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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1555)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now begin our meeting.

Welcome to the fourth meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

[*English*]

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 31, 2022, the committee is meeting on challenges related to the recovery of the arts, culture, heritage and sport sectors, which have been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House of Commons order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application. These proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The video will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

For those participating virtually, I'd like to outline a few rules to follow.

You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. At the bottom of your screen you can see English or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we will ensure interpretation is properly restored before continuing with the proceedings.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you're in the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute your mike. When you finish speaking, please mute your mike. For those in the room, your mike will be controlled by the proceedings and verification officer.

I remind everyone that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair. Each group will have the opportunity to present for five minutes. We will hear all presentations at the beginning and then there will be questions from the committee. For these questions and answers, I will tell you what the timeline is. The timeline actually includes the question and the answer.

I'm going to have to cut you off, because we have so many members. I really want to get through all of you so that everybody can ask questions and you can all say your piece.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly and when you're not speaking, again, please mute your mike.

Thank you very much.

We shall begin with the witnesses. I will start with the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists.

Eleanor Noble, you have five minutes.

Ms. Eleanor Noble (National President, Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists): Thank you, Madam Chair, vice-chairs, committee members and staff.

I am Eleanor Noble. I live in Tiohtià:ke, Montreal. I'm a Canadian performer and the national president of ACTRA, the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists.

On behalf of ACTRA's 28,000-plus members working in English-language screen productions across Canada, I am pleased to appear today before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to share the artists' perspective as part of the committee study of the arts, culture, heritage and sports sectors' recovery from the impact of COVID-19.

When looking back to the early days of the pandemic and the loss of employment experienced by millions of Canadians, it was Canadian artists and other self-employed workers who were left overnight with no income or social safety net to fall back on. Because many of us self-employed workers are not eligible for employment insurance, this made an already vulnerable group of Canada's labour market even more vulnerable.

ACTRA was grateful that the federal government acknowledged gig workers in the rules for the Canada emergency response benefit and subsequent Canada recovery benefit, as well as the more recent Canada performing arts workers resilience fund. These benefits were a lifeline for Canadians working in the arts or entertainment industries who were temporarily or permanently laid off due to the pandemic and who would have faced even further financial hardship. The Canada emergency wage subsidy was also instrumental in keeping our union operational when our revenue vanished.

Thank you for having the foresight to step in and introduce these programs. While these federal support measures have proven effective in the short term, they demonstrate the need for long-term solutions to fill the gaps exposed by the pandemic.

The changing needs of Canadian workers, as well as the ongoing pandemic, have resulted in a fundamental shift in the use of and need for a modernized employment insurance program that reflects and is inclusive of all Canadian workers. An expanded EI program that addresses the needs of a modern economy would allow self-employed workers to contribute to and collect EI, despite not having a traditional employee-employer relationship as defined under the current system.

We are also awaiting relief for Canadian seniors who have had their guaranteed income supplement withheld. Although financial help was announced in the fall economic statement, affected seniors are still waiting.

During the pandemic, many of our eligible senior members applied for and received emergency benefits. Unbeknownst to them, the unintended consequence of receiving these benefits was the effect it had on their GIS. Despite having paid taxes on the emergency relief payments they received, many seniors have either been cut off from the GIS or had the amount severely reduced as a result. The government must follow through on its commitment to alleviate the financial hardship that low-income seniors are facing. Their GIS must be retroactively reinstated immediately.

After the initial nationwide shutdown in March 2020 due to the pandemic, work on film, television and digital media programs gradually resumed in the second half of the year in various capacities across the country. Our ACTRA branches have continued to work closely with government, industry partners and stakeholders to adjust health and safety protocols to keep our industry safe and open. ACTRA members have also played their part by remaining vigilant in following these guidelines.

It's paid off. Our industry is cautiously optimistic about its current state, and across our union, our branches have reported good levels of production allowing our members to return to work.

However, to keep up the momentum, our industry must be provided with the necessary tools to ensure its long-term success.

In addition to following strong health and safety protocols, a significant contribution to our industry's recovery is the federal government's \$149-million short-term compensation fund. The fund addresses the lack of insurance coverage we required to restart our industry by compensating independent production companies for interruptions or shutdowns due to the pandemic. With the fund set to expire at the end of March 2022, ACTRA hopes to see it further extended for as long as necessary to keep our industry open, or until a permanent alternative solution is implemented.

Another action the federal government can take to ensure the long-term viability of our industry is the swift passage of Bill C-11, the online streaming act. This legislation will go a long way in securing the success of our domestic production industry. With the tabling of this bill last week, I was pleased to see the federal government recognize the importance of investing in and promoting Canadian content, but action must be taken to pass this legislation as soon as possible to support Canadian programming.

ACTRA has been calling for modernizing the Broadcasting Act for over a decade.

Thank you.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll hear from Kelly-Ann Paul, president and chief executive officer of the Canada Games Council.

Ms. Paul, you have five minutes.

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canada Games Council): Good afternoon. Thanks, everyone, for inviting me and for conducting this very important study.

Madam Chair and committee members, I'm happy to be here to represent the Canada Games Council and the Canada Games movement.

I'll give you just a brief overview of the Canada Games, recognizing that perhaps not everyone is super familiar with what we do and who we are. We are the mini-Olympics for youth in Canada. We alternate between summer and winter, every two years. Approximately 40% of the athletes representing Canada in Beijing at this time are Canada Games alumni.

There's a funding model for host societies that actually organize the Canada Games and there's also a funding model for the Canada Games Council. We are the franchise holder and I'm here on behalf of the franchise holder of the Canada Games movement as well as host societies. Host societies are funded primarily by governments—57% by governments—and where they're struggling right now is with self-generated revenue, such as from ticketing, sponsorships and grants, etc.

I also want to acknowledge that we recognize that the entire sports and events sector has been drastically affected by COVID. Our organization is probably doing better than some of the other national sport organizations that rely on membership fees and event revenue for their operations. The host society, however, does rely heavily on event revenue and sponsorship solicitation, so we wanted to be here to explain some of those challenges.

As the franchise holder of the Canada Games Council, we were very thankful to be recipients of the Canada emergency response benefit as well as the wage subsidy and the rent subsidy. Without these subsidies, our organization wouldn't have been able to make it through. Our host societies, however, were not quite as fortunate as we, as the franchise holder, were. They were able to access the wage subsidy and the recovery program, which has now turned into a tourism and hospitality recovery program, and a rent subsidy, but because these were short-term programs, they were not eligible for the same level of benefits as we were at the Canada Games Council.

We also want to thank the Government of Canada for giving some additional money to our 2022 host society out of the Sport Canada program budget.

When it comes to key challenges, we want to highlight the postponement. For the first time in Canada Games history, we had to postpone the Canada Games. The host society at that point was at 24 staff, and they had to shrink to six staff for an additional year. There were a lot of mental health challenges, and obviously enduring this situation has been stressful. As well, all of the planning volunteers have had to commit to an extra year to deliver this project.

Our organization has implemented a mandatory vaccine policy, and with that will come additional implementation measures to ensure the safety of Canadians. It has taken a lot of work, additional rigour, time and resources to move that forward.

When it comes to money, the host societies have been experiencing revenue loss, from loss of private sector sponsorship, reduced ticket sales and lack of opportunity for community engagement. Those of us watching the Olympics right now can see that the stands are empty. That has a massive impact on an organization's budget. In addition to revenue loss, the hosts are seeing expenses increase. Food costs and supply chain issues are having a big impact on the ability to deliver the Canada Games within the existing operating budget. The cost of insurance has gone up. The cost of transportation has gone up substantially, and medical expenses have increased largely due to the pandemic and the additional safeguards required to make sure that everyone participating in the games is healthy.

We're also experiencing volunteer fatigue, and there's a significant risk in the participation of our provincial and territorial teams. They have challenges in training, competing and selecting teams for the Canada Games.

- (1605)

With respect to what we're asking for or what we'd like you to consider, we have three main points. We wanted to talk about financial security, support via participation, and media awareness and advertising.

When it comes to financial security, we need to protect the Canada Games against economic losses. The Canada Games has never experienced a deficit in Canada Games' history, and we need to keep it that way to strengthen our brand and to make sure that we have communities that want to host the games. In the short term, we need to make sure that the host societies, which are temporary organizations with immediate needs, are considered for emergency and recovery funding, and right now they're not. For the short, medium and long term, the Canada Games Council, the franchise holder, needs to have the ability to have continued funding and human resource support.

We want to make sure that the government supports the Canada Games through media awareness and advertising, and promotes our games with support from federal, provincial and territorial bilaterals to enhance sport participation.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to say to witnesses that sometimes when you don't get to finish because I cut you off, you can actually say what you want to say when you're answering a question that is posed to you by the committee. You can get your two bits' worth in there as well.

I'm going to move now to Heather George from the Canadian Museums Association for five minutes.

Ms. George.

Ms. Heather George (Curator, Canadian Museums Association): Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members, for giving us the opportunity to add our voice to these important proceedings.

Originally, I had expected that my colleague Michael Wallace would be delivering these messages, but I will do it on his behalf.

Just to introduce myself, and him when he arrives, my name is Heather George. In addition to being a member of the CMA board I'm a guest curator at Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario, which was established on the site of the former Mohawk Institute Residential School. The Woodland Cultural Centre exists to preserve and promote indigenous history and culture.

My colleague Michael Wallace is the president of the Canadian Museums Association and executive director of Theatre Museum Canada, which is a small museum preserving and celebrating our country's performing arts heritage.

Together with provincial and territorial counterparts, the CMA represents more than 2,700 organizations across Canada from community and small volunteer-driven museums to national institutions, as well as hundreds of museum professionals.

It is from this pan-Canadian vantage point that we witnessed how the pandemic-related seesaw of openings and closing affected staffing, programming, planning and morale. The federal government's pandemic assistance programs were instrumental in allowing our institutions to adapt to an unprecedented situation. They also served to highlight the economic fragility of the sector and the need to shift from ad hoc funding programs to long-term strategic support.

While we know of only two museums closing because of the pandemic, we know of many more that are now in danger of closure if circumstances do not change soon, but it is at the human level where the pandemic's impact has been felt most acutely. Every day we hear from our colleagues that their staff are on the brink of burnout. Others tell us that they've lost valuable employees because of the chronic uncertainty. In a sign of the times, more recently we've heard stories of museum employees being harassed and bullied for wearing masks and enforcing public health guidelines.

Of course, described in this manner, the impact of the pandemic on the museum sector is no different from many other sectors, from health care to hospitality, that have been similarly upended by COVID. We have to look more closely at our sector's place and role in society today and in the future in order to chart a way forward that is informed by the lessons of the last two years.

Museums provide a value of \$1.2 billion a year in educational benefits and \$277 million in value of online visits. They provide good jobs and opportunities for Canadians to give back to their communities through volunteering. The economic value to the country is clear, but beyond their economic value, museums are an integral part of social fabric. They've never been more important than they are now.

The stress and trauma of the last two years has laid bare deep fissures in Canadian society. It has brought into sharp relief historical inequities and grievances and exacerbated divisions within our civil society. Museums are safe places for reflection about civility and civil society, about personal and social responsibility, and about diversity and inclusion. They are safe spaces for dialogues and healing at a time when a cacophony of seemingly irreconcilable points of view dominate our daily lives.

As some of the most trusted and respected public institutions in the country, museums can provide Canadians with solid ground on which to pause, reflect and find a way forward out of the uncertainty of today. However, if museums are to play their unique role in healing our society and in helping Canadians imagine a better future together, this must be acknowledged by governments, starting with the Government of Canada.

The Canadian national museum policy was written in the early nineties. That's more than 30 years ago. It's out of date and simply doesn't reflect modern Canada—what it looks like today, the challenges it faces and the potential for tomorrow. A new national museum policy is crucial not only for our sector but for the country.

- (1610)

Developing a new national museum policy was highlighted as a high priority in the mandate letter of the former Minister of Canadian Heritage in 2019. The lessons of the last two years tell us it is even more important today. Without a policy, we cannot determine how to spend our money long term and in a fiscally responsible manner. Let's write a new chapter for museums and for our country together.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. George. You even have 11 seconds left.

Now I will go to the Lethbridge Hurricanes Hockey Club and Terry Huisman.

Mr. Terry Huisman (General Manager, Business Operations, Lethbridge Hurricanes Hockey Club): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of Parliament. I would like to thank all of you for this opportunity to present to your committee today.

Today in my presentation I'd like to talk about COVID-19 and the effects that it has had on the Lethbridge Hurricanes and the Western Hockey League. I will be talking about four main topics

today, those being attendance, revenues, expenses and restrictions and recovery.

On attendance, the Lethbridge Hurricanes enjoyed an average attendance for the three seasons prior to COVID-19 of 3,900 fans per game. In order to break even, we require at least 3,200 fans. This is imperative for a community-owned team to be able to operate. In the 2021 season, it was a 24-game shortened season, where we had no fans within the building. In the 2021-22 season, we have averaged only 2,892. That is a 26% decrease: 308 fans less than what is required for us to break even. The WHL as a whole has also seen a decline of nearly 30% league-wide.

Some of the reasons for the lower attendance are as follows. Fifty per cent capacity restrictions were put in place by the Government of Alberta. Also, full masking with no food or beverage service allowed within the venue created a minimal fan experience. As well, no group ticket sales were allowed due to provincial government restrictions, with ticket sales being limited to households only.

On revenues, the Lethbridge Hurricanes' average revenues for the three seasons prior to COVID-19 were \$3.8 million. In a 2020-21 shortened season, our total revenues were \$1.1 million. The actual revenue was \$250,000, but because of a one-time provincial subsidy we received an additional \$850,000. Also, because of the subsidies such as the Canadian emergency wage subsidy and other subsidy loans from the government, not only were we able to keep all our employees working, but it also helped us with other important expenses.

Our projected 2021-22 total revenues will be roughly \$2.8 million, resulting in a 26% decrease from pre-COVID levels. Some of the reasons for these losses in revenue are that we experience limited walk-up ticket buyers, and we only have enough capacity in the building to hold our season ticket holders. Current capacity restrictions minimize value to our corporate sponsors because there are fewer people attending the games. Uncertainty with future changes to restrictions and protocols has created hesitation for sponsors. Many games have been rescheduled and postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions and protocols.

On expenses, we also have seen added expenses compared to pre-COVID-19 seasons. We had to increase our staffing required to manage the COVID-19 protocols—for example, QR code scanning and security to enter the building. We've also had to increase costs for signage, hand sanitizer and masks at facilities in order to have fans enter the building, and also, of course, for the rapid antigen and PCR testing requirements for our players and staff, as outlined by the WHL and the Alberta Health Services regulations.

On restrictions, in the 2021 season, restrictions allowed no fans in the building. This limited our ability to generate all primary revenue streams. Some of those streams included merchandise sales, 50/50s, all ticketing and limited advertising opportunities. In the 2021-22 season, we started the season at full capacity with masks and a proof of vaccination to enter the building. As of our December 28 game, we moved to 50% capacity, with no food or beverages allowed to be consumed within the building, again affecting the way that we operate normally.

Here are some of the steps we'll need to see to ensure our recovery to prepandemic operations.

We'll need to rebuild our season ticket base. We have lost approximately 12% of our prepandemic numbers, while we're projecting another 10% decrease for the 2022-23 season, taking our fan base from 2,200 season ticket holders to roughly 1,700. Prior to COVID-19, it had taken us five years to build our season ticket numbers from a base of 1,500 to 2,200, so it will take us a significant amount of time to get back to pre-COVID numbers.

We'll also need to re-engage our corporate sponsors because of uncertainty and frequent changes to our schedule. A lot of local businesses are also experiencing significant business interruptions themselves, meaning they have less money to promote their businesses.

As well, we'll need to rebuild the trust within our community. Many organizations are unable to count on the community donations that they once received from the hockey club. Pre-COVID, the Lethbridge Hurricanes were proud to donate and to help to raise upwards of \$180,000 annually for many of these organizations.

- (1615)

Also, there will need to be a huge effort to re-establish ourselves within the community. Prior to COVID-19, our players engaged throughout the community for many different appearances and events.

Then there's the player recruitment side of the business. Some of our league players had some options to play in different leagues or countries.

The limited ability to showcase our players' talents to scouts for professional contracts, the mental health issues that some of our players endured, the seclusion and isolation of living in a bubble and also any time they had to quarantine due to COVID protocols, and asking our players to compete under a tighter schedule weigh on their total recovery and readiness to perform at an elite level and risk injuries.

In closing, again, I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to present today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

For your information, Mr. Wallace, president of the Canadian Museums Association, is still unable to join us. He is having Internet trouble. As you can see, Ms. George represented him beautifully.

The last witness will be Annick Charette, president of Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture, for five minutes.

Ms. Charette.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Charette (President, Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture): Good afternoon.

On behalf of the Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture, which is a Quebec organization, I am very pleased to accept this invitation to speak about the recovery of the culture sector.

The first thing we can say about the impact of the pandemic on the arts and culture sector is that it has been—and still is—among the most heavily impacted sectors. By November 2021, economic activity in that sector in Canada was 23% lower than it was before the pandemic. In contrast, other economic sectors have surpassed their February 2020 levels.

We can only conclude that, despite coming out of lockdown over the summer and fall, it has been very difficult for the sector to get back on its feet despite favourable macroeconomic conditions. Workers and artists in these fields are in such a state of uncertainty financially and about their future prospects that many are simply dropping out and disengaging. It is very important to remember this.

This environment may seem appealing to the uninitiated, but in reality, approximately 80% of artists and craftspeople in the arts and culture sectors were living below the low-income cut-off for a single person in Quebec in 2019. We are talking about \$24,200 and about \$21,500 for artists, according to Statistics Canada.

Imagine now what the conditions generated by the pandemic and the almost complete shutdown of activities in some of these sectors could have done to these workers, whose precarious situation is clearly evident. This is one of the sectors where the social net is particularly light, if not non-existent. We are talking about limited employment insurance rights, random pension funds and minimal group insurance. The waves of lockdown have reduced the living arts of theatre, dance, concerts and popular music to a trickle. They have also put a strain on venues, festivals and the entire ecosystem that goes with them.

Other creators, such as male and female writers, who derive a significant portion of their income from participation in book fairs, have been deprived of this income. Screenwriters have seen some of their projects put on hold. Musicians have lost access to the important source of income from conventions and other corporate events that are held in their presence.

A study that we launched in March 2021 among the main artists' associations in Quebec also shows, without question, according to recognized markers, that the proportion of artists and creators who display high and very high levels of psychological distress is greater than in the general Quebec population. In addition, for 72% of respondents, this psychological distress is entirely or partially associated with the pandemic.

Many cultural workers have left their field of practice in the past two years. At the time of our survey in March 2021, 41% had considered or were considering leaving their careers. They were out of breath and out of resources.

In short, the culture sector has been hit hard by the pandemic. To recover, it will need special attention and a strong will, including a strong political will.

It is clear that the recovery will not be easy, as it will require work on several fronts.

We must first undertake important work to revalue these sectors. First and foremost, we must enhance the image and value of the work of artists, craftspeople and creators, who are the raw material of all culture, before the industry itself; we must restore a taste for practice; we must create better conditions and protections—governments must send a clear message to this effect; and we must let it be known that they are one of our society's most precious assets, because they make us different and unique, enrich us collectively and are the most faithful mirror of our aspirations.

They need to be supported as individuals and as a distinctive sector within specific, well-promoted programs, which is very important, and to have easy access to these programs, which is doubly important. This must be done through consistent accountability that ensures that the public funds invested reach the creators' pockets, which is not always the case.

• (1620)

In 2021, the government announced the establishment of the Recovery Fund for Arts, Culture, Heritage, and Sport Sectors. The \$300 million in funding for this program was allocated through existing organizations and programs.

We believe that these initiatives must continue and that massive funding must be injected into them. We are talking about the Telefilm Canada Recovery Fund and Re-opening Fund; the Canada Arts Presentation Fund; the Building Communities Through Arts and Heritage Program; the Museums Assistance Program; the Support for Workers in Live Arts and Music Sectors Fund; and the Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit.

In fact, cultural workers need...

[English]

The Chair: Please wrap up, Ms. Charette. You will be able to answer in questions later on.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Charette: I will answer the questions, but I still have a lot to say.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry. We do have one more witness, and it's Ms. Iley from the Canadian Arts Coalition.

Go ahead, Ms. Iley.

Ms. Sarah Iley (Member of Steering Committee, Canadian Arts Coalition): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the committee for undertaking this in-depth look into the challenges related to the recovery of the arts, culture, heritage and sport sectors that have been so deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as my fellow witnesses have certainly made clear.

Jacoba Knaapen and I are here as volunteer members of the Canadian Arts Coalition, which is a coalition of artists and arts organizations that first came together in 2005 as a non-partisan advocacy movement of volunteers.

You can imagine that, when the pandemic hit and the sector was shut down in March 2020, the coalition redoubled our efforts to gather and share information about the impact of the pandemic on all of our members, large and small, who are active in the performing, visual and literary arts, as well as in cultural industries right across Canada. We've been very active over the past two years to try to help the government understand the needs of the sector.

To provide an idea of the challenges, my colleague, Jacoba, is going to provide a snapshot of what's happened to her organization's membership. Jacoba is the executive director of the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts, with 164 member organizations in March 2020.

• (1625)

Ms. Jacoba Knaapen (Member of Steering Committee, Canadian Arts Coalition): Thank you, Sarah.

Our membership, representing professional theatre, dance and opera companies, now numbers only 107, which in itself tells how difficult it has been for arts organizations to hang on and to get through this period of closures, unemployment and audience hesitancy. Our members tell us that they've pivoted endlessly to accommodate the measures that are required for public health, and we know this is the case for the coalition's members right across the country.

Prepandemic, the arts and culture sector contributed \$6.3 billion towards Toronto's GDP annually. We know that arts and culture bring health and well-being to neighbourhoods in Toronto and in fact right across Canada. Although 89% of Torontonians believe that the arts make Toronto a better place to live, work and visit, Torontonians have not had access consistently to live theatre, dance and opera on Toronto stages for nearly two years. I can report the impact to date in Toronto with some numbers: 25,000 cancelled or postponed public performances, over \$900 million lost in revenue and 20 million lost audience members.

Placing a dollar-value loss for this stagnation of cultural identity is inherently difficult. Understanding and extending empathy to those who indispensably shape our culture, often selflessly, should be more easily quantifiable.

Emerging artists have been stopped before even beginning. Mid-career artists are hobbled at a time when their past dedication to the craft should be blossoming, and senior artists have experienced a perhaps premature ending to their careers. What's been happening in Toronto is happening right across the country, and not just for those artists and organizations in the performing arts. Visual artists and craftspeople have also been affected. If those artists are indigent, if they're racialized, deaf, disabled or otherwise marginalized, they've been even more challenged.

Ms. Sarah Iley: As a result, the Canadian Arts Coalition has been very thankful for the wage, rent and income supports that have been integral to many throughout the pandemic. We are very thankful for Canadian Heritage's expediency in announcing the parameters for the \$60-million Canada performing arts workers resilience fund. In support of arts organizations, Canadian Heritage's upcoming arts and culture recovery program may cover some additional sector needs, but it may come too late.

Organizations need flexibility in how they access and use these funds to support their unique costs through the pandemic. We also need to ensure that the visual arts, not just the performing arts, are eligible under these programs. While the tourism and hospitality recovery program may benefit some organizations too, its eligibility criteria does not fit all models in the arts sector.

We have seen this since the start of the pandemic in the design of the programs. Another injection of immediate relief funding, administered through existing channels such as Canadian Heritage and the Canada Council, would financially support organizations in a broader system. We would also like to see government-backed event cancellation insurance, not unlike what Telefilm Canada is providing. We are also very concerned that employment insurance be modernized.

Finally, the Canadian Arts Coalition recognizes that we need to encourage not just the government to take part in the recovery of the arts in this country. We need to encourage the private sector as well and engage them perhaps through a donation matching program, like Canadian Heritage's Canada cultural investment fund, which has already been so successful.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Iley.

I just want to recognize that Mr. Wallace, the president of the Canadian Museums Association, has entered the room—or the chat.

Mr. Wallace, Ms. George very aptly represented you as a witness. Thank you very much.

Now I will move to the question and answer section. This is done in rounds per parties. I would like to remind you that “question and answer” includes the question and the answer, not just the question. Thank you very much.

The very first round is for six minutes. We will begin with Rachael Thomas of the Conservative Party.

Ms. Thomas, you have six minutes.

• (1630)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

Ms. Paul, I'm wondering if you could expand a wee bit on your opening comments. You talked about the negative impact of supply chain disruptions, and then of course inflation. Could you comment on that a little bit further just to help us understand the impact?

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: Absolutely. To host the Canada Games, there has to be in place a \$10-million commercial general liability. As an example, typically it would cost in the nature of \$15,000 to \$30,000 for a Canada Games, but because of the impacts of COVID-19, we're having trouble getting insurance providers to cover that. There has actually been a threefold increase to about \$100,000. That's one example.

Just generally, there are the costs to get athletes around all of the venues. We need more buses. Food is more expensive. The supply chain impact right now is affecting a mass number of operational expenses to host the Canada Games.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: That's really helpful. Thank you. It's good for us to understand that and to have the context provided for us.

Mr. Huisman, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about your fan base. You talked about the fact that there are fewer people attending games now, and you suspect that this might be the case for a little while, going forward. Perhaps you could talk a bit about the rhetoric that takes place at a federal level, via the Prime Minister, via the mainstream media, around creating fear.

What impact does that have on fans coming back and filling the seats?

Mr. Terry Huisman: That's a good question. I think that has a huge bearing on how we operate. We saw that from the start of the season, when we saw a significant drop in our attendance. There was a lot of uncertainty. Obviously, being part of the community, in reaching out and discussing it with a lot of our clients and customers, they've expressed the fact that they're just uncertain about coming into the building at this time.

As well, we've experienced a bit of fallback with our corporate sponsorship in regard to some companies just not agreeing with what they're hearing as far as regulations and protocols are concerned. They're not willing to get behind sponsoring us because of the fact that it's just not in their belief system. We have seen a significant drop in those areas, for sure.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Huisman, are there things that could be done by the government—or maybe it's that they need to do fewer things—in order to help that fan base come back, bring back those corporate sponsorships and basically get back to normalcy?

Mr. Terry Huisman: I think once we start moving in a direction where.... I think we'll see some of that with our provincial side here this week. That's what our hopes are. I think we'll see some more comfortableness of people moving in and out of our arena.

You know, the way I look at it is that a lot of the time these companies that are struggling to support us corporately may also need more influx of other programs or subsidies to help them so that they can get their businesses moving in the right direction and they can promote themselves as well.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Right. It's an interesting point.

If you were to talk a bit more about the recommendations that you would make, not so much at the provincial level.... Of course, there are things that are needed there, but is there anything at the federal level, whether it's with regard to financial benefits or with regard to communication points, etc.? What are the things at the federal level that you would recommend going forward?

Mr. Terry Huisman: For us, it would be about keeping people employed and keeping them in their jobs. We've obviously been able to benefit from some of the subsidies and programs that were put forth by the government. We would like to see another round of that immediately to carry us through another six months to a year. That would definitely help us in keeping people employed and keeping things open around here.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I want to come back to the impact of event cancellation and postponement. Is there anything that you would add in terms of the impact that has had on the Hurricanes and those within our community who are engaged?

• (1635)

Mr. Terry Huisman: Obviously when there are unforeseen circumstances and postponements because of too many players on the team having the COVID-19 virus and we get into those protocols, it really does put a barrier on our system. We have to struggle to get in multiple games at the end of the season. We have to extend the season, which means that we have to extend further out with other events, including the playoffs, the Memorial Cup and those sorts of things. There are a lot of factors that are involved where that is concerned. If we didn't have to deal with that, obviously, it would be a perfect world, but that's what we're living in and the players have to deal with that on a regular basis.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Fair enough.

Mr. Huisman, in your estimation, would you have everything in place to be able to go back to normal?

Mr. Terry Huisman: I believe that we do have everything in place to return to normal, whatever that normal will be. We'll be here, ready and willing and excited for that to happen.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: That's awesome.

Ms. Paul, I have the same question.

The Chair: Ms. Thomas, you have 22 seconds.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes, thank you for interrupting.

Ms. Paul, would you mind commenting on that quickly?

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: Sure. The council is a funded MSO and we were eligible through the Government of Canada for additional

support. The host societies aren't. Our temporary organizations that are funded temporarily by the Government of Canada were not eligible for some of those additional emergency programs and they needed to be.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Okay. Hopefully we'll have a chance to come back to that through another questioner.

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: Michael Coteau is the Liberal questioner for six minutes.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity.

I wanted to take a moment to say thank you to all of the deponents today. The arts, culture, heritage and sport sectors, even in the best of days, often struggle to keep going. There are lots of challenges in those sectors. I just wanted to say thank you for all the work you're doing to really help Canadians.

The depositions were fascinating. I learned some things. I have a couple of questions. I'll start with Jacoba from the Canadian Arts Coalition.

It sounds like you've done a lot of research in Toronto. You mentioned there were 164 members pre-pandemic and currently there are 107 members who have survived COVID over the two years. Can you talk about the loss of almost 60 members? Resources and money, I can imagine, were number one, but what were some of the other reasons they had to close their doors?

Ms. Jacoba Knaapen: Thank you so much for the question, MP Coteau. It's a good question.

In Toronto, the challenges that our members were facing due to the pandemic were triplefold. We were dealing—and continue to deal—with very expensive housing and venue costs. The affordability to continue operations.... Some of these smaller, non-venued, independent companies were amongst the companies that withdrew their memberships. They simply couldn't continue. These are companies that are non-venued, as I mentioned. They typically don't receive operating funding—only project funding. They're very small, independent, grassroots companies that are often producing very provocative, risk-taking work.

These are further impacted by the mental health impact in terms of working with very limited funds and few resources. It's what we call the balancing act. Like so many Canadians, we're juggling working from home with families and children—

• (1640)

Mr. Michael Coteau: Because I only have six minutes, if you don't mind.... Thank you so much.

I just have a follow-up question. There were 60 organization members that we saw not able to keep going during COVID. What do you think we can do to get them back into operation? Specifically for those small organizations that even under normal circumstances find it difficult to operate, what can we do federally to better position those organizations and perhaps have some of them return to operation?

Ms. Jacoba Knaapen: Thank you.

I think paying the bills and enjoying a reasonable standard of living are universal hoped-for outcomes in any career pursuit. Our request for support of a universal basic income or a basic income guarantee is really important in terms of being able to level the playing field for all arts workers and beyond, like gig economy workers. We're seeing the impact, of course, in the tourism and hospitality sectors, as well.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Let me jump in again. I know that my time is running out. I'm sorry to interrupt you.

In the coalition as a whole, many of the organizations were able to continue to operate. What programs were offered by the government that actually contributed to that success overall? What did you hear from your members were the key programs?

Ms. Jacoba Knaapen: I'm going to say a bunch of acronyms. Thank you for CWLB, CERB, THRP and for the newly announced CPAWRF, which is the resilience fund.

Injecting additional recovery dollars into Canadian Heritage and the Canada Council, similar to what was provided in the fall of 2020 and the summer of 2021, is really going to have an impact.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you so much.

I have a last question for Heather George from the Canadian Museums Association.

You talked about the digital transformation that took place during the two years. Did we see a massive shift to embracing more digital technologies within the museum sector in Canada?

Ms. Heather George: In terms of programming, there was a big shift. There's also been work by small museums to network their databases to provide more access. A lot of that has to do with MAP funding.

Unfortunately, that is not an equitable approach to museum work. It leaves behind very small communities and northern and indigenous communities that don't have access to proper telecommunications to support this programming. Especially at a time when the entire country is talking about reconciliation, I think an important issue to consider is that digital technology works for the majority of the population, but it certainly does not work for everyone.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. George.

Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: In the next round is Martin Champoux from the Bloc Québécois for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I will immediately turn to Ms. Charette from the FNCC.

Many things in your opening speech struck me, Ms. Charette, and rightly so. You talked about the disengagement of cultural workers. You also talked about psychological distress, which is more prevalent in the cultural industry than in other sectors. I would have asked you how you could explain that, but, for me, it is obvious: it is because the cultural sector is more affected than other sectors.

Tell me a little bit about the consequences of this on the daily lives of your members. I would like to hear more about these very worrying issues.

Ms. Annick Charette: All arts associations saw their membership decrease significantly during the pandemic. Obviously, although money matters, it is not what motivates artists first and foremost. As you have seen, they are almost all living below the poverty line, but what motivates them above all is to be seen, heard and recognized. Obviously, the lockdown has deprived them of this source of motivation. When an artist cannot exist as an artist or practise his art, he must find another way to exist. This is also true for people in other professions, but in the case of artists, they have been deprived of performing or of being able to collaborate on projects greater than themselves. That is what we mean by psychological backlash.

What worries us in the sector in particular is that not all of these people will come back. It's the same with audiences, by the way. Not all of them will come back either, because they have developed other habits during the pandemic. Will everyone return to the venues, to the festivals, to the concerts? God only knows. Perhaps we will see a new economic model, a redefinition of the economic or profitability model of the cultural world.

I think that we should hold a sort of general meeting on the recovery. There are a lot of converging factors. It is not a simple matter of reopening. It's not like a restaurant, where you just buy food, hire people and open the dining room a week later. You have to relaunch projects, relaunch people who are doing projects, put together funding structures, reopen venues. We know how difficult it is to recruit staff to relaunch venues. We talked a lot about festivals earlier, which receive subsidies and benefit from community investment. These investments must be relaunched. The work that needs to be done in the culture sector will be titanic over the next two years, and we need the government's recommitment and a massive reinjection of public funds.

• (1645)

Mr. Martin Champoux: I have a question about what you just said.

Do you feel that since artists and cultural workers are aware of the work involved in rebuilding the cultural industry and recreating the cultural habits of consumers, they will be discouraged and that this could contribute to their leaving the field?

Ms. Annick Charette: This can play a role, that's for sure. Some artists are more determined than others, but some have exhausted their resources. Some venues have also exhausted their human and financial resources. The last lockdown was the final blow to many people and many venues.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Excuse me for trying to speed things up, but our time is limited, as my colleague Mr. Bittle said earlier.

Ms. Annick Charette: I too try to be as brief as possible.

Mr. Martin Champoux: You mentioned something that really struck me, which is that access to funds is doubly important.

Ms. Annick Charette: Yes.

Mr. Martin Champoux: I feel that access to funds is often a big problem. Do you find that the programs put in place are often too complex and discouraging for those who have to apply? Do you ever feel this way?

Ms. Annick Charette: People in the community generally agree that things could be simplified. We understand that civil servants must ensure the proper use of public funds, but sometimes there are many barriers to entry. This discourages people from applying. We need to engage the cultural community. Only artists and craftspeople can revive the activities of the community, but to do so, they must be rallied and motivated to do so.

Mr. Martin Champoux: The Canada Performing Arts Workers Resilience Fund was announced last week. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think we were expecting an emergency assistance fund for self-employed cultural workers who are not eligible for the various EI and emergency assistance programs related to COVID-19. As it is, we have a program that does not simply provide emergency assistance, but that also aims to fund projects, which are worthy, I'm sure. However, don't you think that, once again, the process has been slightly complicated, when self-employed cultural workers needed a breather and financial assistance that was available quickly?

Ms. Annick Charette: This program is well intentioned, because it focuses on mental health and so on, which is not a small part of it, but it went slightly off course between its announcement in the fall and January. As I said, I think it was well intentioned, but it won't be enough. To get back on their feet, cultural workers are going to need help over a longer period than many other workers. The special assistance for cultural workers should be maintained until there is a solid, documented, and quantified indicator of the recovery of the culture sector.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Very quickly, Ms. Charette, what do you think of the revision of the Status of the Artist Act?

What should be included in this legislation on the federal side?

Ms. Annick Charette: I obviously cannot answer that in 15 seconds. However, I can tell you that we really want Bill C-11 to be passed as quickly as possible and that we will support the government in this regard.

Mr. Martin Champoux: We will have the opportunity to discuss this again, I am sure.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I'll go to the fourth person in this round.

Peter Julian, from the New Democratic Party, you have six minutes.

• (1650)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for coming forward today. All of you represent organizations that help tell our stories to Canadians and to the world. We deeply appreciate the work you do every day, and we hope you and your families are staying safe and healthy during this pandemic.

I'm going to start my questions with Madam Noble and Madam Blanchette from ACTRA. You put forward a really effective case, Ms. Noble, in talking about what happened to seniors. The fact that many seniors are now homeless as a result of these government decisions is catastrophic. The government needs to act immediately.

We also saw, prior to Christmas, a very abrupt ending of the CRB that cut off 800,000 people virtually overnight, stopping them from having the wherewithal to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads. Were ACTRA members impacted by that abrupt ending of the CRB? What would you say is the situation now for ACTRA members across the country? How are they making ends meet?

Ms. Eleanor Noble: Yes, they were impacted. Our profession is precarious by nature, and having everything cut off like that when we weren't fully up and running in the capacity that we used to be was detrimental to many members.

As for the GIS, our seniors felt stabbed in the back. We got many calls from them saying that they had contacted the CRA and there were different answers for the whole thing all the time. They had even stopped the CERB and paid their taxes on the CERB, etc., and then their GIS was taken away. The response to them was to apply for the CERB again. They said, "But then I'm going to be stuck in the same position."

That was really very unclear. The help was not there from the CRA to be clear on what was happening, and it seemed like they were stumbling through and didn't know. The people who were affected by that were our vulnerable seniors.

Lisa, do you want to add anything to that?

Mr. Peter Julian: To answer the question of where ACTRA members are right now, you're putting the case that there needs to be more supports in place. The idea that this is all over with and we can just wrap up and go home is not an effective way of dealing with the pandemic, which continues to profoundly hurt the arts and culture sector.

Ms. Eleanor Noble: That's correct.

One of the things on our sets is that we work in close contact with each other, and when we call for "action" to record, we remove our masks. We're in a vulnerable state.

We have been following protocols across the country, but the thing is that we're vulnerable in those positions. Because of that, we aren't at full capacity on our sets. We don't have our full background.

A huge percentage of our membership across the country is background performers. Where there would be hundreds of them on set daily, providing them a proper income, that has now been reduced to maybe a maximum of 10 people, who have to test negative every single day and are then in a vulnerable position where they have to remove their masks while we're shooting a scene. For performers and crews, it's changed as well.

We're all in the same boat. It's just diminished.

We haven't gone back to normal yet, because the protocols are still very strict, and our membership is working at half capacity, rather than at the fullness we were working pre-COVID.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much for that.

I'm going to move on to the Canadian Arts Coalition, and Ms. Iley and Ms. Knaapen.

Ms. Knaapen, if I understood correctly, you talked about 24,000 cancelled events and 20 million tickets that would have been purchased were not. This is catastrophic, as you've pointed out. Do you feel the federal government should be treating the impact on the arts and culture sector as the emergency that it is, and step up immediately with support?

The banking sector and pharmaceutical companies got massive supports. Shouldn't the arts and culture sector be receiving the same type of priority this government has given to banks and big business?

Ms. Jacoba Knaapen: The Government of Canada's commitment to a full recovery for the arts and culture sector is deeply appreciated. I want to mention one of the tools. One of the instruments we can leverage that's critical to our recovery is the box office refund, potentially being able to rebuild some of those losses. The losses to restart a show are never recouped. It's a loss of labour, and it's a direct hit to producers right across the country.

Realistically, in the longer term, a ticket subsidy is going to support recovery. A long-term strategy attached to that.... Just because we are allowed to reopen doesn't mean we've recovered. Revenue from 50% capacity doesn't sustain the expenses of live production.

Our members have been brilliant. They've pivoted. We've heard that "p" word so many times. They've created workshops. They've created panels. They are doing digital content. They've created pod-

casts and livestreams. Some really extraordinary digital offerings have emerged during this time.

We've on-boarded new audience members during this time, as well. We don't know if those digital new audience members will come back. Recouping the losses in our box office revenues is really going to be integral. We need to rehearse. We need to pay the musicians, the cast, the crew, and the front and back of house. Some of the spaces need to be refurbished, as well.

There are additional costs that are incurred through necessary health and safety protocols, which, of course, we're following. Looking at a ticket subsidy could have a real impact for our sector.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Peter. Your time is up. Those were good questions.

We're going to go to the second round.

We'll begin with Ms. Leslyn Lewis, from the Conservatives, for five minutes.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Iley, and it pertains to the cancellations you just spoke about.

I would like to hear more about whether or not you had to refund some payments for cancellations, or if this was just a potential loss of revenue.

Ms. Sarah Iley: There were many requests for refunds. Many organizations would ask their ticket-buyers, "Are you willing to leave the money with us and trust us that we'll bring you the show when we're able to?" There were many ticket-buyers who did do that, but there were many who couldn't and wanted their refunds. There was refunding, and it's been really complicated going back and forth with partial reopenings, capacity limits and that kind of thing. There were refunds on top of the lack of capacity and the lack of sales.

I wanted to add to what Jacoba was mentioning around digitization. Lots of people and organizations decided that a good way to reach out to potential members, potential audience members, potential artwork buyers...and let's not forget the visual arts are all in this too. They said they couldn't reach people unless it was through a digital format, but there is no way those digital formats have had any way of monetizing.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you for that answer.

My next question is for Ms. George. I am curious about the several COVID measures that you highlighted and just the implementation of them. How would you assess their effectiveness in providing the financial relief needed, and where there any gaps and problems that you would like to highlight?

Ms. Heather George: In terms of the supports provided, I would say that thanks to government support, fiscal prudence and support from community members, many museums were able to weather this storm, as it were, and hopefully we're almost done. However, I would say one of the gaps is that all of these parts of funds are in different locations, which presents an additional barrier especially for small institutions that might only run seasonally or whose staff are primarily volunteers. I would say that is a major gap.

Then additionally, specifically to indigenous community organizations and museums, many of our organizations entered this from a position of already being behind the race in terms of funding and societal pressures. The entire pandemic, for all of our organizations and memberships that we represent, really spoke to the precarious nature of arts, culture, heritage and sport in this nation and the need for the federal government to address that.

• (1700)

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Huisman. Your conversation, your answers to Ms. Thomas, I wanted to just expand on them. You stated that you had some increased costs, and you've noted signage and rapid tests and other items. Would you anticipate that these costs will even expand further when you reopen and you allow for things like food, given the cost of the increases due to our limited supply chain?

Mr. Terry Huisman: I would think that we will continue to use those items. Obviously that will be a person's choice whether they want to wear their masks in the arena, but they will still be offered as they walk through the door, and there will still be those expenses as well.

As we move forward and levels of COVID start to drop or continue to drop, I would think that some of that stuff would probably be alleviated from the arena.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: With respect to food, you stated that you're not serving food now and that when you reopen, it's anticipated that you would be resuming the sale of food.

Mr. Terry Huisman: Yes. I think once the provincial restrictions get eased hopefully this week, they'll reintroduce our ability to have food and beverages back in the arena.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Do you anticipate any increased costs due to that because of some problems that we are having in our supply chain?

Mr. Terry Huisman: No. I believe that those expenses have already been incurred.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Okay, wonderful.

My next—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lewis. Your time is up.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry about that.

Now I would like to move to the Liberals, Mr. Chris Bittle, for five minutes.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

For my first questions I would like to go to the Canada Games Council. We're excited in Niagara to be hosting the Canada Games. It would have been nice to do it last year, but unfortunately COVID-19 pushed that back to this summer.

You'd mentioned the inability of the host societies to access programming. I was present at an announcement last year where an additional \$1.1 million was offered to the host society in Niagara to cover the additional costs of postponement. Is that true?

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: Yes. It wasn't a typical program that was actually struck by the government to support COVID relief funds though. It was literally Sport Canada finding some additional money to support the COVID piece, but it wasn't one of the prime funding programs for COVID relief that were available to the rest of the NSOs and the NSO community.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Again, it was the government finding that hole that existed and filling that hole for the host society in Niagara.

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: The support towards it, yes.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you.

I can move on to Mr. Huisman. Perhaps it was just an unusual question, and I'd just like to clarify in terms of the question. The question was about language by the Prime Minister impacting your business. I think you've said it in your other statements. Can you confirm that the restrictions that have been placed on your business are entirely from the Province of Alberta. Is that correct?

Mr. Terry Huisman: Yes, they are.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Okay. The prevalence of a highly infectious disease and thousands of deaths in your province probably greatly contributes to people's hesitancy to attend a sporting event. Is that a fair assessment?

Mr. Terry Huisman: I would say that is a fair statement.

• (1705)

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you so much.

If we can move on to the Canadian Arts Coalition, I know you've discussed the federal government programs that have come into force. I just want to counter a couple of the items Mr. Julian talked about in terms of the banking industry, and the federal government ignoring the arts sector. I would like to point out the \$500 million in the 2020 economic update, \$281 million in the fall economic statement and \$500 million in the 2021 budget.

I appreciate that more is necessary, but I was wondering if you could comment on what the impact of the existing federal programs has been on the sector, and if you've seen the arts sector as a priority of the federal government.

Ms. Sarah Iley: Thank you for the question.

I can certainly say, on behalf of all the membership—and we have surveyed people right across the country—that those particular programs you have listed were absolutely essential. I think we've heard that from a number of people on this panel today. They have been described as absolute lifelines to the arts community. There were some hiccups in terms of some of the designs of the wage subsidy at the beginning. It was very welcomed that the community was asked to provide suggestions about modifications to the programs, and we were able to do that.

There's no question that the list of letters that Jacoba read off has been terribly important—the wage subsidy, the rent subsidy, the CERB and so on. The concern, of course, is that the pandemic is still not over. The audience hesitancy continues. The capacity challenges are still there.

The real concern is that these programs have been essential and will continue to be essential. It's fantastic that the arts recovery program has been announced. Again, we look forward to working with the government to help make sure that it meets the unique needs, not just of the performing arts but also of the visual arts and the other segments of the arts and culture sector, for which these continue to be very tricky days.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Very quickly to ACTRA, has production bounced back towards prepandemic levels?

Ms. Eleanor Noble: Production has been pretty good. We've been very impressed with how it has come back, but as I said before, we are at half capacity on our sets, so the number of people being hired is not the same. Also, when we went into the pandemic shutdown, the industry changed for performers across this country. We no longer go to casting houses to audition. We had to buy and equip ourselves with our own equipment. It was costly and time consuming, and it came out of our own pockets.

Yes, we're doing well on the production side of things, but we are not at full capacity from a hiring standpoint, in terms of how many members are working on sets.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Noble and Mr. Bittle.

We now move on to the next round.

It's the Bloc Québécois with Mr. Champoux for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to address Ms. Noble from ACTRA.

Ms. Noble, we spoke to each other some time ago and we discussed the issue of employment insurance reform and the basic conditions that we wanted to offer to people working in the culture sector. We also had the opportunity to talk briefly about this project that we want to put forward on the reform of the status of the artist within the framework of the federal legislation.

What do you think we should definitely prioritize when we get ready to study these issues?

[English]

Ms. Eleanor Noble: Yes, we really want Bill C-11 to pass and to modernize our Broadcasting Act. It's time. We need media giants like Netflix and Disney+ to be contributing to our industry so that we can develop Canadian stories and production. We have talented Canadians writers, producers, directors and performers across this country, and we need to start producing our own work and—

• (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Ms. Noble, I must interrupt you.

Perhaps my question was not properly relayed. I'm talking about the reform of the EI program and the federal Status of the Artist Act that we want to undertake. We had these discussions when we met some time ago. You pointed out some things to me, and I would like to know what specific aspects you would like us to examine when we talk about these reforms.

[English]

Ms. Eleanor Noble: Do you want to help me out, Lisa?

Ms. Lisa Blanchette: Of course.

For employment insurance we definitely are excited about the review that is being undertaken and the opportunity of broadening the system so that self-employed workers can participate. Our members want to work. They want to be contributing to the system so that they have a safety net if something like this were to happen again.

With respect to the status of the artists, again this is a great piece of legislation that we would like to see looked at again. For example, in Quebec there is the income averaging that's available to Quebec artists. Is this something that could be introduced federally for artists across the country? The possibilities are endless with status of the artist and we're very keen to be part of the consultation.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Ms. Noble, I apologize for the lack of clarity in my questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blanchette and Mr. Champoux. I'm sorry. Your time is up.

We will go to Mr. Julian from the NDP for two and a half minutes. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to ask Ms. Charette a question, but first I would like to respond to Mr. Bittle's comment.

The banking sector has received \$750 billion in liquidity support, which is 1,000 times more than the culture sector has received. So it's clear that there is a lot of work to be done and that the government has not prioritized the culture sector as it should have. This sector is extremely important, not only for our economy, but also for us to tell our stories, both on the national and international stage.

Ms. Charette, you raised some extremely important points. If I understood correctly, you said that nearly 80% of your members have an income of around \$21,000 a year. What should we do, on the one hand, so that artists can overcome the pandemic, and on the other hand, so that they can have a basic income to maintain an adequate standard of living, regardless of where they are?

Ms. Annick Charette: I think the first thing we need to do is to take a different position on the work of artists. We need to recognize that they are the foundation, the raw material of culture, and provide significant accountability when public money is invested to ensure that it gets to the artists.

There are many programs as well. COVID-19 has added to an already present structural crisis. We talked about Bill C-11, which is very important to us. I also heard the ACTRA representatives say this, but it is important for the entire cultural community, because we know the losses generated by the lack of contribution from the Web giants.

As we have just said, there is a real need for self-employed people to have access to EI benefits. We understand that it will be difficult to create a new framework, but we need to work on it and have a clear intention.

We should also review the funding of public corporations such as the National Film Board, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Canada Council for the Arts. It is by supporting our own arts institutions and private investors in the culture sector that we can improve things. As I said, you need to have a vision. Programs are not enough; you need a vision. I hope that this vision will be built by everyone.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Charette.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Now I go to the Conservative Party.

Mr. Waugh, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Some play to lift a trophy. We play to lift the country.

As the father of one of the athletes who took part in the summer games, Ms. Paul, I'm surprised that you never talked about mental health. We have been in the House of Commons for over a year asking for help on a three-digit mental health line. We are told by this government that it's coming; the CRTC is coming. Now we have Bill C-11, the online streaming, which will be controlled by the CRTC.

As a father who watched an athlete struggle mentally to and from the games, I would like to know your position on this, as Niagara was cancelled last year. It's been moved up to August 6, but the adjustments on age eligibility and the requirements for qualifying will certainly change.

What is the mental aspect of your athletes coast to coast in this country as they prepare for 2022?

• (1715)

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: This is where we cross jurisdictional lines with the provinces and territories. However, we do talk to the provinces and territories about mental health in making sure that they're taking care of their teams.

As an organization, we don't have any impact on their mental health at this time. With respect to age categories, that was extremely difficult. We worked with our national sport organizations and made the best decisions with respect to the sport programming and the prior decisions that had been rendered.

When it comes to the Canada Games, though, sport, as we know, is extremely important, and then the mental health of all the participants at the games is important. We do make sure that we take care of the teams at games time with respect to mental health.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Going on with this, in Regina this month, they cancelled the Saskatchewan Winter Games. Many of these athletes will never have another opportunity to compete. What do you say to that?

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: It's extremely disappointing, and it's something that we don't ever want to see happen at the Canada Games. Obviously, we were reaching out to our provincials here. Actually, all four provincial games this winter were cancelled in this country. We do have a network with them, and we have been working with them to support their recovery in any way, shape or form possible.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: But you know that many athletes will not get another chance, through qualifications, through eligibility... There are many in this country who had a chance in the last 18 months to compete, and now they won't have that chance.

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: No—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Whether they move forward on eligibility and just plain... I've seen from 12- to 20- to 30-year olds. Some move on. Some can't, as you know, wait for that time.

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: Yes, absolutely. One of our three recommendations to government was that the federal government could support bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories to support the return to sports, because they are dealing with new norms. They've lost training opportunities and competition opportunities to help them return to sport.

We think the federal government could take a lead and support the return to sport and the success of Canada's first multisport games in this country after the pandemic.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Is there any reaction from the federal government?

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: This is something we're actually talking to you about today, but we are happy to continue this messaging.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I had Special Olympians in my office two or three weeks ago in Saskatoon. They're distraught. They, too, haven't been able to participate in any kind of activity. Your thoughts on that group...?

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: Yes, on the Special Olympics, we work with Special Olympics Canada. They took a different approach to safeguarding health and safety. They're missing a huge window—absolutely—but they felt that it was in the best interests of their athletes and their organization.

At the Canada Games, we're inclusive, so we do have opportunities for athletes with an intellectual disability or a physical disability, as well as the able-bodied. We will continue to do our best in the Canada Games in promoting inclusion opportunities through sport.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

I'm going to go to you, Mr. Wallace. You haven't had time to speak to committee today because you had some trouble Zooming in, but I'm going to give you an opportunity now, because the museums in this country are really suffering. We all know that. I think Ms. George said that only two closed, which kind of surprised me. I thought there would be more.

On digitizing and creating virtual exhibits for visitors online, in the last 18 months have you made any improvements?

Mr. Michael Wallace (President, Canadian Museums Association): "Improvements" is an interesting word.

On the notion for digitizing, I think that all falls in, as Heather was pointing out, on the need for us to have a policy so that we can figure out from coast to coast to coast how digital fits into what museums are trying to do and—rather than having an ad hoc approach where each individual museum is trying to launch digital projects—the ways we can do it together as a country.

• (1720)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's good. Thank you.

I think my time is up.

The Chair: Yes, your time is up, Kevin. Thank you very much.

We'll go to the final person in this round with the Liberal Party.

Ms. Hepfner you have five minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to first go back to Kelly-Ann Paul with the Canada Games Council for a quick second.

I just want to clarify this with you. None of the cancellations were due to any federal government policies. Is that correct?

Ms. Kelly-Ann Paul: That's correct.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you.

I would also like to go back to Heather George from the Canadian Museums Association.

You've been very eloquent today, and I want to thank you for being here. I know the Woodland Cultural Centre quite well. You guys do excellent work there, and I want to thank you for all you do.

I wanted to ask you about this. We've heard today from live music people and from sporting people that there's a lot of hesitation amongst the Canadian public to go back to those activities. I'm wondering if you've noticed the same thing with museums. What did you notice when there would be a reopening after a period of closure? Did you see the same hesitancy, or did people really want to get back into museums?

Ms. Heather George: Thanks so much for that question. It's actually one of the things I really wanted to highlight for everyone.

Museums are a wonderful place to weather a pandemic because of the way that we design exhibition spaces and also because museums have shifted to do a lot of outdoor programming on their sites. We've been able to provide opportunities for people to engage in culture and heritage even during some of the worst times of the pandemic, including, as we have discussed, some digital offerings as well as pre-existing programs, including the Virtual Museum of Canada. Even our use of Zoom has improved dramatically and there is everything from lectures offered, for example, by the Canadian Automotive Museum on topics like electric cars and driving while Black, to beading circles offered by cultural centres and art galleries.

I did want to point out as well that museums work with almost all of the other organizations in the room to provide space and venues for these programs to happen, and I think primarily have been under the radar of this sector in terms of policy development.

Certainly, as soon as we can have our doors open, all of us do, following the guidelines that have been put in place. I think we're actually one of many answers to this experience.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you. I also took note that you mentioned only two museums closed throughout the pandemic. I'm wondering what would have happened if there hadn't been federal government supports. Can you imagine what the museum landscape would look like today if those supports hadn't been there over the past two years?

Ms. Heather George: Sure. The average museum—this is not speaking about the national museums—receives about 40% of its funding from government sources. There are some pre-existing sources, but certainly, we needed the additional support through all of these various mechanisms that were put in place by the government.

Again, to get back to the museum policy, this is not necessarily a current issue. The original policy was established in 1970 and last updated in 1990, so you've had multiple opportunities prior to this pandemic to really look at how museums help communities to weather all sorts of storms. We provide a venue for, really, mental health. Other countries around the world prescribe museum visits as a solution to mental health concerns. I think that is something we could look at as well. It isn't just about the dollars. We certainly are grateful for those dollars, but I think as we look towards, hopefully, a slightly rosier future, we need to look at new granting models and new ways of administering the grants that are more responsive to community needs. We need to look at ways of building philanthropy for our entire sector, providing better matching funds and better tax incentives.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you for that.

You were talking about the museum policy, earlier and just now again, being 30 years out of date. What other things would you like to see if we were to update the museum policy? What would you like to see in there to secure the sector?

• (1725)

Ms. Heather George: My goodness. First of all, I think one of the things that the government committed to was holding a discussion nationally about this topic and I think that's incredibly important. Museums are quite diverse, and I should say it's not just museums. This includes zoos, cultural centres, indigenous knowledge centres and the little tiny exhibition space you have at your library. All of these spaces tell these really important stories and help us build civic pride and engagement in society. I think that really the first step in doing this work is to bring the diversity of organizations together.

Of course, we're happy to assist in that, but the CMA is not the only organization that helps to bring these voices forward, and I think we would really like to see the opportunity to have that discussion go forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. George. Thank you, Lisa.

I want to thank the witnesses for taking their time in answering and helping to find solutions to all the questions that you face. Thank you very much.

I would like to entertain a motion to adjourn.

Is it so moved by someone?

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: I have a point of order.

Is there not another round of two minutes for the Conservatives?

The Chair: I think we are within three minutes of ending the committee meeting, Ms. Lewis, so I think we have about three minutes. I don't know that we have another round within that three minutes. It would be nice, but we had a lot of witnesses in this session.

I'm sorry.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: My understanding is that there were two minutes at the end. Can the clerk confirm that?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aimée Belmore): Ms. Lewis, the second round of questions was completed with Ms. Hepfner going last.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Okay.

The Clerk: It would be a third round if we kept going.

The Chair: Thank you.

I declare this meeting adjourned. Thank you again, everyone.

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