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Suggestions for the Canadian Response During the Post-COVID-19 Recovery

Members of The Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology,

My name is Ryan Banfield and I am reaching out from Richmond Hill, Ontario. I truly appreciate the opportunity to voice my concerns and suggestions to the Committee. As a journalist and an active member of my university community, I am eager to take this opportunity to share my thoughts and insights on the priorities that would, if adopted, enable the Government of Canada to best serve its constituents now and into the foreseeable future.

1. The Government of Canada must immediately develop and initiate strategies to mitigate the impact of food insecurity.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing [shortages](#) of farm labour across Canada, which will ultimately result in lower crop yields from our farmers. COVID-19 has also [disrupted](#) the operations of food processing plants across the country. This will likely cause food shortages, decreased selection in grocery stores and higher food prices in a few months' time. If food becomes less accessible, this is one of the worst events that could happen to Canada's lowest income families; many of whom have already been financially harmed by a weakened economy and the job losses which occurred over the past few months. Food shortages and increases in food prices are also a recipe for civil unrest. Finding ways to alleviate this risk should be a top priority of the Canadian Government. While this problem largely falls under the mandate of The

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food, this Committee's understanding of industry, technology and trade is essential in finding a solution as all of those aspects of the Canadian market economy are extremely relevant to ensuring a steady availability of food for our citizens.

2. The Government of Canada must continue to be devoted to lowering our carbon emissions.

While the focus of the Canadian public has shifted away from climate change to topics of COVID-19 and police brutality, the crisis that is climate change still continues. In addition to major emissions-reduction strategies, some other smaller-scale, free-market strategies may help in the transition away from fossil fuels. One particular policy that may be worth considering is reducing the tax on greener technology (such as hybrid-electric vehicles and solar panels) or outright making them tax-free. This would aid in the reduction of Canada's emissions while also making goods more affordable for consumers, which would certainly be welcomed especially during an economic downturn. If working from home does become more the norm in the aftermath of COVID-19, this trend would increase the burden on our internet, forcing the use of more electricity. This is yet another reason to facilitate the transition to greener power.

3. Mental health must be immediately prioritized by the Canadian Government.

The increase in phonecalls to 911 regarding [domestic abuse](#) and the increase in calls to [suicide hotlines](#) during the lockdown demonstrate that crises can occur on both individual and societal scales. While COVID-19 worsened the nation's mental health, none of this is new. Case in point, throughout the past school year, the topic of suicides among [post-secondary students](#) became a

[topic of national discussion](#). Mental health must be maintained as a major topic of public discussion. This has everything to do with the way that the Government of Canada presents itself via its communications channels. Similarly to how the Government of Canada has made clear its stance on social issues such as Pride and multiculturalism, the government ought to take an official stance in solidarity with those suffering from poor mental health both as a result of clinical and situational factors. Canada must officially recognize that its people are in a worse mental state than last year as a result of both the pandemic and the lockdowns. Increased public awareness for issues of mental health is necessary for alleviating the prominence of [stigmas](#) regarding those in poor mental condition. Only then will it become more of a norm for those people to more willingly seek life-saving help through therapy, rehabilitation and calls to hotlines, among other methods.

4. The Government of Canada must pursue policies that decrease our reliance on foreign manufacturing.

In early April, Canada experienced unnecessary [difficulties](#) involved in getting a major shipment of 3M N95 masks from China, including undue interference in this process by the United States.

In early May, Canada declared that another shipment of imported masks were of [substandard quality](#). These events demonstrate the importance of a robust and nimble domestic manufacturing sector. While multinational corporations will naturally favour countries with lower wages as manufacturing hubs, the Government of Canada should do more to incentivize our domestic companies to choose local materials and to ensure that the multinational corporations who remain in Canada do not leave. Again, the strategy of reducing taxes as a way

to impact consumer behaviour may be worth considering. A highly publicized tax reduction on domestically manufactured goods such as automobiles would not only strengthen our domestic manufacturers, it would also provide more affordable goods for consumers.

5. The Government of Canada must facilitate the expansion of a robust, open and nation-wide broadband network.

The COVID-19 crisis showed that some of today's most [resilient industries](#) are ones that do not require physical interaction for its services to be carried out. Furthermore, many smaller companies which operate online are not particularly reliant on physical resources and space (at least not from the business owner's perspective), are not cost intensive (other than upfront costs) and can be operated from employees' homes or other locations with broadband internet access. Facilitating the expansion of our broadband network to help online industries thrive is not only a decent economic strategy in the case of a lockdown, it is also necessary for establishing a strong domestic information-based sector in the absence of crises. Improving internet access can also be used to encourage the creation of lucrative startups, the establishment of which may also help to prevent further [brain drain](#) from Canada to the United States.

6. Political parties must continue to practice the multi-partisan collaborative approach they adopted during the early stages of the crisis.

Throughout the month of April, the historic feuds between political parties were [put aside](#) for the sake of easing the financial pain that was imposed upon Canadians when job losses were

occurring rapidly. This multi-partisan collaboration has resulted in policies which were not only helpful to the public but also caused minimal political upheaval. It is important to continue putting aside these historic feuds when addressing other extremely pressing issues. One issue of particular importance is climate change, a problem with global implications, the responses to which are still divided on [party lines](#). This recommendation is not specifically connected to the mandate of the Committee. However, it is important to note due to the fact that the Committee is made up of Members of Parliament from multiple, often adversarial parties.

The next few months will be a defining period for Canada both in terms of the struggles we will face and the opportunities that will emerge. The Government of Canada has a responsibility to serve its citizens justly. This means helping those who have been uniquely harmed by a crisis that has impacted nearly every aspect of our lives. Not everyone has been impacted equally and the effects of COVID-19 on Canada have been varied. This will become clear over the next few months, even more than it already has. Keep this variation in mind, keep good intentions at heart and see how the recovery process fits into the bigger picture of making Canada economically and environmentally stronger and safer tomorrow than today. Only then will we come out of this crisis better off than the way we went in.

Thank you for your time.

Ryan Banfield