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

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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey



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

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• (1605)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 16 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Pursuant to the orders of reference of April 11 and May 26, 2020, the committee is resuming its study of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on May 26, 2020, the committee may continue to sit virtually until Monday, September 21, 2020, to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters. Certain limitations on the virtual committee meetings held until now are now removed. The committee is now able to consider other matters, and in addition to receiving evidence, the committee may also consider motions as we normally do. As stipulated in the latest order of reference from the House, all motions shall be decided by way of a recorded vote.

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

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

Before I get started, and this is especially important for the witnesses, I'd like to remind everyone to please use the language channel of the language they are speaking in. If you intend to switch from English to French or French to English, before you switch, be sure to switch the channel.

I would now like to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

We have with us, appearing as an individual, Armine Yalnizyan, economist and Atkinson fellow on the future of workers; and from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, we have Matthew Chater, national president and CEO.

Ms. Yalnizyan, please proceed with your opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

**Ms. Armine Yalnizyan (Economist and Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for the invitation to bear witness to this remarkably hardworking and august committee.

Yesterday, the Bank of Canada told us that the worst could soon be over for the economy, but the pace of rebound is truly far from certain. For Canadian workers, recovery can't come soon enough.

Last month's labour force survey saw Statistics Canada declare that "In April, more than one-third...of the potential labour force did not work or worked less than half...their usual hours". Tomorrow's update is likely to show more of a "he-recovery" than a "she-recovery", that is, more men returning to work than women. That is deeply problematic for us all because of the role of households in the potential for the future economy. That is because household spending accounted for over 56% of GDP before the pandemic hit. It has been a growing driver of GDP now for years because of falling business investment and stuttering exports.

Household purchasing power has been propelling the Canadian economy, and women's incomes are critical to maintaining the strength of household purchasing power, particularly in the post-pandemic period. It is unclear how many workers deemed non-essential during the shutdown will find their way back to being rehired because so many of those workers who lost their jobs were women.

Without question, the limiting factor for women's return to work is child care. To put it most simply, there will be no recovery without a she-recovery, and there will be no she-recovery without child care.

The acceleration of shovel-ready infrastructure projects will certainly help speed recovery, but it is mathematically impossible for growth in primarily male-dominated construction and repair jobs to offset the number of jobs lost by women in the services sector. Furthermore, repairing critical physical infrastructure will do nothing to prevent the loss of critical social infrastructure, which is exactly what we are poised to do.

User fees for child care represent the second-biggest cost for young families, second only to housing expenditures. Many families who lost incomes forfeited their spots in child care facilities because of the high cost of simply holding that space. A lot of child care centres will be affected, and child care costs will undoubtedly rise even further because of the new requirements for physical distancing, dramatically increasing staff-to-child ratios and adding new fixed costs for PPE, cleaning and more space.

We do not know what share of our ecosystem of child care will shutter in the wake of the pandemic. In the U.S., it's estimated that 50% of its child care spaces are at risk. That's 4.5 million spaces. Just to maintain what they have would require an additional \$9.6 billion a month. A bill is going forward right now to prevent further loss of that infrastructure. Of course, the fewer spaces that exist, the less ability there is for women to return to work even when they have a job.

The irony that is not lost on me—and I hope it won't be lost on you—is that subsidized child care literally pays for itself. A study by noted Quebec economist Pierre Fortin and his colleagues has shown that “in 2008 each \$100 of daycare subsidy paid out by the Quebec government generated a return of \$104 for itself and a windfall of \$43 for the federal government”, which didn't put one thin dime into the program.

But there's more—the K-Tel version. Child care can play a three-fold role in recovery. Beyond simply facilitating women's return to work and being a source of employment, there is the decision to ensure that child care is not just a holding tank so mommy can work, but actually affordable, high-quality, early-learning, accessible programming for all families. If that's the approach that we take with child care, we will maximize the future of the next generation of Canadian children. We will lower public spending, and we will increase revenues for governments and society. Now we may choose to act, or we may choose not to act, but whatever we do, we will reap what decision we sow now.

U.S. data shows that there's a return on investment of between \$4 and \$8.75 on every single dollar invested in high-quality early learning, particularly in neighbourhoods where children are more at risk of entering school without being learning-ready. Of course, the impact does not end with preschoolers.

● (1610)

Canadian data from our very own ESDC, Employment and Social Development Canada, shows that spending on Pathways to Education resulted in a net benefit to governments of over \$2,000 through lower expenditures and higher revenues per student in the program, and over \$5,000 for individual participants.

We would literally be leaving money on the table by not using this opportunity to improve our critical social infrastructure by investing in children and high-quality child care.

By rolling out an initiative that is national in nature, but accelerated in our biggest cities first, where we have the highest concentrations of children and poverty, we could maximize their potential and their future, and our potential and our future.

Getting everyone learning-ready and learning-supported as they grow up is a 21st century requirement. It's not just a nice thing to do because of population aging.

Since a shrinking working-age cohort will be asked to support growing numbers of people too old, too young and too sick to work, we really can't afford to discount any of the skills development of anybody. This means that higher quality early-learning child care should not be left to market forces to determine how much should be available, but rather be integrated with the educa-

tion system because it is a public good that is undersupplied by the market at present.

Given the circumstances, I believe this requires a national approach and a strong federal role. I recognize this is a controversial position.

Why should the federal government play a role in child care, which falls constitutionally into provincial jurisdiction? The answers are multiple. It's because child care is just going to get more costly to operate safely in the post-pandemic world as a result of higher staff ratios, more PPE, more time spent on cleaning and on better staff; because provinces and cities are cash-strapped now, which is going to get worse; because the federal government provides funding already for health care and post-secondary education, so there's a precedent; and because, even if we don't raise taxes to pay for better child care and more of it immediately due to post-pandemic pressures, debt by the federal government is the least risky and the lowest cost of any debt held by any economic agent in society, be it a household, a business, a municipal government or a provincial government. Everybody pays more for debt than the federal government does.

Now, I would be remiss not to mention the number of recent immigrants and migrant workers who have been made sicker and have even died because of the pandemic and because of our inadequate provisions for safe reopening. We need better protections for all workers.

Here I especially applaud the federal government's decision to advance the idea of 10 paid sick days, a worthy initiative that should have been in place long before the pandemic hit, but its absence can certainly not be excused now. Every jurisdiction should be clamouring to lead this parade for their workers, who are their voters; but the federal government could and should lead by example and do exactly what it has asked the provinces to do in its own jurisdiction.

Furthermore, the cautionary tale from the use of on-demand and temporary labour in long-term care facilities and delivery services should give everybody pause because the rise of the gig economy is looming on the horizon as employers and consumers look for cheaper, faster, on-demand labour, and workers have fewer paths back to their old jobs.

I urge the federal government to collect better data and monitor this phenomenon very closely, because we don't monitor at all. We don't even measure it well. It will affect everything from income support and skills development programs to public revenue and debt.

In closing, I want to say that the pandemic has revealed that the caring economy, by which I mean health care, elder care and child care, has been revealed to be the vital underpinning of the essential economy. Social infrastructure is as critical to the basic functioning of our lives and jobs as roads and bridges. As our long-term care facilities have shown, twinning care and profit as operational objectives is a risky business.

We need nationwide protocols for the safe reopening of child care. This will require skill testing, for sure, of federal-provincial-territorial cooperation. I don't underestimate the challenges of that, but we all know that a common goal is often easier to pursue when somebody else makes the money available.

● (1615)

Who is that somebody else? It is all of us as Canadians, together through our taxes. Without such shared undertaking, fewer women will return to work, and economic recovery will be further off for everyone, workers and businesses alike. Please, let's not do this to ourselves.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your questions.

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

Next we'll go to Mr. Chater, national president and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada.

Go ahead. You have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Matthew Chater (National President and Chief Executive Officer, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada):** Thanks very much, Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you all today and for undertaking this important work.

My name is Matthew Chater. I'm the president and CEO for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada. I suspect that many of you know what we do, but in short, we provide intentional mentoring relationships to young people facing adversity and in need of additional developmental relationships. Children and youth in our programs face toxic stress by living with adversities like poverty, mental illness, neglect, addiction, identity issues and a range of other sources. Sixty-three per cent of the young people in Big Brothers Big Sisters programs experience three or more of these adversities while at the same time having only one, or often zero, developmental relationships.

That is where we come in with our mentoring supports and services. We provide mentoring relationships to over 41,000 youth in Canada. We provide these services through the support of over 21,000 adult mentors who are matched with youth in our local agencies that operate in 1,100 communities across Canada. This amounts to over four million volunteer hours each year.

It will be of particular interest to this committee that this work is a valuable investment in the country's economic future and our workforce. Research by the Boston Consulting Group found a return of 23:1 for every dollar invested in our mentoring, with those who have benefited from our programs more likely to be employed, earning more over the course of their career, being healthier both

mentally and physically, and more likely to give back to their communities later in life in both dollars and time.

In other words, intentional mentorship through Big Brothers Big Sisters works. We have been providing this critical front-line service in Canada for over 100 years through wars, recessions, a depression and even previous pandemics. However, we, like you, have never experienced anything like COVID-19 and its resulting human and economic impact.

The pandemic has created two enormous challenges for us. First, our corporate and individual donations have slowed to a trickle. We have already been forced to reduce our staff team, and many of our local agencies have had to do the same. Looking ahead, 88% of our local agencies expect to lay off additional staff in the next three months.

I have heard and appreciate the concerns of some members about propping up charities that might have had flawed business models before the pandemic. We do not fall into this camp. We have always had strong fundraising and have never faced a situation like this in our history. Keep in mind that we lost our entire spring fundraising season, which naturally is our busiest time of year with fundraising events and is a critical source of cash flow for the remainder of the year. As a result, Big Brothers Big Sisters as a full federation is facing a forecasted \$21-million shortfall, and that is just for 2020. We expect this reality to be even more precarious in 2021.

Let me be clear, though: Our priority is to continue serving the 41,000 youth in our system now. We will do, and have done, whatever it takes to sustain those relationships, and have put in place a host of measures to switch from in-person meetings and mentoring to doing so virtually. Great credit on this goes to our local agencies and the many volunteers who have adapted their service methods during this time of physical distancing. However, that too has costs. We are having to switch everything to online, which is no easy feat when you are doing the delicate work of matching volunteer mentors with youth through professional staff teams.

These costs come when our resources are stretched like never before. To give you a more practical example, if a youth can't afford a laptop or other device or access reliable Internet, they'd be unable to join a conversation, like the one we're having right now, with their mentor. These are the situations coming up every day that our member agencies are adapting and solving for.

We appreciate the initiatives of the government, such as the wage subsidy and the emergency community support fund, but they are simply not enough, unfortunately. I know you're hearing the same from other charities and non-profit organizations. We support the request of Imagine Canada and the coalition of non-profits and charitable organizations through War Child for a recovery stabilization fund for charities, which hopefully would be of sufficient size to support our cash flow and liquidity positions.

• (1620)

What I just covered is what I would describe as the challenges that we face today. There is also what you would consider our challenge of tomorrow, both for our organization and Canadian society as a whole. It is directly relevant to the work of this committee.

As I mentioned at the outset, we work with youth experiencing toxic stress. COVID-19 is a source of toxic stress for everyone, adults and youth alike. However, imagine what that is doing for a youth already living in isolation, for example, and who has no school, no support systems to rely on, limited contact with friends, if any, and parents who may have lost their jobs. The youths who were facing the greatest challenges before the pandemic are likely to be the most impacted by the pandemic.

Since March 12, calls to Kids Help Phone are up by 55% and texts are up 61%, with 76% of those reaching out saying that they had no one else to talk to. This is heartbreaking at any point in time, but more so now. We are grateful for the investments made by the Government of Canada in these services.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is recommended by Kids Help Phone as a program for young people to reach out to, and it provides ongoing mental health supports. However, we are now in a position wherein we are unable or barely able to sustain our existing matches, let alone take on an influx of new clients. To put that into perspective, we already had 15,000 youth on our waiting list before the pandemic. We expect, and have already seen in many regions, that number continue to grow exponentially as we come out of this and begin, as a community, to heal from the devastating effects of COVID-19. That will put further strain on our resources, both financial and volunteer.

While mentoring is critical for youth mental health, keep in mind that today's youth are going to be entering the worst job market in a hundred years or, perhaps, ever. They will bear the financial and social costs of the pandemic. A mentor at this time is therefore so valuable for helping youths make sense of the world. It is the simple act of giving hope where it may be lacking.

As I mentioned earlier, the data clearly show that mentoring through Big Brothers Big Sisters works in terms of future employment and earnings. In other words, it helps emotionally and mentally, but also economically. My appeal to you today is therefore twofold.

First, you should implement a sector stabilization grant for charities and non-profits, as has been recommended by Imagine Canada and others. If that is not possible, you should address our \$21-million shortfall directly, given our role in providing front-line services to youth. You can rest assured that 90% of every dollar that Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada is bringing in during this time goes

directly to supporting children and families through our member agencies. We are one of the few youth-serving organizations that do not require bricks and mortar to continue providing front-line services. We reach right into the homes of vulnerable youth in Canada, offering critical life-saving relationships.

Second, you should start thinking about the recovery period and the tremendous strain that will be put on young people and front-line service organizations like our own, particularly regarding youth employment. We do not know how this social experiment will end or what its long-term effects will be. However, we do know that without additional ongoing positive relationships to buffer the toxic stress I spoke about earlier, research tells us that the next [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] problems and experience mental illness and disease at unprecedented levels. This is costly, and it is preventable with modest investments. Our focus at Big Brothers Big Sisters is on service continuity and the future of thriving communities across Canada, and we need the ongoing support of the federal government for that.

I speak to youth on a daily basis, as I suspect many of you do as well. I struggle tremendously to process the impact of what is happening as a result of the pandemic on their lives now and into the future. Layered on top of that are the complexities that we're seeing within racialized communities. Navigating the uncertainties of the global pandemic while facing its continual systemic challenges is truly challenging.

• (1630)

We will always be there for them as long as we can, but we do need help.

Thank you again for the invitation to be here today. I look forward to taking your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Chater. Thank you for the excellent work that's done right across the country by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada.

We'll now go to our rounds of questions, beginning with Ms. Kusie, please, for six minutes.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you very much to our witnesses for being here today.

Thank you very much to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada for all the work that you do.

Matthew, you mentioned that you've had to adjust your programming significantly through both layoffs and doing things virtually, as well as moving many programs online. What other things have you done to adjust your programming?

I'm completely overwhelmed as it is by the pandemic, certainly, but in hearing your response and that you have to provide for so many young people who are the future of our nation, I struggle to even comprehend it. What other ways have you found useful to adjust your programming during this most difficult time?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** Monitoring the match relationships and bringing those relationships together in the virtual space is only one element of our business, but also having to look at training our volunteers in the virtual space and undertaking enrolments as well.

We've also had to look at the difficult decision of how to best align the resources during this time. Many of our local agencies have made the difficult decision, difficult within the livelihood of the staff within our organizations but making sense given how we need to respond, to put as much of our resources as possible at the front line and have administrative leaders, as well as other functions within the organization, on leave or their jobs potentially terminated.

Looking at fundraising, for instance, our fundraising team right across the country has significantly gone down. We're having to pivot our services, and the operations of our organizations to bring in those critical funds have also been diminished.

The virtual mentoring space has been keenly of interest to us. As we look to the school year in September, we are not expecting that it will be back to normal, but to a new normal. We are working very closely with our partners to look at virtual platforms to ensure that they are secure and meeting the needs of school boards and communities in that period of time.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** You've talked a lot about your organization dealing with the challenges and stress that youth are experiencing at this time from the pandemic, in particular around social isolation. What are some of the ways your organization has helped youth to cope with the social isolation?

Every time I go for a walk past a park, I see young people doing their best to socially distance, but they're just at such a critical age where those relationships are so important to them to find who they are and who they're becoming. What types of things have you been able to do to help them through this difficult time of social isolation?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** A lot of it comes from upskilling our mentors in being able to have those deep conversations around what it feels like to be socially isolated, because there are behaviours and emotions that are coming up that even a young person might not recognize as being a result of being disconnected. As a human race, we thrive on connection and relationships, and isolation is having a significant effect on mental health and well-being. It's about being able to process and work through what those emotions are, what the feelings are, and making sure that folks know and young people know that there are others who are living through this, and giving them the tools to be resilient through this and also ensuring that they keep up the motivation to be engaged.

I spoke of the conversations we have with youth across the country. From some of the conversations I've had, I've heard from young people who are now the primary source of income for the family, where their part-time role has now become more essential and their hours are going up because their parents do not have the income

necessary to be able to hold the family needs at the forefront. Therefore, it's being able to talk through what that reality is and keeping them connected to education and motivated to learn, but also keeping the degree of hope that I spoke about earlier, just to give that connection point for somebody who is always there for them.

• (1635)

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** You talked a fair bit about facing youth employment and unemployment coming out of COVID-19. What do you think are the major impacts that we'll see on youth unemployment as the economy begins to reopen following COVID-19? What will be the greatest challenges in the new economy?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** I think the greatest challenges will be the skills, as my colleague and the witness before me spoke to. It will be the skills for young people and what they need coming into this post-pandemic world. It means ensuring that they're at the forefront of decision-making for this new economy. It means making sure that they get the skills and connections they need, and that they're able to see and connect with a number of professionals that are working in the space, for them to connect into the skills of tomorrow to be able to thrive in the 21st century.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Chater and Ms. Kusie.

Now we're going to Mr. Turnbull, please, for six minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Thanks, Chair, and thanks to both our witnesses for being here today. I really appreciated your opening remarks. They were very thoughtful and thought-provoking remarks.

Mr. Chater, my questions are mostly for you, but listen, I want to acknowledge the fantastic work that your organization does. Before getting into politics, I spent over a decade working with charities and non-profits across Canada. I had multiple opportunities to run into your organization. The work you do in my community of Whitby is fantastic, but you're a source of Canadian pride right across the country. The service you provide to at-risk vulnerable youth is essential. I wanted to start there with a clear acknowledgement of the work that you do.

I am concerned, of course, by the many stats that you've provided here, and the escalating costs. I think you've shown great adaptability and resilience already, but I want to ask you a little more about the switch to online. You've said that's costly. Could you give us a bit more detail on how costly that is and whether you've been able to access any supports in that regard?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** We've seen some supports at the local level through individual granting initiatives. We are also looking to pursue a virtual platform, as we had noted. One of our partners in this space, the Canadian Mentoring Partnership, has undertaken a significant piece of work to look at e-mentoring platforms. We've been working closely with them as one of those options.

The challenge in the virtual space has been with securing the devices, as I noted, and ensuring that young people have broadband access, the technological access, but it's also in upscaling our staff. When our team members, who traditionally were working out of an office, are having to transition to working from home, there are new technologies that we have needed to purchase.

We have seen some support at the local level. At the national team, we've largely worked virtually, but in the connection between mentor and mentee, it's about trying to do so in a way that is safe and respectful of their privacy and ability. We had to pivot with some of the platforms that we've been using. We continue to seek out opportunity where possible, and the community has responded with some funding to our local members.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** That's wonderful.

Following up on that, you know that the federal government launched a \$350-million emergency community support fund. I'm just wondering how many of your local chapters have been able to access any of those funds so far or whether your national organization has. It certainly seems like you'd be a great candidate for a portion of that funding, and it is a significant amount.

I think we all realize that your request goes beyond maybe that first round of funding. Maybe there's an opportunity to look at that, but in this round, have you accessed some of those funds? Can you give us some information on that?

• (1640)

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** Yes. The national organization has not applied and wouldn't be eligible within that funding the way it's been structured. Big Brothers Big Sisters worked closely with United Way Canada to look at a cohesive response to the application process for our Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies, because each of the United Way locals would be the ones to oversee the administration and the disbursement of those funds. We wanted to ensure that we were demonstrating, much like you were speaking to, that Big Brothers Big Sisters is in need of those resources.

Where we have found challenges in fitting into that funding is in the project-focused response, a short-term project-focused aspect of that funding, whereas the bread and butter for Big Brothers Big Sisters is our core programming and our mentoring initiatives. That is where the support lies. We have seen success and, at this point, we don't know to what extent, as those funds do continue to flow, but we will be doing an impact analysis in the coming weeks to determine to what extent.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Can I clarify this? You said the national organization is not able to access those funds, but are the local chapters able to do that?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** The local chapters can, absolutely.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I'd be really concerned if your local chapters—I think you said there are 1,100 across the country—couldn't access those funds, but you're saying they can, right?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** What about the Canada emergency wage subsidy? How many staff do you have and how many of them have been able to access the wage subsidy through your organization?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** Prior to the pandemic, we had 1,400 staff across the country. With the initial impact analysis we did, we saw a 25% reduction, and that could either be terminations, short-term layoffs or long-term layoffs. We do know that agencies have been applying for the wage subsidy to get the support there. We've had some member agencies express concern and confusion because it is a rather complicated process, particularly for charity and not-for-profit organizations, but we are seeing some agencies get access there.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** You're seeing some uptake. That's good.

We all fought hard in our caucus to make sure that all of these supports would be open to charities and non-profits. It's really good that you are applying and, hopefully, accessing.

The other one is the Canada emergency business account, the \$40,000 interest-free loans. I've worked with many very small non-profits or local chapters that find it almost impossible to get banks to help them out when they have cash flow issues.

**The Chair:** Mr. Turnbull, I'm very sorry, but you are out of time.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Chabot, you have six minutes.

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

I also thank our two witnesses.

I'd like to address my remarks to Ms. Armine Yalnizyan.

I'd like to comment on your analysis of women's work. I think you're joining one of your colleagues we had as a witness, Ms. Jennifer Robson. In fact, you wrote that, mathematically, women make up half of the population that makes up the labour market, but that we may not be able to include them in the recovery. I think those are concerns that we have as well.

You talked a lot about social infrastructure, the social economy and the importance of child care. I would like to say that in Quebec, we made that choice back in 1997. You are right to say that it has paid off, to put it simply. It has greatly improved women's access to the labour market. However, I must respectfully say that this is a provincial jurisdiction. Quebec has made a societal choice, and it is up to the other provinces to question themselves in this regard. That is our point of view.

That said, one day, containment will end, both in schools and in child care. Everything will start all over again. Do you think the economic recovery will be there for women? If not, what would it take to make that happen?



• (1645)

[English]

**Ms. Armine Yalnizyan:** I greatly appreciate the question. I recognize that my comment is controversial in the context of jurisdictions. I tried to make my case as to why I believe this is necessary in the pandemic period, because in most jurisdictions, schools are not open and child care centres are closing.... Consequently, to maintain critical social infrastructure that needs to exist across the country, my view is that the federal government needs to step up to the plate, not just on physical infrastructure but on social infrastructure as well. Of all the social infrastructure, this is the most critical to regaining recovery for men, for women, for households and for the entire superstructure of businesses that rely on household purchasing power.

I don't see how we're going to do it province by province. I think too many provinces are going to be cash-strapped in the wake of this jurisdictional.... Our ecosystem of child care support is...in some measure—and we don't even know which measure, because we count the system so poorly in Canada. It's delivered partly through not-for-profit private sector organizations and partly through for-profit private sector businesses. It's unclear which of these are going to survive. Without federal support, I do not believe it is going to be possible to sustain the infrastructure. As I mentioned, better measurement is done in the United States, and there they estimate they are going to lose 50% of their capacity.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Beyond social infrastructure and what we believe Canada should be doing, I would like to know what economic measures you have in mind. You say that some provinces are in bad shape, but they are making a social choice when they decide whether or not to invest in social infrastructure. I am quite proud of Quebec in this regard. I have done a lot of work on this.

Now everything will start up again. We set up the CERB. As you know, it saved a lot of women. In fact, if employment insurance had been used, many women would not have received support. One day, the CERB will no longer be offered, but we ask that it be maintained.

What support measures for women and families do you see in the context of economic recovery?

[English]

**Ms. Armine Yalnizyan:** This is precisely why I'm turning to child care as both a source of employment and a liberator, a liberator for women who do find work to be able to get work because without child care they can't return.

The schools are not opening until possibly next fall. Child care centres and camps are shut down. Unless we do something to permit women who do have jobs to return, we're going to see even more of a recession amongst women.

I just need to hammer away at this point. I don't think it is a provincial question alone. The CERB was really important to keep people at home during the contagion, 100%. I'm very proud both of the Government of Quebec and its approach to child care and the Government of Canada and its approach to helping people stay home safely to contain the contagion.

However, the CERB is precisely designed as a disincentive to work. That is what its purpose is. Extending it during a reopening makes no sense. We need different policies to get people back to work. In particular, to get women back to work, we need to stop putting up barriers to their getting back to work. Just because Quebec is more advanced doesn't mean that the rest of the country doesn't need help in catching up.

In fact, Quebec could be doing, as you know, an even more aggressive job of reaching into low income communities with very high-quality, subsidized care for early learning and development because so many immigrant families and low-income families send their kids to school not learning-ready. We could be doing more to help children in high school improve their ability to graduate.

• (1650)

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** As I understand it, in your opinion, the CERB should be extended.

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

[English]

Thank you, Ms. Yalnizyan.

Next up we're going to go to Jenny Kwan for six minutes, please.

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

I thank our witnesses for their presentations.

I'd like to ask Ms. Yalnizyan my first question.

I appreciate your presentation of a feminist analysis of the impact of COVID on women particularly and of the post-COVID actions that need to be taken.

I'll focus on the child care piece because I've already heard from constituents in my riding who are very worried about it. Some of them are seeing their maternity leave coming to an end and, likewise, their paternity leave coming to an end. As you indicated, the child care services were inadequate to begin with before COVID. Now many of them are having to operate at half capacity because of social distancing requirements and so on.

In light of that, am I hearing correctly from you that what we need is a national child care strategy? I wonder also what your thoughts are on paternity and maternity leave. My constituents are asking for the government to extend the maternity and paternity leave period.

I'd just like to get your thoughts on that.

**Ms. Armine Yalnizyan:** Let's start with the inadequacy of child care, which is a market failure. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women report that came out in 1970 is going to mark its 50th anniversary in December. We've been talking about the need for child care as part of the early education system for 50 years, and for 50 years we have treated it as a market issue. It is a family choice. It is an individual choice. Let the market decide how it is delivered. We have seen systemic market failure. Now we are going to see a colossal wave of market failure as these centres close because people don't have the money to go there right now, and then when they do have the money to go there, they are not open anymore.

So yes, I think we need a national child care strategy. Yes, I believe it should be federally funded, especially in the post-pandemic period. We need to have national protocols for safe reopening. It's going to mean very different adult-to-child ratios, more physical distancing, absolutely guaranteed supply chains for PPE.

This is not an individual province's problem, just like the pandemic wasn't an individual province's problem. I believe very strongly that we need a national strategy that's federally funded to get us safely through to the recovery.

With respect to maternity and parental leave, we know the most expensive form of child care is infant care. We also know around the world, probably in 99% of cases, the best caregiver for infants is the parent. We could be saving money and providing better care by extending that care, and looking at what other jurisdictions do to help parents to be able to afford to stay at home, but I can guarantee if we're doing it at 50% income replacement...

Again, Quebec is the outlier. We need to learn from the best in this country, and we need to be mirroring this across the country. We have to do better than an EI-based 55% income replacement because low-income parents cannot afford 55% of their already low income.

Yes, longer periods, but the take-up will continue to be ridiculously low for people who can't afford to lose so much income to be able to stay at home with their kids.

This again is a market failure, and this is an issue of the public good. We need to have all hands on deck in 20 years. If we don't invest in these kids now, if we discount now, we will not have them to rely on in 15 to 20 years. I don't understand what's difficult to understand about this.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I will jump in here. Aside from the shortcomings you have identified, there is another aspect as well. Many people do not qualify for the EI system. That's why the government came in with the CERB. Even then, there are many holes in it that we're still trying to plug at this juncture.

To that end, some people have advocated for a universal direct payment, or guaranteed income if you will. Do you have any thoughts about that as we move beyond the post-COVID period?

• (1655)

**Ms. Armine Yalnizyan:** I have a lot of thoughts on it. I've been quite public about my position that I do not think the CERB is a portal to a basic income, and I don't think a basic income is the right approach, given the needs.

We need excellent basic services. We don't need money. We need to make sure everybody is.... Some people need more money. Social assistance rates across this country are appallingly low. They are inadequate. They are riddled with all sorts of precocious ways of kicking you off social assistance.

But that's a different conversation from a basic income. My position would be, particularly in the post-pandemic period, what COVID has revealed is care—elder care, health care, child care—are the preconditions for a functioning economy every bit as much as roads and bridges. We need excellent services we can all rely on. That will cost money, and that will yield higher returns than anything we could provide through basic income.

To your point that too many people are not even eligible to get maternal and parental benefits, I think for sure we will be reviewing our EI system on the other side of this. I have no doubt that part of this discussion will be how we support all parents better, and again, look to Quebec for models of how to do it. We are not without models of how to do it, and we need to suck it up and get going with how to do it right for most people.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Yalnizyan and Ms. Kwan.

Now we'll go to Mr. Vis, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Thank you, Chair. Thank you to both of our witnesses for some excellent testimony.

Ms. Yalnizyan, I appreciate your comments about the role of the federal government, but I also believe there are ways to uphold the constitutional jurisdictions of provinces and territories while responding to some of the very important economy of care, including child care, that you referenced in your remarks today.

First off, I am a father, I'm 35 years old and I was elected last year, so I know full well the cost of child care, being in a family of two working parents, both grinding it to get ahead and paying in excess of \$1,000 a month for child care. That's my reality, before being elected and now.

I've heard from early childhood educators in my province of British Columbia, where I send my son, that they're choked because, while the Province of B.C. initially called them essential workers, it did not list them as eligible for the temporary pandemic pay top-up program.

In your opinion, should early childhood educators who work in day cares and Montessoris have been listed as essential workers?

**Ms. Armine Yalnizyan:** The short answer is yes. In Ontario, we had essential workers supported by free, around-the-clock child care for shift workers. That gives you a sense of how essential they were. They are essential workers, doing their essential work, so, yes, they should have been deemed essential workers. We should put them in the public education system; child care workers should be part of free education.

Can I just say something to the chair, please?

I have also been asked to provide testimony at FINA, which starts in a minute. I'm going to have to leave in one minute. I had no idea this was going to go on this long. I'm afraid I'm going to have to duck out.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Can I ask you one more quick question before you go?

**Ms. Armine Yalnizyan:** Sure.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I believe when I did my taxes for last year I could deduct up to \$8,500 for child care expenses, but my child care expenses far exceeded \$8,500. Would changing the CRA tax credit to allow for the true cost of child care help professional mothers, and even low-wage mothers, to be able to participate in our economy in a more fulsome manner?

• (1700)

**Ms. Armine Yalnizyan:** It's an excellent question and I thank you for it, but I do believe it would help professional women far more than low-income women. What we have seen is that most of the people who lost their jobs, that were deemed not essential, are low-paid workers. We have to get them back into the workforce. Just mathematically, we need to get more people working and more people skilled up, doing better jobs.

Yes, it's possible, but to be completely honest with you, if we spend more money on tax expenditures to discount the full freight of child care, it would benefit people with nannies more than it would benefit people with kids in child care, so I'm not sure why we would skew our tax expenditure system that way.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Okay. Thank you for your testimony today.

I will turn Big Brothers now. Mr. Chater, thank you for being at this committee today as well.

I'm very concerned to hear about the \$21-million shortfall that Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada has. Like all Canadians, we really honour the work you do.

In my riding, in 2017, we had a flash flood and there was some federal matching involved in donations to the Red Cross. Would Big Brothers Big Sisters be open to the idea of a federal matching program to incentivize Canadians with the means to support charities such as yours and other similar charities?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** I like that idea, and yes, we're certainly open to it.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Okay. Thank you.

I know Imagine Canada in the past has talked about increasing the tax benefits for charitable organizations. I do know that political parties all receive a more generous tax credit.

Given the circumstances now, would Big Brothers Big Sisters support an increase to the tax benefits for Canadians who donate?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** Yes, we would support that. We stand behind many of the solutions that Imagine Canada has put forward.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Okay. Thank you.

From speaking with my local police officers, and you did touch on this a bit, and from other anecdotal encounters I've had with constituents, I've heard a lot of unfortunate accounts that domestic abuse has increased during COVID-19-related isolation measures.

Could you comment a little further about what you've seen and the challenges that our at-risk youth are facing during this time?

**The Chair:** Give a short answer please, Mr. Chater.

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** Our agencies are very much aware and are doing wellness checks as well, which is well beyond our mandate. We are checking in on families to ensure that they have the appropriate supports there and are connected to the other community services to get support where they need it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're going to go to Mr. Dong for five minutes, if you have questions for Mr. Chater.

**Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.):** Yes, I do.

I had a prepared question for Ms. Yalnizyan, but I guess she's no longer here.

I will split my time with Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Chater, good afternoon. Thank you very much for coming to the committee.

I want to start with the question my colleague, Ryan Turnbull, was going into, which is your view on the Canada emergency business account. Were you able to access that program?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** Yes, we were. Many of our member agencies, as well, have been able to navigate it. There was some confusion around the eligibility criteria initially, but we were able to get that clarified.

**Mr. Han Dong:** Great. That program has been tweaked maybe two or three times now, especially on the payroll requirement. Are you aware of that?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** Yes.

I would like to mention that coming in to this meeting to talk about the dire situation that Big Brothers Big Sisters is facing considers all of the government programs that are currently in place. As I noted in my opening remarks, we are very grateful for the efforts of the federal government during this time, but we do require additional support.

**Mr. Han Dong:** Because your service is required by communities, there is quite a bit of demand.

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** Yes.

**Mr. Han Dong:** Speaking of demand, I represent a riding where a lot of newcomers to Canada choose to reside and work. Can you tell us a bit about your services, programs and demand—observations you've seen—especially coming from the newcomer communities?

• (1705)

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** We see a significant demand. Many of our organizations across Canada have various programs in order to be able to match newly arrived Canadians with young Canadians who are newly integrating into community and to get those supports. We have conversation clubs as well, where young people can start to understand and integrate, or understand what the school system is like within Canada.

We have always seen a strong demand within newcomer communities. We're always adapting our programs and looking at all of our services through an equity, diversity and engagement lens to ensure that our services are meeting those needs.

**Mr. Han Dong:** I'll pass the rest of my time to my colleague, Mr. Vaughan.

Thank you.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.):** I too had a question for Ms. Yalnizyan.

Largely, I want to clear up the record about the notion that no federal funding for child care or early learning is going to Quebec. The reality is that Quebec hasn't signed the accord to take advantage of the \$750 million we have invested into that system to improve, increase and distribute more dollars for child care.

On that front, as we talk about long-term care, and as we talk about new federal investments, it's not unreasonable to make sure that those investments also add new capacity, increase quality and don't just simply displace provincial dollars being spent with the support for the status quo. Clearly, what we've heard is that the status quo isn't good enough.

One of the other programs we've offered to invest in and are looking forward to bringing forward in our budget is the issue of after-school and before-school care for older kids.

Mr. Chater, in light of the fact that school is out, and school may not be coming back anytime soon, would it be appropriate to use those dollars to support the works of organizations like yours that

deal with youth to make sure that youth are served directly, and that groups that service youth get those funds to make sure—even without school—that they still have a place that's safe and can be provided for through public funds?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** Yes. That is a challenge that I think many are facing, particularly in urban communities, supporting young people and participating in prosocial behaviours during this time.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** If school does reopen in the fall and students return to a place that may be safer than their home, in some circumstances, investment into before- and after-school care is critical to make sure there are safe places for their needs to be met. Would it be wise, then, as we start to move toward recovery, that the promise we made for before- and after-school care for older kids should be intensified to support the learnings we've had coming through the pandemic?

**Mr. Matthew Chater:** I'm not able to speak to policies on before and after care. Big Brothers Big Sisters operates outside of before and after care. Any supports we would have in order to be able to keep youth connected to adult mentors, whether before or after the school setting, would be appreciated.

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

Mr. Chater, thank you for sticking with us, and thank you so much for the work you do.

The meeting is suspended while we prepare for the next witnesses.

• (1708)

(Pause)

• (1710)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I certainly don't want to belabour this, but I do want to move the motion that I had put on notice. This one was dated Thursday, May 28, 2020. Everyone should have received it.

It reads as follows:

That, in the context of its study to the government response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development, and the Status of Persons with Disabilities send for the following documents to be provided by the Government by June 30, 2020.

1) All briefing notes, memorandums, emails, guidance and documents related to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit—

**The Chair:** Ms. Kusie, I'm going to stop you there. Your motion is in order, and you did give notice. However, it is not appropriate to move a motion on a point of order. I absolutely invite you to move it when you have the floor, but it isn't a point of order.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay. I appreciate that.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will now hear from our witnesses. We have with us, from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Angela Bonfanti, senior vice-president, foundation programming; and from the Canadian Women's Foundation, Paulette Senior, president and chief executive officer.

Ms. Bonfanti, please proceed with your opening statement. You have 10 minutes.

**Ms. Angela Bonfanti (Senior Vice-President, Foundation Programs, Canadian National Institute for the Blind):** Thank you, Chair, and hello, members of Parliament.

My name is Angela Bonfanti, and I am the senior vice-president for the CNIB Foundation.

Before I begin, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge that this is National AccessAbility Week. While this is an important week every year, given today's current events related to racism and discrimination, this year's National AccessAbility Week is even more important.

For over 100 years, CNIB has been combatting discrimination and advocating for the equity of all Canadians. We serve all Canadians living with sight loss, regardless of age, gender, race or sexual orientation, because blindness, unlike an unfortunate number of people in our world today, does not discriminate. Far too many members of our community must deal with the reality of being marginalized not only for the colour of their skin, for example; they must also deal with additional the discrimination from travelling with a white cane, for example, or a guide dog. At CNIB we have worked diligently, and will continue to do so, until everyone can live, work and play without barriers. We challenge discrimination and support the rights of every Canadian.

I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight how COVID-19 has impacted over one and a half million Canadians living with sight loss. CNIB's mandate is to remove barriers, combat negative ramifications of isolation, and do what we can to help Canadians living with sight loss live the lives they choose. At a time when isolation was being mandated for all, we knew that our community needed us now more than ever. Almost immediately, every one of our staff members picked up the phone and called every participant in our database. Nearly 10,000 Canadians have been phoned to date.

From these calls and these conversations, we have received insights on what the community wants from us during this pandemic and beyond. The response has resulted in hundreds of new virtual programs serving thousands of Canadians with sight loss in just the last 11 weeks alone. Our programs range from technology training sessions to peer support programs to groceries and prescription drug pickup and drop-off services for our clients who are in need.

Also, as we know all too well, every household with children, including mine, has become a school of its own. For families with children who are blind or partially sighted—

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Ms. Bonfanti, could you please hold your mike? It will be easier for the interpreters.

**Ms. Angela Bonfanti:** Sure.

For families with children who have sight loss, there are new challenges that are presented, so we are providing free access to educational games that have been designed for children who are blind. We are also ensuring families have access to 3D printers to ensure tactile learning continues. This is just the beginning to ensure that no child with sight loss is left behind.

This is a forever change for CNIB. Our virtual offerings are certainly here to stay. We have essentially doubled our program offering without doubling our workforce, and so, as we start our discussions about commencing in-person programs, we must keep the health and safety of our staff in mind, especially since so many of our staff live with sight loss.

In addition to the development of brand new virtual program offerings, our community's feedback has also helped to develop a new advocacy effort that focuses on the albeit unintended yet nonetheless potentially dangerous consequences associated with physical distancing.

Shortly after the pandemic hit, we heard from participants who were receiving negative attention and facing discrimination while using sighted guides to access essential services. Many individuals who are blind or partially sighted rely on sighted guides to help them safely navigate the grocery store, the pharmacy, their doctor's office and the bank, for example.

In response, we launched a public awareness campaign with significant media coverage. We sent open letters to legislators, police services, transit commissioners, and supermarket and pharmacy chains to ensure Canadians with sight loss receive the appropriate accommodations during this time. We also raised awareness about physical distancing and guide dogs. While guide dogs are trained to help their partner get from point A to point B, they do not understand physical distancing. These are not the only issues we've heard.

This pandemic has caused great anxiety for the disability community, including Canadians with sight loss. As part of a Canadian Council of the Blind survey, more than 80% of respondents were worried they may not be able to pay for groceries, prescriptions or even their monthly bills.

While we applaud the government and the opposition parties for approving legislative changes to create the Canada emergency response benefit program, it may not be available to many Canadians living on or below the poverty line because of the minimum \$5,000 income required to qualify for the program. We understand that employment insurance is available; however, the CERB simply provides more money, and it would be very much welcomed by a population where the majority's income is less than those without disabilities.

We also acknowledge the letter Minister Qualtrough sent to the provinces urging them not to claw back disability benefits, and we urge further advocacy from the federal government with the provinces on this most important issue.

I would also like to highlight that the CERB provides a monthly benefit of \$2,000, but the Canada pension plan disability benefit provides a maximum of \$1,300 with an average monthly payment of \$971. CNIB strongly recommends modernizing the CPPD in line with the CERB. If a pandemic can show that Canadians, regardless of abilities, need at least \$2,000 a month to survive, it should be no different for people with disabilities who are unable to work. Emergency response funding for people with disabilities is greatly needed today. If seniors have access to a one-time, tax-free payment of \$300, people with sight loss deserve something similar.

With all of this mind, I would like to ensure that accessibility and inclusion is at the forefront of decision-making as the economy begins to reopen. Our world is inherently tactile, and this is especially important to Canadians who essentially see the world through touch. With a rapidly growing appetite to do everything in a contactless manner, we simply cannot eliminate the elements of a tactile world completely. There would be great dangers and barriers for Canadians with sight loss who rely on these elements to live safely and independently.

As we slowly lift physical distancing measures and reopen the economy, businesses small to large should look no further than people with disabilities to employ. People with disabilities live lives full of obstacles, and they are often left on their own to get over, under and around these obstacles to live successful lives. They are natural innovators and advocates. We believe this is exactly the type of talent organizations need at their table as they open their doors. This is not the time to put accessibility and inclusion on the back burner; it is the time to put it at the forefront, as it will create such incredible value to the Canadian workforce. This is not simply the right thing to do, I assure you; this is the smart thing to do for business.

This past winter, CNIB submitted a pre-budget consultation recommending the federal government fund CNIB's employment program called Come to Work. The program connects job seekers who are blind or partially sighted with employers who want to discover the full potential of Canada's talent. Now is the time to continue this critical work.

• (1720)

Finally, I must highlight the need for financial support for Canada's non-profit and charitable sectors. Since March, the CNIB Foundation, like many other organizations you have heard from already, has seen a significant decrease in donations. They are what

we need to continue our business. Even with the help of the Canada emergency wage subsidy, everything we do to support Canadians with sight loss could very well be in jeopardy if we do not raise the funds we need. As a result of the pandemic, we expect to see our revenues continue to decline for the months and potentially years to come.

We are urging the federal government to prioritize financial incentives for organizations that serve the most vulnerable in our society, such as the many Canadians living with disabilities.

At this time I'd like to thank the chair and the committee members for giving us the opportunity to highlight the impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians with sight loss. I would be most happy to answer your questions.

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

Next we have Ms. Senior from the Canadian Women's Foundation.

Ms. Senior, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

**Ms. Paulette Senior (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Women's Foundation):** Thank you very much.

My name is Paulette Senior. I'm the president and CEO of the Canadian Women's Foundation. I'm pleased to be presenting to you today.

The Canadian Women's Foundation is Canada's only national public foundation for women and girls and one of the 10 largest women's foundations in the world. In our over three decades now that we've been around, we've been granting and doing work that has been focused on moving women out of poverty and out of violence and into safety and confidence.

Thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee this afternoon to discuss the urgent question of the government's pandemic response. I say "urgent" because of the mission of the Canadian Women's Foundation, which is "transformative change in the lives of women and girls in Canada", and the COVID-19 pandemic has heavily impacted women. Women's safety, livelihoods and well-being have all been put at risk, most severely for women from communities that are marginalized by systemic discrimination. The pandemic has shone a penetrating light on gender-based violence, women's job losses, care work and the need for child care.

The federal government has taken many helpful steps to date. As the economy reopens, federal investments will be crucial to women's safety, economic security and well-being, and gender equality. Recovery investments must include all women, especially those facing deep systemic discrimination, and continue to advance equality gains. Achieving that will require applying an inclusive gender-based analysis with an intersectional lens to the process of designing government recovery investments.

More than 60% of the one million jobs lost in March were lost by women. April employment figures showed a sharp increase in men's unemployment as construction and non-essential manufacturing halted, but by the end of that month, women had still experienced greater losses, as 32% of women and 29% of men had lost their jobs or the majority of their work hours.

Those job losses are highly concentrated among the lowest earners. For women earning \$16 an hour or less—a highly racialized population—job losses in February to April were over 50%. The top 10%, earning \$48 an hour or more, experienced only a 1% loss of jobs, and women lost all of those. Overall, women earning the lowest 20% of wages experienced job loss at 50 times the rate of top earners. This is the type of granular data revealed by the intersectional gender-based analysis needed to support recovery investments.

The majority of women workers, about 56% or so, are employed in occupations grouped as what we call the “five Cs”: caring, clerical, catering, cashiering and cleaning. These jobs are largely either care work directly involved in pandemic response or retail work with an uncertain return-to-work date. How much of the job loss experienced by women will be long term remains to be seen, but it will be significant and likely focused in retail.

This is no time for shovel-ready physical infrastructure projects employing a workforce that is 90% men. Construction has reopened in much of the country, and tomorrow's employment numbers will likely to reflect that. It is time to implement the social infrastructure that supports women's return to work.

Quick implementation of the Canada emergency response benefit has been a helpful income support strategy for those who can access it, but a plan is needed for women whose employers cannot reopen after 16 weeks and who are facing long-term unemployment. Employment strategies need an intersectional gender-based analysis and need to address the existing structural issues—like the wage gap—exacerbated by the pandemic. The federal government needs to lead a process to implement the announced 10 paid sick days and to continue to emphasize income supports.

Women—largely black and racialized women—predominate in the care sector in providing front-line support and containing COVID-19, all too often from precarious part-time jobs in high-risk conditions and without paid sick days. Women make up as much as 90% of personal support workers working in long-term care homes and providing home care in the community. More than 65% of—

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair—I can't hear the interpretation right now.

I am so sorry to interrupt Ms. Senior.

**The Chair:** Don't apologize—it's appropriate to flag the problem.

[*English*]

Just hold for one minute there, Ms. Senior.

[*Translation*]

Madam Clerk, is there a problem with interpretation? Can it be fixed?

[*English*]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-France Lafleur):** Yes, just give me one minute. I'll confirm with our tech team.

I'm being told that it's working now.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Larouche, was there just a break in the flow, or did you miss the whole intervention?

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** I only missed the last sentence. I heard the rest. I must have missed a sentence or two.

**The Chair:** Perfect, thank you.

[*English*]

The floor is yours, Ms. Senior.

It appears that the translation stopped working just a few sentences before I intervened. Please go back a couple of sentences.

Don't worry; your time won't be compromised.

**Ms. Paulette Senior:** Thanks. I appreciate that.

More than 65% of cleaners working in hospitals, schools and office buildings are women. Much cleaning work, now perceived as essential, has long been precarious: part-time, low-paid, often sub-contracted work, lacking job protections, paid sick leave or extended health benefits. Pandemic outbreaks in LTC—which harm residents, staff and their families and can lead to community outbreaks—can be traced to some of these ongoing issues. Where full-time jobs are not available, PSWs may work multiple part-time positions at different locations to compensate, which increases the risk of spreading infection from one care facility to another.

With regard to the government response, the federal government needs to ensure a stable, full-time, long-term care workforce, with sufficient protections—physical and job—to provide care and maintain their well-being. That will benefit both the workforce and the residents, who are mostly women, and the community at large. This includes working with the provinces and territories to ensure that employment standards are sufficient and fully enforced, including a sufficient supply of PPE and honouring refusals of unsafe work; to ensure full-time positions at salary levels above a living wage; and to ensure a full, open-ended review of the structure, management and ownership of long-term care, keeping in focus the women who work and live in LTC facilities.

The closure of child care centres and schools placed a triple burden on many mothers doing full-time jobs from home and managing both children and household tasks. The pandemic has highlighted that child care is now integral to the community. Without it, Canada doesn't work. Child care has been revealed as an essential service that cannot be shuttered. Provinces that closed all child care centres quickly reopened some to accommodate workers considered essential during the pandemic. However, the child care sector is fragmented and underfunded, much of it not stable enough to withstand the drop in parent-fee revenue resulting from pandemic closures.

Many centres are not committed to reopening. While the need for physical distancing changes the economics of child care, it remains essential to economic reopening and to gender equality. The federal government needs to ensure that funding is in place to safely reopen the child care sector at pre-pandemic levels of service and to continue to expand until universal access to affordable child care is achieved. The bilateral process with provinces and territories needs to move to a near horizon of three or five years.

As the lockdown increased the risk of domestic violence and decreased women's ability to leave abusive homes for the safety of women's shelters, it highlighted the importance of the violence prevention sector. The Canadian Women's Foundation welcomed the federal government's announcement of \$50 million to assist women's shelters and sexual assault centres with their pandemic responses. We partnered with Women and Gender Equality to distribute some of those funds to sexual assault centres and broader gender-based violence organizations. In the process, we heard once again about the extent of need.

As the executive director of one busy sexual assault centre, describing their transition to working remotely, said, "We had to invest in a phone system as ours was a donation from 1980. We didn't have funds for PPE for staff and volunteers accompanying women to hospitals, police and doctors...the funding helped us purchase PPE...a phone system, and food for some clients. As much as I'm grateful for the 25k; I must be honest with you, it's not enough. ... we need to invest in a web chat system for youth asking to text... we had to do home visits as we fear for some clients' lives and despite reporting to police, nothing has been done. We are running out of PPE... Volunteers have begun to show signs of burn out and we are averaging 60-80 crisis calls a day."

The federal government needs to develop and implement a well-funded national action plan on violence against women and gender-

based violence that recognizes this work as essential to society and gender equality.

• (1730)

By "well-funded", we mean commensurate with the multi-billion-dollar annual cost of violence. The federal government also needs to complete development and start implementation of a national action plan to address violence against indigenous women and girls without further delay.

To summarize, this is not the time for small asks. The pandemic has shone a very bright light on deep fault lines of inequality in Canadian society. The government's response needs to be similarly deep. The structural change outlined will respond to needs of women marginalized by systemic discrimination: black and racialized women; first nations, Métis and Inuit women; women with disabilities; and LGBTQ2S and gender non-conforming people. It will strengthen our social systems to provide sufficient care in times of stress, including for an aging population that is largely women, and continue to advance gender equality.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to your questions.

• (1735)

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

We're going to begin with questions and/or motions.

I'll recognize Mrs. Kusie from the Conservatives.

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

Again, I want to move my motion, which I had put forward previously. Can I dispense? Everyone has the motion, or I can read it:

That, in the context of its study to the government response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development, and the Status of Persons with Disabilities send for the following documents to be provided by the Government by June 30, 2020.

1) All briefing notes, memorandums, emails, guidance and documents related to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit between March 1, 2020 and May 28, 2020.

2) All briefing notes, memorandums, emails and documents related to the eligibility requirements for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit between March 1, 2020 and May 28, 2020.

3) All briefing notes, memorandums, emails and documents related to potential fraudulent cases of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit between March 1, 2020 and May 28, 2020.



4) All legal opinions sent to the government by briefing notes, email, documents or other forms of communication related to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit between March 1, 2020 and May 28, 2020.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mrs. Kusie.

Just to advise the witnesses, the motion is in order and it is appropriate for the committee to deal with it, so please bear with us.

To my colleagues on the committee, if you wish to speak on the motion, please use the “Raise Hand” function, and I’ll develop a speaking list.

I see Ms. Kwan. Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

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

I’m hoping we can dispense with this quickly. I have a couple of proposed amendments to the motion.

I think getting information is important and I think we would all support getting that information. However, I would like to propose that we change the timeline. I know and understand that officials at this moment are very busy trying to provide services to Canadians, and perhaps we can change the timeline to the end of August, August 31, for the materials to be made available to the committee. That’s one amendment, Mr. Chair.

I have another proposed amendment to the motion. In terms of the documentation, these kinds of motions have been moved in other committees as well, and instead of having the documents to be retrieved for this committee apply to every staff person, perhaps we can limit it to ministers and senior officials. “Senior officials” means deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers and directors of departments. I think that will limit the scope somewhat, but nonetheless we’ll get the pertinent information for the committee’s perusal.

Last but not least, Mr. Chair, I would like to suggest that the request for legal opinions be deleted at this time. I believe that’s the fourth item in the motion.

Hopefully, these will be deemed by Mrs. Kusie to be friendly amendments.

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

We have three amendments, and the debate is now on the amendments. I recognize Mr. Housefather.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to thank Ms. Kwan for her amendments. I agree with all three of the amendments, and of course, Mr. Chair, we can only deal with one amendment at a time. In addition to what Ms. Kwan has put forward, I will have at least one additional amendment, perhaps two.

If the first question is to Mrs. Kusie, who put forward the motion, does she accept the three requests by Ms. Kwan as being friendly amendments? We need to know whether we actually have to deal with the amendments, because if we do, we should be going one by one so as not to confuse things.

Perhaps I can yield the floor back to Ms. Kusie to answer that before I continue.

• (1740)

**The Chair:** Ms. Kusie, do you consider the amendments to be friendly, or do you wish them to be debated individually?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I consider the amendments friendly.

**The Chair:** Okay. That being the case, the motion is now amended in the manner proposed by Ms. Kwan.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m going to ask Mrs. Kusie if perhaps she would agree to two other amendments that I hope she will consider to be friendly, and I want to again thank my colleague Ms. Kwan for having put forward those three.

In other committees—the health committee and, most recently, in governmental operations—there was also an exemption made for matters of national security, matters related to solicitor-client privilege and matters of cabinet confidence.

I would propose that the deleted section, the fourth section, which related to legal opinions, be replaced by the following:

Irrespective of the foregoing, matters of Cabinet Confidence, solicitor client privilege and National Security shall be excluded from the request and that the documents be redacted as may be necessary to protect the privacy of Canadians citizens and Permanent Residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter.

I believe this to be consistent with what was adopted very recently as an NDP motion at the governmental operations committee and by the health committee as well.

My second proposal to Mrs. Kusie, if she would consider it to be friendly, would be to simply delete the word “emails” from sections 1, 2 and 3. It would be to leave all of the other documents but exclude emails. The number of emails that would be covered here, given the millions of Canadian citizens requesting these benefits who have gone to these departments and the fact that everybody was communicating only by email during this period, would be exceptionally voluminous. I believe that it is again consistent with other committees that have not included emails but have included briefing notes, memorandums, guidance and documents.

Those are my requests to Mrs. Kusie. If not, I’ll bring them forward as amendments.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Kusie, are you comfortable with those being considered friendly amendments, or shall we debate them individually?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I certainly feel that removing section 4 does address the solicitor-client issue. I could agree to the cabinet confidence and the national security. My only question would be regarding the emails. Would it not be significantly limited, now that we have changed the scope, and given the friendly amendment from Ms. Kwan regarding ministers, senior officials and directors? That’s just a question. I wonder.

As provided by the government, I agree that's a very large scope, but it seems to be more limited now with ministers, senior officials and directors. It would seem to me that the briefing notes and memorandums would be information that would be largely for public consumption already, whereas emails might provide us with more information.

I wonder if there is a way we can edit the emails so that we're both comfortable with that because, as I said, I feel we've taken care of number 4, and I can agree with the cabinet confidence and the national security, but for emails, I wonder how we could address that a little bit further. As I said, it seems to me to be more addressed, given the more limited scope that Ms. Kwan provided us with.

• (1745)

**The Chair:** Mr. Housefather, I'd like to come back to you.

I think what we heard is that with the amendment you've proposed, parts of it are considered friendly, but there are problems with the other parts.

Can we resolve this, or should we simply proceed with the debate on the amendment that you put forward?

Go ahead.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you, and I thank my colleague Madam Kusie for her consideration.

I think what I understood is that she's comfortable to substitute number 4 to deal with solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence, and also to redact for privacy issues. Again, this is consistent with the other two committees. I think she was okay with that.

I think her issue was with the second issue that I raised with respect to emails.

What I would suggest to Ms. Kusie is that when people prepare official documents or documents that relate to guidance, I think they're thinking about the issue at hand. Emails, even between two people we've named in this, can be emails that people are flippantly sending to one another. That can include all kinds of comments that they would never have considered relevant to the subject, but they would be part of a larger email that may contain excerpts related to the CERB or something else.

I'm wondering if perhaps we could start with the deletion of "emails", and if there's something you think then is missing, we can work back. I just don't think that we need all the emails that have been exchanged.

Again, remember that this is not only emails between these named people; any email that the person exchanged with a third party that related to that subject matter would then also be included. I think that's a pretty wide scope. Again, I don't think that's consistent with what's been requested at other committees.

I would humbly request that you might consider just removing the word "emails". If not, I'm happy to propose it as a separate amendment, and we can debate that amendment.

**The Chair:** We'll go back to you, Ms. Kusie.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** As I said, I don't....

I'm getting some new information from my colleagues.

Anthony, I guess they're feeling that we don't...they're not as concerned about the national security or the cabinet confidence or the emails. I guess then that I would say that now we don't consider it friendly.

I'm sorry, Anthony.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** You don't consider either of them friendly?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Yes. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Okay.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** We are now debating the two amendments proposed by Mr. Housefather. The first one deals with cabinet confidentiality and national security, and the second one deals with email.

So we'll start with the first questions on Mr. Housefather's amendment to the motion regarding national security and cabinet confidentiality.

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

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

I agree with the proposed amendments, particularly on the issue of email and privacy. I think the Conservative objective is commendable, but targeting the emails of all public service employees makes no sense in terms of volume. We must also respect our rules.

I therefore agree with the amendment proposed by Mr. Housefather.

• (1750)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Housefather, go ahead on the motion to amend with respect to national security and cabinet confidence, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I said before, I moved this amendment because it is consistent with what other committees have proposed. I think the concept of solicitor-client privilege, cabinet confidentiality and the issue of national security are important. As my colleague Ms. Chabot said, I think it is reasonable that documents that touch on these aspects be removed from the documents provided.

However, if these amendments are adopted, I will agree to the current motion.

[English]

I just want to say again that I think this is a reasonable amendment because it conforms to what other committees have done. I think we all accept that cabinet confidentiality, solicitor-client privilege, privacy issues and national security issues are a reasonable carve-out to this type of motion.

Again, I would hope everyone would support this amendment. I think that's all I have to say.

**The Chair:** We have Mr. Albas on the amendment.

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Thank you, and I'll be as brief as possible.

We shouldn't take what other committees have done and apply them holus-bolus to our debate here today. First of all, this is the Canadian emergency response program. It is very clear what Parliament decided. There are no national security issues with simply discussing taxpayer money and how the program was implemented. There is nothing in here that would put the government or the Canadian people at risk, other than political risk maybe, but certainly not national security risk.

Second, client-solicitor privilege wouldn't be a case, because again, if a government could utilize the solicitor-client privilege, all they have to do is discuss it with the justice minister or one of their lawyers, and suddenly they could utilize that provision on some of these cases.

I see the chair is maybe disagreeing with me, but this is public money that has been spent in large amounts. Perhaps if the government had been a little bit more forthcoming with answers to many of the questions we've had at the COVID-19 committee, or perhaps if we had a full Parliament where we could put Order Paper questions, we wouldn't need to have such wide-open production orders.

The last thing I will say, Mr. Chair—

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

**Mr. Dan Albas:** No, I have one more brief thing to say.

In response to the concerns about emails of individuals, member of Parliament Kwan has already clearly indicated exactly what the scope will be. This is specifically to senior officials and senior elected officials.

I think quite highly of Mr. Housefather, but in this case we should not apply the thinking of one committee to our own.

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

Ms. Kwan, go ahead on the amendment that touches national security and cabinet confidence, please.

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

On the amendment relating to cabinet confidentiality, national security and so on, I think that's a fairly standard clause in the sense of saying we would respect that. From that perspective, I would support that amendment.

However, on the issue around the emails, I think the volume of the material would be limited because we're limiting the scope of who this motion would apply to, and therefore I think accessing

emails would be fair. From that perspective, I will not support the email amendment.

Mr. Chair, if we can separate out the two amendments for the—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** They're separated.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** They are separate.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Just to be clear, I believe they're separate. They're two separate issues. This is only on the national security one right now.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay. That said, that's my perspective, Mr. Chair. When it comes to voting on the amendment, I will proceed as I stated.

Thank you.

● (1755)

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

Mr. Housefather is correct. The debate right now is on the first of these two amendments, which touches on national security and cabinet confidence. Once we've dispensed with that, we'll deal with the second amendment, which touches on emails.

I see no further interventions on the first amendment. Therefore, we are ready to call the question.

The question before the committee is this: That the motion as presented by Ms. Kusie, as amended by the friendly amendment from Ms. Kwan, be further amended as proposed by Mr. Housefather. The amendment is that “Irrespective of the foregoing, matters of cabinet confidence, solicitor-client privilege and national security shall be excluded from the request and that the documents be redacted as may be necessary to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the document as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter.”

Mr. Housefather, do I have it right?

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** That's the question. We will now proceed to a standing vote, Madam Clerk.

We have a point of order from Ms. Falk.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I just want clarification. I understand cabinet confidence and security, but I also heard “emails” in that amendment. I thought they were separate.

**The Chair:** Yes, Ms. Falk. The second amendment that was put forward by Mr. Housefather that is not presently before the committee but will be, once we've dispensed with this one, is that the word “emails” be deleted from sections 1, 2 and 3 and that the words “and dated” be added to sections 1, 2 and 3 after the words “emergency response benefit”.

That specifically deletes “emails”. There is reference to emails in this, but the two issues are different.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Mr. Chair, thank you for the clarification.

**The Chair:** Mr. Housefather, did you have a further point on that?

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Mr. Chair, in regard to what this one essentially means, there's no reference to emails. The reference is to “personal information”, meaning that if a Canadian citizen has emailed one of the people that is in the scope of this, their name, telephone number or email address would be redacted from the document even though the thrust of what they said would be there. Their personal information would be removed. That's what is meant here, but it's not related to the other thing we were talking about, eliminating “emails”, which would be a separate amendment.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

There being no further interventions, we will now proceed with the question by way of recorded vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** We will now proceed with the second amendment proposed by Mr. Housefather. It is that the motion as amended be further amended and that the word “emails” be deleted from sections 1 and 2 and 3, and that the words “and dated” be added to sections 1, 2 and 3 after “Canadian emergency response benefit”.

If you wish to speak on the amendment, please use the “Raise Hand” function.

I'm seeing one. Go ahead, Mr. Housefather.

• (1800)

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I've already dealt with the issue of why I believe the word “emails” should be removed.

I just want to explain “and dated”, because we haven't discussed that. I just think those are missing words. That's just a technical cleanup, because it doesn't explain in the motion. It just says documents “between March 1, 2020 and May 28,” but it doesn't say “sent”, “received” or “dated”. I am just cleaning up the wording to use the word “dated”. I don't consider that to be substantive.

The only substantive change is the issue to remove “emails”. I just want to clarify why I added the words “and dated”. I just think there are words missing from the resolution to specify that when they search the documents, they can figure out what documents to actually go to.

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

Is there any further discussion on the motion?

Seeing none, we will proceed with the question by way of recorded vote. This is on the amendment that I just read to further amend the motion.

**Mr. Han Dong:** I'm sorry, Chair. Is that the amendment to exclude the word “emails”?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Han Dong:** Then my vote is yes.

**The Clerk:** Thank you.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Now that we have passed the two amendments, we need to vote on the main motion as amended. If you wish to speak on the main motion, please use the “Raise Hand” function.

Seeing none...oh, I see one.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Can I just clarify that the friendly amendment that Ms. Kwan made includes emails from the ministers and senior officials, but it is “from” ministers and senior officials and not “to” ministers and senior officials?

**The Chair:** Ms. Kwan, do you care to respond to that?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I would assume that it is “from” and “to”, actually. I don't have the original motion in front of me. The intent of my amendment is to limit the scope so that it's not involving every single individual within the ministry, but rather for it to be limited to the minister and the senior officials.

**The Chair:** Does that help?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Yes. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Albas is next, please.

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

One of the reasons we'd like to have “to” and “from”—and I appreciate MP Kwan for her interventions today—is that we've had officials and the minister talk about “guidance” that was given. Hopefully, we can find out in what shape or form that guidance was given to officials. I hope that all members, in the pursuit of open and transparent government, particularly right now since Parliament is closed, will support this.

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

Is there any further debate on the motion as amended? Seeing none, we're ready for the question.

Madam Clerk, please proceed with a recorded vote.

**The Clerk:** Thank you.

Mr. Dong—

**Mr. Han Dong:** I'm sorry. Could you repeat the vote again?

**The Chair:** Mr. Dong, this is a vote on the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

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

To our witnesses, thank you very much for your patience. Thank you very much for your statements. I sincerely regret—

• (1805)

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** I have a point of order.

In the future, when we invite Canadians to take time out of their lives and their busy schedules to provide us with advice and more information to deepen our understanding of the perspectives advanced, is it possible for us to, as a matter of practice, especially in this time of Zoom calls, delay these procedural housekeeping motions, especially when we have broad consensus? That way we don't waste the time of advocates and experts and can hear from them and, in an open Parliament, do our work as parliamentarians.

I would like to apologize personally to the two guests.

I think that we have a way of managing this better, a way that doesn't put the lives of the Canadians we ask to contribute to our work in a position that I find quite uncomfortable and in fact a little discourteous to their time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Vaughan, there are three others who want to speak on your point of order.

The point that you raise is one that I believe would be appropriately dealt with at the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. I would be happy to raise it there, but there are others who want to speak on your point of order.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** I find that acceptable.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Kwan, please.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wonder whether or not the committee would be able to invite our two guests to come back to a committee meeting so that we can proceed with the questioning component.

I would love to ask questions of our witnesses. They presented very thoughtful, informative and important information to us today, and we missed the opportunity to engage in that dialogue with them. Can we endeavour to make that arrangement somehow, Mr. Chair?

I hope that all the committee members would agree that this is something we should do if the witnesses are amenable.

I do apologize that we will have to make you come back, but I think that the points you made are very important for us to have a discussion on.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I think I see at least two thumbs up on my screen. Ms. Senior likes the idea, and it appears that Mr. Vis does.

I do think that it would be appropriate to raise it at the subcommittee, so thank you for that suggestion.

Go ahead, Mr. Albas.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Yes, I would just like to thank the witnesses for their testimonies. I too would like to have an opportunity to ask questions at some point.

Let's be mindful here that the committee does have a mandate, and we all take our roles as parliamentarians very seriously. If there is an issue on which we believe is in the public interest for us to get a production of papers.... We saw all parties participate in that debate, and we did see that ultimately everyone voted in favour of it.

While I understand Mr. Vaughan's concerns, I will also point out that I too have been concerned when, due to technological issues, we have not been able, as members of Parliament, to ask questions of our expert witnesses. That is unfortunate, but that is also part and parcel of parliamentary life, particularly on Zoom.

I ask Mr. Vaughan to understand that we all have a role to play here. He may not like the timing, and I may not like it either, but I believe that there is a public interest that was supported by all parties.

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

[*Translation*]

I now yield the floor to Ms. Chabot.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I have a problem. Can you hear me?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** My battery is failing me.

I have a wish to express, and I'm not talking about the content. We had received this motion and we had also heard about the amendments. The only thing we didn't know was when it would be tabled.

The fact that it was tabled in the second hour of our meeting today means that we can't call any witnesses.

Yes, democracy is important, but the way it is exercised should not deprive us of our right to question these witnesses.

In the future, we need to find a different way of debating our motions, rather than taking up the witnesses' time.

I'd like this to be discussed at the subcommittee meetings.

• (1810)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Vis, I saw that you had your hand up. It appears that you may have taken it down. I just want to make sure that I didn't misunderstand. Do you wish to intervene?

**Mr. Brad Vis:** No, thank you, Mr. Casey. I'll reserve my comments.

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

We have a formal meeting of the subcommittee set for next week. Be assured we will take up these matters there.

Once again, thank you to the witnesses. It sounds as if there's a fair chance we may be seeing you again, if you're interested in that, and that's what carries the day.

With that, thanks again for your patience. We'll see you soon. Have a nice weekend.

The meeting is adjourned.

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