

FW: Daily Briefing to Parliamentarians Call Summary: March 18, 2020

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Date: Tue, 24 Mar 2020 19:44:30 +0000

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Sent: 2020-03-18 6:04 PM
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Hi all,

Today's briefing to Parliamentarians on COVID-19 was conducted by Dr. Njoo, along with other officials from ESDC, PS, CBSA and ISC. Dr. Njoo began by giving an update from the public health perspective. Over 600 confirmed cases in Canada, and 9-10 deaths, though all deaths can be attributed to long term care/seniors. The US-Canadian border has also been closed to non-essential travel.

Questions asked by Parliamentarians include;

- Senator Kim Pate (ISG): What is the government doing to prepare and assist vulnerable populations, specifically those in northern indigenous communities as well as Canadians within prisons.
 - o *Dr. Njoo: Correctional Services have reached out to PHAC. PHAC has given directions on policies such as self-isolation and screening. The risk remains low to prison populations, but the government must be careful that the virus not be introduced into prison populations. There has been a special sub-committee established for SAC on indigenous concerns. Important to maintain a nation to nation connection, and the government is moving forward from a governance perspective.*
 - o *ISC: Weekly discussions with the AFN and Inuit Health Units. Certain indigenous communities are reaching out to build better infrastructure themselves. Looking at supplemental infrastructure structures to provide health services if need be, and are maintaining a stockpile of medical supplies to be used in northern and indigenous communities. Several communities looking to limit travel from the community, and are looking for support to continue supplies.*
- MP Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (LPC; Beaches – East York): What efforts are underway to expand testing for COVID-19. Why hasn't there been more money spent on procuring more medical supplies like swabs.
 - o *Dr. Njoo: Some challenges to supply of testing kits. But need to look at directing who really needs testing via self assessments. People who are severely ill, or people in*

long term facilities should be priority. There is a bulk procurement mode happening for lab supplies and swabs, but labs are running low on their other supplies too. FP/T collaboration with labs is very strong.

- *Procurement is difficult as every country has the same needs as Canada. Businesses in Canada may be able to shift production to medical supplies.*
- MP Adam Vaughan (LPC; Spadina – Fort York): Shelters for vulnerable populations have been closing across the country, projecting many people onto the streets. Indigenous peoples on urban shelters will return home to reservations. What is the government doing to ensure that provinces and local governments are able to safely provide these services.
 - *This is mostly a concern for provincial and local governments, nothing the federal government can do to mandate change at the local level, but the government will support provincial and local authorities as best as it can.*
- Senator Paul Massicotte (ISG): What are the objectives for the federal government for the overall greater picture. When will the crisis be over.
 - *Dr. Njoo: Flattening the curve is the priority, making sure vulnerable populations do not get sick via social distancing, and other measures. If all goes well with current measures, we will see how well this unfolds over the next few months. But PHAC remains optimistic.*
- MP Elizabeth May (GPC: Saanich Gulf Islands): Is there financial support being increased specifically for indigenous friendship centres, and will there be income and revenue support who have lost money from the closing of indigenous casinos.
 - *ISC: There will be support for friendship centres, and are asking indigenous communities to update their pandemic plans. Indigenous communities will receive funding to be distributed in whatever way the communities see is needed. The assistance is meant to be flexible.*
- Senator Rene Cormier (ISG): What is the government doing specifically to ensure that Canadians abroad stuck in Spain and elsewhere can return back to Canada.
 - *Dr. Njoo: GAC is better suited to answer consular questions.*
- MP Claude DeBellefeuille (BQ : Salleberry – Suroit) : Will the government allow indigenous peoples whose territories are in both Canada and the USA cross the border.
 - *Answer was inaudible.*
- Senator Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia (ISG): What is the government doing in terms of airline and border measures/security.
 - *Dr. Njoo: Airlines are now screening citizens before getting on their flights. People are being asked to self-isolate once they land in Canada.*
 - *CBSA: Have deployed more officers to provide information to travelers arriving, and have increased signage in airports. Customs and automated kiosks are asking more questions, and land border officers are informing of mandatory self isolation. Certain healthy people in cross border commerce have been exempt as they often cross the border multiple times a day.*
- MP Laurel Collins (NDP: Victoria): Where can Canadians go to get more information on economic measures being used to help Canadians. How is the government supporting people not eligible for EI?
 - *ESDC: People under quarantine will have EI waiting period waved. Specific tax measures should be in place by early April.*
- Senator Rosemary Moody (ISG): What is the government doing to ensure that frontline healthcare workers have access to adequate PPE, including those in non-hospital settings.

What is the status of the availability of life saving medical supplies across the country, can the country handle a surge of greater need.

- *PPE supply is good, but PHAC is putting out guidelines so PPE is used in the right settings and the correct way. The provinces are responsible for ensuring all healthcare workers get PPE, but the government is supporting this. There are enough ventilators in Canada, but federal government is preparing to buy more.*
- MP Bob Zimmer (CPC; Prince George – Peace River): What is being done about the availability of testing kits.
 - *ISC: We are equipping healthcare facilities with swabs that are to be sent to provincial labs and the NML if needed. Looking at having rural areas conduct their own testing to reduce strain on urban centres, and make testing accessible for people on reserves.*
 - *ISC: It is being recommended that those who do not show symptoms not be tested in order to save testing kits.*

If you have any questions/comments, please let me know.

Best,

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