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Chair: Mrs. Sherry Romanado



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• (1710)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 13 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. Pursuant to the order of reference of Saturday, April 11, the committee is meeting to receive evidence concerning matters related to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Today's meeting is taking place by video conference, and proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

I would like to remind members and the witnesses that before you speak, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, please unmute your microphone and then return them to mute when you are finished speaking. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly so the translators can do their work. As is my normal practice, I will hold up a yellow card when you have 30 seconds left in your intervention, and a red card when your time for questions has expired.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses. From the Canadian Communication Systems Alliance we have Jay Thomson, chief executive officer, and Ian Stevens, board member and CEO of Execulink Telecom; from the City of St. Clair Township, Steve Arnold, mayor; from OpenMedia, Laura Tribe, executive director; from the Regional District of East Kootenay, Rob Gay, board chair and director of electoral area C; and from TekSavvy Solutions, Andy Kaplan-Myrth, vice president, regulatory and carrier affairs.

Each organization will present for five minutes, followed by rounds of questions. We will begin with the Canadian Communication Systems Alliance. I believe, Mr. Thomson, you are speaking on their behalf, and you have five minutes.

Mr. Jay Thomson (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Communication Systems Alliance): Thank you very much, Madam Chair and members of the committee, with special greetings to my MP, Mr. Amos.

It's nice to see you here, Mr. Amos.

As said, my name is Jay Thomson, and I'm the CEO of the Canadian Communication Systems Alliance, or CCSA, as we call ourselves. Joining me today is a member of our board who is also the CEO of Execulink, based in southwestern Ontario in the town of Woodstock, and that's Mr. Ian Stevens.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in your important deliberations regarding Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like Execulink, CCSA's members are small and mid-sized independent communications companies that provide broadband Internet, video and telephone services, mostly to smaller and rural communities across this country. Their services have become essential to Canadians during this pandemic, a fact that all governments have recognized and confirmed.

I want to assure you that our members take this essential designation seriously. They are committed to keeping Canadians connected during these challenging times and to meeting the increased demands for installation, higher speeds and more monthly band.

In that respect, our members' proactive initiatives include the voluntary suspension of Internet data caps and overage billing, continued service calls—with heightened safety precautions—and the waiver of late payment fees. In addition, as video providers, our members are currently working in co-operation with many broadcasters to provide free previews of a number of TV channels, including children-oriented stations, in order to make available additional activities for those who must still stay at home.

As you know, Madam Chair, last week the House of Commons held its first-ever and historic virtual parliamentary session. The session used video conferencing, just like thousands of Canadians have been doing over the past few weeks to connect with family and friends and access online education and emergency services, and to continue working, just like we're doing now.

Unfortunately, as we know, last week's virtual parliamentary session was not without issues. Several participants had trouble hearing the member who was speaking at the time, and others had difficulty accessing the simultaneous interpretation. The ability of a member to fully participate in the session was largely dependent on where they live, and that's because the quality of their Internet connection is dependent on where they live.

While the majority of Canadians live in urban centres with good broadband connections, millions of others outside those centres continue to have issues with connecting. The trouble that MPs had participating in the recent virtual parliamentary session serves as a perfect illustration of Canada's shortcomings when it comes to universal access to high-quality broadband Internet service.

It's because of those shortcomings that CCSA and other organizations representing smaller communications providers have come together to jointly ask the government to expedite its financial support for rural broadband to help connect more Canadians faster. As this committee looks at ways for Canada to recover both financially and socially from the COVID-19 pandemic, making expedited investments into rural broadband should be high on your list.

Increased and expedited government investments in Canada's broadband infrastructure will advance the ability of all Canadians to participate in our digital economy and will be crucial for stimulating economic recovery by generating employment opportunities and promoting business growth.

Hundreds of locally based independent Internet providers in this country are keeping Canadians connected during this crisis. They also seek to expand their network so they can connect even more, but the reality is that low population densities in the areas they serve means it will be uneconomic to do so without government help.

With the right amount of funding, properly allocated, and with partnerships with government, locally based service providers will be able to reach many more Canadians and do it soon.

Over the years, we have worked constructively with all levels of government to ensure that Canadians, wherever they live, can actively participate in our digital society and economy. We recognize now more than ever that we all need to work together to keep Canadians connected to these critical communications services so that they may access necessary, accurate and up-to-date information and stay in touch with family, friends and colleagues.

For Canada, the return from investing in rural broadband is clear. With universal access to quality broadband services, more Canadians will be able to fully participate in and contribute to our modern economy and to help us quickly get back on our feet.

• (1715)

No parliamentarian, regardless of the riding you represent across this vast and great country, will again be deprived of the ability to fulfill your democratic duties because of a problem connecting.

Thank you again for this opportunity. We look forward to responding to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next witness is Laura Tribe from OpenMedia.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Laura Tribe (Executive Director, OpenMedia): Good evening, and thank you for having me today.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I am joining you today from Ottawa, the traditional unceded territories of the Algonquin nation.

My name is Laura Tribe. I'm the executive director of OpenMedia, a community-based organization working to keep the Internet open, affordable and surveillance-free.

Eight weeks ago today, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic. Today I'm here to focus on the one thing that's getting us through it all: the Internet. In a matter of just days, we saw the entire country shift online in a way we never thought possible. Workplaces instantly went remote, stores adopted e-commerce solutions, restaurants switched to delivery apps and schools pivoted to e-learning.

The Internet is holding our country together, it's keeping people employed, it's keeping families connected and it's allowing our democracy to continue to function, bringing me to you today from safe within my home.

Imagine the stress you would feel if your Internet connection went out right now. What if it were out for a week? What if it were out for a month? What if the government told you it would take another decade to fix? That is a reality for rural Canadians across this country. Unless you change course urgently, hundreds of thousands of Canadians could be left behind for the next decade. That's what I'm asking you to fix.

Here are some quick statistics on Canada's home Internet landscape. One in ten Canadians households does not have a home Internet connection. Only 41% of households in rural Canada have access to the CRTC's basic broadband speed targets of 50 megabytes per second download and 10 megabytes per second upload. On first nations reserves that's even lower, at 31%. That is not acceptable, and COVID-19 hasn't helped. Before the pandemic, those who didn't have home Internet access could use public libraries, schools or Tim Hortons Wi-Fi to help bridge the gap. That's no longer an option, and even for those who do have Internet, things aren't great. Over a third of Canadians are reporting slower speeds since COVID-19, according to a recent survey. This isn't good enough.

There is some good news, however. We've heard from your parties across the political spectrum that we need to address the digital divide. Minister Monsef has promised to speed up rural broadband rollout. Ms. Rempel Garner released a new plan to connect Canadians by 2021 instead of 2030. Mr. Masse has been calling for a national broadband strategy. Your parties represent the overwhelming majority of Canadians across this country, and they're saying that more needs to be done to get everyone online during COVID-19. The debate about whether or not to act is over. Clearly more needs to be done.

So now the question is this: What are you going to do about it? We need immediate short-term solutions and we need long-term systemic fixes. We have a long list of suggestions, but to start, here are the top three things that you, as parliamentarians, can do right now.

One is to mandate a basic Internet package to ensure that every single person in Canada has access to affordable high-speed Internet. Over 3.5 million people applied for CERB in the past two months, and Canadians already pay some of the highest prices in the world for Internet access. People should not have to choose between food, rent or connectivity.

Two is to release new funding to support shovel-ready infrastructure development projects, connecting underserved rural areas with high-speed 50-by-10 access during COVID-19. Where upgrade projects are ready, give them the money and get them off the ground. Ensure this money helps promote more choice for customers by prioritizing smaller independent service providers and network operators. An economic crisis is a scary time especially for small companies to tackle large infrastructure investments, but you can provide the financial backing to help make them happen and promote greater competition in the process.

Three is to provide a detailed plan with new funding to ensure universal connectivity much sooner than 2030. OpenMedia has been calling for a national broadband strategy since well before the CRTC declared the Internet a basic service in 2016. If I were an MP from a rural riding, I would be genuinely afraid to tell my constituents that they would have to wait until 2030. You have the power to speed this up. Please do it.

Fixing Canada's digital divide only takes two key ingredients, political will and money. You can make both of those happen. There's no going back to normal when this pandemic is over. Our world has been changed forever. Remote work is the new normal. E-learning is here stay. We wouldn't tell rural, remote and indigenous communities that they deserve second-class doctors, teachers or medicine, so why are we telling them to settle for second-class Internet?

When you leave this meeting today, I want you to imagine going back to a town hall in your community. What are you going to say to them? That you're doing every single thing you can to bring them the lifeline they need or that they'll just have to wait and see?

• (1720)

If there is one thing I want you to take away from today's meeting, it's this: The Internet is an essential service. It is your job to ensure that every single person in Canada has access. The country needs Internet heroes, and I hope you'll be one of them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next witness is Mr. Rob Gay, from the District of East Kootenay. You have five minutes.

Mr. Rob Gay (Board Chair and Director Electoral Area C, Regional District of East Kootenay): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Good evening.

• (1725)

[*English*]

Welcome. It's my honour to present to you this evening. I certainly appreciate all the work you're doing. I really have to build a little bit on what Mr. Thomson and Ms. Tribe have said. I'm going to make exactly the same points, but more in a regional forum.

I'm from East Kootenay in British Columbia, in the extreme southeast corner of British Columbia. I've been involved in local politics for about 15 years now. I chair something called a regional broadband committee, which is a regional approach. There are three or four regional districts. We represent about 160,000 people scattered throughout the mountains, so it's a very expensive area to serve.

Our present state, and why we have a problem, is that what happens in our area—and I'm sure in much of Canada—is that big telecoms come in and look at a business case. Their business case is predicated on where the density of population is, and they take that. That's fine. That's how business works, but the people on the fringes—they could be 50 metres out of the fringe, they could be 10 minutes out of that fringe—will not get service. As was mentioned by others, this is an essential service for all of us. That really leaves us with a tough problem.

Who came along to help us solve the problem? It was the small Internet service providers that were talked about by previous speakers. These businesses are small, localized, and are faced with a difficult problem. The cost of infrastructure in most of Canada is such that it generates low revenue, especially where you have mountains, where you have to build lots of very expensive towers.

This is not a formula for sustainability in business; hence, all orders of government, be it our local government, municipal governments, or the federal government, need to provide these small carriers with access to funds so they can provide the service to rural people. Much of rural Canada is not profitable. We understand that, and that's our role.

I think, from your point of view, how might you help? We, in local governments, provide essential services. That's what we do, providing things like water and sewer, and we fund them by a formula where the taxpayer, the person receiving the service, will pay for that. For the infrastructure, it's usually a funding formula among the local government, the provincial and the federal governments. Once the service is established, it's not that difficult to pay for the ongoing operations.

To our experience, again I must agree with the previous speakers. We lack, in this country, any sort of strategic plan for this. We have programs. This is the way this has been managed for many years: We have programs. One I was first involved with was called connecting Canadians. I recall it was a good program because it focused on rural programs. Then we had a program called connect to innovate. We applied for it. We weren't successful.

What that program did—and I won't criticize it—is that it gave people who a decent level of service a great level of service. Those who had no service—and you heard the statistics earlier—still had no service. That program didn't go very well. It took almost two years for us to rewrite our applications about four times, and ultimately we were told no. Programs that are very goal-oriented support one part of the country, but again, they're not based on a strategy, from our perspective. What we need to do is to make some programs that reduce the administrative burden on these small Internet service providers. We need to get away from these goal-oriented programs.

Can we create a new granting model that focuses on the strategic needs of the community and the region? This might include consideration of the very real business challenges faced by the local ISPs. Can the grant process be modified toward more localized measures of success? These small carriers are our private sector solutions for offering affordable high-speed Internet.

Another option—and you'll probably hear it, and maybe some of your communities do it—is where the municipality takes a role. That has not been our choice, but it's not something that we won't do.

Again, as the other witnesses have said, we very much lack high-speed Internet for all the reasons you're well aware of. COVID-19 is just making it that much more difficult for our residents, our students at home, for telehealth, to get the job done.

I have included in my report an appendix to a report issued April 23, 2020, by the B.C. Broadband Association. They talk about varied success—access to spectrum is a big one, and the lack of infrastructure.

Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next speaker is Mr. Kaplan-Myrth from TekSavvy Solutions.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Andy Kaplan-Myrth (Vice-President, Regulatory and Carrier Affairs, TekSavvy Solutions Inc.): Thank you.

Good evening, Madam Chair, vice-chairs and committee members.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak with you.

My name is Andy Kaplan-Myrth. I am VP, Regulatory and Carrier Affairs at TekSavvy.

TekSavvy is an independent Canadian Internet and phone service provider based in southwestern Ontario and Gatineau. We've been serving customers for 20 years and now provide service to over 300,000 customers in every province. We have consistently defend-

ed some very simple values concerning the Internet. We believe in affordable, competitive access to the Internet, and we have consistently defended network neutrality and our customers' privacy rights.

TekSavvy invests in building broadband networks in southwestern Ontario, as well as delivering services across Canada, using wholesale services that we buy from incumbent carriers. Wholesale-based competitors like TekSavvy serve more than one million Canadian households and businesses, and we act as a competitive alternative for countless more.

For more than 20 years, with mixed results, successive governments have worked to nurture telecom competition, but the entire framework is at a breaking point, and competitors are at risk of disappearing. If we don't act to protect broadband competition now, then we risk coming through this pandemic with a more expensive and a less competitive market for Internet services.

As you know, the CRTC sets the rates we pay for the last mile of broadband services. Those rates are required to be just and reasonable, fully compensating incumbents for the cost of their investments. In an important decision last year, based on years of study, the CRTC dramatically lowered wholesale broadband rates. The commission also ordered that incumbents pay back the difference between the inflated rates and the final rates going back to early 2016, an amount that's estimated to be around \$350 million that competitors collectively overpaid to incumbents.

We knew the incumbents might appeal that decision, but we decided that Canadians deserved the benefit of those lower rates, and we immediately reduced our prices. Other competitors did as well. Of course, phone and cable companies have launched multiple appeals of those final rates and, meanwhile, they're charging us the old inflated rates. As a result, going into 2020, we were already losing money, but rather than raising prices on our subscribers, we decided that we were in a strong enough position that we could stay the course and lose money for the next year while we defend the appeals.

With COVID-19 and the move to work from home, a reliable residential Internet connection is more important than ever. To support our subscribers, we immediately suspended any charges associated with exceeding bandwidth limits, but the main impact of COVID-19 has been to exacerbate those pre-existing rate problems. In particular, to address the increased traffic generated by people working from home, we have significantly increased the capacity we buy from incumbents, all at the old inflated rates. Revenues are essentially flat while our costs continue to mushroom.

We had expected to carry financial losses for up to a year while the incumbent appeals played out, but the impact of COVID-19 effectively put us where we had expected to be at the end of this year. To manage those costs, TekSavvy has taken drastic and painful steps, laying off almost 30% of our workforce and increasing service prices by \$5 a month. We have also had to delay planned investments in rural networks. This is a perverse outcome. Those underserved areas ought to get service more quickly because of COVID-19, but instead their service will be delayed unless the government steps in to fill in the funding gaps.

TekSavvy strongly encourages the government to take a long-term view even while addressing the immediate pressures of the COVID-19 public health crisis. This must be a competitive market that serves the needs of all Canadians and should not be replaced with monopoly markets.

From TekSavvy's perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has not, on its own, created problems for competitors; rather, the foundations of the regulatory regime that support wholesale-based competition were already crumbling, and COVID-19 is adding stress and exposing just how dire the situation is.

Thank you for your time.

I look forward to your questions.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our last witness is Mayor Steve Arnold.

You have five minutes. I'll ask that you speak very slowly and close to your mike for the interpreters.

Mr. Steve Arnold (Mayor, City of St. Clair Township): Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is all a new experience for me over the last month with Zoom meetings and things like that, and I appreciate the opportunity to be able to discuss St. Clair Township's Internet coverage before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you said, my name is Mayor Steve Arnold. I represent a community that has a population of approximately 15,000 people within 640 square kilometres, and our western border is the United States. They're less than half a kilometre away from us.

The balance of the property that we have is approximately 90% rural and 10% urban. Half of our assessment, and also half of our water usage, is based on heavy industry, which is well serviced by fibre optic cable. Because they're big customers, everybody wanted to make sure they were serviced.

In 2011, I was part of the western wardens who established the SWIFT initiative in southwestern Ontario. We also started trying to entice high-speed Internet providers in 2004 in our municipality to expand service to commercial and light industrial companies, and to our residences in areas outside of where our industrial complexes were. During that time, from 2004 to 2019, we have worked with eight different providers with limited success. Usually what happens is that they get all excited, and they come and charge you \$60 to see whether or not you have a strong enough through-the-air sig-

nal, and 90% of the time you don't. You pay your \$60, and they say sorry and go back to wherever they came from.

The residents who currently have Internet, even in our more built-up area, which is Corunna, they get it through the cable providers at 45 megabits per second transfer speeds, and anybody else who can get anything through the airwaves gets between five and seven megabits per second transfer speeds, but if you do your checks, on the lower end, it's usually around 0.5 to one, which makes it pretty well impossible to do anything.

I'm told that downloads of larger files can take from two hours to two days for movies and homework. I've had teachers call me to complain because now they have to do online learning, due to the COVID stuff, and it's just impossible to get it out to the rural communities. Even on the Internet that I have—I use a satellite connection—I'm getting slow speed detections that are shutting me down and taking me offline for sometimes a couple of days at a time. It's very frustrating for us.

There are a number of households that I've been contacted by that are now using two providers in order to get enough service to complete even simple tasks. With our proximity to the United States, signal piracy is common. Canadian providers install a new through-the-air tower, and then the reception and transfer becomes as poor as prior to the installation. They're very entrepreneurial when you cross the international boundary close to us.

However, the good news is that we are very pleased to have been successful in working with Cogeco to receive a SWIFT fibre optic cable project and grant, which will service our most under-served and largest population outside of our village of Corunna. It is their hope that we will see this project completed within 18 to 30 months. It's a \$5.8-million project and it will provide service to approximately 30% of our total land mass and approximately 5,000 more residents than we currently have serviced. However, we will still be limited....

Am I done? Okay. Thank you very much.

• (1735)

The Chair: No, no, you have 30 seconds.

Mr. Steve Arnold: Okay. One of the things we want to make sure of is that the Internet be viewed as an essential service. You may think this is strange, but Detroit, which is 60 miles from us, did a 10-gigabyte transfer speed through fibre optic. Why would we feel that five to 50 Mbps per second is acceptable for rural Ontario and the majority of my municipality?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mayor Arnold.

Now we will move to our rounds of questioning. First is a six-minute round. I will give the floor to Madam Rempel Garner.

You have six minutes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

I would just like to start by saying that Internet access is not a luxury. It is a requirement for equality of opportunity and I think it's becoming a barrier to equality of opportunity to economic growth and productivity. So this isn't an issue that we can just ignore and hope that the status quo will fix.

What I hope to hear tonight is some consensus on a few issues. First of all, 2030 is not an aspirational or appropriate target for universal, reliable access to the Internet.

I'm going to start my questions with one directed to Ms. Tribe. Investment is important as we work toward access across this country, but would you say that spending is the metric that we should be driving to? Perhaps it should be to connect every Canadian with the 50-down/10-up requirement that you set forward within an aspirational timeline? I want to shoot for the end of next year.

Ms. Laura Tribe: I don't think the amount in dollars spent is really the metric, although we do know that connecting the majority of rural Canada is going to cost a fair bit. Really, adoption needs to be the number one metric, not just in terms of who technically has access to services but also in terms of who is using them.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay. Many companies will say that they have unlimited data plans right now. Is that really the case, or is it in fact that they actually choke access or access speeds or reduce speeds after a certain level of usage?

• (1740)

Ms. Laura Tribe: I think where we see unlimited data plans is often in those urban areas if you have fibre or cable connections. For those on satellite or those who rely on any sort of wireless services, they are not unlimited at all, and even if they are unlimited and not subject to a financial penalty, once those services are throttled they are rendered effectively useless.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Would it be accurate to say that virtually no part of rural Canada has consistent, reliable, 50-down/10-up access?

Ms. Laura Tribe: I would have to look at the map to see if I could find an area that would identify as somewhere that has access, but I think that it's really hard to point to a large swath of rural Canada that would consider itself sufficiently connected.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: CRTC has asked some companies to revise the rates that they charge small Internet companies to use their service networks, and some say that the August 2019 CRTC revised mandated wholesale rates are below cost, while others say that they are too high. What's the truth?

Ms. Laura Tribe: The rates that the CRTC put out in August were so dramatically reduced from its previous rates that there is no way the CRTC could be off by that much. The rates customers are paying right now are way too high. I think the best example of whom to believe might be what we heard from the incumbents themselves in the wireless proceedings in February at the CRTC, where they really made it clear that ultimately their loyalties lie with their profits for their shareholders, not with their customers.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Do you think that the current spectrum auction process, which is how radio frequencies are assigned to telcos to transmit service, makes sense? Or, should we be looking at use-it-or-lose-it type licences so that there are no possibilities for companies to unnecessarily hoard frequencies needed to connect Canadians?

Ms. Laura Tribe: We've heard a lot of concern around the way that the regions are divided with regard to spectrum and how that often lets companies own the spectrum but only develop the services in the most-developed areas. So ultimately, we would put forward that if companies are not using that spectrum, they need to either make it available to other companies or communities to access, even if they maintain the rights, or they should lose the right to it entirely.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: The CRTC is evaluating allowing smaller companies to access wireless service providers' network infrastructure to create more competition and service provision for cellphones. Some bigger companies say that mandated MVNO access—that's what we're talking about here—is harmful, is socialist and will prevent the development of rural Internet services. Is this true?

Ms. Laura Tribe: No. It's not a political slant; it's actually an argument regarding efficiency. When we look at the approach to date of trying to get any new companies to come in and start a network from scratch and build across the country, that is dramatically less effective; it is a waste of finances and resources, and ultimately it fails to serve customers. So introducing MVNOs will meet the needs of different segments of the market; it will increase affordability for customers, and it will provide a wide variety of services that are not currently available, more efficiently.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Do you think that the necessity of big companies having to pay large upfront costs to build their own Internet networks, or facilities-based competition, creates too high a barrier to new competitors to create enough competition for market forces to work? How can we correct this issue?

Some have suggested that the builders of the infrastructure and the providers of Internet service should be mandated to be separate corporate entities, as they are in the U.K., to prevent potential market distortions and improve access. Could you comment on that?

Ms. Laura Tribe: Facilities-based competition, I think, has caused a lot of the problems that we're seeing right now in our market. There are definitely costs upfront in investing in that infrastructure, but the current model has really forced incumbents, in particular, and those vertically integrated companies to mix their business interests.

Models like structural separation would be what you're referring to, allowing a company to be either a service provider or a wholesale provider. It's definitely one way of going about it, yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Briefly, at the end, would you say that the status quo, the current regulatory environment, will allow us to achieve universal affordable access in Canada in a very short period of time?

Ms. Laura Tribe: I don't think that's possible without significant government intervention and funding.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next round of questions goes to MP Will Amos. You have six minutes.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to our colleagues and, in particular, our witnesses for joining us today.

Representing a rural riding in western Quebec, I cannot think of a topic that is more germane and important to the entirety of my riding.

I had a call this morning with a mayor and council from a small town who remain frustrated with their Internet access. This is the number one infrastructure issue in my riding. It has been since the start of my service as an MP in 2015, and it will continue to be until we get to that 100% connectivity target.

I share the passion of those witnesses with us today whose articulate presentations I really appreciate.

I would highlight that we really have reached a point of consensus in Canada. Many of you will be aware that in the previous Parliament, I advanced a private member's motion, M-208, which called for heightened investments in our Internet infrastructure across rural Canada. Thankfully, we had united support across all parties, so I think we really are at a moment where there is violent agreement that it is absolutely necessary. I think the question is really more about how we get there.

I agree with the point made by Ms. Tribe. Waiting until 2030 won't satisfy my constituents. People want Internet yesterday, and they deserve that, but the challenge is a technical and financial one. I don't think, though, that at this point it's a question of political will. I believe that our government has demonstrated that we're willing to step up.

I would note, just as a point of history—and this was brought up by our representative from the Kootenay region—there were programs prior to 2015, but they didn't go to private residences. The federal government provided subsidies that enabled schools, municipal halls, fire halls and libraries to get hooked up, but individual households were left without that support. They were left to the vagaries of the free market.

We have changed that, and the connect to innovate program does bring fibre optics to homes. Up to now, our government has connected nearly 400,000 homes, and leveraged federal and provincial funds to enable \$1.2 billion worth of projects. That's not insignificant, but more needs to be done. We all acknowledge that.

I'll go to Ms. Tribe and to my friend and constituent, Jay Thomson, on this issue. What in the design of the next program—in the universal broadband fund, when it is brought forward—needs to be altered to ensure that it is a successful program?

● (1745)

Ms. Laura Tribe: I'll go first, but I will try not to take up so much time. I'll make sure Mr. Thomson also gets to speak.

I think it needs to include a focus on ensuring that the high speed is actually available in homes, not just technically available. We really need to make sure it's getting into the homes. It also needs to involve a consultation on what the individual communities look like, particularly indigenous communities. There's a lot of interest in their having decision-making powers over the types of services available to them.

We think the technology really needs to be future-proof. This is not about hitting the 2016 targets. They're a minimum. We want to make sure the technology being deployed is essentially fibre everywhere. If we need stopgap solutions now, there should be a plan for long-term connectivity.

We also need to make sure the speeds are actually being met. The advertised speeds are a big problem we have now because people aren't necessarily receiving them. That came up from multiple people in the technology tests done in advance of this.

I think the biggest challenge—again, not to harp on the money aspect of it—is it has felt very piecemeal. It needs to be nationalized in that every single community needs to know when they're going to get service, how that's going to happen and what they can expect from it, with enough money to back it. The biggest failing of the programs to date over the decades, although not any particular program, is even though they have been chipping away at problems, every time an announcement is made a different community feels left behind because it wasn't done.

Mr. Jay Thomson: I'll jump in.

As others have already said, it's important to look to the smaller, locally based providers that are actually in the communities and fully understand the needs of their local customers. Money can be made available to them, perhaps in smaller amounts than have been the case in the past. We don't necessarily need huge multi-million dollar projects in smaller communities, but we need a way to get access to money quickly and through a simple application process, with the ability to use the smaller amount of funds for local projects.

There is another aspect to it. There's more to this than just the capital expenditure to build the network. Once it's built, it has to be maintained. The economics of rural Canada and smaller populations are such that the cost impact is the same for builds as it is for maintenance. Operational support is also important so that once built, a network can be maintained and even improved over time.

● (1750)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm very pleased that we're finally addressing this topic. I'm happy to see a consensus. I still want to emphasize one point that I had in mind and that Ms. Tribe just raised, namely, the idea of nationalizing the service delivery. I think that this idea is worth considering.

My question is for Mr. Kaplan-Myrth. It's good to see you again, Mr. Kaplan-Myrth.

The crisis obviously affected your business model, including the monthly price, the ability to generate traffic and perhaps the ability to provide unlimited data to your customers. Is that the case?

[English]

Mr. Andy Kaplan-Myrth: Effectively, yes. We're not charging overage fees for the small number of customers we have who are still on capped plans. Effectively, everybody is unlimited for as long as we can do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Could the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC, help you by introducing more suitable regulations? If so, when would you want these regulations implemented?

[English]

Mr. Andy Kaplan-Myrth: Our main concern is the wholesale rates and the August 2019 decision. It really all goes back to that, because that's fundamentally what makes this sustainable for us or not. The old rates are dramatically inflated and we're stuck paying those for as long as the new rates are suspended and under appeal.

What can the CRTC do about that? It's complicated because the rates are before the courts; the Governor in Council, with a petition; and the CRTC. Those are the three appeals. The CRTC could issue a decision on the review and vary quickly, and I think it could actually step in and take some action to set emergency rates for the purpose of helping competitors manage this period of the pandemic.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: In a recent discussion, we spoke about the influence of providers and the role of distributors. In this case, I'm talking about Bell. The provider sells a service to itself or to one of its subsidiaries. It doesn't offer the same price to all its resellers. It also doesn't offer them the same speed, the same quality or the same access to technology.

Do you think that this situation is fair to the consumer?

[English]

Mr. Andy Kaplan-Myrth: To be clear about this, Bell, for example—or any of the incumbents, really—builds the broadband networks and then uses those broadband networks to provide services to its own customers on a retail basis. It also sells wholesale access to those networks to providers like TekSavvy and other wholesale-based competitors, and we take those wholesale services that we buy, put them together with other services that we took to

make our Internet service and sell them to our customers. The requirement is that everyone who is buying those wholesale services from Bell is buying essentially the same services. There's some variability because of off-tariff agreements, but the tariff services that we all buy, I assume are essentially the same. We have a level playing field among the competitors, but that is very different from the service that Bell provides to its own retail customers.

This is really not just about Bell, it's about all the incumbents that are mandated to sell wholesale services. They typically have many advantages that they can leverage when they're selling services to their own retail customers, operational advantages and efficiency advantages, and they obviously have a lot of information about what services, capacity, backhaul and other sorts of things are available and can manage that in ways on their retail side that we can't on the wholesale side.

This goes back to some of the ideas of structural or functional separation that Laura Tribe was talking about earlier, where if Bell, for example, were required to buy its own broadband services on the same terms that we buy its broadband services to serve their retail customers, I think that would create a level playing field and would probably improve the services that we all got from their broadband network.

● (1755)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I gather that the consumer may benefit from the prohibition of the practice whereby a builder could be a reseller in the same company.

At that point, should the provider be a crown corporation, or at least a third party company that would offer a fixed price to everyone?

Would it be feasible for each distributor to have a customer ratio in urban and rural areas?

[English]

Mr. Andy Kaplan-Myrth: I'm not sure I would want to limit what different businesses could do. I think the goal here is to try to connect more people and get more good services to those people. Starting from that focus, I'm not sure that businesses that provide the broadband services shouldn't be allowed to also provide the retail services, but certainly, they're—

The Chair: Unfortunately, Mr. Kaplan-Myrth, that's all the time we have for that round.

Our next speaker is MP Masse. You have six minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Kaplan-Myrth, go ahead and finish your thoughts.

Mr. Andy Kaplan-Myrth: Thank you.

I think that depending on the different model that you use to build those networks, if you funded somebody to build the broadband network and provide even terms for everyone providing retail services on that network, including perhaps the company that built the network, that might be a way to use the funding mechanisms to ensure that level, competitive playing field.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you.

One of the things we haven't touched too much on just yet and that I think is important is that this country actually had spectrum auctions and gained \$20 billion of revenue for essentially no real product for which they had a cost to roll out. The spectrum has taken in around \$20 billion—the last numbers are going to be even more important for our future—and we haven't put that back into the system.

In fact, what we've done is that we've created a very low competition market. We have areas that are poorly serviced, by design, in what we have now. We've had experiments in the past, through Maxime Bernier, in regard to opening up for foreign competition, but then at the same time not even having mandates to protect that competition or allowing it to do anything other than just having a precursor introduction into our market.

Still, what we don't have yet is a basic package commitment from the government, and 2030 is absurd. That's just not acceptable.

My first question is for you, Ms. Tribe, with regard to the universality suggestion you made. I think there is an example that was handled poorly in the past, when we actually forced a skinny package for cable and Internet providers for news and basic services. There should be a political decision or a drive to mandate a basic set of services at a lower price at the minimum threshold you should expect for a Canadian who needs to use the Internet now more than ever before.

Even before COVID, we saw government services moving online. We've reduced public offices where you can actually get service and help and we've streamed people to online services. We've made it even more important to be connected, let alone that it is important for your education, the economy and so forth.

With regard to your suggestion of a basic package, can you highlight a bit of what you would see as features for that?

• (1800)

Ms. Laura Tribe: One of the challenges we've seen with ideas like a skinny basic package around cable is that in the past they were buried on websites. They were impossible to find and impossible to navigate. I think what we're talking about with a universal package that's available to everyone is to make it as inclusive and as widely available as possible.

We can look at any of the affordability packages that have been put forward in the past. They tend to be incumbent led, particularly around cellphones or for home Internet for subsidized housing in plans that are restricted in the amounts that people can use and restricted in the speed. Even though they may be affordable—for something like \$10 a month—if they don't actually give people the services they need, it's a problem.

I think what we're looking at right now is something like a plan for \$20 to \$25 a month. It gives people those high-speed access services. If you want something faster than the minimum basic from the CRTC, you can do that, but I think we need to recognize, those who are making that call, that for companies like TekSavvy that are

providing wholesale, that's a real challenge, because of where the wholesale rates are at right now, to make that actually feasible.

That's really where this isn't just regulating at the retail rate. It has to get at a lot of those systemic, underlying issues of everyone being overcharged at the base level off the bat.

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes.

You raised an important point. I was there when Mr. Amos' motion 208 went through. The problem we have is that it was a motion, so it's not legislation. We need it enshrined in law. It was good, and we had some really good discussion on it. It highlighted and moved some things. I don't have any criticism whatsoever, other than how we need this to be more mandated by law.

If you want to actually play in the market, I see this spectrum auction as an opportunity to do that. On this spectrum auction, I'll again follow up with you, Ms. Tribe. I've been advocating—you can disagree with this, so feel free—that instead of getting the money from the spectrum auction, we need to focus on access to service and having specific claw dates to actually have accountability for that spectrum.

What we have right now is \$20 billion in revenue from our current system. As for where it's gone, we have no idea. I've asked the government many times about that. They've put very little of that money back into rolling out Frankenstein packages all across the country to try to fill in the gaps. When we do this spectrum, I would rather see it focused less on money and more on actually getting access.

Ms. Laura Tribe: I think it's definitely incredibly expensive for the amount that's going into purchasing spectrum. I think in the last round for spectrum, it will be a little while before it's actually deployed. It's all preventative and trying to hedge around 5G.

I think if the spectrum is to be given away for free, as it has been in the past, historically, which I think is really where the charges started to come from, realizing that such a commodity was being given away for free, then we really do need to make sure that the fund is going directly back into the services themselves.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will begin our five-minute round with MP Gray.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really appreciate all the witnesses being here today. Really what I'm hearing is that in order to connect Canada, it will take political will to change the status quo. That comes with creating good policies, so I really appreciate the comments we're hearing here today.

My questions today will go to you, Mr. Gay, from the Regional District of East Kootenay. In rural communities such as yours, access to mental health services were limited, at best, prior to the pandemic. With the added isolation that today's physical distancing brings, mental health concerns are on the rise. Video calls with family members and friends are very important to help reduce this isolation.

What would increased access to the Internet in your community mean to health and well-being?

Mr. Rob Gay: Thank you. That's a very good question. I don't think we really realize the depths of that issue, because people are home; they're solitary.

When it comes to mental health issues, it would allow them to at least communicate with somebody. We're an aging community. For many of our seniors, loneliness is one of their biggest issues. As was mentioned by another speaker, maybe some seniors can't afford the access, but they can go to their local libraries to get it. Those libraries happen to be closed now.

All our communities are rural, and I think people are suffering more than they need to. Lots of things could be provided online in terms of counselling and coaching. We have a doctor shortage here as well. We're trying to bring more doctors to our community. There are lots of things in terms of mental health. In British Columbia, telehealth is quite a growing aspect, but again, without connectivity and high-speed Internet, telehealth isn't much good.

• (1805)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Mr. Gay.

Next, I'm not sure if you have had a chance to read the Conservative Party's consultation document on rural access to Internet. We released it just yesterday. We made recommendations on how to alleviate short-term bandwidth shortages in rural communities.

Have you had a chance to go through this document? Do you have any thoughts or recommendations? Did anything resonate with you in that document, if you've seen it?

Mr. Rob Gay: Yes, I have seen the document. I recognize that your committee will also be doing a study on the various aspects. I think you'll end up in the same place. I think most of us know it.

Certainly your document talks about a strategy at a national level, with some priorities. As I mentioned in my presentation, these program-based things solve a particular program for somebody, but it's not a universal fix, so I think that strategy is good. The discussion talks about infrastructure and the need for more money in infrastructure. As was mentioned, the money or the services could be available through the auctions. In this auction of spectrum, we're selling air. It's the greatest way to earn money. In politics, we'd love something like that. So put the money back or get these companies to provide the service. That's really important.

It does talk about a solution around municipalities owning it. At the Regional District of East Kootenay, we do own some fibre. When we first got into this, we were going to try to do it ourselves. We had a vote. Our citizens knew the importance of it. I think we own about 40 or 50 kilometres of fibre in our Columbia Valley area. In fact, it's funny, because we lease it back to Shaw, one of our larger carriers.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: That's really good information, Mr. Gay. Thank you for that.

One of our other recommendations in the consultation document is for changes to the way in which spectrum auctions function. Are spectrum auctions in their current form useful to your community? Do you have any thoughts on that at all?

Mr. Rob Gay: No. I would not be the best one to ask about that. Maybe it should be somebody who has a broader view on it. We follow the spectrum auctions and we see the dollars that are spent.

We do hear, though, from the smaller Internet service providers that they're locked out of this. The spectrum they need is just not made available to them. These individuals, as Mr. Thomson talked about, are in a very difficult position. They have high costs, difficult revenue and really difficult access to infrastructure. I think we would all like to see more competition, which would help with our rates, but we just can't seem to get these small companies up and running at full speed.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Have you seen any cases of small ISPs being bought out by larger corporations in your region or has that affected your area at all?

Mr. Rob Gay: Yes, certainly. Some of them actually started...sorry. The answer is yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Unfortunately, that was all the time.

The next round of questions goes to Nathaniel Erskine-Smith. You have five minutes.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thanks very much.

I'd like to change tack a little bit and focus on digital proximity tracing.

Laura, I understand OpenMedia, alongside the BCCLA and some other privacy and civil liberties focused organizations, released a statement of principles in relation to digital proximity tracing. I also understand that, today, privacy commissioners jointly released a similar statement about principles. I agree with almost everything in those documents, but I do wonder a little bit about the importance of voluntariness. I say that despite the Prime Minister indicating that voluntariness was critically important too, to build trust in these applications.

My challenge, and I wonder how you would respond to this challenge, is on the question of efficacy when we see that adoption rates are so low. We've seen 20% adoption rates in other countries, for example, that have a voluntary system. That adoption rate is not going to be effective. We've seen research out of Oxford that suggests a 60% national adoption rate is sort of a standard that one would look to, to say that would be effective.

Do you see a way to overcome that challenge, and to ensure there are adoption rates in a voluntary system?

• (1810)

Ms. Laura Tribe: I think the concerns that we have in these privacy principles.... That is one of the other things we're putting in the written record of this proceeding, because there's only so much time today. We will have more on it.

I think the biggest concern for us around voluntary versus mandatory is that, if it's mandatory, this is no longer consensual. The privacy protections that we have in place through PIPEDA and the Privacy Act are insufficient to actually protect Canadians' data. It's really rare that the voluntary piece needs to come in. I think there are huge concerns, taking a step back from the privacy principles that we've put forward, around the effectiveness of these apps, even where they are adopted.

I take your point around the efficacy concerns for adoption rates, but I think the testing that needs to happen needs to come first. The contact tracing needs to come second. This app is really a supplemental piece and a tiny fraction of the puzzle. I think one of the concerns that we have, or one of the things we've been hearing around the voluntary adoption, if the government is to go this way.... All of those privacy principles that we have put forward are done with the intention of making sure there is trust, because if there is no trust in this service, people will not use it, even if it's mandatory. People will leave their phones at home. They will not take them with them.

I think it also puts a huge disadvantage to those who, as we were talking about earlier, are on the other side of the digital divide, who don't have a phone. If this is now something that is being used to give people the permission to leave their houses or ride public transit and you don't have a device, you're now effectively being penalized and left behind even more.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I think that's a good point, where you tie privilege to the use of an application and people are left out as a matter of the digital divide, whether we're talking about seniors, the homeless or other circumstances where people don't have access to the technology. That is a real challenge that would need to be overcome.

But, when we're talking about initially what is effective, I wonder, the go-to to voluntariness... and I say this as someone who's been incredibly vocal and supportive of privacy overall as a parliamentarian, but if we're not even going to get in the door of any efficacy or usefulness out of this because of the barrier of voluntariness then.... I'll use an example here maybe. I read the privacy commissioner's statement, and de-identification is an incredibly important principle, but then they also note that de-identified, or aggregate, data should be used whenever possible unless it will not achieve the defined purpose.

Couldn't we take the same approach of necessity and proportionality writ large when it comes to voluntariness as well?

Ms. Laura Tribe: When we look at the really big picture, I don't think these apps are going to work. I think that's the big problem. I think that forcing them onto people when they're not going to actually have the impact that's desired—

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: That's a fair point if they don't work, but if they do work and they require a level of adoption for them to work, and voluntariness is standing in the way. I'm trying

to think through this problem, and the challenge I see is that our economies have been devastated. We're obviously facing a recession and, if it extends further, potentially a depression. Our civil liberties are already curtailed significantly. We're not making this decision in a vacuum.

If—and it's a big if—the use of these applications that are an opt-out system rather than an opt-in system can move us faster to a life that means we can have some sense of normalcy, our economy returns and our lives may potentially be saved, I don't know whether that's the hill to go to battle on in the end. I wonder what you say to that.

Ms. Laura Tribe: I think, from a principled perspective, the way the government treats its citizens in crisis is the biggest test of our democracy. That's really why it's still a hill to battle for now.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Thanks, Laura. I appreciate it.

The Chair: The next round of questions goes to MP Dreeshen.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Of course, I just had a notice that my Internet connection is unstable, so hopefully I'll be able to get through this.

First of all, I want to thank everyone for appearing at this virtual committee hearing today. Those of us from rural areas have spent many hours trying to sort out these issues of our own connectivity. Of course, it's an ongoing battle made worse now that COVID-19 is forcing so many Canadians to try to adapt to a new paradigm of work, study and social connections from a computer monitor.

From my own perspective, hopefully the two geese that were trying to nest on my cell tower this morning have moved on to other parts, and we can go from there.

As the former vice-chair of the industry committee, I was honoured to help initiate the study on rural and remote broadband in the last Parliament. There was a great flurry of activity with respect to promises from this government regarding their connect to innovate program. There were some discussions about the connecting Canadians program that we had before. Well, that was five or six years ago.

We recognized the initial rollout that was associated with that, but of course, as Mr. Gay indicated earlier today, if you happen to have been fortunate enough, you might have been able to have some money come through the connect to innovate program, as many people in this country have, but there were a lot of places that were left out. I think that's really why we're so concerned about this.

Also, I believe there was some commentary about the consultation process that the Conservatives were doing on rural Internet access. One of the proposed recommendations we made had to do with the detailed strategy plan to address the geographical and economic disparities that exist as we embark on this goal to improve rural broadband access. One of the items preparing for further crises that might be part of that could be considering temporary deployment of cells on wheels to get out to some of these areas that have a lot of really serious problems.

When it comes to the disproportionate impact of rural broadband access to Canadian society, I'd like to get your thoughts on this and other measures that we could take to mitigate this inequality.

Perhaps I could have our folks from TekSavvy speak to this, please.

● (1815)

Mr. Andy Kaplan-Myrth: You're asking, I think, what can be done to move things quickly. While I think there is a place for cell on wheels as a very temporary measure to get connectivity to some place that's just unserved now, that is a very temporary measure. It puts more pressure on cellular networks and will not deliver the kinds of speeds people are looking for, and certainly not in the long term.

Really, there are a lot of projects that small providers and probably large providers as well could initiate right now very quickly to get people online. It's really a matter of funding. TekSavvy has projects that are partially funded that we're ready to go with, but, as I alluded, our whole business is turned upside down by the rates and the appeals, and we don't have the money to fund it right now. If we did, we would be able to connect thousands of people in the southwestern Ontario area within a couple of months. It's about deploying money quickly to get projects done.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Again, part of that, of course, is our municipalities. Our municipalities have to grapple with the business disruptions that are taking place right now. They have to address the need to seamlessly connect students and teachers, ensure ways to give confidence to their residents and communicate with those who are facing the most trying of times.

From our folks in B.C., what have you been hearing from your municipal leaders with respect to the capacity build-out required to serve these rural communities?

Mr. Rob Gay: Certainly, as was said, there are plans on the shelf. We have projects under way right now that are underfunded, but could be extended. We have some real obstacles. I think across Canada we have telephone poles, electricity poles. Access to that infrastructure, these poles, even in our province is owned by BC Hydro, and we cannot get on those poles. It would be quite easy to deploy fibre. So access to infrastructure is an issue too.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Our next round of questions goes to MP Jaczek.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses.

I think we can certainly agree the urgency of ensuring connectivity across Canada has been heightened through the pandemic, as so many of you have pointed out.

My riding of Markham—Stouffville does include a very rural area. Some of the comments made by Mr. Gay and Mayor Arnold really resonated with me because through the years there has been a concerted effort by municipalities, by York Region, to try to improve connectivity through the rural areas. Of course there has been the situation—Mayor Arnold, you referenced it in particular—that people come in, do an assessment and somehow it's not worth their while. There's no business case to improve the connectivity in particular areas. In particular, it seems—and I've heard this from rural MP colleagues—that some of the incumbents—Bell, Rogers, Telus—have made it quite clear they don't see a business case for them to connect rural Canada.

Mayor Arnold, could talk to that experience a little?

● (1820)

Mr. Steve Arnold: You're absolutely right. Some of the larger corporations don't want to bother. We've dealt with TekSavvy, and even they struggle at times with being able to provide service for some of the smaller communities that we have. We've allowed all kinds of communication devices to be put on water towers wherever we can. We went through an exercise whereby we were volunteering to pay towards having it put in. Even \$8,500 per residence wasn't enough to cover the cost.

The model is exactly as you said. You have to have a profit model there somewhere. These large corporations don't want to be bothered with small places where they're not going to be able to turn any type of profit for a number of years.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you.

Ms. Tribe, you've talked about your three priorities for action, mandating a basic Internet package and so on. How do you deal with the reality that Mayor Arnold has just described? How do we make the connectivity happen?

Ms. Laura Tribe: That's the point I was getting at around the money. It sounds so silly to keep coming back to it, but that's why the current approach hasn't worked: because it has been waiting for companies to do it themselves, and they have been so reliant on what would be profitable.

As we've all agreed on this call, the Internet is essential. Everyone needs it. If it's essential, that's where the government needs to step in. It sounds so easy when I say it that way, but it's hard because it's a lot of money. Hearing Mayor Arnold talk about what that costs for each home, that makes a really big difference in the lives of the people who live in that house. The larger companies in particular have really put an amount on the dollars they can get back. That's why this does require the government to step in. If we don't put forward a plan that will subsidize that to make sure those families know they matter.... Those companies don't because it's not profitable.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: But when government procures a service from a provider, it obviously asks for a proposal from as many people as are interested. The government then analyzes those particular proposals, and of course looks to price. Are you suggesting that to ensure connectivity in rural Canada the government goes through a normal procurement process? How exactly would it work?

Ms. Laura Tribe: I think there are a number of models the government has already used for applications for funding. They have frequently led to the same providers receiving the money. They've actually, I think, in some cases for the incumbents, learned to not invest until the government is willing to subsidize them.

When we're looking at these rural areas in particular, the number one thing the government should look at is who is already there. Who's already serving those communities? They're the ones who have invested in those areas and they are the ones who are going to be around long after the government funding is gone.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My time is up.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

• (1825)

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Good evening.

My question is for Ms. Tribe.

Ms. Tribe, you spoke earlier about the idea of nationalizing the network.

[English]

Ms. Laura Tribe: Sorry but I just need to interrupt for one second.

The translation is not working on my stream. I apologize. My French is so poor I would not be able to understand anything.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: It isn't your fault.

[English]

Ms. Laura Tribe: There's no translation service. There's no ability to switch languages on my Zoom.

[Translation]

The Chair: Just a moment, we'll check.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Tribe, could you check on the bottom to see if you have the little globe for interpretation?

Ms. Laura Tribe: No, I'm sorry. I emailed as well. There is no ability to flip that I can find.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Savard-Tremblay, I stopped the clock.

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson): Good evening, Ms. Tribe.

Could you just tell us what device you're using, please?

Thank you.

Ms. Laura Tribe: Yes, it's a MacBook.

The Clerk: Okay. Then you might have a three dots at the top of your screen. Can you check for that?

There are no options at all on your screen?

Ms. Laura Tribe: No, I apologize.

I've been looking for it for the whole meeting. I can't find any option for it.

The Clerk: We're just going to ask for some help from the technician in the room. Just one moment please. Thanks.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Chair, in the meantime, I want to clarify something. I see that the clock is ticking. We must be able to complete the third round, as requested by the steering committee of this committee. It would be really sad if, because of an interpretation issue, 5 p.m. comes around and Mr. Masse and I don't have time to finish our third round.

The Chair: Rest assured that we'll complete the third rounds. We want to make sure that the witnesses can also take part in the meeting.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Absolutely. It's essential.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I'm just going to suspend the meeting for a moment so that we can have the technician work on the translation problem.

• (1825)

(Pause)

• (1830)

The Chair: Mr. Masse, we'll go to you. If you have a question for Madam Tribe, when she gets back on we can try to figure something out.

Mr. Brian Masse: It's okay. I do, but I also want to make sure that I ask a question for one of my neighbours to the mayor from St. Clair Township.

Perhaps you can talk about how important it is to have our own domestic support systems for Internet. In Windsor, where I'm from, we get bounced and also we pick up Detroit signals and roaming charges and so forth. Maybe you can highlight that to people who aren't familiar with what can happen to Canadians living on the border, and talk about the charges we can get through roaming.

Mr. Steve Arnold: Thank you very much for the question.

You're absolutely right. We get non-stop charges for roaming in the United States. We can be as far away as 10 to 12 kilometres from the border and we're still picking up those charges. You end up having to get your bill redone, and you always end up paying more.

The Internet is worse. We had a new Rogers tower put up just outside the village of Sombra, which is right along the St. Clair River. What happened is that in the first two weeks the Internet was wonderful in the village. People couldn't get over it. Then, all of a sudden, the Americans in Marine City found out it was there. They sucked all the bandwidth out of the tower, and it was far worse than it was before. What Rogers did, in their infinite wisdom, was they turned the satellite signal around, and it did absolutely nothing.

You're absolutely right. It's a real challenge. That's why fibre is the only option for us.

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes, I think that's important too. I only have a little time left, but maybe you could highlight what's necessary for your municipal emergency services. It's not just about the inconvenience of getting a charge with regard to a cost, but also in times of emergency and so forth, fibre really is what's necessary for places such as yours.

Mr. Steve Arnold: Absolutely, because with fibre you get that connectivity. Anything through the air will get bounced around in Michigan. Maybe it will come back, but maybe not, and then we have people who get caught with disasters on their hands not being able to communicate with anyone.

Our cell service is another thing that's a major issue. It just disappears in certain areas.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP Masse, for your flexibility.

Madam Tribe is back.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I don't see Ms. Tribe on the screen. Can you confirm that she can hear the interpretation this time?

• (1835)

[*English*]

Ms. Laura Tribe: I can hear the interpretation. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Perfect. Thank you.

In your presentation, you talked about the idea of nationalizing the network.

How would this work in practice?

Have you thought about the potential costs involved? In short, how would this work and what would be the broad strokes?

Could you elaborate on this idea?

[*English*]

Ms. Laura Tribe: Thank you, and thank you for your patience.

When we are talking about the plans for putting this forward, for us, the plan needs to be national and the funding needs to be national. In terms of who the government is funding, I don't necessarily believe, and we don't necessarily believe, that the government needs to own those networks.

It could be a matter of the government building them on an open access model and then allowing other providers to provide the service over them. I think that what is more likely and probably faster than having the government decide to get into the Internet service business is to instead ramp up the services we already have, which are investing in those who have the expertise in those areas, to make sure they're building on the services they've already started.

Does that help?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: In other words, if I understood your explanation correctly, the issue is more about the establishment of a national plan than nationalization. Is that correct? I just want to make sure that we're clear on the terms.

[*English*]

Ms. Laura Tribe: Yes, that is what I mean. I think there are worlds in which more dramatic intervention could look like that, but I think the plan we are putting forward is for the government to fund those smaller providers, as opposed to taking over the networks to operate them themselves.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: This would include a subsidy plan, a support plan.

Madam Chair, I can see that a card is up. Is my time up?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: So we're talking more about a subsidy plan, about funding for small and medium-sized businesses, which would provide the services in this system. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Ms. Laura Tribe: Yes.

The Chair: We'll go now to the third round.

MP Patzer, you have five minutes.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question to start with will be for Steve Arnold.

Steve, you mentioned that your area had received funding through the SWIFT program. I'm just curious about how much of that funding has shown up and whether you have been able to address any gaps with that funding.

Mr. Steve Arnold: We're right at the start of it. We were just told in January that the money was coming. It'll be put through Cogeco. They've shown us the areas where that money will be spent. It revolves around Enbridge now and their wellheads in some of the more remote areas. All of it will be spent along the St. Clair River, which is where we need it.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Okay. Are there any other funding programs you've applied for or been able to receive?

Mr. Steve Arnold: We've applied for four different funds over a number of years. With one of the ones that we did receive—and I don't have the name off the top of my head—we could not even find a provider that would put the service in for us. They weren't interested for that kind of money.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Was that when you were referencing the \$8,500 per resident? Was that the cost then?

Mr. Steve Arnold: No, this was prior to that. It was about four or five years ago that we were going through this process. There were three municipalities that were involved in it. We could not get a provider to pick up the grant and provide the service for us.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: I'm interested, though. For the \$8,500, was that for people within the community, or was that out to acreages and out to farms? What was the nature of the \$8,500 per resident?

Mr. Steve Arnold: That \$8,500 per resident was essentially the same project that SWIFT is doing now. The majority of it was fibre optic along the river. You build up areas and then there's a series of towers serviced by fibre optic cable to go to the rural areas around it. It was the whole municipality.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Okay, right on. I wasn't too sure because there's a town here in Saskatchewan which, for \$1,700 per resident, was able to get fibre to the home, but it was right within the community. That's why I was wondering.

Mr. Steve Arnold: If we could get it for \$1,700, I'd have to sign them up right now.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Yes, I bet you would. That's not too bad of a price, especially for fibre.

You mentioned earlier that you can only get half a megabit to one megabit of download right now. What is the advertised rate of speed that you have in your community?

• (1840)

Mr. Steve Arnold: Through cable, it's around 50 megabits, and through the airwaves it's around seven megabits. That's what they're advertising. And with seven megabits, you may as well put two cans and a string together.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Yes. One of the biggest issues I've been finding across the country is that a lot of the companies are using low signal quality for their mapping and not high quality. I think this is a direct result of that.

One of the proposals that we have in the proposal document that we just put out is about accurate reporting, transparency with Canadians, and accountability. Earlier, we heard Ms. Tribe talk about 41% of rural Canadians having access to 50 and 10 megabits per second. I spent 10 years working in telecommunications prior to being elected, and I do not recall very many communities, if any, that actually had access to 50 and 10.

Is 50 and 10 available to every resident in your area, or is it only in the actual community where you are?

Mr. Steve Arnold: For us, it's just in the Corunna area, the largest centre. That's where you get the 50 and 10 megabits per second. Some of the more rural areas and the smaller areas of the community can't get anything because it's all about line of sight. The kids go down to the library and sit outside the library to try to get online there in the middle of winter.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Yes. That gets to the whole equality of opportunity that we need to have for our rural areas. I think one of the barriers to getting investment into these rural communities is that a lot of companies are waiting for 5G, rather than investing in fibre to the home or fibre to all these communities. Are you finding that's potentially the case as you've been working through this?

Mr. Steve Arnold: They'll never come out and admit to that. We haven't had that much discussion around the 5G itself.

I think a lot of it is just because the market is so small that people just aren't interested in the small areas, with so many miles and so many acres to move stuff. I think that's the hardest part for most providers, and I don't blame them. They have to be able to make some money too.

I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next round of questions goes to MP Jowhari.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses.

Ms. Tribe, you highlighted three short-term, let's say, steps that would help us with the emergency situation we are dealing with. On the third item, you talked about detailing a plan that would expedite getting us way ahead of 2030. In follow-up questions, you talked about coming up with a national strategy. You constantly referred to the government, and I would assume you're talking about the Government of Canada, the federal government, as the key driver of this through subsidies, through funding for infrastructure.

Where are the other players, from your point of view, playing in this puzzle? We still have provinces. We still have regions. We still have municipalities. We have IS providers, larger ones and smaller ones. We have some of the infrastructure that is already in place. We also have the residents.

How do you think these players, these stakeholders, play into this national strategy and the national rollout that you're talking about?

Ms. Laura Tribe: Yes, I am referring to the national government in terms of who I think needs to put forward a national plan. There is definitely a role for the provinces, for municipalities, for the territories and for local communities to play in determining what that looks like for them. However, I think the idea that it can be driven from the local level, without knowing they have the backing of the federal government, isn't going to get those projects very far. So I think the federal government putting forward a plan that says, "We are committed to this, and now we're going to come and meet with you at the provincial level, at the territorial level, at the regional level to figure out what the plan is that suits you and how we can best support you and work with you," is really how to get that done.

• (1845)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Let me share with you the experience I've had, at least over the last six years, as the federal government introduced a lot of infrastructure programs. Where we run into a bottleneck is when those infrastructure programs come to the provincial level or the municipal level. A lot of, let's say, positioning had to take place to make sure they were prioritized.

Despite the fact that the Government of Canada, at least in the case of my riding, identified infrastructure investment as a top priority, when it came to the province and when it came to the region there was that friction, or there was misalignment, I would call it, and timing that didn't allow us to roll out that infrastructure in a timely manner.

Yes, we can drive it, but we need partners at the table to develop this and agree on it, rather than us saying, "These are the pieces," and then, "Province, this is your piece to go." What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Laura Tribe: You will all know better than I do how difficult it is to get multi-layered government projects aligned, particularly with elections, when governments can change in different cycles at different times. There are different interests that come in. However, for starters, this is an issue where there is a lot of alignment at all levels of government. People need connectivity, and I think you can start there.

Then, if the government is firm in its commitments, and the provinces, the municipalities, the regions know that you're going to be there in one year, two years or three years to follow up and to

continue on this—this isn't just a press release, it's not just an announcement, but it's actually a plan that's going to be followed through on—I think you're going to be amazed to see they're willing to sit at the table knowing that suddenly you're going to help them get their communities online.

When those conversations are taking place, there's absolutely an expectation that those communities are participating in the conversation. They are helping to drive what services they're looking for or what the set-up is they're looking for. That's in cities and towns, as well as first nations communities. That consultation process is something the federal government is well positioned to facilitate in those smaller circles.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I think I have about 10 seconds, so I'll yield that to the chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next round of questions goes to MP Rempel Garner.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Yesterday, as some of my colleagues mentioned, as the Conservative Party, we put out a document that outlined about 14 different recommendations for the government to use in considering how to address the issue of rural broadband access. One of the things we talked about was the fact that oftentimes we see companies advertise the best possible speed in the utopian environment, and what often happens is that a consumer will get an average speed that's far lower than that.

My question is for Ms. Tribe.

Would it be fair to say that many Canadians do not receive the speeds that they think they're paying for? Do you think that requiring companies to advertise the average speed in their regions is a good idea?

Ms. Laura Tribe: Yes, one of the biggest concerns that we hear, particularly during the pandemic, is that people are looking.... I think, as Mr. Kaplan-Myrth referred to earlier, people are upping their speeds or upping their needs, but they're not necessarily seeing that result in the final product they're getting at home. That is one of the concerns we're hearing. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we've seen that a third of Canadians have reported that their speeds have gone down since the pandemic without changing their package they're receiving.

There are huge disparities. We've seen that it has been more prevalent in rural areas where the service has been a bit more tenuous to start, and as that reliance becomes more heavy, those services are dramatically reduced. One of the recommendations the CRTC put forward in 2016, when it declared the Internet a basic service, was that there needed to be minimum service guarantees, and that was how the metrics should be put forward for the services that people are receiving and what they're paying for as opposed to what they might be able to receive.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thanks.

The Auditor General, when they reviewed the connect to innovate program, found that the program didn't require applicants to demonstrate that their projects would not be feasible without public funding, which is concerning to me, because there's really then no requirement for people who would receive these funds to focus on harder-to-reach or lower demand areas. Do you think that could be a requirement for any new public funding for rural broadband ?

• (1850)

Ms. Laura Tribe: Yes, absolutely, I think that public funding being required is a huge piece. I can only speak for OpenMedia's community, but I think that's why we've seen a lot of frustration when government funding consistently goes to companies like Bell that are using rural Canada as a pawn.

In August when they were upset with the decision, they said they were no longer going to connect 200,000 homes as planned, and now that the pandemic is out, they're promising to reconnect 135,000 homes that they had originally withdrawn. If that flexibility is there and that funding is there, and it's really just a matter of prioritization, that's on them. This is really us asking the government to say, "Make it happen for those who can't do it otherwise."

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I was going to leave this question—it's a little spicier—for last, and I'll word it carefully, but look, the status quo was maintained for a long period of time, and I think we've all experienced the influence of those who would like to maintain the status quo.

Do you think the lobbying practices and ownership of other assets by certain companies in the space that we're talking about are a part of the reason we don't have universal, affordable access to Internet in Canada? Carefully worded, what would you suggest for legislators and media who are writing in the space? How should we navigate this? If we're managing to access and we want a free market and we want people to be making money, but we also want access, how do we break this logjam?

Ms. Laura Tribe: I am not an expert on the Lobbying Act or the practices there, so I can't speak to lobbyists themselves, but I think, as a public interest advocate who is working really hard to get the voices of our community to all of you, to people in positions of power, it is amazing to watch the tantrums, the bullying and the fits that we watch the incumbents throw when they don't get their way. The amount of power that they wield when it comes to our media companies, our Internet service providers is really unparalleled. Those tantrums really do go a long way, I think, to influencing government, and I think the greatest way to influence that is to reduce the power they have overall.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Our next round of questions goes to MP Lambropoulos.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Hello everyone.

I'd like to thank all of the witnesses for being here with us this evening. I was actually just logged off because my Internet was faulty. Luckily, I got back on just in time.

Obviously, we live in a time when we completely depend on the Internet more than ever. Every single Canadian should have access to the Internet. I'm happy we're having this conversation today.

My first question is for TekSavvy.

You were answering that you were having some difficulties pre-coronavirus and needed the government's help with regard to keeping the company going. I was wondering if you had an increase in demand after the virus hit and once people were forced to work from home.

We'll start with that question.

Mr. Andy Kaplan-Myrth: We were actually already seeing dramatic increases in how much capacity we needed to carry our customers' traffic late in 2019, before the pandemic. It was already getting expensive. That's partly a factor of a lot of new streaming services coming online all at the same time. We also lowered prices. People increased their speeds. There were a number of factors. We were working really hard to add capacity to our network as fast as we could.

With the pandemic, yes, we definitely saw an increase in the amount of traffic on our networks, and not just during the day, but overall, and at peak times, which is really the limiting factor for us. The way we provision our networks is by buying the amount of capacity we need at peak time.

We saw huge increases in the amount of capacity that we needed. We immediately placed a lot of orders to add capacity to our networks. That's a process that takes time for us. It's a service that we buy from the incumbents.

It was helped somewhat when YouTube, and Netflix, I believe it was, reduced the quality of their streams. That saved a lot of bandwidth and we had some relief from that.

But, yes, we saw very large increases in the amount of traffic generated on the networks.

• (1855)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

I live in a non-rural community. I'm in an urban community, but still we get a lot of complaints. I've heard a lot of complaints because the main providers are Bell and Vidéotron and people have a problem with the fact that those are the only providers. They're not the only ones, but they're the most mainstream ones, and the ones people go for.

What's your take on that? What role do you think our government should play in changing the way things are currently?

Mr. Andy Kaplan-Myrth: You are describing Bell and Vidéotron as the main providers. They're the incumbents. They've been there the longest. They have all the advantages and privilege of incumbency, and they're the best known. They do own the wires, but TekSavvy probably provides service in your area and lots of other competitors probably do, too. You actually have lots of choices for providers.

It's on the same wires, and what you don't want to do in an urban area is encourage more providers to build more fibre to your home. There's already technology that goes to your home that can carry the traffic that you need. You might need to add capacity—I keep seeing your signal levels drop there—but there are already wires going to your home, so you don't need to incentivize more companies to build more wires. What the government and the CRTC need to do, and what the CRTC tried to do last year, to their credit, with setting their wholesale rates, is enable competitors to use those wires to deliver services so customers have real choices where they already have that connectivity.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you so much.

If I have any time left, I'd like to ask Ms. Tribe a question.

You had given us three main recommendations, but you said you had a whole slew of other ones. As we're reaching the end of our time here, if you had any more that you'd like to put on the record before the end of this session, you can go ahead.

Ms. Laura Tribe: Thanks.

I will put more in writing to you, but I think the biggest thing that can be done today that would make a big difference to people who are on the verge of being connected or not is to remove data caps on cellphones. We know that in low-income families cellphones are often the only connectivity device they have. If they are now reliant on that, with the most oppressive data caps that we have, with the most punitive overage fees, I think that's the biggest thing we could do to bridge that gap in the short term.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to the next round of questions.

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In my opinion, we have a duty of fairness to all consumers. I'm thinking about the idea of a universal floor price in the country,

meaning in Quebec and Canada, in both urban and rural areas. This price would be fixed by a government agency. It would be a universal fixed price for data use, and the provider would offer this price to the distributor. The goal is to ensure that the customer doesn't pay more, whether the customer is in an urban or rural area. Of course, this could give competitive advantages to small providers.

My question is for the representatives of the Canadian Communication Systems Alliance, who referred earlier to the idea of stepping up financial support for broadband services in rural areas.

Do you agree with this principle of independence between the provider and the distributor?

Also, do you agree that each distributor should have a legal obligation to maintain the same ratio of customers in urban and rural areas?

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Thomson: As an organization, we're entirely supportive of the notion of universal access and affordable access. If we can offer services at the same price in rural Canada as Canadians pay in urban Canada, that would be a fantastic accomplishment for the whole country. However, to the issue that has been at the foundation of the discussion today, that takes money. It costs a lot more to operate a service in rural Canada than it does in urban Canada.

• (1900)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Doesn't the government have a duty of fairness to all Quebecers and Canadians, a duty that it could fulfill by fixing the price offered by providers to distributors? In the end, we would ensure that the bill is the same for everyone.

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Thomson: If the goal is equal prices across the country, it's a laudable goal, but it can't be done without government support, substantial government support.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: However, there's a fairness issue here. You acknowledge that, don't you?

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Thomson: Yes, entirely. We entirely agree that universal access is a question of fairness and citizenship.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Our next round of questions goes to MP Masse.

You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to take a moment to thank our researchers. They did an amazing job in pulling together some good data with regard to the coverage that each province has and the private companies that are involved. That needs to be noted because we get some really good service here.

Ms. Tribe, I want to ask again about universality and the streaming and net neutrality issues we have. Has that taken a back seat right now given what has taken place in terms of connectivity? What I worry about to some degree, just as I do with privacy rights, is it becoming subservient during times of crisis to expediency, which can undermine our pillars of democracy, and also with net neutrality and streaming, advertising and other things could be affected. Do you have any comments related to that?

Ms. Laura Tribe: Thanks. I love to talk net neutrality.

As for where net neutrality stands in Canada right now, the CRTC has made a number of strong decisions that support net neutrality as far as content not being prioritized over other content is concerned. It is up for debate, in the review of the Telecommunications Act, what any new legislation would look like.

The biggest thing I take away from this pandemic with regard to net neutrality is that so many of the arguments we have heard from the incumbents on why certain content should be prioritized over other types of content are about traffic management needs. It's the same reason they justify low data caps, which we have seen artificially suppress usage. We've seen our major ISPs remove data caps across the board in this time of crisis, and therefore, fundamentally, we need to look at whether they are needed the rest of the time. If we can uphold net neutrality now, I think it will set a strong precedent for when things return to a more normal state, whatever that looks like. Those principles need to remain then, too.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I see the red card.

The Chair: Thank you so much. That brings us to the end of the third round and the end of our time this evening.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their time and their patience and, of course, our IT crew, our translators, our analysts and the clerk. Thanks to all the members for their patience and their excellent questions again this evening.

[Translation]

Have a good evening.

[English]

This meeting is adjourned.

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