

The road to Canada's COVID-19 outbreak, Pt. 3: timeline of federal government failure at border to slow the virus

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks from behind a podium bearing the hyperlink to a federal government website about the coronavirus disease during a press conference about COVID-19 in front of his residence at Rideau Cottage in Ottawa, on Sunday, March 22, 2020. JUSTIN TANG / THE CANADIAN PRESS

Pt. 3, March: Trudeau attacks calls to close borders: “There is a lot of knee-jerk reaction that isn’t keeping people safe”

COVID-19 exploded upon the world in March 2020, shutting down much of the economy in Europe and North America by mid-month, just as it had already done in Asia in January and February.

But early in the month, the Liberal government in Ottawa clung to the notion that it must not close its borders to travellers, or quarantine them when they arrived, even as that was by then standard practice in Asia, and even as infection brought in by travellers were spreading in Canadian towns and cities.

Yet by the end of the month, the Liberal policy did a complete about-face, shutting down our borders.

In Parts [1](#) and [2](#), we looked at the multi-partisan in effort to dig in and question Canada's border policies on COVID-19. In Part. 3 of our series, the timeline is extended into March, detailing the key quotes and debates leading to the federal policy change.

March 4. Trudeau's wife **Sophie Gregoire Trudeau** is in London England for a major event, WE Day. She posts image on Instagram and posed for photos with celebrities including Idris Elba and Lewis Hamilton.

March 5: Justin Trudeau strongly affirms Canada's open borders approach to reporters: "We recognize there are countries that make different decisions. The decisions we make are based on the best recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the tremendous health experts who work within Canada and around the world...We know that keeping Canadians safe needs to be done in the right way and we're going to keep doing things that actually keep Canadians safe. There is a lot of misinformation out there, there is a lot of knee-jerk reaction that isn't keeping people safe. That is having real, challenging impacts on communities, on community safety."

March 6: The Canadian government awards contracts for research into coronavirus, including a \$828,046 to the University of Alberta and Wuhan Institute of Virology, the same laboratory that has been linked by some to the outbreak, though this was only speculation, with nothing proven (in April the Washington Post would report on fears of sloppy standards at the lab).

"The immediate priority focuses on developing two complementary techniques to be performed on-site and in resource-limited settings, in support of rapid diagnosis of COVID-19," the Canadian government reports: "The mid-term priority focuses on validating and evaluating the new diagnostic tests for field applications in the epidemic center of COVID-19. Our team members in Wuhan who currently perform the standard diagnostic tests will lead this effort. Once validated and approved,

the new diagnostic tools will be used to support screening and diagnosis of COVID-19 at the community level.

March 8. **Gregoire** continues to post on Instagram.



March 9: Canada confirms its first death related to COVID-19.

March 9: Alain Rayes, Conservative MP for Richmond-Arthabaska, Que, asks in the House: "Many countries are starting to talk about COVID-19 as a global pandemic. As of today, the vast majority of developed countries have already implemented measures for travellers. Here in Canada, there are no restrictions on or monitoring of people entering the country. My question is for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. Does he intend to ban travellers from countries such as China, Iran or Italy from entering Canada?"

Health Minister **Patty Hajdu** replies: "We have been carefully screening travellers from a variety of countries, based on expert advice from the World Health Organization and many other medical professionals that have indicated to us that the best effort is to ensure we are asking travellers at the border to identify themselves, if they have travelled from specific regions. There are special questions on the kiosks. If a traveller is unwell, he or she is referred to public health and the local public health authorities."

Bloc MP **Kristina Michaud** asks: "On Friday, travellers at the Montréal-Trudeau International Airport complained that passengers arriving from at-risk areas were not being tested. Some travellers even likened the airport to a sieve. We need to protect the public against the spread of this virus. The government must issue clear directives to ensure that no cases of the virus are allowed in. Will the government set up detection measures for the coronavirus at all border crossings, starting with airports?"



Hysterical media urges public not to panic over Coronavirus. (Cartoon by Malcolm Mayes) /Malcolm Mayes

Hajdu responds: "I would like to thank the hard-working men and women of both the CBSA and the Public Health Agency of Canada who have been working together so diligently for several months to ensure that we can support the health of Canadians as they come back home and also support the health of international travellers ... As you know, and as I have been saying for two and a half months, this is a situation that is very fluid. It has been evolving across the globe, and we see it is evolving very rapidly here in Canada as well. The number of cases in Canada and around the world continues to increase, and globally now there are more than 100 countries affected. I am sure you all saw that the World Health Organization has declared that this is a pandemic. However, that is not shocking to us because we have been acting as if it had this potential in the early days, and certainly over the last several weeks and months we've been working to prepare

Canada for a worst-case scenario. I will remind the members that we have been acting as if we were in a pandemic since the beginning. When we noticed the small cluster of illnesses in Wuhan, we knew that this was an issue of significant concern. Dr. Tam is an expert adviser on the World Health Organization committee that continually reviews the evidence. We have been having these conversations daily.”

March 11: The World Health Organization declares the global outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic.

March 11: Dr. **Theresa Tam**, Canada’s chief public health officer, at Parliamentary Health Committee: “The WHO did call this a pandemic today, but the key message is that all countries can still change the course of this pandemic by doing a number of things. I will go through them very quickly, but I believe we’re already doing them.”

In her list of things needed to be done, she did not include border closures or strictures, but says: “Second is to detect and then to protect the population, and to treat if necessary. I think the detection is very important. We have been setting up surveillance systems and laboratory testing since the start.”

Bloc MP **Luc Thériault** asks: “You said earlier that, from the start, you’ve managed this crisis as if it were a pandemic. With all due respect, I doubt this very much ... The federal government must — and this falls under its jurisdiction — protect the public, properly identify cases and determine any restriction. In that respect, the news isn’t necessarily good, based on what we’re hearing from the customs workers. Will you tighten up these measures? When will the Public Health Agency of Canada take responsibility for tightening up screening measures and send clear guidelines to the Canada Border Services Agency officers working at the border? Your current approach is to inform people and let them decide what they must do in terms of good practices to protect themselves. When will the Public Health Agency of Canada take responsibility for tightening up screening measures and send clear guidelines to the Canada Border Services Agency officers working at the border?”

Hajdu replies: "I'll first of all say that we've been using science and evidence to make the decisions around borders. I'll point you to Italy, who had some of the strongest border measures in the G7, who closed their borders in fact to China, and who then, all of a sudden, had an incredible outbreak. That's because ... of course, the science will settle this as well, but there is some speculation that it's because people came in from a whole bunch of other routes that were not as direct.

"Instead, we chose to use World Health Organization recommendations that said it is much better to have targeted measures at the border. That helps you identify the people who are coming from severely affected areas, which can help ensure that you know who is coming in, that they have the information about what to do and that we can monitor them as they self-isolate.

"The first location that was added to the screening kiosk was Hubei. When people came from an affected region, they were met by CBSA and public health officials. CBSA would pull them aside and ask them some questions about their health. Public health would work with them, if in fact they were symptomatic, and would transfer them to the local health facility. If they were not symptomatic, then they were asked to self-isolate at home with a mandatory requirement to check in with public health within 24 hours. We have evidence that there was a very high compliance rate. We added Iran as a country of concern as well, because Iran, obviously, had cases that in fact weren't detected until we had identified a case from Iran. I would also remind you that a virus does not know borders. Over 100 countries now have coronavirus in their country. No country will be left unaffected by the time this is over."



Social Media repeatedly hits panic button with coronavirus jackhammer.
(Cartoon by Malcolm Mayes) /Malcolm Mayes

Tam adds: "I think that in the public health domain we certainly have to remember that our borders are not a solid wall, as was just said. They're but one layer of protection, and it is never a perfect layer. The greater the number of countries affected, you can imagine that trying to screen people at the borders becomes a much more ineffective means of addressing the coronavirus outbreak.

"Nonetheless, we do use a very rigorous risk assessment. We've also put several countries on our level three travel health notice, those being China, Iran and, now, all of Italy and some areas of Korea. You have to focus your efforts. Otherwise, you're screening every single traveller.

"What we have chosen to do, which I think is really important, is to tell every international traveller that when they come back into Canada or come into Canada they must watch for symptoms, immediately go home if they're sick and then call ahead to their health system. It is not manageable with over a hundred countries having coronavirus. You need to shore up your health system, protect the vulnerable, such as those in long-term care facilities and hospitals, and protect your health workers.

"It is a massive societal effort. Every aspect of the public health system is already turned on and fully alert, but you cannot flatten this curve without

every member of the public working with you. That's why, while borders are one layer, the other layers are more important if you're going to actually do something about breaking any chains of transmission in Canada.

"I do know that we have really stepped up our presence at the border. I think the border is the moment for education and telling people what to do when they come in."

Tam mentions the mortality rate for this virus was just under 1 per cent. "I think we can assume that this is an outbreak that's very serious ... Right now the best estimate is that it could be just under one per cent, depending on which country you're in, whereas a pandemic influenza, the worst one, is going to be one per cent to two per cent. If this is close enough to a one per cent case fatality, it is a very serious situation.

"It is the first coronavirus to cause a pandemic. It is probably a virus that has hit the sweet spot. It is not completely lethal, so there are people with mild illnesses and a range of clinical symptoms who can transmit the virus, for instance. The severe end of the spectrum is with people who are older in age and have underlying medical conditions, but there's a bulk of the illness in working-age adults. We're not seeing it much in kids.

"If you looked at the full range of mild, moderate and severe and were looking at the likelihood of exposure versus the severity of the disease, this is hitting at about a moderate or medium scenario. However, viruses always have surprises, which is why we have to keep monitoring it. It may change the trajectory."

March 12. It is announced that the Prime Minister's wife Sophie Gregoire has contracted COVID-19 and the Prime Minister has gone into 14-day sequestration.

In the House of Commons, Conservative leader Andrew **Scheer** sates: "The World Health Organization has declared coronavirus to be a pandemic, and while the government says that the risk to Canadians is low, countries around the world are taking decisive action. Italy is one of the hardest-hit countries and it has initiated many measures to lock parts of that country down.

However, when the final flight out of Italy landed here, passengers were not screened. No temperatures were taken and no one was quarantined. They were given a pamphlet and sent on their way. Is the government convinced that a departmental pamphlet is enough to reduce the spread of this disease?"

Chrystia Freeland, deputy prime minister and minister of intergovernmental affairs, replies: "We need to continue to listen to our medical experts. They are telling us that the situation will get worse before it gets better. They also say that Canada is well prepared."

March 12: Bloc MP **Claude DeBellefeuille** asks in the House: "Just yesterday, travellers arriving from Italy at Pierre Elliott Trudeau airport were shocked to see that no one asked them any questions. They were coming from one of the largest outbreak zones in the world, yet they were simply handed a pamphlet. This afternoon, the government's travel advisory for Europe still indicated the lowest possible risk level, even though when we are in a full-blown pandemic. There is a happy medium between panicking and doing nothing. Will the government finally take real measures to monitor the coronavirus?"

Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, replies: "Mr. Speaker, let me assure the member opposite that we, in fact, have implemented very significant new enhanced screening and detection processes for all of our CBSA officers. In addition, we have made sure that they have the training and equipment they need to do this important job. All persons who enter this country from affected regions are subject to questioning by our CBSA officers, and those who are determined to be symptomatic are quickly referred to our public health officials. I want to assure the member opposite that our officers stand ready. They have the tools and training they need to do their part to assist in this public health crisis."

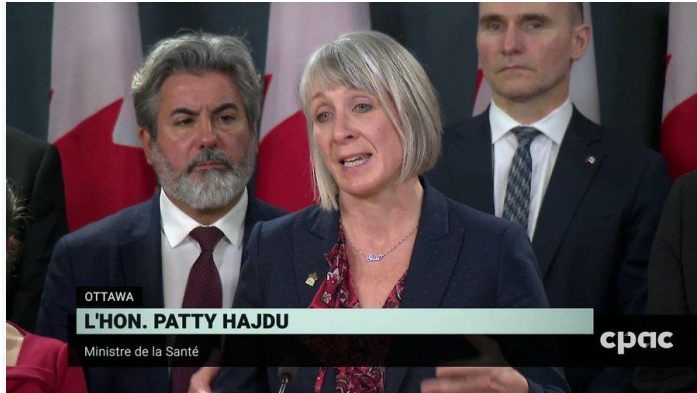


Coronavirus wrecking ball destroys economy. (Cartoon by Malcolm Mayes) /Malcolm Mayes

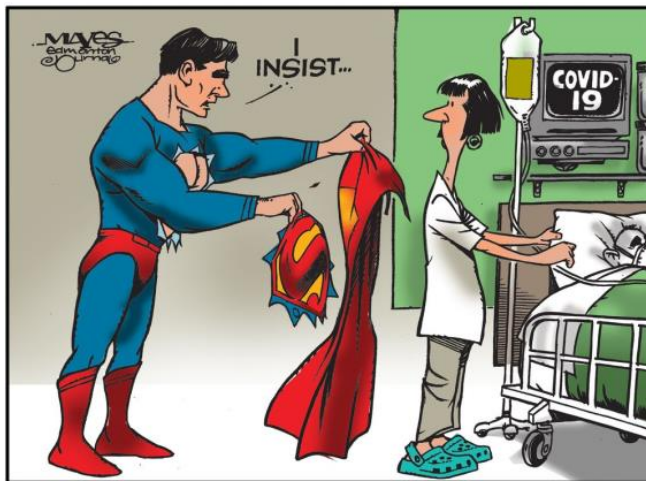
March 13: Canada advises Canadians to avoid all non-essential travel outside of Canada until further notice. "My advice is to postpone or cancel all non-essential travel outside of Canada. This means reconsidering your vacations, going to sporting and entertainment events, large international conferences," Tam says during a press conference.

Asked if Canada was considering a similar ban, or imposing border measures between our country and the United States, Minister of Health **Patty Hajdu** says: "Canadians think we can stop this at the border. But what we see is a global pandemic, which means that border measures are highly ineffective and, in some cases, can create harm. We see that in countries that had the worst expressions, the tightest borders."

Health Minister Patty Hajdu offering a pretty compelling reasons why enacting wide travel bans and border shutdowns aren't productive.



March 13: Justin Trudeau at his press conference in quarantine on Canada's own open borders: "We will recall that a number of weeks ago in the beginnings there was discussion of whether or not we should entirely close our borders to China the way the United States did. We did not. We were able to manage it in a way that allowed for control and a non-spread of the virus that gives us confidence that our public health officials are giving us the right recommendations for Canada."



Superman offers cape to Coronavirus nurse. (Cartoon by Malcolm Mayes) /Malcolm Mayes

March 16: The federal government changes direction abruptly, with Canada closing its doors to the world by severely restricting international flights. The federal government advises all returning Canadians entering home to voluntarily self-isolate for 14 days. Prime Minister **Trudeau** also says all

international visitors to Canada will be turned around at the airport, with the exception of Americans, diplomats and flight crews.

Trudeau says: "I know that these measures are far reaching. They are exceptional circumstances calling for exceptional measures... From the very beginning, Canada's response has been based on the latest available science and advice from our world-class health professionals. Today's announcement is no different. These measures will help save lives.

"I want to remind all Canadians that they should avoid non-essential travel outside of our country until further notice. Canadian travellers should return to Canada via commercial means while it is still possible to do so. Let me be clear. If you're abroad, it's time for you to come home. If you've just arrived, you must self-isolate for 14 days. And finally, all Canadians, as much as possible, should stay home."

A reporter says to **Trudeau**: "You've said that your decisions thus far have been dictated by science. What is the science behind leaving the US border open, but denying entry to other travellers?"

Trudeau responds: "We recognize that the level of integration of our two economies, and the coordination that we've had over the past while, puts the US in a separate category from the rest of the world."

A reporter puts **Hajdu's** March 13 quote about border controls being ineffective to **Trudeau**.

Trudeau responds: "We have seen over time, various countries take very stiff border measures that proved ineffective... We've now come to the point where the best advice from public health officials is that additional border measures on top of the social distancing measures that we are encouraging domestically is the right combination to move forward now."

At a press conference, Dr. **Tam** says they've asked that no one go outside the border unless it's essential and that when you come back you self-isolate. "We have to maintain essential movement of people and services as well. And I think that's the key to every country in the world," she says.

Is self-isolation mandatory? "We're asking that all travellers who come back self-isolate. This is not essentially ordered ... It is impossible to keep tabs on every traveller that comes in."

Before they had asked every traveller to self-monitor, Tam explains, now they're asking to self-isolate.

Why not close the border?

"Countries that have enacted travel bans have not been able to keep out this particular virus," she says.

The key, she says, is rapid detection, looking to contact tracing and breaking the chains of transmission in Canada. "The front end border is but one layer of protection and is never perfect. You can get people coming in in other ways as well."

Countries impacted by the virus the most have sometimes had the most stringent border measures, she says.

March 17: Public Safety Minister **Bill Blair** says Canada will continue to allow in irregular border crossers and pledges to screen them for COVID-19 and put them in quarantine. "Because of the need for the 14-day self-isolation, we are now making separate arrangements for those individuals to be placed in appropriate shelter in order to accommodate the requirement for the period of isolation. We are doing this because we believe it is necessary and in the best interest of keeping all Canadians healthy and safe."



Liberal MP Bill Blair in 2018 ASHLEY FRASER/POSTMEDIA

March 18: Canada implements the ban on foreign nationals from all countries, except the United States, from entering Canada. The Canada-U.S. border is closed to all non-essential travel, and redirected international passenger flight arrivals to four airports in Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal.

Justin Trudeau says: "We closed the borders to overseas travel on Monday. And today, two days later we announce that we are restricting nonessential travel between Canada and the United States. This is something that we've been coordinating with the United States on over the past days. Yesterday, the deputy prime minister Freeland reached out to Vice President Pence, to really advance these negotiations. And were able to announce it in a coordinated fashion on both sides of the border this morning. This is something that we need to move forward on to protect Canadians."

March 19: From Dr. **Tam**: "All persons arriving in Canada: You must self-isolate for 14 days. Join Canada's effort to disrupt the transmission of COVID-19."

March 19: Taiwan's Vice President **Chen Chien-ien** lashes out at China and the WHO, saying that early in the pandemic Taiwanese doctors had heard from their mainland China colleagues that medical staff treating patients were getting sick — an obvious sign of person-to-person transmissions, the Financial Times reports. Taiwan continues to try to share information about its work stopping COVID-19-spread, but is unable to share that information at the International Health Regulations site, which is run by the WHO to update countries.

March 20: Former federal Conservative cabinet minister **James Moore** tweets: "Canada should table a resolution at the UN General Assembly calling for the immediate closure of the deadly and irresponsible wild animal and wet markets in China; enforced by international inspections and economic sanctions for non-compliance."

March 20: The federal government reverses itself on asylum seekers, announcing they will now be rejected at the border and returned to the

United States. Prime Minister **Trudeau** tells reporters: "Today Canada and the United States are announcing a reciprocal arrangement where we will now be returning irregular migrants who attempt to cross anywhere at the Canada/US border... In regards to the agreement we just worked out over the past 24 hours with the Americans, we recognize that these are exceptional times and someone who comes to the border to request asylum will be turned back to American authorities, as happens right now when someone comes to an official border crossing and requests asylum, we turn them over to American authorities at the border where they are released almost immediately into the United States. They are, for the most part, people who are legally in the United States and that is something we are confident about. We also have ensured that we are comfortable with this process as being in line with Canada's values on the treatment of refugees and vulnerable people."

And **Bill Blair** tells reporters: "It's part of a larger suite of measures that we are putting in place to have better control of non-essential passage of that border. This is a challenge to manage and regulate, and so to address that challenge in these extraordinary circumstances, we've agreed that this is the appropriate measure to put in place."

March 22: Travel advice from the government of Canada: "Travellers arriving in Canada should self-isolate for 14 days and monitor their health for #COVID19 symptoms. If you have symptoms upon arrival, you will be given instructions on the next steps to take."

March 24: From Dr. Tam: "To lower travel-related cases, travellers coming into Canada MUST self-isolate at home for 14-days, even if no symptoms. As long as no symptoms, it's okay to go outside for walk but keep 2 metres away from others."

March 25: Again going against WHO policy, Canada puts in mandatory self-isolation for incoming travellers, with large fines for violators.

March 25: From Dr. **Tam:** "Day over day increases in COVID-19 cases and a fundamental shift from mostly travel-related cases in the early part of the outbreak, to now over half of new cases being linked to community spread... GOC advisories to avoid non-essential travel have reduced travel related cases,

but we still need to do all that we can to reduce the impact and spread from travel imported cases. Today the GOC began implementing new measures making 14-day isolation mandatory under the Quarantine Act for all travellers coming to Canada. This is part of an all-out effort to #SlowTheSpread.”

March 25: From Dr. **Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesu**, secretary-general of the WHO: “If you remember, we have been saying for more than two months now, this virus is public enemy number one. I think we squandered the first window of opportunity. But we are saying today in my message, I made it clear that this is a second opportunity which we should not squander and do everything to suppress and control this virus.”

At the same time, the [Change.org petition](#) calling for the resignation of Dr. Ghebreyesu now has more than 600,000 supporters.

March 25: Olivia Stefanovich of the CBC asks **Trudeau**: “We’ve learned that sick Canadian travellers are masking COVID-19 symptoms to get through airport screening.

Why does Canada not test temperatures, screen air passengers for fever, or use thermal screening at airports? Should there be thermal screening and consequences for those who mask their symptoms?... Should there be consequences for those who mask their symptoms, and should these passengers also be forced to sign a document to make sure they self-isolate? How can you ensure that?”

Trudeau replies: “We know that people need to isolate when they land in Canada. They agree to an attestation on their processing when they arrive, that they will self-isolate for 14 days. That is an important thing. And Canadians with symptoms will not be allowed to board flights coming home. That is a difficult measure, I know, for many people, for many families, but we need to make sure we’re doing everything we can to keep Canadians safe.”

Stefanovich continues: “But some passengers are masking their symptoms. What are the consequences for that?”

Trudeau replies: "Okay. We will continue to do what is necessary and have been explaining to people what it is they need to do in order to keep themselves safe and keep Canadians safe."

March 26: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs for China says Chinese leader Xi Jinping has written to WHO leader Ghebreyesu, praising him: "Xi noted that WHO's vigorous efforts in promoting international cooperation against COVID-19 under the leadership of Dr. **Tedros** have been widely recognized by the international community. China will continue to lend firm support to his personal and WHO's active role in leading the international cooperation against the outbreak. China has all along been an enthusiastic supporter to the global fight against the outbreak." The department communication notes Jinping wrote to China in response to Dr. Ghebreyesu's letter of March 17, where the WHO leader "expressed his deep appreciation for the Chinese government's financial support for WHO and the international response effort."

March 26: China brings in a travel ban, making it the latest country to go against the WHO guidelines to not ban travel.

March 26: Canada now has 4043 cases of COVID-19, 39 deaths. Taiwan, expected to have the world's second biggest outbreak, has 252 cases and two deaths.

March 26: Justin Trudeau tweets: "We are implementing the Quarantine Act to keep all Canadians safe. So let me be clear: If you do not go home and stay home for at least 14 days after coming back into Canada, you could face serious fines or prison time."

March 26: Dr. Tam: "The lesson we are learning from COVID-19 pandemic is that none of us can be safe and healthy unless we are making sure that all of us, worldwide, are safe and healthy. #OneWorld #StrongerTogether... The seriousness of COVID-19 cannot be overstated."

March 26: Molly Thomas of CTV asks Trudeau: "I want to ask about, there's more than 30,000 cases alone in New York, that's a state that borders parts of

Ontario and Quebec. Would we ever ban essential goods or people coming in specifically from that hotspot?"

Trudeau says: "We understand that part of protecting Canadians is ensuring a good supply of food, of medical supplies, of necessary equipment across our border. We will continue to look for ways to make sure we're keeping Canadians safe while providing us with the things we need."

March 28: The Chinese Embassy in Ottawa tweets of a supply donation to Canada: "On March 27, Bank of China donates medical supplies (including 30000 medical masks, 10000 sets of protective clothing, 10000 goggles and 50000 pairs of gloves, followed by N95 medical masks) to Canada fighting against COVID-19. We are together!"

In response, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs **François-Philippe Champagne** tweets: "Thank you for this donation. In the face of a global pandemic, supporting each other is not only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do."



Ryan Saavedra  @RealSaavedra · Mar 28

March 17: China announces that it is expelling American journalists out of the country

March 19: China announces for the first time that over the previous 24 hours (3/18) that it had no new locally transmitted coronavirus cases and the 34 new cases it had were all from overseas

March 28: Hong Kong english language show The Pulse broadcasts interview (17:00 minute mark of Youtube video for full segment) with the WHO's **Bruce Aylward**. **Aylward** is a Canadian, an international infectious disease expert, and an advisor to the WHO director general. **Aylward** refuses to address whether Taiwan should be part of the WHO or discuss in specific terms Taiwan's success. A clip of him trying to avoid the questions on Taiwan goes viral internationally. As The Federalist described the interview:

March 28: Numerous commentators from around the world rapidly weigh in on the **Aylward** interview.

From the progressive U.S. outlet, Daily Beast columnist **Gordon G. Chang** says: "Aylward's behaviour reminds us that either we remove China's pernicious influence in multilateral institutions like the World Health Organization or the world's free states defund them and start over."

New York Times and CNN part time writer **Ezra Cheung** says: "It is an embarrassing scene. WHO (senior advisor to the Director General) Bruce Aylward, hangs up in an interview with RTHK when he is asked about reconsidering Taiwan's membership. Ironically, despite being so close to China, Taiwan manages to keep the #coronavirus infection and fatality rate low."

And **Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian**, the China-USA reporter for the tech business site Axios: "This is really stunning. Beijing's power over the speech of a Canadian WHO official."

And Los Angeles Times columnist **Jonah Golberg**: "WHO really carrying a lot of water for Beijing these days."

March 29: United States Senator **Marco Rubio** weighs in on Aylward in a statement: "Why is the WHO choosing to play politics amid a global pandemic? Taiwan should be lauded for how they have handled Covid_19."

And NBC news Beijing Bureau Chief **Eunice Yoon**: "The WHO in damage control after Bruce Aylward's cringey interview with Hong Kong The Pulse RTHK's Yvonne Tong."

In Australia, Dr. **Malcolm Davis**, Senior Analyst of Australian Strategic Policy Institute: "The WHO's Dr. Bruce Aylward refuses to mention Taiwan. This is a shameful display of lack of professional integrity, not only by Aylward, but also by the WHO which clearly is loyal to Beijing which funds them."

But Conservative Senator **Linda Frum** put Aylward's comment in a different context:

"Here's another take: Dr. Aylward needs Chinese co-operation to understand Covid-19 on behalf of rest of world and doesn't want to get bogged down in a

political fight which distracts from his core mission. I also did a double take but let's remember he's here as a doctor not a politician."

Yaqui Wang, the China researcher for Human Rights Watch, reports: "Interestingly, Aylward's reaction was called 'brilliant' by Chinese state media. The media/internet environment in China is increasingly its own universe, separated from the rest of the world."

March 29: The WHO responds to the Aylward situation, issuing a statement about the organizations policy on information: "In a recent interview, the WHO official who headed the joint international mission to China, did not answer a question on Taiwan's response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The question of Taiwanese membership in WHO is up to WHO Member States, not WHO staff. However, WHO is working closely with all health authorities who are facing the current coronavirus pandemic, *including Taiwanese health experts...* Two Taiwanese public health experts participated in the Global Research and Innovation Forum organized by WHO on 11-12 February 2020, thus contributing, alongside other world scientists, including from mainland China, to critical research questions and to finding ways to work together to advance the response."

In response to the WHO's statement, **Felicia Sonmez**, the Washington Post's national political reporter, said: "Simple enough — why couldn't Aylward have just said this rather than pretending his audio cut out and ending the interview?"

March 29: Dr. **Tam**: "Snowbirds, March Break & other travellers coming into Canada now/in the coming days: A) You MUST respect the mandatory quarantine now in place, which requires you to go straight home, Stay Home & Self-Isolate for 14 days. B) DO NOT stop along the way. Do arrange groceries & essentials by phone, online or through friends, neighbours, community."

March 30: Former Prime Minister **Stephen Harper**: "As we head into the third week of undertaking emergency measures to battle COVID-19, Laureen and I extend our heartfelt thanks to frontline healthcare and essential service

professionals across Canada who are working tirelessly to support our communities; you are the real heroes!”



A nurse gathers a sample at a COVID-19 drive-thru test site in Calgary on Friday, March 13, 2020. SUPPLIED

March 30: Dr. **Tam** on face masks: “We want to protect our frontline healthcare workers and prioritizing supply is critically important and we’re looking at all sorts of avenues to procure. For the public, I think the current scientific evidence we are continuing to evaluation. Of course we can be flexible if we find any new evidence. But I think the scientific evidence is that if you are sick then put on a mask to prevent those droplets from flying in any space as you’re perhaps going to a clinic or having to move around the community for essential needs. Putting a mask on an asymptomatic person is not beneficial obviously if you’re not affected. If you have close contact of a case, under certain circumstances, you’ll also be in self-isolation by the way if you’re in close contact of a case, and you need to move for any essential reasons that’s perhaps another situation. What we worry about is actually the potential negative aspects of wearing masks, where people are not protecting their eyes or other aspects of where the virus could enter your body and that gives you a false sense of confidence. But also it increases the touching of your face. If you think about if, if you got a mask around face a mask around your face, sometimes you can’t help it because you are just touching parts of

your face. The other thing is that the outside of the mask could be contaminated as well. The key is hand-washing, absolutely, for sure.”

March 30: Conservative MP Michelle Rempel Garner tweets: “If we can reduce the R0 by wearing homemade masks while simultaneously saving the limited supply of surgical / N95 masks for those providing care on the front lines, why wouldn’t we? Even if it’s a small protection, why wouldn’t we add it to everything else we’re doing?”

March 30: Conservative Sen. Linda Frum tweets about news from Austria that wearing a mask in public is now compulsory there: “If the pattern holds this means Canada will be reversing its current policy on masks 3 weeks from now.”

March 30: Brian Lilley, columnist for the Toronto Sun, asks, “The travel screening measures that you talked about on Saturday, you had previously dismissed those for international flights. You had dismissed calls for banning travel earlier on even just less than two weeks before you eventually did. At that point, most of the cases of COVID-19 were travellers coming into Canada. Now it’s 63% community spread. Do you regret not acting sooner on travel restrictions at airports for international flights from hotspots?”

Trudeau replies: “I think there are going to be lots of analysis after the fact about what around happened when, what could have happened a few days earlier, what only needed to happen a few days later. Our focus every step of the way is doing what was necessary at every moment based on the recommendations of experts, based on science, and doing what we can to keep Canadians safe. We’re obviously not — in an unprecedented situation — always going to get things perfectly right but we’re going to continue to be committed to doing the right things as best we can, and figuring out what works, what doesn’t work, and moving forward in a way that is both nimble and focused on helping Canadians in so much as a government can be nimble and agile.”

March 30: Edmonton Journal columnist **David Staples** discusses Canada’s border response with Danielle Smith in Calgary in radio interview.

March 30: Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch in New York, [links](#) to a Guardian story on the Aylward incident and tweets: "This WHO official's evasive and dishonest response to a journalist's simple inquiry about Taiwan is consistent with his dishonest and slanted reporting about the coronavirus in China. He ignores Beijing's cover-up and refusal to allow independent inquiry."

March 30: Alberta Premier **Jason Kenney** at telephone public town hall: "China lied to the world."

March 30: Doctors Without Borders and Amnesty International [calls](#) on the Canadian government to immediately reverse its March 20 legislation to shut the Canada-US border to people seeking refugee protection and return them to the US: "Canada's ill-conceived decision to close the border as a COVID-19 public health measure will endanger people, runs counter to best practice for outbreak control, and flouts the international legal norms that Canada consistently claims to defend. Canada has an opportunity to exemplify the international standard it wants to set by protecting the public's health and upholding international law."

<https://edmontonjournal.com/news/national/the-road-to-canadas-covid-19-outbreak-pt-3-timeline-of-federal-government-failure-at-border-to-slow-the-virus/>