Thank you.

Mr. Kurek.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I'll hand it over to Mrs. Stubbs to start my time.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Thanks, Damien and thanks, Chair.

Now that we finally seem to have established that PHAC is responsible for running the facilities in which the instances occurred about which we are all here meeting today, can PHAC please clarify the La Presse report that says that residents are not allowed to use the security locks inside the rooms and in Sarah's room, it was removed altogether.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Mr. Chair, I just wanted to confirm again that there are locks on the doors in these facilities.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Right. What about before? I'm talking about the La Presse report that says exactly what I just said.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** There have always been locks on the doors on these hotel rooms.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** You're saying this is a false claim reported in La Presse.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** I can only tell you what I know about our practices in the facilities that we run. There are locks on the doors.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Do you have other reports of alleged assaults or any other criminal behaviour within the facilities?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Since the beginning of the pandemic, close to 6,000 people have gone through our facilities, and this is the first incident of this kind, which we regret completely.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** I have another question. Four days after the hotel quarantine rules started, a public health employee at an airport told a family to go home because all the hotels were booked. I wonder if you know why that would have happened, who would have decided, and how many other times has it happened.

How are Canadians supposed to have confidence in the program if home quarantine was clearly sufficient in that case, according to the public health employee at the airport, just because the hotels were all booked?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** When someone arrives and doesn't have a hotel room pre-booked as required by the regulations, there are two things that can happen. They can be asked to book a room on arrival, and opportunities are provided to do that, or the person is sent to a designated quarantine facility.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** This family was sent home, but okay.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Thanks very much. I'll take the next two minutes.

Dr. Kochhar, you mentioned these incredibly tragic instances as "unforeseeable events" and "lessons learned". That language is very troubling.

Briefly, because there are a couple of questions I want to get through, I'm curious as to whether you can provide any information about any inspections that would have been done prior to Canadians being told to go to these facilities.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** My colleague Brigitte already mentioned that before these DQFs are authorized, we have inspections. They are on-site inspections, and based on that, those facilities are approved. That is one of the clear guidelines we have in place.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Thank you very much for that.

I'll ask the same question to the Public Health Agency of Canada: Were inspections completed in these facilities prior to Canadians being forced to quarantine in them?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Just to reiterate, hotels were invited to apply, based on a set of criteria.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I understand that. It's really a yes-or-no question: Did the Public Health Agency of Canada inspect these facilities prior to Canadians being forced to quarantine in them?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Yes, the Public Health Agency did a site visit prior to designating these hotels on our list.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Thank you very much.

I have a final question, and I'm hoping you will be able to provide information because there was certainly some ambiguity from the minister about whether Canadians are informed of their rights and various things.

Would the Public Health Agency of Canada and CBSA be able to provide copies to the committee of any literature that is provided to Canadians, one, when they are going across the border, and two, when they are sent into these facilities?

I'd certainly like to see the copies of the literature in both official languages, please.

• (1930)

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, that information can be provided. There is a welcome kit that is provided, so we can provide that from our side.

Denis, do you want to add anything from the border services side?

**Mr. Denis Vinette:** Probably.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Also, could I ask, especially from the CBSA, for any training material and guidance that is given to officers? If that could also be provided as evidence to the committee, that would be very helpful as we study this very serious issue.

Thanks.

**The Chair:** I assume that you still want an answer from Mr. Vinette.

Mr. Vinette.

**Mr. Denis Vinette:** Yes, thank you.

Really quickly, I can say that we do have handouts that we give to every arriving traveller that inform them of their requirements as it pertains to in quarantine or exempt, as well as a different form for symptomatic or asymptomatic. As well, for the committee, we would be pleased to look at the materials we've put together and issued to our front lines.

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

The clerk will regard those undertakings as undertakings to the committee.

Madame Khera, you have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Kamal Khera:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be sharing my time with my colleague, Ms. Damoff, as well, but I'll start.

First and foremost, I want, on behalf of all my constituents, to thank all the officials and Dr. Bogoch for being here.

Thank you for the incredible work that you all have been doing for the last year or so in the midst of this pandemic.

I do want to talk a bit about some of the concerns and complaints that I've heard directly from some of my constituents. I represent the riding of Brampton West, and certainly there have been people who have travelled and have raised concerns with regard to delays in bookings, difficulties in getting meals or water in a timely manner, and the public health measures' not being followed or enforced. I know that a lot of them are legitimate, but I also know that there is a lot of misinformation out there.

I know that this is a new territory for everyone. We're working together with so many different agencies and jurisdictions, with actors such as the Hotel Association of Canada and even third party contractors.

My question is for PHAC. Can you talk a bit about how these concerns are being addressed so that Canadians can have confidence that their concerns are being taken seriously?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** In reality, as the program was rolled out, there was, sometimes, an overwhelming of the hotels. In reality, what happened was that there was, at times, a little bit of a wait in between, until the time when the people got into their rooms. That has been a focus of our attention, as I mentioned earlier, and we are working with the Hotel Association of Canada to make sure that these things don't happen again—providing people with food at the proper time—as well as to make sure that all the requirements that the hotels are supposed to provide to the incoming guests are actually taken care of.

As I mentioned earlier, we also do spot checks. We do the calls and contact with the clients who are in the hotels to make sure that the things are in proper shape. We continue to work with the hotels. We continue to work with the incoming passengers by giving them the welcome kit and all the numbers so that if they have any issues, they can connect with the proper contacts. That's what we have been trying to do.

Overall, at this point, we see that the hotels have been able to get the clients in a spot where we don't hear any more of those complaints. Those are the things that we have tried to put in place so that this can be a successful program for the people who are actually going into these government-approved accommodations.

**Ms. Kamal Khera:** Thank you.

Ms. Damoff.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you so much.

Dr. Bogoch, you're one of the most recognized and respected doctors in the country. You've been guiding us through the pandem-

ic from the beginning, providing Canadians with advice they can trust. I'd like to give you the opportunity to answer the question that was put to you by one of the Conservatives about whether or not the quarantine policy is actually an experiment on the Canadian public.

• (1935)

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** Thank you for that opportunity. I don't think it's an experiment at all. I think this is what you do in the face of an unknown threat. This is a very reasonable and well-trodden path from a public health standpoint.

Of course, it means you learn with time and you pivot when you have appropriate data to pivot, but I don't think it's fair to suggest that anyone would have data at their fingertips to guide an initial decision. That's why you're guided by the precautionary principle. We learned that from SARS as well. This is, again, a well-trodden path in the public health world.

Of course, no one's suggesting that an approach like these quarantine hotels is a long-term strategy. As you learn more, as the data gathers and as you gather evidence to pivot from that, you can. I think it was not an unreasonable recommendation, especially with the emergence of the variants of concern and the certain unknown threat that that posed at the time.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you very much.

I think I only have about eight seconds left, Mr. Chair, so I'll end it there.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, that completes the third round. I have to be guided by the clerk here on how many minutes are left in the two-hour time slot that's been set aside.

Is it your wish to go back to a round one and complete the time allotted?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** How much time is that, Chair?

**The Chair:** We have 15 minutes left.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Why don't we divide up the time slots accordingly? If originally it was six, make it four.

**The Chair:** Just four minutes for each party? Is that good? Does that make everybody happy? Well I won't go that far.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I think we can default to the first round style. I think there's precedent for that.

**The Chair:** Then I'm going beyond the time because the first is 20 minutes.

I'm simply going to go to four minutes because the more we talk about it, the less time we will have.

With that, the Conservatives have four minutes. Who is going to be up?

**Mr. Tako Van Popta:** I think I am, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Popta, you have four minutes.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta:** Thank you again.

For one of the officials, when did planning for hotel quarantining start? We're about a year into the pandemic now, and the rules were implemented a couple of weeks ago. It all seemed to have been done very much in a rush, at least to the casual observer.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, I can start, and I will invite colleagues to pitch in.

In reality what we have been seeing over time is that as COVID-19 progressed, we also came across one of the bigger threats, which was the COVID-19 variants. Those variants were really of concern because of increased transmissibility.

Also at that time, we were still gathering information about what would happen in our testing, our ability to have medical counter-measures.

The gradual approach was first of all, Mr. Chair, the flights from the U.K. were stopped. This was the first time we heard of a U.K. variant. Over time when we started to look around, there were experiences of other countries like Australia and New Zealand. We were informed of the results from the pilot projects we had been doing at various airports, for example, Alberta, where there were some data that people were coming in with infection.

That was a prompt for us to look at what more we could do to stop the importation of COVID-19 and specifically stop the importation of the COVID variants.

That's the frame we were working off.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta:** That's fair enough. It's the introduction of variants into the equation that caused us to want to look at yet another tool, hotel quarantining in this case.

When did other countries start hotel quarantining?

• (1940)

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** There are different ways when we talk about hotel quarantining. Australia or the U.K. use the hotels for the entire quarantine period. In Canada, we prefer people quarantining at home for the 14 days being the best situation.

However the variants and how to prevent the potential spread of those variants led us to examine the quarantine hotel for a short period of time with the introduction of testing on arrival.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta:** Okay. That's good.

I hesitate to use the word experiment because Dr. Bogoch has corrected that, but we are testing new evidence. We're exploring. We are looking into new ways as to whether there are additional tools that can help us keep Canadians safe.

Is that right?

**The Chair:** Dr. Bogoch.

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** Yes. I think that's a fair assessment. There are lots of right approaches to this issue as well.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta:** How will we know when we can stop this program? Will we know that before or after there's herd immunity from vaccines?

**The Chair:** Be very brief, please.

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** Yes, we will. It's an arbitrary decision on when this program can be stopped. There's no hard and fast rule.

I think you can look at the data of the degree of protection that the quarantine hotels have provided, and you can certainly look at the degree of immunity in the population and travel patterns. There are a lot of metrics you can use. Ultimately it will be value judgment, hopefully driven by data.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Lightbound.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Joël Lightbound:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't think I'll use my four minutes. I would just like to ask a question that I did not get a chance to ask at the end of the last round of questions. It is for Mr. Kochhar.

The Public Health Agency of Canada announced on 24 February that it would investigate the incidents in Montreal and Oakville.

What is the status of this investigation into practices to prevent this from happening again?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** I can answer this question.

What I can tell you is that the agency's safety division did an internal review to see what lessons were learned and how we responded to what happened. Following the exercise, a report will be completed. Some measures have already been put in place, including increased surveillance of hotel entrances.

**Mr. Joël Lightbound:** Okay.

That concludes my questions. I do not need more time.

But I will take this opportunity to thank you for all the work you have done over the past year. Public servants have worked very hard, and we thank them on behalf of Canadians. It has been a trying time for everyone.

Ms. Lambropoulos, I will stop here and give you the rest of my speaking time.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you, Mr. Lightbound.

[*English*]

My question is for Mr. Bogoch.

What do you recommend going forward? What does the future look like for travel for Canadians going forward?



**The Chair:** She was a little faint there. The question is, what do you see as the future for Canadians travelling?

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** What recommendations do you have moving forward?

**Dr. Isaac Bogoch:** This is going to evolve with time. I think we will certainly reach a period of time when we can travel freely, like we did before. I certainly foresee vaccine passports in the future, whether we like it or not. However we debate it, this is probably going to be for a significant portion of travel, be it in Canada or elsewhere in the world. I think that will be a significant component, because COVID-19 is not going anywhere. This is going to be around on planet Earth for years and years to come. I do see enough of us vaccinated such that we can travel. I see border restrictions lifting, and I see vaccine passports in our future.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you.

• (1945)

**The Chair:** Okay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for four minutes.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask some questions about travel exemptions.

Some things have been reported to us by our fellow citizens. One of them is that foreigners, permanent residents and Canadian citizens who are abroad and want to come to Canada to take care of a sick person or to attend a funeral can fill out the exemption form and be exempted from the mandatory hotel quarantine. Conversely, Canadians who are in Canada and who have to go abroad to take care of someone are not exempt from mandatory hotel quarantine when they come back. That seems rather illogical to me.

I would like to know what the rationale is behind this.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** I can answer this question.

It is indeed something that has been brought to our attention and that we are looking into.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** So you are looking at the possibility of extending the list of exemptions? It must be said that the government only made the list public on 24 February. Our citizens were asking a lot of questions and wanted to know if they could be exempted from the mandatory quarantine. We didn't necessarily have an answer for them. We were given an email address to submit individual cases. It was on a case-by-case basis and it took a long time to get answers.

Will you publish a list of these exemptions in the near future so that our citizens have the right information?

People in family reunification situations would like to be exempted from the mandatory quarantine. I'm talking about extreme situations, of course. It is only right that hotel quarantine should be mandatory for as many people as possible.

Will those who really have valid reasons to travel be entitled to certain accommodations?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Every time we publish a new version of the order in council, we receive a lot of comments. As in the previous

case, the issue you raise has been brought to our attention, and this is one of the issues we are looking at. I cannot tell you what the decision will be, but we are aware of the situation.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** So, if we have any concerns, perhaps we should submit them to you so that they can be part of the reflection.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Yes, indeed.

You mentioned the email box where we receive questions. We consult it as and when requests come in. This allows us to make a decision and to give a regulatory or non-regulatory answer.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you. It is appreciated.

I would like to come back to the situation that occurred in Oakville.

What guidelines are given to screening officers, quarantine officers or police officers with regard to people who refuse to comply with instructions?

I guess verbal, physical or sexual abuse is not an option and that it was not covered in the training these officers received, but could you tell us a bit more about the nature of that training?

How should officers deal with people who refuse to abide by the rules?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Very briefly, please.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Yes.

[*Translation*]

These are agents who have to go through a series of training sessions, and they have to take an exam after each one. Our agency has a very clear script and very strict rules about the way people must present themselves. For example, a screening officer cannot enter someone's home.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, we're going to have to leave the answer there.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Harris.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Christiansen, you said earlier, and I think it was the clearest indication that there was very little discretion on the part of the CB-SA officers on admissions, that you actually have training materials that you developed from the order in council with the descriptions as to how they ought to be applied.

Could you undertake to make available those training materials to the committee, please? That would give us an explanation as to how that interpretation is being laid out for the border officers. I think that would be most helpful to members of Parliament, for sure, and certainly members of this committee when offering advice to people, because we're asked for it all the time, in regard to whether or not they may or may not be in compliance with the essential worker exception.

• (1950)

**Mr. Calvin Christiansen:** Absolutely.

Mr. Chair, this is very similar to the request for information that was made before, and what we do is we send out field guidance in a format that depends on which OIC we're dealing with. It could be 10 pages long, it could be 14 pages long, and that's the guidance that we have.

We will definitely make that available, in both official languages.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** That would be wonderful. Thank you very much.

I have a question for PHAC about another aspect of people having difficulty getting entry into Canada for compassionate reasons. We know that there's a compassionate exemption for people attending funerals, and also for people trying to see a loved one who may be in palliative care or close to death, although sometimes the approvals haven't come early enough.

Dr. Kochhar, can you confirm that?

Also, is there a possibility of having a compassionate exemption for international adoptions? We've had requests in our office, and I know others have as well, where there's a situation of bringing a child into the country from a traumatic situation and not being able to actually quarantine at home with the child being brought into the country. Is this something that PHAC is prepared to consider as well?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** I'll turn to Brigitte on the current thinking but certainly we continue to look at opportunities to assist in any way.

Brigitte, do you have any specifics on that adoption piece?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Yes. As I was saying, we are aware of this question as well. A number of questions have been raised that we are continuing to examine, including the one you just raised.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Then that's under consideration right now?

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Yes, and a long list of other issues.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Can you describe some of the other possibilities for compassionate grounds? A lot of people think that the non-essential travellers are people who are off vacationing, like some of the politicians we've heard about, or other people vacationing and coming back. We do have circumstances where people who have been away from the country for a year or two and it's their time to come back after finishing studies or whatever. This additional expense is a terrible burden to many of these people. Are there any exemptions for this? They're not workers returning. These are Canadians coming home.

**The Chair:** Be very brief, please.

**Ms. Brigitte Diogo:** Yes, as I mentioned, when these OIC situations come to light that we must examine, we are doing that. I will finish by saying that we are concerned about the variants. The international movement is of concern, so we will examine how the risks can continue to be mitigated.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

On behalf of the committee, I wish to thank the witnesses and the staff for their patience and their service to our country in this very difficult time. We are all struggling together.

This completes our time.

The meeting is adjourned.







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