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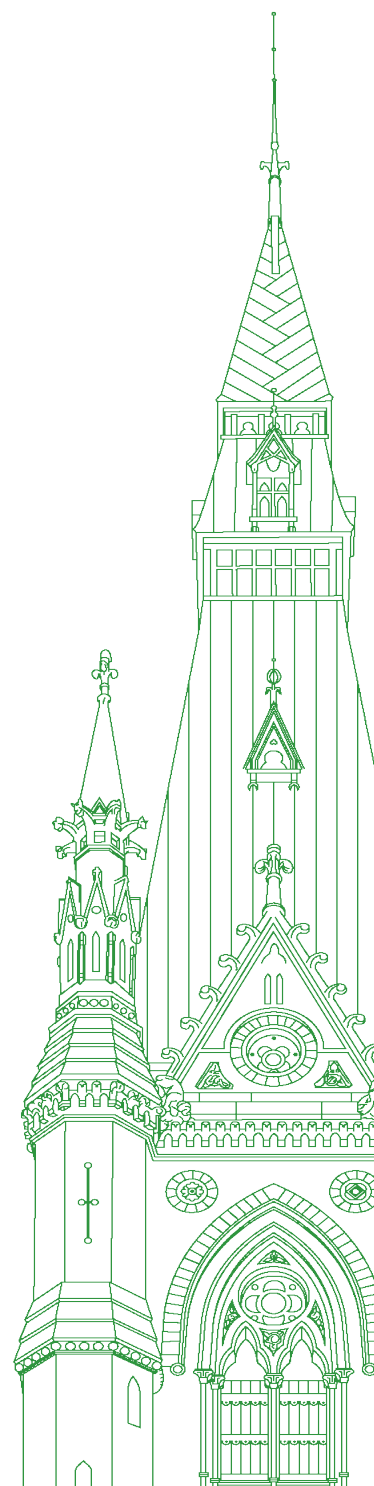
Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

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Chair: Mrs. Sherry Romanado



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• (1405)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 30 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 for the purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters related to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Today's meeting is taking place by video conference, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

I'd like to remind the members and the witnesses to please wait before speaking until I recognize them by name. When you are ready to speak, please unmute your microphone, and then return to mute when you are finished speaking. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly and hold the microphone for your earbuds close to your mouth, if you are using earbuds, so that the translators can do their work. It is also very important that you make sure that your channel is on the appropriate language, the language in which you are speaking. Therefore, if you are speaking English, please make sure it is on English. If you are speaking French, please make sure it is on French.

As is my normal practice, I will hold up a yellow card when you have 30 seconds left in your intervention, and I will hold up a red card when your time for questions has expired.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

[Translation]

We have with us Magda Fusaro, rector of the Université du Québec à Montréal, and Denis Martel, rector of the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

[English]

From the University of Calgary, we have president and vice-chancellor Ed McCauley. From the University of Toronto, we have Matt Ratto, associate professor and Bell University Labs chair in human-computer interaction. From Universities Canada, we have Mr. Philip Landon, vice-president and chief operating officer.

Each witness will present for five minutes, followed by our rounds of questions.

We will start with Professor Ed McCauley, president and vice-chancellor of the University of Calgary.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Dr. Ed McCauley (President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Calgary): Thank you.

[Translation]

I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

[English]

All aspects of our societies have been impacted by COVID-19. Post-secondary institutions across the country responded rapidly to ensure the success of students. At the University of Calgary, we moved 30,000 students to remote learning, brought home our students and scholars studying abroad, ensured that our domestic and international students were safe, and moved over 5,000 faculty and staff to remote work where possible. This was done in a matter of days. We implemented a decade of innovation in a few weeks.

At the same time, as a great research university, our faculty and students were engaged in national and international research programs to understand COVID-19 and reduce its impact on our health and our societies. We worked closely with all levels of government to inform public health policy. Our spin-out companies rapidly pivoted to supply much-needed products to fight the transmission of COVID-19. Our students, themselves impacted by the pandemic, stepped up to support our community.

[Translation]

I'm extremely proud of how our students rose to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did they adapt, but they also gave up their time to help those in need.

[English]

They supported grocery delivery for those who couldn't get out. They volunteered to conduct contact tracing for the provincial health care system, and over 200 pre-service teachers provided free individualized online tutoring for primary and secondary students. Our staff rallied to produce supports for mental health, up-to-the-moment information and advice on how to deal with the day-to-day impacts of the "new normal". I'm very proud of how we helped and what we accomplished.

But now is the time to look beyond the immediate COVID-19 emergency and ask how we can support this generation of students and scholars and ensure Canada's future. COVID-19 has shown the crucial roles that universities play to support Canadians, which is why I'm pushing as hard as I can to ensure that we learn from this year's "decade of innovation".

This fall, we are adopting a hybrid model of delivery. Within public health guidelines, we want to maximize in-person interactions. They are a key part of our student experience and a key component of knowledge creation and innovation. The electricity, the lifelong friendships formed and the excitement of starting a new journey are not easily replicated online.

Canada needs the knowledge our universities create. The world will not be standing still, and our prosperity depends on it.

Our Canadian government can help to ensure the success of students and scholars in the coming months through investments. Investing in work-integrated learning and upskilling is an investment in Canadian productivity. There is also investing in research. Previous investments have paid huge dividends during COVID-19. Continuing this investment will grow and diversify the Canadian economy. Finally, investing in technology platforms will unlock the power of the digital world for delivering advanced education and lead to new discoveries.

These are just three examples of many where the return on investment to Canada could be huge. Such investments will ensure that Canada is equipped to deal with the next major global calamity, because we will have the talent, the creativity and the ability to create new knowledge.

As I wrap up my opening comments, I want to emphasize that the pivots over the last few months have been expensive, but we view these expenditures as vital for our students' success and the prosperity that they will bring to the future of Canada. In a world with such significant uncertainty, investment in post-secondary institutions is both an investment in our future and an investment in preparing for the next unknown.

I'm happy to take any questions you may have.

• (14:10)

[Translation]

Should you wish to ask me questions in French, I hope you don't mind, but I will answer in English.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor McCauley.

We'll now go to Professor Ratto.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Prof. Matt Ratto (Associate Professor and Bell University Labs Chair in Human-Computer Interaction, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

Thanks for the invitation to testify.

I've been going through the transcripts of recent witnesses to this committee, and I was struck by comments by Dr. McDonald, on June 1 of this year, about the development of an emergency ventilator by an international team of scientists and engineers.

My goal today is to highlight those kinds of efforts and tell you a little bit more about research that's ongoing, not just by research scientists and Nobel Prize winners, but also by groups including front-line doctors, local hobbyists, students and even indigenous groups like the Nishnawbe Aski Nation in northern Ontario, who have been leveraging local know-how, digital fabrication and new technologies to produce local solutions to COVID.

In the last few months, millions of face shields have been printed and laser-cut. There are hundreds of different, but often related, ventilator projects, alternative face masks and respiratory technologies, a real groundswell of activity centred on protecting and serving the needs of front-line health care workers and COVID patients.

You probably have heard these sorts of feel-good stories in the media, and they really do highlight the resiliency and capacity of Canadians. But I think they're more than that. They also signal new capacities for innovation and technology development that sit outside the typical mechanisms and provide key capabilities to quickly problem-solve and respond when industrial systems and infrastructures break down as we recently experienced.

I'll give you a little background on me. I'm a professor at U of T, and when COVID hit, I turned my attention to seeing what we might do about it. I got a little bit of money from the University of Toronto to set up what we ended up calling the Toronto emergency device accelerator and brought together a group of faculty, students and staff to work on critical issues.

Since then, we've produced about 10,000 face shields and distributed them to hospitals and long-term care facilities, supported the development of a number of hospital-centred projects and provided essential equipment to assist in the development of a Canadian N95 mask test facility run out of the Dalla Lana School of Public Health.

But really what we did is we supported what has been called community-based innovations focused on supporting communities in need. For example, the face shield project that we built was really part of an open innovation process through which we built on the solutions of others and provided our own solution to others as well using open licensing to support widespread dissemination and quick improvements rather than using patents or other IP mechanisms.

We could, of course, do this because we were leveraging the public infrastructure of the university and funding from this institution with the goal of having a direct and immediate impact rather than generating a financial outcome.

These shields and all the others created by all the other groups served a very important role in the initial months of the crisis, providing safety and protection until the regular private enterprise solutions could spool up. Now that they have, the face shields that we made are not really competitive, costing more to make and being limited by our use of university infrastructure, which has now been returned back to its main role of research and teaching.

These are a feel-good story, but they serve to illustrate my main take-away. Within the university we typically divide innovation up in the following way: as contributions to human knowledge that we publicly share through academic publishing, and then these other types of contributions that typically require patent protections and are focused on economic value.

But I think there's a third way, which, I believe, the above story highlights. It's about innovations that are generated through deep and continuous collaborations with communities in need, and that require open licensing and ongoing support to have impact. Here, I really want to highlight the role that Canadian universities can play, given their centralization of expertise and knowledge, and their focus on the public good.

I'll just end with a couple of quick recommendations. I want to encourage this committee to keep this kind of innovation in mind as they deliberate on related issues such as the role of the new college of patent agents and trademark agents.

I also want to encourage the continued funding of research grants and other forms of funding that encourage universities and researchers to set up hubs that focus not just on the creation of new private companies, but also on new organizational forms to support innovations of the kinds I described above.

These innovations really helped us solve a problem in this PPE emergency, and I believe these offer us a model for continuing strategic and critical capacity.

Thank you.

• (1415)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Professor Landon.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Philip Landon (Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer, Universities Canada): Thank you very much.

Thanks for the invitation, and thanks for conducting this study and for the extraordinary work that all parliamentarians are doing during this very challenging time.

Universities Canada represents Canada's 95 universities nationally. Taken as a whole, our universities are a \$38-billion enterprise and are significant drivers of economic prosperity. They provide employment for over 300,000 people, and they are anchor institutions in the communities and often the largest employer in the communities, all of this while more than half of their revenues derive from non-governmental sources.

[Translation]

Canada's universities are an integral part of the team Canada approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, from mitigating the risk to finding a cure and accelerating Canada's economy into recovery. We appreciate the challenge now facing the government, and all of us—that of restarting the Canadian economy while continuing the health measures necessary to keep COVID-19 at bay.

We have also greatly appreciated the steps the government has taken to date, including the \$9 billion in support measures announced for students, flexible rules for applicants to the post-graduation work permit program and funding to restart on-campus laboratories.

[English]

While these measures are essential to helping young people and universities through the pandemic, I want to highlight three key areas today. The first is around international students; the second is around infrastructure; and the third is around research and innovation that will be vital to supporting Canada through the pandemic and beyond.

International students are part of the rich and diverse fabric of institutions and their communities. They're also one of the biggest sources of revenue for Canadian universities and their communities. They contribute \$22 billion to the Canadian economy, more than softwood, more than wheat and more than auto parts. This includes \$6 billion in tuition revenue. With the closed borders and with the pandemic, we can anticipate significantly lower international student enrolment this fall. This loss will directly impact all students and the ability of universities to meet the needs of Canadian students. We've been working very closely with federal officials to develop supports for international students to study either online or in person, and we continue to emphasize the need to ensure that international students can continue their studies, stabilize university operations and contribute to economic recovery. We're very keen to send a strong signal to the international community that Canada is open to international students.

I should also highlight the need for federal assistance should institutions see a significant loss in revenue as a result of the drop. A direct federal transfer will help universities bridge their operations until borders are open. Furthermore, federal investments in regaining Canada's market share in key source markets and international students, along with diversifying source markets, will be important for stabilization and recovery of the sector.

Around infrastructure, and looking forward to our recovery from COVID, Canada's universities can be partners in accelerating our economic rebound.

• (1420)

[Translation]

Canadian universities have \$7 billion in shovel-ready infrastructure projects, the majority of them focused on building green, digitally enabled and accessible campuses that will reduce the country's carbon emissions.

[English]

Investments in digital infrastructure in particular will rapidly expand access to post-secondary education, upskilling and re-skilling even as the country reopens. These investments will also ensure that students can attend regardless of disability, physical distancing, or work or family requirements.

Then finally around research and innovation, a huge opportunity for economic recovery is investing in our universities in research and innovation. The time is right now to harness the co-operation of the last five months to build a comprehensive idea-to-innovation strategy. Such a strategy would leverage existing investments in research into concrete solutions for emerging national and local challenges in a post-pandemic Canada. It would include support for institutional knowledge mobilization strategies and regional innovation adoption hubs to connect university research with local needs across the country.

We appreciate the work of all the members of this committee to help Canada recover from COVID-19. Thank you very much for having us here today.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now turn the floor over to the representatives of the Université du Québec system.

You have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Denis Martel (Rector, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Réseau de l'Université du Québec): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for inviting us to contribute to your work in such an extraordinary way. We are here on behalf of the Université du Québec, or UQ, system. I'd like to give you a brief overview of this unique university model in Canada.

In academia, the UQ system is a tour de force, and so is its contribution to Quebec and Canada. Ten separate and independent university institutions spread across urban and rural Quebec offer more than 1,300 undergraduate and graduate programs. Over 100,000 students enrol each year. We believe access to higher education is a core value. That belief governs our approach to students with unique needs, ranging from first-generation students, indigenous youth and student parents to those already in the workforce and, of course, graduates straight out of CEGEP. They are all part of our student population.

In a half-century, we have handed out more than 750,000 degrees in an effort to improve quality of life for those who live in the areas we serve, as well as for a number of populations in Canadian society. With 2,700 active professors in the knowledge field, we have developed niches of excellence all over, in each institution, and we

have found solutions to big challenges facing modern society, as well as current challenges related to COVID-19.

Collectively, the system is first in the country when it comes to research volume. Researchers build projects rooted in the communities they serve. They work with a wide range of partners, from community groups, business people and companies to cultural communities, health agencies and international organizations. Naturally, they also work in partnership with nearly every university in Canada. Our technological, scientific and social breakthroughs and innovations contribute to the economic growth of both Quebec and Canada, as well as the well-being of all citizens.

My colleague, Ms. Fusaro, will now take over.

Ms. Magda Fusaro (Rector, Université du Québec à Montréal, Réseau de l'Université du Québec): Thank you.

I'm going to touch on the examples my colleague just mentioned to highlight the powerful impact the system has through its community-based research across the province. I will also illustrate how those institutions can serve as incredible levers for invention and innovation. Before I go on, I truly want to commend the Government of Canada for its recent efforts. It's worth mentioning how quickly it deployed programs and how much financial support it provided. Nevertheless, as you will have noticed in our brief, we condemn the fact that a handful of universities in Canada receive the bulk of research dollars. That is essentially the point we'd like to make today.

Canada has a hundred or so universities across its vast territory. My colleague talked about diversity. How is it, then, that research funding is concentrated solely—or rather, mainly—in the university collective known as U15 or universities with faculties of medicine? We can have a full discussion on the subject afterwards, I have no doubt. It's unfortunate because, today, universities are so diverse that a phenomenon like COVID-19 involves not just epidemiology, but also society, the environment, the economy, social factors and gerontology. The impact on senior centres is proof of that. The examples go on and on and on.

Even though our university system does not include a faculty of medicine, we have more than 800 researchers—notably, across all disciplines—collaborating on projects as we speak. If you look at our brief, in boxes 2 and 3, you'll find a list of all the initiatives and studies our researchers are carrying out. You'll see that it's possible not to have a faculty of medicine, but to have, as we do at the Université du Québec à Montréal, a P3 laboratory, a fairly sophisticated epidemiology laboratory. Canada is privileged in that it can count on an amazing academic system. Half of all students enrolled are trained in universities that, combined, receive barely a quarter of research investment. I'm going to run out of time, so I won't go over our three main recommendations. I have no doubt we'll have a chance to talk about them.

I'll conclude on this note. A different funding allocation scheme would help the UQ system achieve its objectives: contribute to pandemic response—because there will indeed be others—strengthen the resilience of populations and organizations and, above all, support a green economic recovery.

We would be pleased to answer any questions you have.

Thank you.

● (1425)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

We will now move to our rounds of questions.

Our first round is for six minutes. I turn the floor over to MP Rempel Garner.

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

I have talked to members of all parties about this, so I'll be starting my remarks with a quick notice of motion. Today CBC News reported that Canada's Competition Bureau is investigating Amazon's online practices in Canada with a focus on potential abuse of dominance as it relates to the potential treatment of their independent sellers. I'm providing the following notice of motion:

That, pursuant to standing order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology invite representatives from the Competition Bureau as well as Amazon.ca, to appear regarding reports of anti-competitive behaviour on the part of Amazon.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Chair, I would ask if we could maybe quickly deal with this through unanimous consent. I have a small amendment but I think we could get this motion passed.

The Chair: Mr. Masse, unfortunately we don't have the 48 hours' notice. Madam Rempel Garner is giving notice of the motion. It's not admissible for debate at this time.

Mr. Brian Masse: I think though that you can ask for unanimous consent to deal with the motion, and if we're granted that, then we can proceed quickly to that. I could be wrong, but I'm fairly certain that was the case for procedure unless it's different this time.

The Chair: It does require unanimous consent, but I can open the floor if there are any members who would like to consider or not consider this. There is now a request to deviate from the motion that was passed in February by this committee to provide 48 hours'

notice. I appreciate that Madam Rempel Garner has given us the notice of motion. I'm just going to open the floor, and if there are any members of Parliament who would like to put forth that we maintain the 48 hours' notice, I would ask them to let me know immediately.

Madam Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): I just want to say I think we should keep it at 48 hours, mainly because we have our witnesses here today who are here to provide testimony, and I don't think it would be right for us to move ahead with this and take time away from them.

The Chair: Okay, so with that, unfortunately, we do not have unanimous consent, Mr. Masse.

● (1430)

Mr. Brian Masse: We can't request a vote for that? This is time-sensitive and I'm kind of perplexed as to why we would show inflexibility, especially given the circumstances we have and what's presented to Canadians. I just hope, perhaps, we can rethink that. I would be willing to give up some of my time to deal with it. It's that critical.

The Chair: Mr. Masse, there is no unanimous consent. There is a member who just mentioned that she would like to maintain the 48 hours, so unfortunately we do not have unanimous consent.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, I will start the clock for you, Madam Rempel Garner for your six minutes.

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

I'm going to direct most of my questions to Dr. McCauley.

It's nice to see you. I might call you Ed, and I apologize.

I'm just going to start by recognizing that our community in Calgary has potentially experienced the pandemic in a different way, and experienced an economic shift in a different way, because we were in a pretty bad spot going into the pandemic earlier this year in terms of unemployment numbers and economic downturn. We'd seen a lot of policy changes that were detrimental to the energy sector.

I was just wondering if you could, very briefly because I only have five or six minutes, outline almost in bullet point format some of the challenges that the university has experienced, your asks to both the provincial and federal governments to rectify those challenges, and any observations about how the University of Calgary has been addressing some of the needs of the broader community during this time of crisis. I know that you guys play a really important part in that, but I think, for the record, for committee purposes, if you could do that very succinctly, it would be very helpful for members to hear about that.

Dr. Ed McCauley: Thank you.

Yes, undoubtedly COVID-19 and the impacts on industry throughout the world in all the different sectors that are prominent in Calgary, whether it be agriculture, energy, transportation and logistics or finance, combined to really create a very major storm.

What the University of Calgary tried to do right from square one was to maintain business continuity as much as possible. That business continuity included making sure that we were capable of conducting research to help provide solutions for the COVID-19 issue in particular, but also to support our community.

I mentioned that our students stepped up amazingly. They volunteered and very quickly filled out the contact tracing. Our Cumming School of Medicine rapidly upskilled approximately 400 physicians locally to support Alberta during the pandemic.

At the same time, we were providing evidence-based guidance and suggestions to the city, the provincial government and the federal government in terms of how we could deal with the public health issues associated with COVID-19.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Ed, I'm sorry to interrupt you. The time goes so quickly. You have about two minutes. What do you need? What are you asking for? Put it on the record.

Dr. Ed McCauley: Support for the international students and clarity in terms of admission for students, I think, are really important. We hope to host around 4,500 international students this year at the University of Calgary.

The research funding continuity is very important. I've been talking to my assistant professors, and their programs have been dramatically impacted, so we really appreciate the business continuity funding from the tri-council, which is important.

Once again, having the capacity to support upskilling and re-skilling to support the Calgary community would be very beneficial at this time.

As I mentioned earlier, technology development and platform development for advanced education and for research would be very generous and beneficial.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'll close with another question to you, Dr. McCauley. I've had a few queries from students and I think this is a topic of discussion across the country. Students have said, "Look, our studies were disrupted this year. We didn't have online classes. What's the deal with tuition and how are we going to get our education?"

Do you have anything to say to them or any best practices for how universities in Canada can go forward? What are your needs from the federal government with regard to facilitating both?

• (1435)

Dr. Ed McCauley: First of all we've worked very closely with our students, both our undergraduates and our graduate students to ensure continuity for their programs. We have discussed tuition aspects with them. Our professors and our staff are delivering the same quality of materials in different formats, and in addition we're working closely with students to say if we're not offering this service, then those fees have been relaxed.

I mentioned business continuity. Our graduate students are very important for the future of Canada, and continued funding from the federal government for graduate students whose research programs have been interrupted would be very beneficial.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I just want to take the opportunity with the time I have left to thank you, Dr. McCauley, and the entire team at the University of Calgary for doing your best and punching above your weight during this crisis, from a research perspective and by looking for ways to support our community during an economic crisis. I hope all of my colleagues on this committee will look to your institution as a way to assist Alberta through the economic crisis and during the pandemic. Thank you for all of your hard work.

Dr. Ed McCauley: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now turn to MP Lambropoulos.

You have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you, Madame Chair.

Thanks to all of our witnesses for being with us today. I have a few questions for several different witnesses. The first is for Mr. Landon of Universities Canada.

You mentioned that obviously the international student community is very important to us. It's great revenue for the universities and for our GDP. Have you noticed a decrease in enrolment for the upcoming term and for the upcoming year? What exactly is the reason? Considering that most universities or many of them have said that they will be going online for the fall and winter semesters, what do you believe the reason is for this decrease in enrolment by international students who could very well take the courses from their home countries?

Mr. Philip Landon: The hard data on enrolment is still in flux. We'll probably know in October, I would think, at institutions across the country as to how much of a hit there has been. The fact is that right now, if I'm a student looking to come to Canada for the first time from China, I don't actually have a clear pathway to come. I do have a pathway to study online, which is good, but international students want to come to Canada. That's part of why they study here, and that's why they contribute to our classrooms and then often to our communities as time goes on. There has been a little lack of clarity around that and around the openness.

I do understand that the Public Health Agency of Canada is now working with the ministries of health in the provinces and territories to ensure that the universities have the right protocols in place, and the universities do. We are really looking for a strong signal that students will be able to come back, not only for this semester but actually for the January semester, as students come in. As I outlined in my testimony to begin with, this is a huge part of a university's revenue, it's a huge part of what we do as Canada and it's a huge part of our future to be open to international students—so we should see.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

If I understand correctly, you're asking for some leeway as well with regard to giving access, to international students who have proof of enrolment, to coming across the borders now that they're currently closed.

Mr. Philip Landon: Correct. As I understand it right now, they still have to have a letter to say why they must come across, and that's being interpreted by border officers in different ways. However, that is if they have a student permit from before March 18. We're looking for clarity on that. We know that our universities are ready to accept them and that they have quarantine measures in place. It's part of our competitive advantage internationally to be able to welcome international students back to our campuses at this time.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: As many of you have mentioned, your universities played a vital role in helping communities across the country come up with solutions to COVID-19, some more vulnerable communities in some cases. I feel there's often a disconnect between our universities and our businesses, or a disconnect between the universities and actually being able to reach the community level. Do you have any suggestions as to how the Government of Canada can help maybe bridge the gap that exists there between the two?

That question goes to any of the witnesses who wish to answer. I think Mr. Ratto had mentioned something along these lines.

• (1440)

Prof. Matt Ratto: I think you're right. I think there's often a disconnect. We've seen that disconnect, though, be brought back together, particularly with groups that have community-focused research. We've seen it in education and we've seen it in social work, where community-based research has served to basically allow the university to provide a valuable role in those contexts. I think community-based innovation can serve a similar purpose, with the goal not necessarily being the creation of new pedagogies or forms of social work, but actually the creation of technologies and other systems that can provide direct benefits.

Sometimes that sits outside the standard mechanisms of business. That's why I focused my attention on the creation of alternative organizational forms and alternative forms of support for bridging that gap through the use of technology.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. McCauley, I believe you had also mentioned something about that, if you would like to chime in and give recommendations.

Dr. Ed McCauley: The first piece is on, once again, dealing with the COVID-19 emergency and making sure the most needy in

society were gaining access to resources. I think what we're going to find with COVID-19, and we're already seeing it, is that the changes in life are really going to have an impact on mental health, which we have really tried to invest significantly in to try to provide the supports necessary for the community.

We have also been working closely with businesses and with industry, providing public health advice as to how they can reopen, how they can restart and how they can maintain business continuity.

I would also like to support Professor Ratto's comments about use-inspired research. Universities across the country invest in that really significantly, and that means the knowledge we create can be mobilized quite quickly for the benefit of society.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: That's my time, so thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

It's your turn, Mr. Lemire. You have six minutes.

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

Thanks also goes to my fellow committee members for wanting to continue this work on universities. As I see it, support for research is important.

Today is August 14. Mr. Martel, the university's current rector, will clearly remember what this day represents.

My father was the registrar at the Université du Québec 10 years ago. On that August 14, I was at the cottage, finishing up construction on the tree house he had started for his grandkids.

The day before, August 13, the Université du Québec had honoured him. I mention the date of that anniversary, Mr. Martel, to highlight the work that you, yourself, and Johanne Jean, the current head of the Université du Québec system, do. Those are still vivid memories for me.

My first question is obviously for the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, or UQAT, official. I'm very proud to be able to discuss these issues in a setting like this.

What role does a university play in a region, specifically, Abitibi-Témiscamingue?

Mr. Denis Martel: Thank you for your question, Mr. Lemire.

You brought up some sad memories, indeed, but also memories of a great man.

I often talk about the true role a university in the regions plays. I can sum it up in one sentence. A regional university, like ours, is a contributor to and a driver of the region's development.

It contributes to development by providing leadership, coordination and partnership, as well as by bringing stakeholders together and being a motivating force. It drives development by attracting businesses because they know they will have access to a highly skilled workforce. It draws students and brilliant minds who support the area's social and cultural advancement.

All that to say, a regional university plays a fundamental role. In regions like ours, it really serves a primary function.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Clearly, that fundamental role in regional development factors little into the research funding scheme, and we would really do well to do a better job of spreading funding around to target basic research.

It's a fact that 15 or so major universities receive nearly 100% of research funding. We need to stop the concentration of research funding and spread the funding around to benefit regional universities like yours.

The federal government needs to allocate significant funding to support universities in their efforts to assist the economic recovery.

Wage support for research office personnel is another important consideration, as is distance education support for students, especially international ones. It's also necessary to support paid work placements that businesses provide to students. Obviously, this is an area where funding needs to go to, and be managed by, the provinces. Universities are under provincial jurisdiction, after all.

Do you think it would be a good idea for the federal government to review its funding scheme?

• (1445)

Mr. Denis Martel: It's the funding scheme, yes, but it's also the approach taken.

In our brief, we refer to a few examples and suggestions.

As my colleague Ms. Fusaro said, Canada has a hundred or so universities. By allocating 55% to 60% of research funding to a select group, the government is penalizing universities like ours, and those in regions across Canada, especially rural ones. It makes it hard for us to renew our knowledge and talent pool and to attract young researchers in search of career advancement.

There are ways to adjust existing programs to better allocate funding to all universities, and that means a fairer allocation of funding. That's crucial.

We can't afford to lose out on everyone's expertise. We say it all the time. The Naylor report did a good job of highlighting that excellence is not tied to a single institution, but is found in every university. It's unfortunate for Canada to miss out on that potential and capability. We have to figure out how everyone can contribute more effectively.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I would add that it's important to have dedicated funding for the pooling of regional resources to support investments in knowledge-sharing mechanisms. Doing so would build both practical and theoretical knowledge, fostering the diversity and solution-finding capability businesses in the regions need. The environment is another important area of focus, and UQAT is especially proactive on that front.

Another important challenge in this COVID-19 era is the whole matter of international students. Clearly, the Université du Québec system welcomes many of them.

If Abitibi-Témiscamingue can't host international students, how might that impact your funding?

If international students can't enrol as planned, does provincial, but especially federal, legislation affect your ability to welcome students and, ultimately, balance the budget?

Mr. Denis Martel: Of course, it has financial repercussions. In Quebec, the provincial government was able to make some adjustments that will help mitigate those repercussions in the upcoming year. However, the repercussions will be much more significant in the future. That means the financial repercussions are serious. We need to be able to welcome international students. The biggest repercussions are obviously financial, but above all, Canada runs the risk of losing out on great minds that are crucial to innovation development in the country.

In a region like ours, it's fundamental, and we know it. We have sectors that are a lot more focused on natural resources. We could start providing distance education classes to foreign students, but they have to be able to get here and be on the ground quickly, working in mines and forests, or doing agricultural research. That requires opening up the borders a little more and finding ways to bring those students to our institutions.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much, Mr. Martel.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to MP Masse.

You have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

With regard to the start of the meeting, I want it to be clear that the NDP supports this excellent motion that was presented for us to consider in future business. I want to make a small amendment. Just so people know where we're coming from, I will let you know that we would add third party sellers on the Amazon marketplace, or those formally on it, and consumer organizations. Being from Windsor, I watch the United States very carefully. U.S. lawmakers have been going after a number of issues related to Amazon. I'm simply tired of Canada being treated as a colony by some of these organizations. This is an opportunity that we should take. I'm sorry we missed it this time, but I'm looking forward to that.

With that, Madam Chair, I will turn to our excellent witness panel here.

Mr. Ratto, you gave a great example of the production of real goods and services from the university that get to our streets. I thought that was excellent. Where I'm from, the University of Windsor has been doing that in a variety of ways, everything from the automotive sector to a whole series of science and health products and so forth that were, before COVID-19, a part of our culture here.

I do want you to maybe mention or at least highlight some of the patent barriers you might have and some of the intellectual property barriers you might have. This committee has studied some of those in the past. Perhaps you can shine a light on how those things can be altered, especially during emergencies, or how they can be re-fined for more open research to help these types of initiatives, which you should be, and I'm sure you are, quite proud of.

• (1450)

Prof. Matt Ratto: Well, thank you very much. That's a great question. I'm often very concerned with and focused on IP, and not necessarily for the same reasons you just mentioned. Within the university, I think we have a tendency to see intellectual property as one of the primary ways that we create value—through the production of ideas that are then patented or somehow have some type of IP protection, which then gives us the capacity to exchange those or sell them out to industry. What I've actually been seeing during this COVID period is people choosing the alternative path—choosing not to patent, choosing not to copyright even their inventions. You saw this, in this committee, with Dr. McDonald talking about the lack of patenting of the ventilator.

The issue here is not so much that people may not have the freedom to operate or that they may be restricted by patent, but that they may be restricted by their own institutions, which may not understand how to value the results they have created unless there is somehow intellectual property involved. It's quite interesting that IP is often valued in the same way that, say, a published article might be valued in the university. That's a great way for people to kind of pad out their CV. What do you do if what you're creating results in neither one of those two things but has real impact in the world? How do you navigate that? I think that's actually a bigger restriction.

In a series of interviews I've done with people who've been participating with my own little group, the Toronto emergency device accelerator, this has been highlighted as a real issue for them, that they've taken time out of their normal work, their normal research, to try to have a real impact, and now they're looking at, "Well, what has this really done to my career?" I find it very sad that this is the case.

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes. It's a missed opportunity, in many respects.

Mr. Landon, I'd like to get you in on the conversation for an important issue, I think. You mentioned that there are quarantine capabilities available by universities for foreign students coming in. I think it's important for you to articulate the plan in place in case people get sick. Here in Windsor, the government allowed migrant workers to come in, with a plan that was altered, allowing a three-year-old business plan to be submitted. They didn't do on-site inspection. It shut us down to stage two for a long period of time and

it caused the death of three workers. Many more are actually in hotels right now, held up because they got sick in Canada, not coming into Canada. They were healthy when they got here. Now they're sick.

What can you say about that situation? That's a really significant problem. It's not just the humanitarian aspect with regard to the deaths of individuals; there are also consequences for the entire economy, as we were left out of moving through the different stages.

Mr. Philip Landon: I think it's an absolutely tragic event. I guess it is a lesson learned for the universities, but also for the local health authorities, the provincial health authorities and the feds, on how to make sure that the quarantine works but also that the protocols are in place. That's what's happening right now in consultations between the local health authorities and the institutions, to ensure that what happened with temporary foreign workers doesn't happen with students. We have the right people at the local health authorities working with the right people at the universities.

Mr. Brian Masse: Do you have everything, from translation to education services for the different cultures coming in? Do they have personal insurance for health care? Also, are there communications with the services in case they do get sick, so they aren't overwhelmed?

Mr. Philip Landon: Yes. Very briefly, I can't speak on behalf of all the universities and what plans they have in place, but those are the plans that they are putting in place now to ensure that this type of event doesn't happen with international students.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now move into round two of questions. Our first round of questions goes to MP Dreeshen.

You have the floor for five minutes.

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

It's indeed an honour to have the witnesses here today and to talk about some of the issues that are so important to such a large sector of our society.

Of course, the type of education that you're going to be offering in the fall and into next year is going to be quite different, thanks to COVID-19, and students are going to be asked to take courses online, which many regard as a substandard learning experience, especially when it comes to labs and hands-on courses. I know I've spoken to many students who were excited about going to university this year, and they were so disappointed that this method of learning is going to be their new reality—so much so that some of them are considering waiting for a year in order to be out of the system until things get sorted out.

As perhaps you might have heard as the different MPs tried to get on to this virtual meeting today, we have concerns with broadband access and so on. Those Canadians who are living in rural Canada don't have adequate broadband access to the Internet, so we're almost looking at a two-tier education system, whereby some students will have full access to courses and all the things that entails, while others are left out of the higher education system almost completely.

My question is whether universities have put in place plans to address this particular issue. How will you be able to provide universal access to higher education if students have enrolled in your courses and they find out that it just can't work for them? Will you have the flexibility to be able to offer them a refund or to allow them to come back at a later time?

Perhaps I could go to Universities Canada first.

• (1455)

Mr. Philip Landon: Thanks very much for that question.

It may be helpful for the other members to respond specifically with what's going on. Certainly, when we put 1.4 million students online in a period of three weeks in March—as Dr. McCauley referred to it, the innovation of 10 years within a year—it was to finish up the last semester and to get students through. Our universities did that admirably. There is a lot of work to do to improve the level of digital and online learning, particularly, as you point out, the accessibility requirements so that everyone is getting the same opportunity for learning.

The universities across the country have been working all summer through a variety of ways. In most cases, they are spending extra money and extra time to develop more innovative ways, more accessible ways. This is the number one priority on campuses across Canada: How do we make sure that the distance learning and online learning opportunities are of a scale and a level that will maintain the great learning that happens at our universities?

It may be helpful if someone else—

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you very much. I will go to Dr. McCauley.

Could you address that? I was a high school math and physics teacher for 34 years. I was involved with distributive learning and different types of things. There are students who excel in that particular platform, and there are others who are completely lost. The other aspect of it is that it isn't so much.... A lot of it has to do with the technology and so on, but you have to train your instructors to figure out how to make this work effectively. I think that's one thing. We talk about making sure there's a machine out there for a student, but you have to make sure that your instructors are properly trained so that they can actually keep that motivation and keep the engagement.

What types of things have been done to assist in the distribution of learning from the instructor's point of view?

Dr. Ed McCauley: That is a really good question.

I mentioned that we pivoted very quickly during the winter term. That was done in a period of around four to five days. We allocated resources to faculty to help them pivot and get the courses online.

We were also completely online during the spring/summer because of COVID-19. Our Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning actually provided resources to individual faculty members who wanted to further develop their courses. Actually, enrolment has increased in the spring/summer session because of that.

We're taking those learnings as much as possible and using them going forward for the fall term. However, as I mentioned, we want to be as open as possible in the fall term, just because of the hands-on practices you were talking about. We estimate that we'll have over 10,000 students on our campuses in small class settings, person-to-person interactions, and we've done a complete analysis with the public health system as to how we can actually accommodate that.

So we'll be looking very, very carefully at making sure the student quality and the quality of instruction are there for distributed learning, as well as in person.

• (1500)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to MP Longfield.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, again, to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Dreeshen covered a few of my questions, but I want to go back to Mr. Landon, maybe with a little bit of a different ask on the question.

I met with the CSA group from the University of Guelph this past week and listened to their concerns as students returning in the fall. We had undergrad as well as grad students. There's much in common, but there are some real differences between undergrad and grad students, especially where grad students have family or they have to find housing and they have challenges around some of the costs in terms of having their family with them as they go through their education. They talked about tuition costs—there's no change in the cost of tuition, even though there's a change in the delivery of material—and challenges with communicating with supervisors and professors. Looking at rural students, as Mr. Dreeshen mentioned, there is poor connectivity, socio-economic status—not everybody can afford the electronics to study—and limited access to mandatory and paid-for student resources. They don't have access to the library, but they're still paying for library resources.

Has Universities Canada been working with student groups? Do you have a working group that's looking at the impacts from a student's point of view, how COVID has impacted their lives and how universities are working to provide them with opportunities going forward?

Mr. Philip Landon: Thanks for the question.

We don't have a working group, but we stay in close contact with student associations and their national representatives on this and on a number of other issues. In many ways, the short answer is that we have close to a hundred institutions that are doing their best at the moment. Sometimes it may not be what the students are looking for, but they're working towards that. The universities listen to their students as well.

I think the crux of the matter is that the cost to the university remains the same. In fact, the cost to the university has increased: the building maintenance costs, the staffing costs, and now the added cost of new design. It has increased. What universities across the country are doing is working to get the best possible online experience, with the hope that we'll be able to start students coming back as soon as September and start to move into an on-campus environment as soon as possible, because that's actually what makes our universities so great.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great. Thank you.

My next question is for Université du Québec à Montréal.

As was just mentioned by Mr. Landon, looking at the cost of running the university, we have support staff, cleaning staff, the professors themselves, the researchers, unionized in different sectors. Most of them are funded through the provincial funding models. How can the federal government support universities in terms of the wages and the cost of operation from the wages of the staff?

I'm directing it to Quebec, but if Mr. Landon or anybody else wants to chime in, that would be helpful as well.

[Translation]

Ms. Magda Fusaro: Thank you for asking.

Essentially, a number of avenues exist, beginning with operating costs. It's true that they are spread across a wide range of employee categories. Operating costs associated with non-teaching staff are funded structurally through student enrolment and tuition. Similarly, the same funding model covers the costs associated with teaching staff, so student enrolment, on one hand, and government funding, on the other.

Next is research. Many Université du Québec researchers, particularly those at my institution, are funded federally. You'd be quite surprised at how many researchers the federal government funds at the Université du Québec à Montréal, or UQAM. One promising option—and this ties in with what I mentioned in our short presentation—is supporting research through programs that are slightly different, for instance, those aimed at emerging researchers or post-doctoral international students.

You seem to be quite interested in international students, so I took a look at the figures while you were speaking. At UQAM, the number of international students in undergraduate and graduate programs is on the rise. In fall 2020, we'll be welcoming more international students than we did the year before. The increases are small, of course. I don't mean 400 new students all in one shot, but at the undergraduate level, nearly 500 new international students will be arriving on campus.

• (1505)

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you. That helps to get the complexity into our report. I appreciate that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to MP Gray.

You have the floor for five minutes.

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

I'll start my questions with Mr. Landon from Universities Canada.

Since COVID-19 is taking most students out of their physical classrooms, have you heard, with all the universities that you represent, if they're looking at increasing their class sizes due to the fact that they might have been restricted previously because of classroom physical limitations?

Mr. Philip Landon: That's a very good question.

I would say that I actually haven't heard that, but that's very interesting. Perhaps some of my colleagues have, but I have not heard that at all.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I'll go on with a couple of other questions.

Of course, this might be different for each university, but as an average going across the country, what is the average percentage of tuition that comes from international students?

Mr. Philip Landon: I don't have the number right in front of me. It does vary, but it is upwards of 20%.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Landon, with a lot of international students potentially not entering Canada this year, as you mentioned in your earlier remarks, are you seeing universities substituting for this with domestic enrolment instead, since they might be losing some of that international enrolment? Are you hearing that universities would be substituting those spaces with domestic students instead?

Mr. Philip Landon: It has never really been a trade-off like that.

What we have heard is that enrolment numbers for domestic students are looking similar to those in previous years, so that's very good news. However, it has not been a situation of universities denying domestic students in order to take international students. In fact, they've been growing to be able to take both.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: If potentially there may not be as many international students this fall, have you heard whether any universities might be amending their admission requirements to allow for more domestic students, to bring up their capacity, which would also increase some of their revenue?

Mr. Philip Landon: I haven't heard that, in terms of universities changing.

I think the market is usually that with the admissions requirements, the top students are able to get in, and if there's less competition, more students will be able to get in, but, really, I haven't heard of that being an issue or a strategy across the country.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: We did hear today that there were increased costs, in large part due to technology. Of course, that's with everyone. It doesn't matter whether you're in business or in this type of work; everyone has had to increase their costs with technology, sanitation and all kinds of different issues with COVID-19.

Have you had conversations, or are you hearing about a reduction in costs on the campuses related to not having as many students or faculty there on a daily basis?

Mr. Philip Landon: There certainly have been reductions in costs across the community. There have been layoffs as a result, so it's been a tough time at many of our campuses.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: We did hear a lot today about research dollars and some of the good work that's been done. Have you heard if some of the research funding that's been coming in...? Is it fairly consistent? Has it been increasing? Has it been decreasing during this time? Are you getting any sense of that, looking forward?

• (1510)

Mr. Philip Landon: Again, there may be others who are better placed to speak than I am, but the Canadian government has added to the research fund in terms of looking for COVID-19 strategies. That's been very helpful. In many cases, timelines have been extended, and that's been very helpful as well.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I have a last quick question.

When it comes to students in the fields that we've seen are important during this time, especially those in nursing, the sciences and supply chain management, have you heard of some universities changing their models to address some of these sectors that have really risen during this time and where there's a greater need?

Mr. Philip Landon: Yes, I think so. The other witnesses have given examples of how universities have pivoted quite well to address the needs of the community, and the links between the communities and the universities have never been stronger as a result of that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to MP Jowhari. You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all our witnesses.

I'm going to question each one of the witnesses on a different aspect of international students. I do understand there's been accommodation made for the new applicants to be able to participate online. However, I'm getting a lot of feedback and our office is getting a lot of feedback from the existing international students who reside in Canada and who are engaged in master's, doctoral and post-doctoral studies, and some of them in their first four years.

What we are hearing is that they are having problems sourcing finances from their homeland. Therefore, they are having a lot of issues being able to find accommodations to live and being able to pay for their books, food and also their education. What is happening is that now they're under a lot of stress to be able to, first and

foremost, pay for their education, and they put that first. They're making compromises in other aspects of their lives, such as having four, five or six people now living in a single room, sharing some books or just not being able to do their studies.

My question for each of the witnesses is this: How can the universities help these international students, and how can the federal government partner with universities to help these international students get through this?

I've also collected some information, some suggestions from them, which I will gladly share.

If I may, I'll start with Mr. Landon from Universities Canada. Can you share your thoughts with us on how we can manage this challenge?

Mr. Philip Landon: Thanks very much.

The hope had been that, when the Canada emergency student bursary became available, it would be made available to international students. It wasn't, so they have fallen between the cracks in terms of emergency support during the pandemic.

Universities have funds and means of supporting students in need, but those are being severely tested right now. As you speak with the presidents and rectors of the universities, they can talk about how each campus is trying to deal with this issue.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Let's go to Dr. McCauley.

How can your university help, and how can the federal government help?

Dr. Ed McCauley: We have around 2,500 continuing international students, many of whom decided to stay to continue their studies during COVID-19 because they wanted to advance.

I haven't heard about any specific cases coming to our office about hardship around international students in particular, but as Philip Landon mentioned, we have many different approaches at the University of Calgary to deal with students in need, including mental health supports, economic supports and so on.

I think one of the pieces that are important for the federal government is that through research funding and the continuity of research funding, many students—international students, in particular graduate students—are supported through grants and scholarships. That support is really beneficial for their ongoing subsistence and to supplement what they get through the universities in teaching and so on.

• (1515)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Let's go quickly to the Université du Québec. There were some recommendations made that I'd like to share and put on the record.

Monsieur Martel.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Martel: Naturally, for a small regional institution like ours, 500 international students is quite a sizable population. The university has put measures in place to support them. We rely heavily on the regional community, which does a good job of meeting the demand for help thanks to the university foundation. The federal government could lend a hand by transferring funding to community organizations in the region, which are there to support the students. That might be a good solution.

[English]

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

I have about 10 seconds to go.

Can the universities kindly consider using some of their excess capacity as it relates to their residences, which are empty right now, to help these students, as well as consider providing an extension to the international students over one or two terms as it relates to their tuition, with the commitment that they will pay? Their families are also suffering as a result of COVID-19.

I thank you, Madam Chair, for your consideration.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Unfortunately, that is your time.

We will now go to MP Simard.

[Translation]

Mr. Simard, you may go ahead. You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): My question is for Ms. Fusaro.

If I'm not mistaken, Ms. Fusaro, in your presentation, you spoke of three measures or recommendations that could be implemented to better support the Université du Québec system with a view to recovering from the crisis. Could you tell us more about that?

Ms. Magda Fusaro: Thank you for your question.

The first recommendation in our brief ultimately calls for investment in research dissemination, coordination and, above all, partnership. Not many of you asked, and that's normal, but research is built on partnerships with communities and, to a large extent, with companies. You'd be surprised at how much universities collaborate with companies. It's a research ecosystem. Researchers don't work in a single university, so support for interuniversity, intercommunity initiatives that bring partners together is hugely important.

The second recommendation has to do with the programs. As I mentioned, the federal government funds research, and the fact that research is concentrated in a select few universities—exclusively those with faculties of medicine—is detrimental to all of Canada. My colleague Mr. Martel made the point with respect to the regions, and I can do the same for Montreal, which is also a region. It's necessary to diversify research, which is really what the Naylor report showed. The more you diversify research, the more the population as a whole benefits. It doesn't seem like much because it doesn't require millions of dollars more in investment. What it does require is a better allocation of the money between innovative pro-

grams and emerging research teams. It's always the same teams that get the funding, hence the concentration. That's what we want to illustrate. Diversifying research and giving everyone funding is mutually beneficial.

Someone asked a question earlier about partnerships with local communities. We are deeply rooted in communities. The universities are working on real problems. As far as basic research goes, they're also contributing to the community, and they pursue innovation together.

The third, and final, recommendation concerns digital technology. You talked about that. There are still areas all over Canada where it's difficult to access resources, whatever they may be. Access is a problem, plain and simple. That underscores the need to develop digital technology. That would be useful. Distance education has come up a lot, but some students are on campus, while respecting all the proper safety and public health guidelines, of course. That said, students can be on site and still need digital technology.

I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Mario Simard: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Our next round of questions is for Mr. Masse.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to continue, if I could, with Mr. Landon, to get an overall sense of where universities are with regard to critical needs for infrastructure and a green economy. The other thing, too, is housing. Is there an inventory list? With perhaps not as many students returning....

My daughter is actually at NSCAD, and she's staying there because she doesn't want to fly back and so on, a series of other decisions, just to be safer there. I know that some of her classmates are staying. Some will be coming back, but they will be fewer.

Is there any opportunity here? For example, maybe older residences and other living accommodations that may not have a high standard could be enhanced—greenhouse gas emissions reductions or safer living quarters designed for future challenges like this one. Obviously, we could have this extended further, or we could have a similar scenario evolve that we don't expect.

Is there an opportunity here, with a reduced population, to perhaps seize that and do some bold, innovative improvements for our universities, on campus or just around campus with facilities?

• (1520)

Mr. Philip Landon: Yes, there absolutely is. I think I referenced in my opening remarks that our universities have \$7 billion in shovel-ready projects. The last time there was an infrastructure fund, a few years ago, we were able to build the infrastructure—green infrastructure—in three years, in a timely manner and in a manner that helped upgrade our universities.

It would be helpful now as we go digital and as we think about older buildings that have suffered from deferred maintenance. Now would be a very good time to invest in these for energy efficiency, for refurbishing and for green infrastructure.

Our universities are very much ready and need this funding to be able to move further into the 21st century.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you.

I know, Madam Chair.

I just got yellow-carded and I don't want to get red-carded, so thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry about that. I hate doing that.

We will now go to our third round of questions.

Our first round goes to MP Patzer. You have the floor for five minutes.

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

Before I begin, I'm just going to move my motion from last meeting:

That, as part of its study on the Canadian Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology invite Daniel Therrien, Privacy Commissioner of Canada, to testify regarding the development and ongoing operation of the recently released contact tracing application.

The Chair: We have a motion on the floor. I will now open the floor to debate.

I see MP Erskine-Smith has his hand up.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Yes, if this works.... My connection might cut out.

The one amendment I would like to see is to replace the language of “contact tracing” with “exposure notification”, because it isn't in fact a contact-tracing app; it's an exposure notification app. So, I would move that we replace the words “contact tracing” with “exposure notification”, just to be clear and precise.

The Chair: We have an amendment on the floor, so I open up debate to the amendment.

Mr. Patzer.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: I'll just say quickly that I'm fine with that. I think that's good.

The Chair: Is there any further debate on the amendment?

We will call a recorded division for the amendment on the motion, and I will turn it over to the clerk.

Mr. Brian Masse: Could you read it one more time?

The Chair: Certainly. In English, it says:

That, as part of its study on the Canadian Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology invite Daniel Therrien, Privacy Commissioner of Canada, to testify regarding the development and ongoing operation of the recently released....

I'm going to check with Mr. Erskine-Smith. I don't have the correct wording. It was not “contact tracing”, but it was—

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: “Exposure notification”.

The Chair: Thank you. It's “exposure notification application”.

I will now turn it over to the clerk for the recorded division.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

• (1525)

The Chair: I believe we have to dispose of the original motion, so I'm going to turn to the clerk to call the recorded division on the original motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: With that, Mr. Patzer, I will turn the floor back over to you for your questions.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, everybody, for your patience while we dealt with that quickly.

I will begin with Mr. Landon. We don't have any representatives for students here today, but I still want to ask about the government's support for Canadian students. The Canadian Federation of Students has launched a petition stating that the \$912-million Canada student service grant was flawed from the start. They strongly criticize its practicality and usefulness for students.

My first question would be whether the federal government consulted with any universities about the value of this program.

Mr. Philip Landon: I'm not aware of any consultation.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Okay. Was this an idea that you think the universities or students would have considered or proposed on their own?

Mr. Philip Landon: Quite possibly, yes. I think the idea of having students be recognized for the work they're doing in volunteering would be something that students might have put forward, yes.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Okay. One reason I'm asking this is that we already have a program called the Canada summer jobs program. In my riding specifically, there were more businesses and groups that did not receive funding for it than did, which means there were more students who were not hired than who were hired to work jobs for these various businesses here.

Again, I'm just wondering whether pre-existing programs such as Canada summer jobs or some other arrangement would work better to help students impacted by COVID to continue their studies.

Mr. Philip Landon: I believe what the government was looking at was a variety of measures to try to address the challenges for students across the board. I think a number of them were added to. The CESB was very helpful for students. It's hard for me to comment on the appropriateness of one over the other.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Okay.

A big concern for a lot of students is getting a job after they graduate. How much has COVID limited the job market for potential university graduates?

Mr. Philip Landon: That is a really live question. I think you have to look at the macroeconomic figures for the entire economy. I think that job challenges are going to be the same for students, for new graduates, and perhaps more so across the economy.

That's why we're very keen on upskilling and re-skilling for students and graduates, and, in the long term, for Canadians who are looking to pivot their education to the new economy as time goes on. We think there are a number of measures that could help towards that.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Do you want to elaborate on any of those measures specifically?

Mr. Philip Landon: Sure. One thing we're looking for is to be able to provide funding for universities as they adapt their programming to new needs. We're seeing that there are real areas of opportunity in cybersecurity, in communications and in health care. We want to make sure that our universities are prepared and equipped to offer those quickly to students and graduates as they become available.

• (1530)

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Do you find that the broadband available to our universities is sufficient to move to more e-learning, more online learning, or even just the on-campus experience as we move to a more enhanced digital experience?

Mr. Philip Landon: You mean the literal broadband, not a figurative broadband.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Yes.

Mr. Philip Landon: Absolutely, we all need more broadband, and we need more broadband in our rural communities as well. I think that's absolutely essential for the country.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: You're absolutely right.

Are you or your members planning for how the economy is likely to shift during and after COVID? How does it look for lines of work that require post-secondary education?

Mr. Philip Landon: We're doing some thinking right now as to what the coming 10 years are going to look like. A lot of the values of the university remain there—critical thinking, research, innovation, building the leaders for tomorrow—but some of the actual job markets that come out of that are changing and shifting, and the universities are all looking at how to build back better from this pandemic.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Okay.

Just quickly, how do the restrictions on Canadian university campuses compare with those in the U.S. or in other countries?

Mr. Philip Landon: It's a little difficult for me to comment on that. I would say that our universities, like our country, have taken a prudent approach, a careful approach and a data-driven, science-first, health-first approach, probably more so compared with those to the south of us. With the European countries, I'm not as sure.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Thank you for that. I really appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP Patzer.

Our next round of questions goes to MP Erskine-Smith.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Thanks, Madam Chair.

First, I just wanted to note, in light of today's news, that I think it's interesting that the Competition Bureau is investigating, because in June 2019 our international committee on big data and privacy, joined by parliamentarians from other countries, had Amazon attend before us and we put questions to them. I remember Raj Saini asked probably the most pointed questions on the competition issues of Amazon at the time. It's interesting that the Competition Bureau has undertaken it. I think it's a useful thing for this committee to look at, and maybe to look broadly at strengthening our competition laws along the way, in light of recent meetings.

My first question is in relation to IP strategy.

On May 24, Natalie Raffoul and Jim Hinton wrote in the *Globe*, "Canadians picking up the tab for foreign companies' research is a familiar and systemic problem, especially for strategically valuable technologies such as 5G and artificial intelligence." One example they noted was this: "Public funding via Dalhousie University experts has contributed a slew of patented inventions that are the basis for Tesla's new 'million-mile' battery." They point to what they call a "unique disease": "the propensity for Canadian taxpayers to fund and create ideas that other countries commercialize."

I'm interested in Mr. Landon's view on this. I know much of this work is ultimately provincial, and the provincial government in Ontario has taken some steps recently, but I wonder if you would have any view on the federal steps that could be taken on this subject matter.

Mr. Philip Landon: Thanks very much.

There's a pretty complex ecosystem around how Canadian universities use IP strategies and the policies. We have examples on campuses where the IP rests with the creator, with the student or the faculty member. Also, we have examples where it rests with the institution. I think there are pluses and minuses in each case, as to how eventually the IP gets translated into value.

One of the things we're really looking for is more support for knowledge mobilization in Canada. We're not doing as good a job of this as we could: taking the IP, taking the ideas, and then translating that into the local communities and into the local economy. We're pushing to have a knowledge mobilization fund, similar to something they're doing in the U.K. right now, which would help Canadian universities work closely with their local markets, both the social and the economic markets, so that they can translate their work into viable products and the betterment of the economy.

Some of the other rectors and presidents may want to answer on the specifics of IP policies on their campuses.

• (1535)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: In light of those comments, where there are different strategies within different universities—and obviously you've referenced the U.K.—I would maybe put this to each one of you, starting with Mr. Martel, and then Mr. McCauley and Mr. Landon: Within Canada, what would you identify as a best practice that you would like to see federal and provincial governments work together on to make the best practice and standard?

Internationally, could you identify a best practice for us to look at as well?

Dr. Ed McCauley: Maybe I can begin.

As Philip mentioned, the ecosystem is really complex at all our institutions. At the University of Calgary, we have an inventor-owned IP policy, because that encourages innovation. What we try to do as a university is put those support mechanisms to enable individual scholars—whether it be students, faculty or staff who have ideas—to mobilize that as quickly as possible. I think it's a combination of the IP and also getting the innovation ecosystem in place to actually support that with encouraging incentives to attract capital to move these ideas forward, whether they be for profit or not for profit.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Does anyone else have anything to add?

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Martel: Yes, I would like to add something.

Much of the current system needs to be reviewed, at least in Quebec and certainly throughout Canada. Intellectual property poses a complex and difficult challenge. Depending on the area of research, awareness isn't necessarily the same when it comes to social, technological and biomedical innovation. A more flexible model is needed, one that varies according to the type of innovation in question.

Ms. Magda Fusaro: If I may jump in, I would say that Canada is quite progressive in its Copyright Act reforms, but the last reform wasn't completed. Universities had a hand in the process, with Universities Canada submitting briefs.

The work on the act is unfinished; the review was done, but now it's time to finish the job.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

MP Gray, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a question that I'd like to pose to all of our witnesses here today. I've heard from a number of students in my riding about the issue of mental health and socialization, and how learning from home and being away from the classroom environment with their peers, as well as reduced extracurricular activities, may affect their ability to succeed. What steps have all the witnesses here today undertaken with their respective institutions to help students with their mental health and social connections, both during this pandemic and moving forward?

We'll start with Ms. Fusaro.

[Translation]

Ms. Magda Fusaro: That's a great question. We've actually stepped up our efforts by holding virtual coffee breaks and meetings, as well as offering mentorship, tutoring and assistantship. We've made it easier for students to take advantage of all the available supports, whether through their teachers or colleagues in various groups.

That wasn't enough, though, because what students needed most was mental health support. In other words, the number of requests for psychological counselling literally went through the roof in March, April and May. We've focused the bulk of our efforts, initially, on expanding remote access to services, with sessions being conducted that way.

In addition, as you know, we had to respond in real time, so we were constantly monitoring the situation to make appropriate services available. We then offered integrated options. That's the direction we'll be heading in come the fall, incorporating a bit of classroom learning. I say "a bit" because Montreal is, after all, closed off, with a lot more cases than other parts of the province. We're proceeding very carefully so as not to cause another outbreak, of course.

[English]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great, thank you.

Mr. Ratto.

Prof. Matt Ratto: My responsibilities are fewer, I think, than those of many of the folks here, who are obviously responsible for many more students. Within my own faculty and within the bachelor's degree program that I ran up until recently, we focused on reaching out individually to most of the students. I run a primarily graduate faculty. Our undergraduate cohort is very small; we only had 15 students this year. It was the first year. We were somewhat insulated from these overall problems.

We did find, though, that in fact the mental health issues that many of the students faced were somehow related to real-world issues. A major one that we encountered was a concern about their plans for work-integrated learning. We doubled down on our focus and resources associated with work-integrated learning and made sure that all of our students had opportunities for co-ops and other forums that really would help them. We found that those kinds of real-world things solved more problems than just addressing the mental issues themselves.

• (1540)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great, thank you.

Mr. McCauley, go ahead.

Dr. Ed McCauley: Yes, like my colleagues, we ramped up significantly right away the mental health supports, not only for our domestic students but also for the international students we had. We still have about 500 international students who decided to stay and maintain residence to complete their studies, so we wanted to make sure they had the services necessary.

What I've been most impressed with is how our students themselves, our undergraduates and our graduate students, have self-organized groups, including Zoom dances, Zoom plays and things like that. We've been trying to make sure that they have the resources to connect and to help one another.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

Mr. Landon, do you have anything else to add for the universities you represent?

Mr. Philip Landon: I think perhaps Mr. Martel might answer. I really don't have anything to add. I think they've given a very good cross-section of what's happening on the campuses.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: That's great. Thank you.

On a similar theme, I'm wondering if anyone can let us know today.... If there were some resources or some different external programs available, what would those look like? Where do you see the greatest need...that might assist with this?

I'll just open it up for anyone who wants to chime in.

Dr. Ed McCauley: As I mentioned earlier—I know Philip talked about it, as well as Universities Canada and U15—work-integrated learning opportunities right now would be incredibly helpful, as would be upskilling for individuals who want to develop, for example, micro credentials to actually transform their life journey or their work trajectory. I think those types of programs would be very beneficial.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you. I think we're out of time.

The Chair: We are, unfortunately.

We'll now go to MP Ehsassi.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much to all the esteemed witnesses we've had the opportunity to hear from today.

I'll start with Professor Ratto with the University of Toronto. Professor Ratto, I want to pick up where MP Lambropoulos had actually started asking you a question. You talked at length about how innovation takes place in settings that can be atypical or other mechanisms. Given your passion for seeing collaboration between universities and communities, what would you say would be the implications for universities making sure they can be capable of harnessing closer collaboration with their surrounding communities?

Prof. Matt Ratto: I really think universities could do better to support and value forms of research that result in direct community outcomes. As we've heard already from other colleagues of mine in the university system, community collaboration is something that is highly valued in the university. I think it is, but I think the direct outcomes that are related to it are not necessarily valued.

I would love to see universities focusing on those relations and on outcomes in the same way that universities increasingly provide specific support for entrepreneurship and innovation within private business. Setting up, for example, specific hubs or resources on campus for faculty and communities to meet and engage together in creating real-world...or as Mr. Masse said, getting to the "streets" of the research, I think, would be of great benefit.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

Is there any university that sticks out, in your opinion, in terms of doing a good job of benchmarking these things and encouraging its faculty and students to do so?

• (1545)

Prof. Matt Ratto: Not any university in Canada, I'm afraid to say. I think there are universities in the U.S. that are privileged in having long histories of those relationships and focused, oftentimes, on creating student experiences as well that are really about creating public good, often through things like engineering programs that focus on real-world impacts. One that I can think of off the top of my head is Olin College. It's a small engineering college that is very much focused on public outcomes.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much for that.

Now, I'll turn to another issue, Mr. Landon, if I could. We've been hearing that there's a huge spike in the number of domestic students who intend to actually defer for this academic year. Do you have any sense as to what those numbers are and what the impact would be on Canadian universities?

Mr. Philip Landon: We don't have a real sense. I would say the concern for that was actually happening a little earlier. As far as we see now, enrolment figures for domestic students are levelling up quite nicely, but it was a concern at the beginning of the year.

I think a lot of what happened in the summer semester was that students decided they could go. I think all of us have been in the situation of "What's going to happen over the next three months?" We're a little less concerned about that. There still is the challenge of students wanting to defer, potentially, for a year or to take only a few courses, but as I said earlier, it's hard for us to measure that until all the enrolment numbers come in, which will probably be around October.

Right now, for domestic students, the numbers are okay. They vary in interesting ways that they didn't before. In Ontario, for example, we have some schools that are oversubscribed and some schools that are undersubscribed compared with previous years. I don't want to speculate too much as to why that is, but the overall enrolment for domestic students seems as if it's going to be reasonably healthy this year.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: I open it to other witnesses.

Dr. McCauley, what has been the experience at your university? To the extent that there are students deferring, what would be the impact on the bottom line of your university?

Dr. Ed McCauley: We haven't experienced that so far. We have mechanisms in place that allow students to defer, even if they start the program, to make sure they can continue.

One of the challenges that universities are facing is that they have to plan for all of these contingencies. We're planning for increased domestic enrolment; we're planning for decreased domestic enrolment, yet our costs are relatively fixed for that. One of the challenges we're facing is the uncertainty and how we can move forward productively to ensure a great student experience.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Simard, over to you. You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Simard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a question for Mr. Martel and Ms. Fusaro about partnership-based research. It's a fact that, in times of economic downturn, the first thing companies usually forgo is investing in research.

Given how many research studies are carried out in partnership with companies and given how much that investment represents—in some cases, it can be a third of the entire budget of a research program—do you know of any projects that are at risk because of the current situation? What could the government do to support partnership-based research, in particular?

Ms. Magda Fusaro: Mr. Simard, you're absolutely right. In fact, the federal and provincial granting agencies set up emergency funding to ease the stress temporarily.

You brought up research that's carried out in partnership with industry and companies. To that, I would add research that's carried out in partnership with government. Governments are a major research partner.

Earlier, my counterpart from Toronto mentioned face shields. We, too, produced masks for public distribution using 3-D printers. My colleague from Abitibi can give you other examples. We contributed to the response effort, and I should say that we made the masks available for free. It wasn't even a burden. We were happy we could help the community at large, which really needed it.

Giving out money is one thing, but making grants available over the long term is extremely important. A grant has a start and an end date. A fundamental step would be for the government to give researchers subsidy extensions penalty-free, since COVID-19 pre-

vented universities from carrying out research. That would be an option.

Another idea is to put measures in place for students because research is team-driven. The principal investigator isn't the only one working on the research project; there's an entire team of second-year, third-year and post-doctoral students, not to mention research colleagues.

Mr. Martel, my apologies for taking up so much time. Go ahead if you have something to add.

● (1550)

Mr. Denis Martel: Partnership-based research is indeed crucial. That's true for all universities, but especially in rural areas, where we work with organizations that can be large companies.

In our region, it's mining. Because the sector is booming, it just renewed a research partnership agreement for the next seven years in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. The price of gold these days says it all. It's going up, up, up. Other sectors, however, are having more trouble, such as forestry and agriculture, so it depends on the sector.

Mr. Mario Simard: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

We now turn to MP Masse.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't want to ignore the other witnesses, but I will pick just one for now. Mr. Martel was speaking, so I'll go to him next. If we have any time left, I'd invite Ms. Fusaro and Mr. McCauley to quickly jump in as well.

I'm wondering what your personal opinion is in terms of the quality of education when we get through this, and how the private and public sectors will view a degree during COVID-19, since most stuff is going online. I'm just curious to know whether you've thought about that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Martel: Our region stretches over a vast area and has low population density, so it was out of necessity that we began providing distance education nearly 40 years ago. We had to so that everyone could access our programs. We are known for our high-quality training, not just in the region, but also across Quebec, around the world, even, given the collaborative initiatives we've established all over. I see no issues, as far as we're concerned, since we already have the expertise. It's tougher for institutions that were forced to respond more swiftly. The strength of the Université du Québec system is that the institutions pool and share best practices and methods. I can assure you we have the capacity to deliver high-quality training remotely and in ways that do not rely on classroom learning.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse: I don't know if there's time left, but Ms. Fusaro—

Dr. Ed McCauley: We offer a lot of online degree programs. One thing to emphasize, though, is that everybody recognizes that the Canadian experience is very, very important. Having students coming from the world to Canada and having students coming from different parts of Canada in order to experience all of Canada is really, really important as part of the Canadian experience. There are huge discussions about the commodification of education around the world, but I think what we value is the Canadian experience.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you.

Ms. Fusaro, you have time for a quick answer.

[Translation]

Ms. Magda Fusaro: I think my colleague covered everything. If there's anything I could add, it would have to do with relevance, but

I think everything's been mentioned. You're right when you talk about students coming to Canada. We have many of them coming to the country, especially Quebec. We are fortunate to have a varied and diverse student population. We need to keep welcoming them because what they have to offer benefits us all.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is the end of our third round.

I'd like to thank all of the witnesses for being with us today. There was excellent testimony with great questions today. I think this will really help us in terms of our report on the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you very much for your assistance in that regard.

That ends our time for today.

I now call this meeting adjourned.

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