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From: Harris, Emily (SPAC/PSPC)
Sent April 1, 2020 8:36 AM
To: Gerasimov, Boyan (SPAC/PSPC)
Subject: Fwd: SUJET/SUBJECT: Ministers and Government of Canada officials hold a news conference to provide an update on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - March 31, 2020

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Services Media <Services.Media@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca>
Date: March 31, 2020 at 2:26:34 PM EDT
To: "Laporte, Anthony (SPAC/PSPC)" <anthony.laporte@canada.ca>, "Mullan-Boudreau, Caitlin (SPAC/PSPC)" <caitlin.mullan-boudreau@canada.ca>, "Roy, Cecely (SPAC/PSPC)" <cecely.roy@canada.ca>, "Kusnick, Chelsea (SPAC/PSPC)" <chelsea.kusnick@canada.ca>, "Ibe, Chukky (SPAC/PSPC)" <chukky.ibe@canada.ca>, "Parmar, Dovejot (SPAC/PSPC)" <dovejot.parmar@canada.ca>, "Lockington, Elliott (SPAC/PSPC)" <elliott.lockington@canada.ca>, "Harris, Emily (SPAC/PSPC)" <emily.harris@canada.ca>, "Tallerico, Joel (SPAC/PSPC)" <joel.tallerico@canada.ca>, "Murdock, Kelly (SPAC/PSPC)" <kelly.murdock@canada.ca>, "Church, Leslie (SPAC/PSPC)" <leslie.church@canada.ca>, "Taipalus, Madison (SPAC/PSPC)" <madison.taipalus@canada.ca>, "McKenna2, Neil (SPAC/PSPC)" <neil.mckenna2@canada.ca>, "Laycock, Tristan (SPAC/PSPC)" <tristan.laycock@canada.ca>, "Freeman, Tyler (SPAC/PSPC)" <tyler.freeman@canada.ca>
Cc: "Lord, David (Ext.)" <david.lord@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca>, Elizabeth Lindsay <Elizabeth.Lindsay@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca>, Me'Shel Gulliver Bélanger <MeShel.GulliverBelanger@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca>, Jean-François Létourneau <Jean-Francois.Letourneau@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca>, Services Media <Services.Media@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca>
Subject: SUJET/SUBJECT: Ministers and Government of Canada officials hold a news conference to provide an update on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - March 31, 2020

TRANSCRIPTION/TRANSCRIPTION

Date: March 31, 2020
Time / Heure: 12h15
With / Avec: Chrystia Freeland, Dr. Theresa Tam, Anita Anand, Navdeep Bains, Jean-Yves Duclos
Topics Discussed / Sujets Discutés: COVID-19 cases in Canada, Quarantine Act, procurement of medical equipment, tests, medication and personal protective equipment, Canadian manufacturers and production of medical equipment, medicom, safety of health care workers, financial aid to businesses and Canadians, travellers entering Canada, support for First Nations communities, requirements for personal protective equipment, physical distancing, asylum-seekers, Canadian banks and interest rates
Link / Lien: <https://www.infomedia.qc.ca/pwqsc-tpsqc/2020/03/31/226852986>

Ministers and Government of Canada officials hold a news conference to provide an update on coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

CBC: Lets go to Chrystia Freeland.

Chrystia Freeland: We must stay strong and stay at home. Unless you are doing essential work like stocking grocery shelves or working on the frontlines of our amazing healthcare system, please stay home. You can go for a walk or a run, but maintain your distance and wash your hands when you get home. I know that this is very hard, but I also know that Canadians are resilient and I know that we can do this. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] This is a critical week in our fight against the virus. Canadians must practice social and physical distancing. Remain strong and stay at home unless you're doing essential work such as stocking shelves or providing healthcare services. You can go out for a walk or go for a run, but remain far from others and wash your hands when you get home. I know this is very difficult, but Canadians are resilient and I know that we can do this. [End of Translation] Today we will hear from Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Anita Anand, the Minister of Science and Innovation, Navdeep Bains. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] The President of Treasury Board and the Vice-President of the Cabinet Committee on Covid-19, Jean-Yves Duclos. [End of Translation].

Dr. Theresa Tam: I'm going to give an update on the number of cases. I'm going to use the number published this morning on our website. This is a dynamic situation with different provinces announcing different things. In Canada as of 9:00 a.m. this morning, there were 7,708 cases of Covid-19, including 89 deaths. In addition, at any point in time, there are many other people under investigation awaiting lab results, or not yet testing. Even if you're not hearing of cases in your community, it doesn't mean there are no cases and there are no exposures waiting to happen. So we now have completed tests for over 236,000 people in Canada, with about 3.5% of people confirmed as positive and over 93% confirmed as negative. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] Our greatest concerns at the moment relate to the introduction and spread of the virus in enclosed settings where vulnerable people reside. We currently have a number of ongoing outbreaks in long-term care homes, cases in First Nations and Inuit communities, and a correctional facility. These events are deeply troubling, both because they result in outbreaks that accelerate the spread of the virus, but more so because of the serious consequences of these high-risk individuals. However, the young are not spared from severe outcomes. Adults under 40 account for 10% of hospitalizations. Just yesterday there was a report of an individual in their 30s who died of Covid-19. [End of Translation] Of greatest alternate at the moment is the introduction and spread of the virus in enclosed settings where vulnerable people reside. We currently have a number of ongoing outbreaks in long-term care homes, cases in First Nations and Inuit communities, and a correctional facility. These events are deeply troubling, both because they result in outbreaks that accelerate the spread of the virus, but more so because of the serious consequences for those high-risk individuals. However, the young are not spared from severe outcomes. Adults under 40 account for 10% of hospitalizations. Just yesterday there was a first report of an individual in their 30s who died of Covid-19. We must prevent introduction into vulnerable populations at all costs, as well as prevent new travel-related cases from sparking community spread. As all Canadians continue to strictly adhere to physical distancing to protect themselves and others, we expect all travellers coming into Canada to join these efforts. Moreover because of an increased risk of Covid-19 outside of Canada, the quarantine order requires these travellers go directly home upon arrival and quarantine themselves for 14 days. We all need to keep up physical distancing while maintaining social connections. Thank you.

Chrystia Freeland: Thank you very much, Dr. Tam. Now we will hear from our Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Anita Anand.

Anita Anand: [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] Thank you very much and hello to everyone. As we continue to work through this truly extraordinary situation, I want to thank

Canada's essential workers. Your work is helping to contain the spread of Covid-19 and we are incredibly grateful. [End of Translation] As part of these efforts, Public Services and Procurement Canada is aggressively buying in bulk from all available suppliers and distributors. To date, we have ordered millions of swabs, gloves, masks, and other vital equipment. I'll take a moment now to highlight additional progress that we are making. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] We have signed a contract with Medicom to provide an important supply of surgical masks. [End of Translation] Including this order, we have now managed to secure more than 157 million surgical masks to support the response. To date, we have also ordered more than 60 million N95 masks, a key piece of protection for healthcare workers. Delivery of these will begin this week. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] We are also working with Spartan, the Ottawa-based company that will provide kits. [End of Translation] This will allow us to test many more Canadians over and above the millions of tests we have already ordered. On ventilators, we have a significant order through Thornhill Medical in Toronto, part of the 1,570 ventilators that we have ordered from companies in Canada, Europe, the United States, and overseas. We are working to secure upwards of 4,000 additional ventilators and very possibly more. Canadians have always risen to the occasion in times of challenge. The companies with whom we are working from every region in Canada and abroad are clear examples of this important point. I also want to thank Suncor and Home Depot for stepping up with generous donations of personal protective equipment. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] We know that this type of equipment is very important in order to fight against Covid-19. We will be investigating \$2 billion additionally in terms of purchasing PPE as well as bulk purchasing in coordination with the provinces and territories. [End of Translation] We know how important these supplies are to the fight against Covid-19. We will support the additional \$2 billion investment in the Public Health Agency of Canada to purchase personal protective equipment, including for bulk purchases with provinces and territories. These funds will continue to be dedicated to purchasing the equipment necessary for our doctors and nurses, hospitals, and other frontline health workers across the country. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] Our goal is to be as best prepared as possible and Canadians can rest assured that we're exploring every possible option. [End of Translation] I also want Canadians to know that we are working together in these unprecedented times. I have reached out to my provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure that we have strong and established lines of communication with regard to procurement in addition to the work that is already being done by Ministers of Health across the country. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] I have reached out to my provincial and territorial counterparts to assure we have strong and established lines of communication with regard to procurement in addition to the work being done by Ministers of Health. [End of Translation] Extraordinary measures are required in these extraordinary times. To limit the spread of Covid-19, protect critical infrastructure, and ensure that Canada has the supplies required, our government is leaving no stone unturned. It is all hands on deck right now. Thank you.

Chrystia Freeland: Okay. Thank you very much. Now we'll hear from the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Navdeep Bains.

Navdeep Bains: Thank you very much. A little over a week ago, our government announced Canada's plan to mobilize industry to fight Covid-19. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] This plan aims to provide critical medical supplies and equipment to healthcare workers and prioritizes the health and safety of Canadians. [End of Translation] Since then, we've achieved considerable progress. As was just announced, we've advanced to the procurement stage with the three companies we highlighted last week. On Medicom, I will say anything to the immediate mask procurement, we are in the process of finalizing an agreement to support the development of manufacturing capacity in Canada. It's strengthening our domestic supply that remains a core objective of ours to make sure we have the ability to build these masks in Canada. Another part of our last announcement included a call to action, asking companies to step up in this fight against Covid-19. While as of noon yesterday, we have received over 3,200 e-mails from companies and we have directly connected with over 2,900 of them. Whether it's companies with ready-to-go products, with products not yet authorized, or companies whose products need more development or need help scaling up. If you tell us you want help, we will

connect you with the relevant federal support to make sure we increase domestic medical supplies so we have Canadian solutions ready to protect and support Canadians. We have now signed additional letters of intent with five companies who have signalled they can assist in the government's response to Covid-19, supplying testing kits, hand sanitizers, personal protective equipment, and medical apparel. As I said, we're refocussing our industrial policy and are deploying funds on an accelerated basis through shorter applications and faster approvals. We're committed to this strategy to make sure we can do everything we can to help our healthcare workers. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] It's been encouraging to watch companies rise to the challenge. Often joining others to equip our healthcare workers with the tools and protection they need. [End of Translation] We're also bringing together industry partners, from the Cosmetic Alliance of Canada to Canadian Consumer Specialty Association and Spirits Canada. Together they're working to facilitate the supply of key ingredients to increase the manufacture of hand sanitizer. Another step we've taken is advancing the next-generation manufacturing super cluster initiative which brings together more than 970 members into a Canada-wide manufacturing network. It recently put out a call for proposals to its members and it's making \$50 million available to develop and scale up new products and equipment that are in short supply. Within 48 hours of issuing this call, the super cluster reviewed and additionally approved three projects for innovative manufacturers to produce ventilators, testing kits, and face shields. It's my colleague mentioned, I want to recognize General Motors, Ford, Linimar, Suncor, Home Depot, Canada Goose. All of them have offered to donate personal protective equipment. I encourage other companies to follow their lead in generously donating whatever they can in this challenging time. Let me wrap up by reminding everyone that we're in this together and I'm proud of how industry has stepped up to fight Covid-19. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] We all have our role to play to flatten the curve and to support Canada's economy. Thank you. [End of Translation].

Chrystia Freeland: Thank you, Nav. [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] And now, I give the floor to the President of Treasury Board, Mr. Duclos.

Jean-Yves Duclos: Today we're doing an assessment of two important strengths, that is the capacity of the Canadian government to provide supplies and the capacity of the industrial network of this country to support this country. So we've talked about this investment of \$2 billion in procurement operations of the Canadian government to be able to buy medical equipment, tests, and accelerated tests in the purchase of PPE and disinfectant and hand sanitizers, and the possibility of buying medication to treat people who are ill and also to provide ventilators. We're also speaking about the importance of mobilizing the production capacity of the government and of private companies throughout the country. Thousands of companies are mobilizing to support the efforts of the Canadian government, to support the healthcare and Public Health Agency activities. The government is working with Public Procurement Canada to ensure and accelerate this collaborative effort between companies and the Canadian government. Thank you.

Chrystia Freeland: So now, we're ready to answer your questions.

Question: [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] Thank you very much. I would like to know if your goal is to become self-sufficient for the production of PPE or to become self-sufficient regarding certain equipment that's difficult to obtain on the international market and what are the deadlines that you're looking at?

Chrystia Freeland: I think that Anita and Nav will be able to answer those questions.

Anita Anand: Answer: Thank you very much for your question. We're working and collaborating with the entire government and in partnership with provinces and territories and industry in order to obtain the goods and services that we need in this extraordinary period. There are many things that we're doing at this stage. We're working through all methods possible to obtain all the essential medical equipment for Canada. We're looking overseas as

well to support provinces and territories and Canadians and healthcare workers as well. So perhaps my colleague would like to add additional comments.

Navdeep Bains: No, thank you very much, Anita. Our strategy is very clear. She's correct in that. We're going to work with other jurisdictions in order to obtain the essential equipment that is required, but we also want to have a strategy for manufacturing here in Canada. That's why today we announced that there are three companies that can manufacture the essential equipment here in Canada. So our strategy is to try and meet Canada's national requirements, but also we're going to try and continue to buy essential equipment from elsewhere in the world.

Question: You talked about Medicom. You said there might be an agreement shortly to the production of new companies. Could you be a little bit more precise in that regard?

Navdeep Bains: [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] Answer: Yes. We are going to invest a lot of money. I can't confirm the amount at this point, but I hope I'll be able to do so shortly. We're going to invest in a plant that's going to manufacture essential equipment in Montreal only for Canadians at the time, but I hope that they'll be able to manufacture for other jurisdictions, but it's a priority for Canadians here. [End of Translation] We are going to invest in Medicom through the strategic innovation fund to produce masks here for Canadians so we have domestic capacity. The goal is not only to meet the domestic capacity requirement, but ultimately to produce masks for other jurisdictions in the future as well.

Question: Thank you. This question is for Dr. Tam. I wonder if there is any national tracking going on regarding the number of healthcare workers that have become infected with Covid-19?

Dr. Theresa Tam: Answer: Yeah, that's a very important question and it is part of the data that we wish to get confirmed by the provinces and territories. So we're working very hard to do that. Of course we do know of a number of healthcare workers, particularly related to the long-term care facility outbreaks that you've heard about. Some of the healthcare workers were the initial cases, followed by the residents. So those are the kind of settings where that is going on. So we do have knowledge about those particular outbreaks.

Question: I'm wondering, as a follow-up, we've heard from other countries that are further down the road that there are some times where doctors, as many as one in four, are off sick because of Covid-19. I'm wondering what kind of contingency plans are in place in Canada if that were to happen here?

Dr. Theresa Tam: Answer: I think protecting the healthcare workers in the first place is important. It would go all the way from healthcare workers who travelled, we need to pay special attention to them, making sure that they're not sick and they're not spreading of course the virus in both their family context or in the hospital context. That's really key. Having processes to screen and stop infection from spreading in those healthcare institutions protects the health workers as well as the patients or the residences. Of course the personal protective equipment that you've just talked about. But as a health professional, I think we all have to also practise everything that we preach, including social distancing, protecting our patients and our family. But for sure protecting the health workforce is absolutely critical. Secondly, looking at surge capacity. So with the provinces and territories having already engaged medical colleges, retired healthcare professionals, students who are studying in the medical professional field, and all of those engagements are now taking place with provinces already engaging that kind of surge capacity as they need to do, for example, contact tracing for the public health side as well as surge for the healthcare system itself. So that planning is extremely active right now so that we maintain that health workforce.

Question: [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] Good morning. Mr. Legault, the Premier of Quebec, yesterday said he might be trying to see what to do for those working in essential services. Ms. Freeland, you were referring to people who are stocking grocery shelves. He was looking to see how they might be compensated because they are paid on a minimum salary basis and they're earning less than what the CRB would provide to them. Are you going to

look at this option for the people who are underpaid in the essential services, that they're not put in a very unfair situation?

Chrystia Freeland: [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] Answer: Thank you very much for your question. The priority for our government from an economic perspective was firstly to be certain that all workers can remain at home if necessary or to self-isolate or to help others or children who are not at school or other members of their family who might be sick or to help workers who might have lost their jobs because of the impact of Covid-19. That was the first priority. The second priority, and this is what the Prime Minister announced on Friday, we wanted to help workers at work to help companies to maintain the link between the employer and the employee. This is what we did as well. We understood that there are industries and sectors, including the essential services sector, whereby there is a situation where our country has an external need for those people to continue working in the essential services sector, but at the same time there are economic consequences because of the necessary policies that have been put into place. The federal government is in agreement with Mr. Legault as to the consequences of these policies. We must find a fair way to treat all workers in Canada, including those people who are carrying out essential work, such as people who work in grocery stores.

Question: [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] Do you have a timeline or a goal in terms of the provision of a fair solution in the coming days, where -- or will people have to wait and see?

Chrystia Freeland: [Speaking French] [Voice of Interpreter] Answer: What we have already said, these are extraordinary times and our government has understood that it's important to act quickly. This is what the context requires. However, one of the consequences of adopting policies more quickly than in a normal context is the fact that we announce a policy and we start doing something in relation to it, but in the following days we have to establish all the details surrounding such a policy. This is exactly what we're doing. Today, I cannot announce the details concerning the situation that you have asked about, but I can tell you that we're in agreement with Premier Legault, who is doing excellent work, that this is an excellent situation. We must think about it and do something. [End of Translation].

Question: [Indiscernible] -- That the United States on the basis of public health. Given that you can speak independent of the government, I'm wondering if you think this will help public health, if this is putting people at more risk, if we see people speak -- sneaking around without reporting. And what did you advise the government about these crossings?

Dr. Theresa Tam: Answer: I think both in terms of protecting whoever is crossing and the rest of the population is extremely important for managing this particular epidemic. So I think from our public health perspective, whether to do the screening and making sure that together with cbs anyone who is sick is properly managed. Of course a reduction in the number of travellers from any entry points can potentially reduce introduction of course to Canada. So it's just a -- different layers of measure I think, but I think that's partly it. And of course we need to look after each other on both sides of the border. As much as we are working on our side, I think the public health officials on the other side of the border are also managing anyone who is sick as well.

Question: Minister Freeland, your government has talked about a nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous people. We are seeing some First Nations ask for military support. I'm wondering if they're under the thumb of the provinces, if there is a disagreement with the provinces. If you're going to work with a First Nation -- we're expecting a flood risk in Manitoba this year. I wonder if you would be prioritizing that over a military hospital in a First Nations community?

Chrystia Freeland: Thank you very much for the question and thank you for your focus on Indigenous issues. Look, to the flood point, we are very aware that there are emergency situations in Canada every year, even in the years when we are not facing a global pandemic. Minister Blair and Minister Miller have been working very hard with their teams specifically -- and I should also say Minister Sajjan. We have been having discussions to prepare to walk and

chew gum at the same time. It's important for Canadians to appreciate that. Floods happen every year. We have been seeing more extreme weather events. So we appreciate that we need to be ready to handle those potential extreme weather events, even as we continue to work hard to fight the global pandemic. That is the particular responsibility of the Minister of Public Safety and he is definitely on it. The Minister of Defence and DND is very, very focused on the military's particular role this season and this year to defend and support Canadians. That's why we heard from them yesterday. When it comes to Indigenous communities in particular, Minister Miller is very, very focused on the specific needs. We heard from Dr. Tams - Tam just now that we need to focus on these Indigenous and northern communities. We are working with these communities to understand what they need and specifically what we will need to do to support them. Nothing is off the table.

Question: I think this is for Ministers Anand and Bains. Just going back to the companies you're working with to produce medical equipment and other equipment being procured internationally, when are we going to see these companies produce equipment and get that in the hospitals, specifically a timeline on that? And are we going to allow these companies to produce equipment that we then sell internationally or donate to other countries around the world?

Anita Anand: Answer: I'll begin and then hand it over to Nav. Thank you for the question. I want to begin by talking about what we do at Public Services and Procurement every single day, 24/7. We are purchasing a broad range of personal protective equipment. We've received already masks, surgical and N95, gloves, swabs, and additional masks in the future. We are taking an aggressive and proactive approach to procurement every day. We are working 24/7. This country has never seen procurement like it is occurring right now. It is broad-based and aggressive. On that basis, I will say that the timeline is a long. We are engaged in procurement immediately as well as in the long term to ensure that Canadians have the equipment that they need to keep frontline healthcare workers and beyond safe. In terms of the particular companies, we are expecting supplies this week, ventilators in particular. I will turn it over to Nav, who can continue with the explanation.

Navdeep Bains: Thank you very much, Anita. Just to build on what Anita has said. We are dealing with global demand. And we recognize the global supply chains have an enormous amount of pressure and they are unstable. That's why we are partnering with industry to build capacity. The Medicom example is an example of building up that capacity. The primary objective of providing essential equipment for Canadians. So these are Canadian companies that are retooling to provide solutions to Canadians, particularly for frontline healthcare workers and to support our healthcare system. So that is our number one objective. In the long term, if we're in a position to build up such significant domestic capacity to help other jurisdictions, I think it's incumbent on us to consider that because this is a global pandemic. This is not just about protecting Canadian lives, but we have a responsibility to other countries. Our primary objective is to recognize that global demand is going up, global supply chains are unstable. We need to build up domestic capacity.

Question: So they are mandated to keep what they are producing in Canada for Canadians?

Navdeep Bains: Answer: We are in an arrangement with them to help them retool or rescale, clearly the objective is to make sure we meet with the demands and requests made by the provinces and territories. That is the objective. Saying we are going to help you scale up or retool so that you can provide those essential medical pieces of equipment, personal protective equipment, for Canadian frontline healthcare workers. That is clearly the objective. As I was saying, in the long term, as Minister Anand just mentioned, some of this equipment is going to be made available in days, not weeks. Down the road if we're in the fortunate position where we have the ability to help other jurisdictions out, we will consider that. The number one priority is to supply Canadians.

Question: My second was about there have been numerous reports in Europe about masks coming from China being defective. The Chinese embassy here donated they were donated

some masks. Is there work being done to make sure the masks we get from China are functional and effective?

Anita Anand: Answer: Thank you for the question. That question pertains to goods across the board, not just to China. Public health has specifications and requirements that need to be met in order for PPE to be distributed and utilized safely for frontline healthcare workers. I will say once the shipment comes in, and I'll ask Dr. Tam if she would like to add in on this point, there is inspection to make sure that the specifications are met. In addition, we are making sure that in China there is quality control on the ground there. I have been in close touch with Ambassador Dominic Barton actually every single day to make sure that we have people on the ground in China who are assisting us with our procurements there. They are performing an excellent and useful service for Canadians on the ground in China. And that makes the procurement process in many, many respects much more smooth. Dr. Tam.

Dr. Theresa Tam: Yes, I can confirm any kind of donation, we will need to make sure it meets the standards in Canada. Health Canada has posted the criteria and guidance, but each of those donations will be checked in terms of whether they meet the standards.

Question: I'm not sure if this is for Ms. Freeland or for Dr. Tam. We know that about a third of the 65 positive Covid-19 cases in Windsor-Essex are Canadian healthcare workers who cross the border, they work in Detroit and come back with the virus. Is it time to stop the back and forth?

Chrystia Freeland: Answer: I'll start because last night I had a good conversation with the Mayor of Windsor about precisely this issue. He is very focused on it, as are the local MPs. He has been in very close touch with all -- he reported to me that he's been in close touch with both the Canadian hospitals and the US hospitals. It's a measure of how closely intertwined our economies are that there are in Windsor both Canadian healthcare workers who every day cross the border to work in Detroit. There are also people who cross the border from the United States every day to work in the Canadian healthcare system. Stepped-up measures have been put in place at the hospitals, both on the US and Canadian side of the border, to very carefully check the health of the healthcare workers, to be sure when they go to work and when they leave work that they are healthy and well. And also, opportunities have been offered to them if they would prefer not to go home to their families, to be able to stay in hotels close to where they are working. So a lot of very hard, very important work is being done on the ground in Windsor. I really want to say the Mayor is completely on it. I want to thank him for his hard work. It is a situation that we are monitoring closely and we need to monitor closely. We are going to continue to do that every single day. If Dr. Tam wants to add something.

Dr. Theresa Tam: I think just to add that we're also connecting with Ontario and the public health officials in terms of the procedures and guidelines that they're putting in place as well for healthcare workers, but not much more to add. Thank you.

Question: My second question is to either Ms. Freeland or to Dr. Tam. Again, the fact that for the past few days everyone has been saying this is a crucial week to see if physical distancing and staying at home and self-isolating is working. I guess the question is what happens if it's not and infections continue to rise, is there a plan B?

Chrystia Freeland: Answer: Look, I'll start just to say we all need to be prepared for the reality, which is the situation is going to get worse before it gets better. That is the unfortunate truth of where we are right now. I'm delighted by the way you framed your question, because it shows that people are understanding that we can actually make a difference. You know, we mustn't be fatalistic about this. If we take the right actions, we can have the least bad outcome for Canada. Taking the right actions means first and foremost Canadians every day practising physical distancing. This is a particular kind of crisis where every single person in the country can make a difference. I know that people are trying really hard and I can't emphasize too strongly the need to do that. I think the first answer to the question is let's do everything we can, and each one of us has power here, to avert the worst-case scenario. Having said that, of course it is

incumbent on all of us in government to do everything we can to prepare for a less good outcome. That's why you've heard to do from Anita and Nav on the truly extraordinary efforts we're making in procurement internationally and getting Canadian companies who have been terrific working hard to build what we need at home. I also really want to commend the work of premiers across the country. To give you a sense of how focused the premiers are on being ready for worst-case outcomes. I can tell you that just this morning I was on a conference call with Doug Ford and Francois Legault, which Premier Ford organized on his phone, to work on procurement. And I had a text with Premier Horgan also with specific questions. This is a real Canada-wide effort. The premiers are doing extraordinary work. We are getting ready for a less good outcome. At the same time, even as we say that, let's all of us remember that what we need to do today is -- [Please stand by] that what we need to do today is do the best we can to avert that. I think we would all love to hear from Dr. Tam as well about this.

[Please stand by]

Dr. Theresa Tam: So we've been thinking of how do we make sure that every jurisdiction has the resources they need to do that contact tracing. Contact tracing is quite intensive. If you get a cluster or outbreak, you're going to have to trace all of the people who may have been exposed. It is a really, really important aspect. So doubling down on that. Also, the concept of reducing and extinguishing this is predicated by the fact that we want any infected individuals to not pass it on to more than one person. If one person that is infected passes it on to two, your epidemic will continue. So that is an ultimate goal. To do that, this is why -- essentially physical distancing is so important for Canadians because you want to reduce that risk of transmission. And that's why that aspect of the response is so serious. So you've seen across the country the public health system beginning more and more to restrict those movements in some way. So mass gatherings, when we started, absolutely you shouldn't be going to conferences or these mass gatherings, and it went down to 250 and then 50, and now pretty much everyone saying, we need to really buckle down and do our maximum physical distancing. Making sure vulnerable populations stay home and support them, so that they're not at risk of infection, potentially in the community or other settings. And all of the sort of essential services, having them make sure, grocery stores or other places where people do have to visit, are also practising social distancing measures. That is so important. That's where, I think, you know, as we speak, we're still enhancing those measures. And we'll want to exceed those absolutely. And then, of course, at the same time, preparing for the scenarios where you can increased influx of patients. Alternative sites for evaluating patients. How do you help people who are mildly sick but can't be self-isolating at home, having hotels and other things. Homeless shelters cannot manage these outbreaks. So you need alternative sites to manage and isolate people from those vulnerable settings. All of this is happening right now. So I think -- that's why I say this week, again, double down and keep going. And it's a whole of society response.

Question: [Speaking French] [speaking through interpreter] Good afternoon, everyone. The doctors and nurses on the front lines, and the hospitals as well, are afraid of a lack of masks. Legault is talking about a lack of the masks in the next three to seven days. Is there a danger in that regard?

Anita Anand: Thank you very much. [speaking through interpreter] Answer: Thank you very much for your question. It is tremendously important to have masks and other equipment for doctors and people who are working on the front lines. And I want to assure you that we obtained masks, different types of masks for the workers. [End of translation] As I mentioned, we have ordered 60.9 million N95 masks, and 157.5 million surgical masks, and some of those are being produced right here in Canada. [Speaking French] [speaking through interpreter] So it is tremendously important, and we're working extremely hard to obtain the equipment for Canadians. [Speaking French]

Question: But my question is whether there is a danger of a lack of masks? Is there a danger or a risk of a shortage? [Speaking French]

Anita Anand: Answer:[speaking through interpreter] At the moment, we're working night and day to purchase masks. [End of translation] And we're working very hard to make sure we have that equipment to distribute not only to Quebec, but to every single province in this country. I will add that our efforts are supplementary to the efforts that individual provinces themselves are making. And so, say, as Chrystia Freeland said, we're working as a country, with the provinces, every single day, to make sure that we have the equipment that front line health care workers require to keep our country safe and to fight against Covid-19.

Jean-Yves Duclos: [speaking French, voice of interpreter] If I can reassure you, what you're hearing this morning is that the procurement capacity of the Canadian government and the industrial capacity of Canada are mobilize to overproduce materials and equipment, to ensure that we have the maximum production of PPE and other equipment that healthcare workers absolutely need. Of course we're supporting the work and the essential activities that that the provinces, including the Quebec government, are undertaking because we know that there is sufficient supply, but there is this current concern of being overprotected and overproducing, such that the industrial capacity of the country can provide sufficient quantities of PPE. Thank you very much.

Question: [speaking through interpreter] Just to clarify what you just said, I'm not sure I understood. Are you able to say that two weeks from now, if we have an increase in cases, as we're seeing at this point in time, that two weeks from now all the nurses, doctors, and patients who need a ventilator will have the necessary equipment? Is that you're telling us, in two weeks, three weeks, everybody will have the equipment? We won't need to make difficult decisions relating to ventilators?

Jean-Yves Duclos: Answer: What we're saying is we have to produce the maximum capacity of Canada's industrial abilities. So we're going to produce a great amount in the next few weeks. At the same time, we have an individual responsibility to the best scenarios. At the same time, the Canadian government best mobilized all of the industrial capacity of the country to ensure we have the maximum of resources in the coming week, and such that we'll be ready for any type of scenario that might arise. [speaking through interpreter]

Question: Follow-up question: Can we say to Canadians that the government promises we'll have equipment for the worst-case scenario?

Jean-Yves Duclos: Answer: We're having trouble hearing you because of the break up in your speech. But at the same time, what we can say is that the Canadian government is ready to mobilize as if we were at war. And so we're mobilizing all of our efforts, industrial and the government efforts, to ensure that the equipment is provided to provinces and territories in the coming weeks. We're working with the provinces and the territories to ensure that that equipment is available at the right time. And we have confidence in that collaboration between the government and the provinces, and, of course, when we're talking about the worst-case scenarios, we hope if they were to occur, that they would be the best-case scenario possible.

Question: My first question is for Minister Freeland. I'm wondering if you have an update to provide (indiscernible) to the countries of origin when the United States sends them back. Do you have any information in that regard?

Chrystia Freeland: [speaking French, through interpreter] Answer: I can tell you that this is a significant and important issue for us. The work is continuing on. I was speaking to Minister Blair last night and this morning regarding this issue. He is very committed and engaged, as is our Ambassador Hilman in the United States, who is engaged in this issue with our American counterparts. And I can reassure Canadians that the government takes seriously our international obligations concerning asylum-seekers. And Canada will never do anything that will go against those obligations.

Question: Mr. Duclos, question: When we talk about the role of the banks in establishing interest rates for the credit cards, sometimes they are 20% to 30% interest rates. What would

you like to see from these large bank of banks to ensure Canadians don't become further indebted.

Jean-Yves Duclos: What we want to do is that the banks are committed to deferring interest and capital payments on mortgages. People are often stuck and don't have the means to pay their mortgage as they would do in normal times. But what we're expecting from the banks and Desjardins is not only to be aware of the precarious situation of many families in Canada, but also to ensure that the way in which they provide loans through credit cards or other means, be adapted to the present context. We know that credit cards lead to very high interest rates. In normal context, people would have trouble reimbursing those interest rates. So we're expecting that they would offer to individuals other means to pay back their loans and to pay lower interest rates in the coming weeks and months. This message has been explained to the banks and Desjardins, and we hope that this message will lead to practical situations for families throughout the country.

Question: Hi, good afternoon. Thanks again for doing this. My first question is for Dr. Tam. Right off the top you mentioned specifically now cases within Inuit and First Nations communities. I'm just wondering if you could please provide any more specifics on which communities you're talking about confirmed cases.

Dr. Theresa Tam: Yes, there are a number of communities. I mentioned yesterday that Nunavik, which is in the northern aspects of Quebec, have experienced their first case. And some large First Nations communities in Ontario, and also, I believe in some of the Prairie provinces. Even one case in any of these communities is extremely serious. And the leadership in the communities have taken very rapid action in terms social distancing and restricted measures within the community. And, of course, colleagues from Indigenous Services Canada are in close touch to look at what means there are. But those -- and also, as we are reporting, not necessarily specifically Indigenous communities, but the north of Canada, so Yukon and Northwest Territories both have cases. And they are introduced into the community from travellers. And all of those northern territories are taking very aggressive public health measures to try to prevent introduction, and also adapting what social distancing means in those communities, particularly where they have crowded living conditions, looking for alternative sites, for example, in managing their situation. And, also, the health system is also revving up to look after different patients. And having very close planning with provinces linked to them in terms of medical care and transportation. So all of that planning is being done. But any single case in those communities, we have to really take it extremely seriously.

Question: And just as a follow-up, the Indigenous file is a big part of the work I'm hearing. And some leaders, for example, in Northern Ontario -- I've heard they have zero test kits in some communities. And I'm just wondering, you know, if we can't figure out who has Covid-19, if there are no test kits available, how can we really get a handle on how widespread this is and also treatment? I know testing is an issue in a number of different parts of the country, but it seems as though there is serious concern from leadership about their capacity to test at all.

Dr. Theresa Tam: Yeah. And it will be linked to the bigger system of the provinces and territories as well. But, I think there is absolutely a gap that we have to fill because even the samples have to be flown vast distances to laboratories. So one of the priorities we have right now, and we're evaluating some testing mechanisms where they can do that much closer to the patient, and so the maximum microbiology lab is now actually doing some of those tests on those much more -- on the patient test kits that can be used. That is actually happening right now. And we'll give you more information as that progresses. The goal is then to equip the territories or the more remote areas with their own capacity so they don't have to transfer specimens.

Moderator: And this brings the press conference to an end.

CBC: The main message was about how the federal government is working with private industry to ramp up procurement of medical equipment that will be needed now and in the weeks ahead.

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SPAC PSPC

16A1 - 11, Laurier, Gatineau, QC, K1A 0S5

Services.Media@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca