

Daily Briefing to Parliamentarians Call Summary: March 31, 2020

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Today's briefing to Parliamentarians on COVID-19 was conducted by Rhonda Kropp, along with other officials from PSPC, ISC, CBSA, CRA, ESDC, GAC, ISED, PS, SC, and TC. Ms. Kropp began by giving a brief update from the public health perspective. As of noon today there are 7708 cases in Canada and 89 deaths. In Canada, 236,000 people have been tested.

Final number of call participants: 168
Number of questions unanswered: 8

Questions asked by Parliamentarians include;

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- Senator Rob Black (CSG): Agricultural shortfalls need to be addressed for the agricultural sector to ensure food security. What is being done about this?
 - o *Ms. Kropp: Food security is a topic of great concern. No one of AAFC here but we will note question and pass it on. ****
 - MP Steven Blaney (CPC; Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis): Question inaudible
 - o *N/A*
 - MP Rachel Blaney (NDP; North Island-Powell River): How is the 30% wage subsidy going to be calculated, and how will the wages be calculated. Are people working on commission going qualify, and which department is rolling out this subsidy?
 - o *ESDC: This polis is very active and we're very live to all these questions. We need to do further work in order to answer all those questions and develop the policy around it.*
 - o *ISED: Very live, things are gong very quickly. Hopefully we will have more in the coming days. No exact timeline though.*
 - MP Paul Manly (GP; Nanaimo-Ladysmith): The CERB system online is not working properly, hopefully it gets worked out soon. Will there be similar issues with MyAccount with the CRA? Can we get messaging out to Canadians that certain people are able to apply for these programs even if they are still making 20% of their income?

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- *CRA: We're making sure to that we distribute applications over a few days to avoid crashes. People should register for a MyAccount beforehand and make sure direct deposit information for them is correct.*
 - *ESDC: Communications around this is very important, were trying to make sure we have the appropriate communications with this. We're working very hard to get Qs and As up on one source on the GOC website to avoid confusion.*
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- MP Nelly Shin (CPC; Port-Moody-Coquitlam): A constituent is having issues accessing the internet online to access the CRA website and apply for benefits. Will there be means to help Canadians like this? For any Canadian who is a resident abroad, will there be economic provisions made for them?
 - *CRA: There will be an automated phone system for people to apply for the CERB, the phone number will be made available. If someone is a resident of Canada, they can complete an application abroad for the CERB.*
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- MP Brad Vis (CPC; Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon): What's being done on AgriStability? What's the policy for American citizens who own property in Canada, can they enter and what're the policies on this?
 - *CBSA: We have turned some people back at the border who are coming up for leisurely purposes, but others are being let as long as they meet the criteria. We inform these people that they must self isolate or they could face fines or criminal charges. If its evident these people wont self isolate, we'll make a note and refer them to a QO next time they come back to the border for an assessment. We are watching for people who try to cross at multiple entry points as well, and were coordinating RCMP about how to fine these people.*
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- MP Laurel Collins (NDP; Victoria): Is there a detailed update on eligibility criteria for CERB? Is the load testing for the CRA website being done for the phone system? Does someone need to have their 2018 taxes to create a CRA MYAccount?
 - *ESDC: Sorry to keep giving the same answer, but were working as hard as we can to get the policies developed and will give a question and answer as part of a package being released soon.*
 - *CRA: There's lots of pressure on our contact centres, we're shifting to let workers take calls remotely. The automated phone system will not be impacted by the ability to staff phone lines. People are asked about their 2018 tax form to authenticate their identify, but they can use their 2017 one as well.*
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- Senator Kim Pate (ISG): Will there be plans to reduce the number of positive cases in prisons?
 - *Ms. Kropp: No one from Correctional Services Canada are on the call, but we will send this Corrections for their thoughts, and we will get an answer back.*
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- MP Mike Lake (CPC; Edmonton-Wetaskiwin): In regards to testing, the numbers of cases are going up substantially and so are deaths. Testing rates were going up, but how is possible that they are now going down?
 - *Ms. Kropp: We will consider having department specific briefings. In terms of testing, couple reasons nuber could be going down. Given there is a particular supply of kits available, jurisdictions have to make judicious decisions about these test kits. NML is looking at helping to cover shortfalls on the reagents, and were looking at potential POC tests to decrease testing times. Can't say exactly why its going down, but people may be making judicious use of their supply.*
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- There was a relaunch of the website this morning, and there is a single portal that links to other websites. We have followed up on the previous phone line comment, and the phone line has been fixed per your comments.
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- MP Rachel Harder (CPC; Lethbridge): What is the procedure to collect the CERB, what's the message for employers to hold people in their employment without paying them, what's the legality on this?
 - ESDC: Working closely with legal counsel to come up with answers, can't answer right now but these will be worked into the rollout that will come out soon.
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- MP Carol Hughes (NDP; Algoma – Manitoulin – Kapuskasing): Why would we allow US citizens with cottages to come into the country given the American situation? Is Health Canada considering using P-100 respirators for hospitals? Will the government consider a tax credit for those who are donating these to hospitals? Why does Bell Canada continue to not cap internet fees for people who work on hubs and have had increased internet usage?
 - Ms. Kropp: In terms of potential donation of masks, can't speak to that mask type, they will need to meet HC regulatory standards and these things are currently being tested with HC.
 - CBSA: I don't disagree with what you're saying. There are a couple of complex problems, as some people are dual citizens, or are married couples with one being a Canadian citizen and one not. But we respect the advice given as it will put strains on medical systems.
 - CRA: The creation of a tax credit would be a Department of Finance responsibility.
 - ISED: Large corporate donations from a number of corporations, PHAC and ISED have been facilitating these donations. There is no contact to address individual donations, but they should reach out to local health authorities.
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- Pierre Vanier (Political advisor to MP Luc Thériault, BQ; Montcalm): Is there an update on the temporary foreign worker program?
 - Ms. Kropp: We will follow up with IRCC.
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- MP Dave Epp (CPC; Chatham – Kent – Leamington): Because of the delays of getting temporary foreign workers in, current temporary foreign workers are requesting extensions of their current work programs. Is there something being done to help this situation?
 - Ms. Kropp: Taking note of this question for IRCC and will get back to you.
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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.

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