

Daily Briefing to Parliamentarians Call Summary: March 27, 2020

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Hi all,

Today's briefing to Parliamentarians on COVID-19 was conducted by Rhonda Kropp, along with other officials from IRCC, CRCC, CRA, AAFC, CBSA, ISED and ESDC. Ms. Kropp began by giving a brief update from the public health perspective. Globally, there are 530,000 cases as of today. As of today there are over 4033 cases in Canada and 39 deaths. About 165,000 people have been tested which is 65,000 since Monday. Canada has some of the highest rates of testing in the world.

Final number of call participants: 166

Number of questions unanswered: 11

Questions asked by Parliamentarians include;

- MP Gerald Soroka (CPC; Yellowhead): Is there money available for farmers to take care of their children while they do their farm work?
 - o ESDC: That's a bit outside the scope of the benefit, but if they meet the criteria they are able to receive the CERB. They could apply for wage subsidies as well.
 - o AAFC: Were continuing to look at some other options and for the specific concerns of farmers.
- MP Wayne Easter (LPC; Malpeque): In regards to 2 weeks isolation for temporary foreign workers (TFW), farms are concerned about the extra costs of isolating these workers. We're hearing that because of that time, farmers are shifting crops away from vegetables, and this will be a problem for food security.
 - o Ms. Kropp: We have been working forwards with guidelines for COVID in Canada for TFWs, and we know this will have a impact on agriculture.
 - o AAFC; We have had conversations with the industry and P/Ts about the issue. We work with PAC and IRCC on this, and we are looking at other solutions to this.
- MP Heather McPherson (NDP; Edmonton – Strathcona): The system to access new benefits is crashing, or people can't get through or phone lines are crashing too. Is there a plan to prepare for the huge amount of applications coming for EI?

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- ESDC: There has been an unprecedented amount of applications, and the system has been holding up well but there are delays. We hope this will encourage businesses to keep their employees on instead of having them go on EI. We will continue to work on getting these services to Canadians.
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- MP Mark Dalton (CPC; Pitt Meadows – Maple Ridge): Will students who are not laid off but looking for work get access to benefits, will money made abroad count for the benefit, and what's the current repatriation situation in Peru?
 - ESDC: So as long as the students have had income in the last 12 months that's \$5k of money that is earned in Canada, they will be able to receive the benefit.
 - GAC: We have our third flight back from Peru that's landed today, and 3 more are coming next week. We're working on moving people within Peru to areas they can access transportation out. 1200 this week and 1200 next week.
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- MP Alexandre Boulerice (NDP; Rosemont – La Petite-Patrie): Will there be repatriation flights from India for the many Canadians stuck there?
 - GAC: We're working to negotiate flights but the Indian government has completely closed its airspace. Hope to more announce soon.
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- MP Paul Manly (NDP; Nanaimo – Ladysmith): Constituent who works for a company that mass produces N95 is looking for a contact to sell the masks to the Canadian government. Municipalities are being asked to defer taxes. Is there a package for municipalities who need to pay for essential city services.
 - ISED: PSPC has set up a buy and sell link to allow private companies to sell into the COVID response package. Companies can also go through the ISED website, via the Minister's "call to arms" email.
 - CRA: We don't administer municipal taxes, and we're not aware of a specific program that targets municipalities at the moment.
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- MP Ken Hardie (LPC; Fleetwood – Port Kells): A TSXX venture exchange employee is concerned that private companies are not-eligible for new economic supports but publicly traded companies are not. Can there be clarification on this?
 - ESDC: Not sure we can answer on this, we are primarily focused on helping workers through unemployment.
 - We will take note and get back with a response.
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- MP Carol Hughes (NDP; Algoma – Manitoulin – Kapuskasing): We have pensioners who have a second job who find themselves without work. Can they access the monthly \$2k without having to go on EI? Will people who are currently on EI have their EI extended? Will non-profits be able to access the benefits announced today?
 - ESDC: The CERB is designed so that people have to be employed for at least 14 days and they have to have been affected by COVID-19. If EI runs out, you can still apply for the benefit.
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- MP James Cumming (CPC; Edmonton Centre): In regards to people who have been travelling and who might exceed the 6 month requirement to return before insurance no longer qualifies, is there a negotiation to extend this given that some snowbirds don't feel safe traveling back to Canada, or cannot travel back?
 - Ms. Kropp: Question is noted, we will get back.
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- MP Laurel Collins (NDP; Victoria): For people who are on disability benefit but are not working, will they be able to access the CERB?. Are people who are contractors but have lost some of their employment still eligible?

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- ESDC: Can't answer for sure on the disability credit, but the contractor person has to be fully unemployed for 14 days.
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- MP Tamara Jansen (CPC; Cloverdale—Langley City): Nepal has closed flights until March 31st, is there negotiations to get Canadians out of Nepal? What's being done on Agri-stability?
 - GAC: We are hoping this will be among the same repatriation effort as India. These people are on our radar and the top of our planning list.
 - AAFC: We need to look at other options given the unique circumstances farmers face.
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- MP Dan Mazier (CPC; Dauphin – Swan River – Neepawa): How are truckers being screened? We have beef packing plants that are understaffed but busier than normal, is someone looking at staffing levels? For local Service Canada offices that have closed, is there an opportunity to come up with local solutions to help people get access to benefits?
 - CBSA: There are a number of Canadian drivers who have identified themselves as ill over the last few days. We ask some basic questions on their health, we will do what we can to have their load cleared, then they have a conversation with a quarantine officer where they are they then directed to self isolate. We provide with an information package on what to watch for with COVID-19. We have given guidelines to the trucking companies as well.
 - ESDC: No one from Service Canada on the line. This is a very recent development, and we're working on different mitigation strategies. We're looking at many different ways to deliver services people depend on.
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- MP Elizabeth May (GPC: Saanich – Gulf Islands): What do we do with international students that are staying in Canada but don't qualify for the 5k amount required for benefits? Are we looking at a different category for relief for young students? Are we looking at having the banks reduce mortgage rates?
 - Ms. Kropp: No one from Finance, and we will pass message on.
 - ESDC: We're looking at how to best respond to support students, recognizing the impact on summer jobs and them returning in the fall. We're working within the parameters of the program to bring solutions.
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- MP Mike Lake (CPC; Edmonton – Wetaskiwin): Is there an approach that gives constituents a single consular point of contact that people can reach out to? Called the Coronavirus information line yesterday and noticed a number of inefficiencies. The number is a great model for constituency staff, but if we can direct people to a single government "war room" contact" it would make everyone's lives easier.
 - Ms. Kropp: In terms of testing, we are working on a potential point of care test. There is a single "war room" for COVID if you will, but not sure if that's what you would like to see. The GOC serves as a central point and we will have Public Safety address that later.
 - GAC: We do have the 24/7 emergency call line and email, and you could direct people to contact the missions that are relevant. We all work from one shared consular case system, so we can continuously work on consular cases from HQ and abroad. We have had to centralize into toll free numbers.
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Please note that this report is a working draft and is for internal PHAC use only. If you have any questions/comments, please let me know.

Best,

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