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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.)): I'd like to call this meeting to order. It's good to see all of you here today.

We have some very special witnesses to testify today and to talk about the supplementary estimates.

I'd like to welcome the Minister of National Defence and ask him to introduce his team. Minister, then you will have time for your opening statements.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence): Madam Chair, first of all, I want to congratulate you on your recent appointment as chair, and I thank everyone here for the tremendous work they do as part of this committee.

I see that I'll be here for two hours today. I always enjoy having these conversations. Normally it's four hours at committee of the whole. Hopefully we can get everything done in two hours.

Truly, I have a wonderful team. I'd like to introduce you to my deputy minister, Jody Thomas; our vice chief of the defence staff, Lieutenant-General Jean-Marc Lanthier; Ms. Shelly Bruce, chief of CSE; our chief financial officer, Cheri Crosby; Mr. Troy Crosby, ADM materiel; and Rob Chambers, assistant deputy minister, infrastructure and environment.

Some of you may have already heard the announcement that our vice chief of the defence staff is retiring. I want to personally take the opportunity in front of all of you to thank Jean-Marc for his tremendous 31 years of service.

Thank you very much.

Lieutenant-General Jean-Marc Lanthier (Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present the supplementary estimates (B) for the Department of National Defence and the Communications Security Establishment.

Our allies and partners, and Canadians, know that the defence team is always here for them, ready to answer the call at any given moment.

Our Canadian Armed Forces assisted with record snowfalls in Newfoundland as well as responded to wildfires all the way into Australia. They helped bring Canadians home safely from China

and elsewhere, as they mobilized to establish a safe and comfortable quarantine space at CFB Trenton in the face of COVID-19.

That is just in the first two months of this year. As you know, it has been extremely busy for us.

These events all underscore the need for a strong and agile defence team. It is our job to make sure that the team has the support they need to be effective. That is why my number one priority has always been to look after the women and men of our defence team in the Canadian Armed Forces and also their families.

Two and a half years into Canada's defence policy, "Strong, Secure, Engaged", we are moving forward with our plan to support our people so that they can do the challenging jobs that we ask of them. Through these estimates, we are requesting approximately \$796.9 million to continue implementing SSE. The majority of that funding relates directly to the care of our people.

We take our responsibility to take care of our members and their families very seriously. That is why we stood up the Canadian Armed Forces transition group to support ill and injured Canadian Armed Forces members and to ease transition for our members, our veterans and their families.

We also enhanced tax relief for Canadian Armed Forces members deployed on international operations, to recognize them for their hard work and to ease some of the stress for them and their families.

Our reservists also form a very critical part of our defence team. They help with flood relief efforts and also in fighting fires. They do all of this often while maintaining a career outside the military. They too deserve our full support. That is why we made sure that reservists take home the same day's pay for the same day's work as their regular force colleagues.

We also recognize how challenging it can be for the families that serve alongside our members. It is one of the reasons that we are working through Seamless Canada with provinces and territories to make relocation easier. We are helping to give military spouses dedicated access to jobs with national employers in the private and public sectors through the Military Spousal Employment Network.

All the while, we are focused on changing the defence team culture to make sure that the organization is more welcoming, equitable and reflective of the Canadians that we serve. That is why we apply a gender-based analysis plus lens during the development of our programs and policies, to enhance our capabilities to make us more responsive to the needs of our workforce and the people who are also called upon to protect. It is why we are working hard to recruit more women into our forces.

Since 2015, we've doubled women's enrolment in the reserve force and increased enrolment by 72% in the regular force. Women now make up 15.9% of the Canadian Armed Forces membership.

In NATO, where the average of the active duty women across NATO nations is at 11%, Canadian women are also taking on very important leadership roles as well. There is more work to be done but we will not waver in our commitment to our success.

Part of that work also means recognizing that the Canadian Armed Forces has not always been a welcoming and safe environment for everyone. These estimates include \$148.6 million for defence team members who were victims of sexual assault, harassment and discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation. We hope that this settlement will help bring the survivors closure and healing.

We continue to work towards a respectful work culture that is free from harassment and discrimination. The department is also working with our government partners to implement the final settlement agreement of the LGBT purge class action lawsuit. We have evolved our military justice system to better deal with harmful behaviours through Bill C-77, which received royal assent last summer. We will not stop until all of our members feel valued, cared for and supported.

• (1535)

Taking care of our people also means equipping them to do their jobs. SSE provides a road map and carves the funding out of our fiscal framework to allow us to do this.

We have already completed or started more than two-thirds of the projects that were outlined in our defence policy. These projects not only ensure that the defence team is ready to meet modern security demands, but they also have a significant impact on the Canadian economy. Taking the joint support ships, for example, to date under that project, we have awarded contracts that contribute close to \$950 million to Canada's GDP. This maintains close to 740 jobs annually. We have selected the design of our new Canadian surface combatants, modernizing our current Halifax class frigates. We also launched the second of six new Arctic and offshore patrol ships for our navy.

Through these estimates, we are requesting \$490.8 million to advance many more capital projects, such as upgrading capabilities on

our helicopters, ships, planes and submarines; procuring new surveillance capabilities through satellite and space-based technologies; and modernizing equipment, facilities and our infrastructure.

Our government is committed to reducing our emissions to help reduce the impact of climate change. It is why all of our defence infrastructure projects are done with an eye towards greening defence. We have built LEED silver standard or equivalent armouries in Halifax, Saint-Hubert and Sainte-Foy. Investments like these have helped to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 32% from 2005 levels.

Our investments also produce economic benefits for communities across Canada. These are investments like the Nanisivik naval facility, and upgrades to runways in Inuvik and Goose Bay, which increase access into these communities and bring economic opportunity.

Just as we partnered with Treaty 1 first nations to transfer the Kapyong lands, we are working closely with indigenous partners as we look to enhance our ability to operate in the north. We have collaborated with more than 25 indigenous partners on the new whole-of-government Arctic and northern policy framework. We are also advancing research and development, investing in innovation to help solve key challenges that will benefit all, including our northern and indigenous communities.

The Canadian Rangers are a direct link to these communities. As Canada's eyes and ears in the north, they are instrumental in both Arctic sovereignty and search and rescue operations. The Canadian Armed Forces will continue to work with the Canadian Rangers to defend Canada's rights and sovereignty, to keep the north safe and well defended and to ensure that the Arctic remains a region of peace and stability.

In this ever-evolving security environment, we need every advantage to help us identify, prepare for and defend against threats to our country. That is why our government is committed to building on the successes of the Communications Security Establishment and the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. Through these estimates, we are requesting a funding transfer so that CSE will keep pace with advancement in quantum technology and exercise new authorities to conduct cyber operations to support national defence.

Even with all the right people, all the right resources and all the right technology, Canada cannot tackle modern defence challenges alone. We cannot be on an island of stability in an ocean of turmoil. Eventually, the negative ripples will reach our shores. That is why we are committed to being a reliable partner and a good global citizen.

We continue to collaborate with our closest partner, the United States, on continental defence, and we are modernizing NORAD.

We are pleased that the Iraqi government has also reaffirmed its support for NATO's continued presence and its training mission, which Canadian Major-General Jennie Carignan proudly leads.

Through these estimates, we are requesting \$132.5 million to continue supporting NATO assurance and deterrence measures.

Canada leads a battle group in Latvia and supports NATO air policing in Romania. We also contribute to the standing NATO maritime group and NATO's high-readiness force. We have rejoined the NATO airborne early warning and control force, known as AWACS.

We also play a very important role with the United Nations. Last summer, we completed the air task force deployment to the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali. We continue to maintain staff officers in support of that mission. We also began providing cross-mission tactical airlift support to two other UN missions as part of Operation Presence in Uganda.

● (1540)

The funding we are requesting today will also allow us to keep our people at the centre of everything we do. Every day they represent Canada with professionalism, leadership and excellence. For that we owe them the right tools to get the job done as well as our unwavering support and our most profound gratitude.

Madam Chair, the defence team is here to answer the questions that you and the committee members may have. We are ready to answer these questions, but if we happen to not have all the facts at hand, we will make sure that we provide them to you at the earliest convenience.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Bezan, you're up first.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for appearing.

Minister, it's always good to have you here. Two hours is going to be a good time for us to have a conversation.

General Lanthier, congratulations on your announcement of retiring. We wish you all the best and thank you for your incredible service to this country.

LGen Jean-Marc Lanthier: Thank you.

Mr. James Bezan: That makes six vice chiefs of the defence staff that we have gone through, Minister. What's going on here that we've had such a high turnover of vice chiefs of the defence staff?

Is it political leadership? Is it military leadership? What's the issue? It's not providing a great morale boost for our troops.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First of all, the development of our officers is exceptional. When you reach the levels of this position, the training that you get for being in this job is quite intensive.

The current vice and the previous vice who have held this position are absolutely up to the capabilities of doing the job, but they're also supported by a tremendous team. As you know, in the Canadian Armed Forces, it takes an entire team to be able to do the work they do, and one thing I can assure you when it comes to the work that the entire staff of vice chief do, is that they are tremendously capable and properly resourced to be able to carry on that work.

Mr. James Bezan: I have to say I am concerned. We have incredible flag officers within the Canadian Armed Forces, and the general staff is, bar none, among the best in the world, but it doesn't send a strong signal that we continue to see vice chiefs of the defence staff coming and going. What is supposed to be a two-year or three-year appointment is turning over every few months. That does not send a positive signal to the public—

● (1545)

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt here.

This is supposed to be testimony about the supplementary estimates. If you can relate it to the supplementary estimates, we can let it stand.

Mr. James Bezan: We'll get there.

The Chair: I understand that the minister will wish to answer some of those questions, but let's try and relate it back to the supplementary estimates.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Chair, I'll just say this. It was part of the testimony that the minister brought forward. He was talking about the vice chief of the defence staff. I thought I'd drill it down based on his comments earlier on, so it is in order, in my opinion, but I'll move on.

In the supplementary estimates, you were talking about moving them around within CSE and dealing with cybersecurity.

It's my understanding that we just had a White House official here, who was one of the leads, talking about the dangers of Huawei being allowed access to our 5G network. I know that officials at National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces have been quite strongly opposed to having Huawei involved in any way, shape or form. However, CSE has said that it is able to manage the situation.

As the minister responsible for all segments of national defence, which includes CSE, how are we going to make a decision on whether or not Huawei would be banned?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Thank you for the opportunity to actually discuss this. I think it's a great opportunity to talk about the systems that we have in place.

I've had many discussions with my U.S. counterparts over the years on this. Since I became the Minister of National Defence back in late 2015, I've realized the tremendous work that has already gone on. This is how I described it.

One thing I can assure you is that the current system we have with the 4G technology is the best in the Five Eyes. What the Five Eyes have told me, my U.S. colleagues and other counterparts around the world, is that moving forward the work that we will do.... We want to make sure we get this right, so the decision that we make will have a system that is easier or just as good, if not better.

The system we have right now we can be extremely proud of, so it's nice to have some of the officials from the U.S. come. It allows us to educate them on the tremendous work that CSE is doing. The system that we have now puts a lot of confidence into not only what we do in government but also for Canadians themselves, because 5G is an opportunity, but we need to make sure that all Canadian interests are protected, and that's how we'll be making a decision.

Mr. James Bezan: I am concerned if we move ahead in any way on Huawei, how that affects our relationship with the United States when they are saying Huawei is not allowed in any way, shape or form.

To move on, when we look at these estimates and also the main estimates, which have already been tabled, they are \$1 billion short compared to what was in SSE that was released in 2017. You're expecting this coming fiscal year to spend \$24 billion and the main estimates only say \$23 billion, so you're \$1 billion short. We know that since SSE was announced, it's short by almost \$8 billion in investments that were supposed to be made into our Canadian Armed Forces. That's not happening.

As I mentioned in question period earlier this week, \$247 million in infrastructure spending since the 2015-16 fiscal year, the first year that you were the minister, were underspent. Why aren't those investments being made? I know all these funds lapse. You always say they are there for future years, so show me the money. Show the troops some money. Give us some confidence that those investments are going to happen.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We've been demonstrating that year by year. In the first year we returned money to the centre. No money is now returned to the centre.

The money we have right now, the system we also put in place when it comes to defence policy.... To make sure the defence policy is whole, we need to make sure the money is there. Right now, with all the projects we have, we have the opportunity to allow us.... For example, if a project needs to be moved forward, we have the ability to move it. It's like a bank account. We can draw upon it. If a project is slowed down for whatever reason, we can move the mon-

ey into future years. This gives us the flexibility to make sure that it adjusts to the current situation, because also, with the 20-year plan for our defence policy, we need to be mindful that situations change. We need that flexibility as we move the money around to make sure the projects are done.

One thing I can assure you is the way we move money around is to move projects forward, not to slow anything down. One of the things that our troops can have absolute confidence in is, for example, the LAV support vehicle project. That was a project we had initially planned to do, I believe, in 2024, but we were able to move that project forward and get it approved last summer. That's over 300 armoured support vehicles under the LAV family that our troops can use. So the system is working.

We also are being mindful that, as we move forward, we're creating efficiencies in the procurement system, but no money has been given back to the centre.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Robillard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister Sajjan, for being here today with your team and for speaking with us.

In supplementary estimates (B), I see some transfers for granting councils and other research institutions.

Can you tell the committee how your department is involved in stimulating innovation?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The innovation piece is extremely important. One initiative that we started once we launched the defence policy was consultation with industry. Early on in the process, those consultations stated it was easier for them to do business outside Canada than inside Canada. They had less predictability of where we were going. One of the things we wanted to do was give them an opportunity to look at where the defence challenge is.

We have started a project called IDEaS and that allows us to throw down a defence challenge, so rather than a company having to figure out what the product is, we compete the idea itself. Then we pick the best idea from there, do early investment into it and then look at the next development of it. If it shows a greater fruit, then we are able to invest further and carry it on further.

This also allows us to solve our defence challenges and open up to the greater talent pool, but at the same time, it allows individual universities or companies to take part and potentially turn their own idea into a business. These are some things that are being connected into the wider innovation agenda that Minister Bains runs. It makes it far more—let's put it this way—encouraging for our defence industry and says we are better partners with them.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Supplementary estimates (B) include funding for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in government operations. As one of the largest government departments, the Department of National Defence has the heavy responsibility to lead by example.

What concrete steps is the department taking to ensure that it does its job properly?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We knew very early on that we needed to be a part of the solution, because in National Defence we are one of the largest emitters. We committed to greening National Defence in our defence policy. We started very early on by renovating a lot of our buildings, working with industry to find greater efficiencies. I believe 80% of our fleet is going to be either hybrid or electric. We are also investing in new technologies and looking at how we can operate with better systems up north, for example, and get away from diesel generators.

These are the effects we are having, and we are well into not only meeting our targets but actually exceeding them.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: You recently returned from a NATO meeting. What are our allies saying about Canada's role in the organization?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Going to NATO these days, especially after four years of continual investment into multilateralism, we look at investment in NATO in three ways: cash, capabilities, and contributions. We need to be able to have the money there to invest in the right capabilities, which we are doing, but then we also need to contribute as well.

As you very well know, we are leading a battle group in Latvia. We have a persistent presence with our frigate in the Mediterranean. We have conducted air policing. We are back in the AWACS program. We are working on a number of other initiatives as well, which allow us to be seen as a credible partner that can be relied upon.

That also translates into having our voice and influence matter, something that plays a very critical role when we are dealing with the mission in Iraq, the one that we actually command right now with General Carignan. It allows us to look at using our own experience and offering our advice on the way forward.

We were directly involved with a lot of our international partners and with the secretary general to make sure that the mission was going to move in the right direction. I am happy to say that the great leadership team we have there did tremendous work on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Earlier this week, we were told that Russia posed the biggest threat in the world. How will the funding included in these estimates help us to continue supporting our Ukrainian partners?

• (1555)

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First of all, I'll talk about the Russian threat itself.

As you very well know, Russia has been testing us up in the north and we have been responding every single time. In the defence policy very early on we identified that we needed to make sure not only that our sovereignty was protected but also that we had to message that with significant investments.

As we are doing NORAD modernization, we are also starting to invest very early. It is called all-domain situational awareness. You may recall from various committee meetings, we need to look at the threats from all the way out in space down to under water, so we're investing in the right research and development.

As we look at the changes and the capabilities that we need, we need to make sure that we stay at the cutting edge of technology, working very closely with the U.S. on this to maintain our technological advantage against Russia. We need to make sure that this continues and does not stop, because stop-and-go mechanisms have created problems in the past, and this is what we are working toward.

As we talk about Ukraine, we know if we don't send a very strong message, Russia will take action as it has done in Ukraine with the annexation of the Crimea at Donbass.

Let's not forget that they actually started foreshadowing this very early on with what happened in Georgia. Somebody mentioned that when President Putin actually gave a speech at the Munich security conference. We need to be very mindful. We can't just look at current adversaries or potential adversaries. We need to see the early signs and look at preventing them in the first place.

These investments are also about sending a very strong message to turn it into capabilities so that we can actually deter any type of aggression.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Boudrias.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister Sajjan, public servants, Mr. Lanthier, we all know that the Department of National Defence has civilian and military sides. In supplementary estimates (B), the Department of National Defence is asking for an additional \$487.3 million in funding for capital investments.

How much of that funding is for the civilian side of the department and how much is for the more military side? This would help us understand where the money is headed.

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: What we have done in defence—Rob, you can talk about that in terms of some of the infrastructure pieces—is that we don't look at it as being from the civilian side or the military side. When we came in, we wanted to make sure we demonstrated an entire team concept with me, the chief of the defence staff and the deputy minister.

What is done in National Defence is about supporting the members of the Canadian Armed Forces. We have various projects that we have started. For example, in terms of certain things like infrastructure, our defence policy prioritized looking after our people. That means housing for our people, for example, the project Ms. Gallant talked about in Petawawa with the health services centre, which is now 90% complete. MFRCs are another project. When it comes to looking at things, we're looking at what our troops need and working outward. Let's also keep in mind the operational aspects and what we also need to make sure the command and control headquarters are done. For example, the extension of the runway in Inuvik has a direct impact on our response, and NORAD's as well, but at the same time provides direct support for the communities.

There have been approximately \$1.2 billion in investments strictly into infrastructure, but we have been having to manage this money so that we can prioritize it into the right areas. One thing we also need to note is that maintenance of our infrastructure is absolutely essential. You can't just stop; it needs to be continued, so what we are trying to do right now is prioritize the work first, because the investments weren't there in the past. Once we get things under control, then the goal is to get it into a regular cycle, but we're not there yet.

Rob, perhaps you could answer the question in terms of which projects—

• (1600)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Boudrias: To clarify, there are basically three components: the air force, the army and the navy. Then there's the civilian side and the Communications Security Establishment, or CSE. An additional \$487.3 million is wanted for capital investments.

I'm not asking for the exact figures, but can they be rounded up? Do we know what proportion of this amount is for each component and for the civilian side?

[English]

Mr. Rob Chambers (Assistant Deputy Minister, Infrastructure and Environment, Department of National Defence): Certainly, I can speak to the infrastructure portion of that, sir, taking into account the minister's earlier comment about the defence team.

Some of these resources really are integrated, and they are of benefit to all of the services.

To give you a specific example, in Valcartier, Defence Research and Development Canada is the leading defence R and D function in the Government of Canada. A large portion, \$16.65 million of that amount, is destined for a project for DRDC. I wouldn't be able to specify the benefit to the air force, the army or the navy from that. It is very much a defence team investment.

There are a few other infrastructure projects here that are a little more targeted, some for army, some for air force, although when they are applied it goes beyond just that service. I think that for the overall picture I would defer to my colleague the CFO or the deputy, to give you that bigger picture beyond infrastructure.

Ms. Jody Thomas (Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): We have a list of the projects that these particular supplementary estimates are for. It is a mix of army, navy, air force and SOFCOM, as well as some infrastructure funding.

Examples are the naval large trucks, the common pattern armoured vehicle and the Canadian Forces electronic warfare support. Some of it is for things like identity management, for when we are doing recruiting, so we can capture identity more quickly and put them into the recruiting system more quickly—those kinds of things.

There is no project here in particular for anything other than, on the capital side, military capability between the four services and the recruiting group.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Boudrias: Is this list accessible and public? Out of curiosity, can we look at it somewhere?

[English]

Ms. Jody Thomas: Yes, absolutely, we can table it.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Boudrias: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the minister and all the staff for being here today. Of course, I give a big thanks to the Canadian Forces for the important work they do every day for all Canadians. I represent one of the larger military ridings in the country and am acutely aware of that.

I was very pleased to see in your opening statement, Mr. Minister, that you said your number one priority has been to look after the women and men on our defence team, so I am going to ask you some questions about that.

You mentioned some very welcome initiatives, such as the settlement for the victims of sexual assault and the settlement of the class action lawsuit on the LGBT purge.

The biggest issue in my riding among employees is, of course, DND civilian employees in the Phoenix pay system. I have been asking you about this for four years and I am going to ask you about it again today. What I hear very consistently and heard over the last week when I was in the riding is that the problems with the pay system aren't going away and that they have an effect on morale, recruitment and retention of the skilled people needed to work in the DND civilian workforce.

The most recent report by the Auditor General said there are more cases—not fewer cases—and that these cases involve more money than they previously did. The last report I saw from DND showed that 63% of DND employees have pay issues. Sixty-three per cent of the 28,000 people is almost 17,000 people.

My first question is: Have you seen impacts on the operations of DND as a result of the failures of the Phoenix pay system?

• (1605)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'm going to have the DM get into the details of this, but I agree that this is absolutely unacceptable. I know I give this answer every single time, but it deserves it. We do need to acknowledge it and not hide the fact. Fixing this problem as a government is a priority for us. In defence, I want to particularly let you and everybody else in this room know how seriously I and the senior leadership team are taking it.

We get regular briefings on how things are going. We're putting resources into the right areas, and more importantly, we're actually looking at identifying...even right down to individual issues. If somebody has a concern, it goes directly to the deputy minister. She can task things so action can be taken.

Mr. Randall Garrison: As a cabinet minister, have you made these concerns known in cabinet? Have you pushed your cabinet colleagues? Obviously, we're not going to fix this system. We keep getting more cases. Something has to be done to solve the problems. Have you been pushing, as a cabinet minister, to get a solution to the Phoenix pay system?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I think all cabinet ministers have been pushing very hard to solve this. No one should be having to deal with these types of issues. More importantly, we're also looking at how to move forward with a proper system. Work is ongoing. The investments are being put into the right areas. People are being hired. We're trying to get as creative as possible. The number one priority is that if somebody is dealing with any type of hardship, it's dealt with very efficiently.

I also want to say, just in case there are any new members in the room, that we did make a conscious decision in the past not to put the military on the Phoenix pay system. Now when we look at any type of personnel management programs, we go through a very rigorous process to see how it's working, how it's tested and to bring it in very slowly to make sure that things are done well while not losing the other system as well.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you. In the interest of time, I want to move to a second issue here.

I know it's your priority to make sure we look after women and men in the Canadian Forces. In 2015, Operation Honour was started to try to address the problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Canadian military. Recent evaluations, both surveys and through counts of the number of complaints, found the problem has not been successfully attacked by Operation Honour. It shows 7% of women in the reserves and 4% of those in the regular forces face sexual harassment or sexual assault.

If we're going to reach the goal of 26% women in the Canadian Forces by 2026, what are we going to do to improve or replace Operation Honour to make sure we really seriously address these problems?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First of all, Operation Honour is a name given to the very important initiative that everybody is taking very seriously. In terms of the stats you're talking about, it's something that the Canadian Armed Forces is asking about independently to make sure we are moving in the right direction.

One aspect of this is to get an accurate account of what is actually happening. A lot of good initiatives have been put into place. We also want to make it an encouraging environment for people to come forward if something has happened, even in the past, so it can be dealt with. When it comes to the numbers, I am very mindful of that, but I'm also extremely mindful of the actions that we need to take and whether we are taking those actions and learning from them.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Members of the Canadian Forces were asked if they thought it was an effective program, and fewer than half the members responded that yes, they thought it was an effective program. That's not a very ringing endorsement from those who are serving.

• (1610)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We're going to learn from every opportunity. This cannot be...for example, pushing out an initiative and thinking it's going to be working. This is putting a process in place that will constantly evolve. We have learned a lot. In fact, changes have been made. For example, the sexual misconduct response centre was done. The declaration of victims rights was added into the code of service discipline. I can go through a list of things, but for me right now it is about the results we are showing.

What we're doing here is making sure we have the independent look at every opportunity to evaluate whether we are moving in the right direction. One thing I can assure you is that we will take every step to make sure that until we have a harassment-free environment, we will not stop.

Vice, do you want to add anything to that?

LGen Jean-Marc Lanthier: Thank you, Minister.

In terms of two of the big initiatives we're pursuing, we're just about to release a strategy about the change of culture. How do you affect culture? How do you change it? How do you understand it? How do you characterize it? Our ethos, our ethics, are profound, are right. There is a drift. How do we bring back that alignment so that we do respect the first principle of our code of ethics, to respect the dignity of each person?

The second piece is being able to measure that, as the minister alluded to. We're putting in place a performance measurement framework that's been developed with extensive consultation with the experts and the external committee that's provided us advice. We're aligning the policy. We're also to release a DAOD that will align all policies, whether it is about duty to report, all those aspects.

I'm confident we're moving in the right direction. It's a problem society has struggled with, and we are a representation of society, so we're working really hard. The trend is now showing fewer incidents over the last 12 months. We now have a database in the system, the Operation Honour tracking analysis system, which is owned by the chain of command to really track both the cases and the reporting of the cases, and to understand that dynamic.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garrison.

Monsieur Martel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today and for answering our questions.

Mr. Lanthier, thank you for your 30 years of service. I wish you a happy end to your career and a very happy retirement.

Minister Sajjan, supplementary estimates (B) include \$487.3 million for your department. How much of that amount is intended for the Bagotville base?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'll talk about Bagotville. It's not strictly what's in this program, but it will help to understand the role that Bagotville plays and the investments that currently have been made, as well as the wider piece. There are investments that have gone into Bagotville as part of this.

Bagotville is one of the response bases for NORAD. One other aspect that is very important, which I got to see very early in my tenure as Minister of National Defence, is the air task force concept. It was decided that would go into Bagotville. That requires upgrades in the infrastructure, which have already started, but more importantly, for the supplies that go there.

In addition to the investments to the base itself, Bagotville has become far more operationally needed because of some of the organizational space that has been created. We call it the air force expeditionary capability program at Bagotville. For this one, it's \$1.78

million, but that's just what has come into it. The total cost of the project is \$110 million.

You have to look into the whole concept of what we're trying to do. Let's also look at NORAD modernization. We're also doing a bunch of further studies of those needs. Bagotville is a very important base for us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: Regardless of the choice of the next fighter jet, you know that we must upgrade our hangars or build new ones.

Is your department ready for this?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Absolutely. As I mentioned, it is a base that we sprang for NORAD, modernizing the hangars for the new aircraft that we will get. It's going to be at a higher classification, so that's going to require newer infrastructure so those planes can be housed. Yes, it's going to come with more infrastructure, but that's how we've planned out this project. I can assure you, Bagotville is a very important base for us.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: In principle, we'll have our first aircraft in 2025. Will this work begin in the near future? Do you plan to start work on these hangars, if necessary?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The project is already under way. Even when we designed the project and the competition itself, what we wanted to do was make sure that we did not start looking at infrastructure after the planes were delivered. We wanted to make sure that before the planes arrive the infrastructure projects are in place. That work is ongoing. In fact, we have regular discussions on this.

Not only is the infrastructure in place, but the right people are there. We have to look at the mechanics of it. It is far more complex and much wider than even the infrastructure. All of that is being taken into account.

Also, let's not forget about the future fighters. We also have the remote pilot assistance project, which is the UAVs. When I visited your neck of the woods, I also got to see the drone centre of excellence and the work that's being done. As I stated, as we look at the various provinces and across Canada where the capabilities are going to go, these are the types of things I look at. What is the expertise in those areas? I was very impressed with the drone centre of excellence and how, for some of the work that's being done there, the military can work in that regard.

All these things are taken into account, but we also like to dig deep into what the communities offer as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: You just mentioned drones. Can you provide an update on Canadian military drones? Where do things stand?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The program is well under way. The program has already started.

Troy, do you want to answer on just exactly where we are with the project?

Mr. Troy Crosby (Assistant Deputy Minister, Materiel Group, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chair, the competition started with a qualification process to identify suppliers with a capability to actually be able to deliver what the Canadian Armed Forces needs. We've been in industry engagement with those suppliers now for some time. We're working towards having portions of a draft request for proposal available to them to consult with in the next year, with an objective of having the complete request for proposal released next year.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: On that point of the qualifying period, I think it's important to mention that one of the things we looked at to make the project go faster was the qualifying period Troy is talking about. Instead of just looking at every company and thinking they could apply, we do a short list of things. Do they really have a possibility of actually competing for the project? That's what Troy is talking about.

It allows us, then, for the final list, through the discussions we're having, to fine-tune and actually speed up the projects. It's an initiative that the team started, which is making procurement a lot more efficient and is actually moving this project forward a lot faster.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Chair, thank you.

To the minister and everyone at the table who has served in the military, thank you very much for your service.

Normally I would ask one question after another, but I have two questions. I don't want you to use all the time on my first question, because I want to hear an answer to the second question.

The first one is about COVID-19. The military has had a great role and I'm sure it's very appreciated by some Canadians. Maybe you could update Canadians on your role in that.

Second, you mentioned recent interactions in the Arctic. I think it was yesterday that Canadian and American jets intercepted a Russian one 50 miles off Alaska. Maybe you could comment on that.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: When we were discussing the defence policy, one thing was sure. We wanted to make sure that the Canadian Armed Forces will be there for Canadians in times of need. We can anticipate the different types of disasters that come up. If you look throughout previous years, in the last four and a half years you see floods, fires, and our dealing with missiles from Iran and other issues around the world.

In this one in particular, the Canadian Armed Forces responded superbly. We can move very quickly on the logistics piece. Even on the first flight from Wuhan, we had military medical personnel on the aircraft. We were able to make sure that when Trenton was selected, we had the right accommodations, the right people there. At the peak of it, we had over 300 personnel in support of this.

Part of this is we also have significant expertise, so as we were looking at providing support, we were very mindful that we had to protect the force itself. We are taking the appropriate measures, so that we can maintain our operations overseas and at the same time be able to support Canadians.

This was a very unique challenge that we had to move very quickly on. The military worked very closely with all the other departments to respond very quickly.

When it comes to the recent intercept when the Russian Bears came into the American.... One of the pictures was just brought to me, which I want to share with the committee. We have our F18s actually intercepting that Bear and we have the F22 in the background here as well. We hear about it, but I get to see some of the actual work that goes on from the early detection to the actual intercept.

It also goes to show that Russia is continually looking at new methods. We need to make sure that we put the right investments in it. We are doing that now, but we have a lot more work to do in regard to modernization, which is going to help deliver on a lot of those projects.

• (1620)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Perhaps you could give us some of the resources available to Canadians and Canadian businesses with respect to cybersecurity, thanks to the establishment of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Before I hand it over to Shelly, I'll be honest with you. I'd call it a gem for Canadians when it comes to our cybersecurity. It gives me a lot of confidence when I talk to my American colleagues and counterparts around the world about the system that we have. The decisions that were made in the past, the investments that we made, have put us in a much better situation than our allies.

This gives me a lot of comfort when I look at the things that we're going to be doing moving forward, not only to protect Canadians from a national security perspective, but also to make sure that we're able to help our Canadian businesses keep cyber safe, all the way from small businesses down to the individual. A lot of initiatives have been started and the cyber centre is doing tremendous work.

Shelly, can you elaborate on that, please?

Ms. Shelly Bruce (Chief, Communications Security Establishment): Thank you very much for the question.

Madam Chair, the cyber centre's creation in October 2018 has really brought together a lot of the cybersecurity operational expertise under one roof. It allows us to have a more consolidated and more unified response to issues when they arise.

We've taken a lot of the lessons that we've learned from protecting government systems and turned them into advice and guidance that we can share more broadly with critical infrastructure owners and operators, as well as those who operate small and medium enterprises.

We are running a call centre now and that is allowing us to get a sense of what the issues are that are being encountered more in the private sector space. We're also building and delivering open source tools to the private sector so that anybody can download and use these to their advantage.

We also are working with industry and academia and conducting two-week long blitzes to build...and to solve problems together, to create a more innovative base and something that can help spark some of the start-up ideas that can take Canadian industry forward a little more.

We also have new legislation that was tabled and passed last summer that gives Canada more tools in our tool kit to respond to some of these incidents, especially those originating from offshore.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Chair, I'm speaking through you to the minister.

Due to federal legislation, upriver reservoirs have been unable to drain fully to allow for the runoff and precipitation which may come, so inevitably you're probably going to have to implement Operation Lentus. With Op Lentus, they're working in the cold and wet and they're already getting sick, but now we have the WHO-declared pandemic and the hospitals are full to capacity right now.

Earlier you said that the hospital at base Petawawa was 92% complete. How long will it be before it's actually done and usable?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First, I want to explain that it is actually a health services centre; it's not a hospital. It's for the Canadian Armed Forces. We don't have hospitals inside the bases. It provides the appropriate services, but then we....

When it comes to the actual work, I did get an update from the team, and it is ongoing. This is when it comes to various work that needs to be done, and sometimes it could be a contract delay.

I personally have visited Petawawa on a number of occasions, and I did notice the need for infrastructure investment. It's not only the health services centre looking at accommodations but the MFRC in particular in Petawawa is very important to me. On that, I have directed—

• (1625)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We're on the medical facility, and I want to know why it has been delayed for almost two years.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The thing is, the work is ongoing. It's 93% complete. Some of the delays have been due to some contract issues.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay, I understand that it was contract issues, because Defence Construction Canada wrote to me saying that Bondfield Construction is under insolvency protection. Why has that not been ameliorated? Why does Defence Construction Canada still have the same insolvent company on the books to finish the job?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: When a company goes out of business, we need to look at finding new ones. Our team there worked very diligently to find new ones, and that's how they're moving forward. The important aspect here is that we're actually investing in health services centres, not just in Petawawa but also in Valcartier, Comox and across the country, because this is very important.

To get back to your original question regarding Operation Lentus, you're absolutely right. We need to make sure that we have the right tools and that people are looked after. When it comes to the COVID-19 aspect, all of this will be taken into account to make sure that our troops are able to respond. We're going through the evaluations so that our troops have the right equipment and are protected from this virus so that we can make the appropriate responses.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Bondfield is under insolvency protection, and the reason behind that is the former CEO, John Aquino, is alleged to have defrauded the company of up to \$80 million. The forensic audit could take years and may spell the end of the company. Has DND given any of the funds in the \$34-million contract to Bondfield yet?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: PSPC leads when it comes to the contracting work. One thing I can assure you is that our team is working very closely to make sure that the project will be completed.

Let's not forget that when it comes to a lack of investments on bases like Petawawa, the investments are being made now. The special operations multiplex and significant investments are going into Petawawa because it provides a very important role for the region.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Right, and has that contract with Bondfield been cancelled so that a new contractor can come in and finish the job?

Again, on the \$34 million, has any of it been paid to them, and if yes, are there going to be efforts made to recover the money?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Rob, do you have an answer and details on that?

Mr. Rob Chambers: Madam Chair, yes, I am happy to answer the question.

We expect the project to be complete in June, so we're very close.

You're correct in your assessment of the contractor. Unfortunately, that does happen from time to time. There is a bonding agent in place. Perini Management is overseeing the project. Bondfield is finishing the work but under the oversight of the bonding agent. It's a standard mechanism that we use in construction projects. At this stage in the project, we're going to allow that arrangement to continue because we are, as the minister said, 93% to 92% complete. We'll let that run out and finish.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Our main objective is making sure that the project is completed so that our troops can utilize it. As Rob mentioned, it'll be completed by June.

More importantly, there is other important work that is also going on in bases, and the MFRC is a very important one, which will be starting construction in the fall.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Of course, you're coming back to Petawawa for the opening in June.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I met one of your constituents for a barbecue too, by the way.

The Chair: Okay, you bunch. Jeez, you're tough.

Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, and to your entire team for being here today.

General, thank you for your service, and congratulations on your career and your retirement.

Minister, in the supplementary estimates there's a line about reinforcing Canada's support for Ukraine. I would like to ask you about Canada's training mission in Ukraine, Operation Unifier.

This week I was elected the new chair of the Canada-Ukraine Friendship Group. I think it's fair to say that, to members of the group, to many Canadians, to many of my constituents in Etobicoke Centre and especially to people who are members of the Ukrainian Canadian community, of great concern is Russia's invasion of Ukraine, its annexation of Crimea and the resulting impact of 13,000 people killed and close to two million people internally displaced in Ukraine.

I want to thank you and your team for your steadfast support of Ukraine and her people. I know you reiterated that support at last month's NATO defence ministers conference. Would you be able to provide an update on Operation Unifier's impact on Ukraine's ability to defend and re-establish its sovereignty and territorial integrity?

• (1630)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Congratulations on your election to become the chair, and I also thank all members for steadfast support

for Ukraine. It sends a very strong message when you have all-party support for Ukraine at the time of need.

Operation Unifier plays a very important role, which I remind all my colleagues at NATO when we go, whether it's me hosting a meeting or hosting a breakfast to be able to elevate that conversation.

On Operation Unifier, there are a couple of things that we're doing. The work that we're doing is about providing for the right need. Rather than just our figuring out for ourselves what we're willing to provide, it's about assessing the various needs. Very early on, rather than training from one location, I made the decision and gave the direction to spread that training out, to go where it's needed. Rather than having the Ukrainian armed forces members come to one location when they have to deal with trying to get in the front line and doing all the various training, we now go to them. The locations fluctuate depending on what's going on. It's usually over 10 at any one time. We look at any opportunities to be able to expand on that training.

One thing we've also said is that with the defence co-operation arrangements, plus Ukraine being added to the automatic firearms control list, that allows us to now look at how the procurement system will work. What we want to do is link from procurement into the type of training that we can provide, because equipment is absolutely useless until you train somebody to use it well, and you make them far more effective. For example, the sniper rifles that have been purchased through Canada, and the training that we provide—because we literally do have the best military snipers in the world—is providing that capability that has the impact.

Also the medical training resonates in my mind directly. That was something that a team identified. It wasn't part of the initial training. People coming back from the front line didn't have the appropriate training and people were dying. Getting the first aid training is not just for the individual, but it's teaching about the whole system that's needed, from the casualty collection point to putting people into an ambulance. You need to stabilize them before they get into the ambulance; otherwise, they're going to die on the way. Those are all things that actually have had an impact.

What we also need to work very hard on is to support Ukraine on its reforms, because the reforms are going to be absolutely crucial to making sure that Ukraine is going to be eventually successful.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you.

I'd like to switch over to Operation Reassurance. There's probably a limited amount of time for this, but in the one minute that I have left, could you speak briefly to the impact of Operation Reassurance, especially in its goal of containing Russia?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: As we talked about Operation Unifier in Ukraine, even though it's not a NATO operation, Operation Reassurance, our contributions of what we're doing in NATO, is having a direct impact to Ukraine.

I've always stated it. If you look at it—from Latvia up in the north where we are commanding a battle group, to Ukraine, and we also have troops in the south, plus we have our naval task force that we command, in addition to sporadic air policing in Romania—you'll see that we're literally on the eastern edge of Europe and sending a very strong message to Russia that, when it comes to their aggression, it's not going to be tolerated. Yes, the Russians have taken the very bold and dangerous step, but any further actions are not going to be tolerated, and we take every opportunity.

I think there are a number of steps that we can also take as parliamentarians, but also as part of this committee, and that's something which I think we can discuss further in support for Ukraine.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Baker.

Monsieur Boudrias.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Boudrias: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll try to be a good soldier and stay on today's topic, which is supplementary estimates (B) 2019-20.

During my period of service, some type of administrative and financial madness always occurred between January and March 31, because that was the end of the fiscal year. We were told either to make budget cuts or to transfer money to the senior levels.

In the most recent budget, I can see that almost \$22 billion was spent on National Defence. To me, it's never enough. Today we're asking for half a billion dollars in capital investments. I'm not questioning the importance of the various programs, which are essential. In recent years, wasn't our budget enough to meet our needs and fulfill our ambitions?

We still have external operations under way that are being carried out under great conditions, despite our limited means. The same applies to equipment, which I referred to earlier and which you mentioned briefly. All this is essential.

Minister Sajjan, do we have the means to match our ambitions?

• (1635)

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'll talk about March madness in a second—it's something that I wanted to get away from—and why it used to happen.

First of all, when it comes to running the military, we have the budget for that. Any operation that a government approves is funded separately. There is money given directly to the operation, so the operation itself is going to be successful. We have always made sure of that, and there are always contingencies in place.

Plus, as with the defence policy, we are prioritizing on the capital projects to make sure that we are supported. For example, there are

the upgrades of all LAVs. Every LAV that the army commander has asked for has now been fully upgraded. Initially, when I came in, not all of them were allocated, but all of them have been.

We're moving on projects now for the support vehicles. We have brand new LAVs, but as you know, some of the ambulances and command post and engineer vehicles have been getting older, so now we're moving those projects forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Boudrias: Okay, Minister Sajjan.

This is all part of the procurement programs that have already been announced, and we're following the procurement schedule. I'm fully aware that this can't be done in one year.

The fact remains that, at the end of the budget year, half a billion dollars is being ripped from the budget. We're talking about the day-to-day management of things already under way and not about surprises, with the exception of legal recourse for victims of sexual assault or sexual harassment, for example. This is a new component, and I understand that this expense wasn't initially planned.

However, the rest is foreseeable. I understand that certain market situations, such as the exchange rate and the value of the Canadian dollar against the euro or the American dollar, may influence the possibility of purchasing certain products or equipment. Indeed, if we're asking for additional funding each year for existing programs, is our overall funding adequate, also given the 2% required for NATO?

I know that the men and women in uniform in our armed forces are doing an extraordinary job. They manage to do everything with very few resources. They'll never tell you that they lack anything. They'll say that they can carry out the mission.

I understand that our external operations are independently funded. Nevertheless, we're still in a situation where we must rob Peter to pay Paul in order to increase our power and deploy our forces. At some point, we must be consistent.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm afraid there's only a short time for an answer, Minister.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First, to answer your question, no. We're making the appropriate investments into the right areas. That's what the defence policy is about. What we're trying to do is move the projects quickly enough to make sure we fill those gaps that we had in the past. Those are being done.

For those projects that I talked about, it was about moving quickly. What we don't want to also get into.... What we've been passing down through the deputy minister and the chief of the defence staff is for all members' commands to be able to spend to their budgets, making it easier. We're looking at where those needs are, and it's to have that flexibility. What we needed to be able to do is.... We can't be stuck into one place and not be able to move money around. Having that flexibility was very important to us because, as needs change, priorities change as well. We've been able to do just that. That's what you see sometimes. Changes are sometimes not out of necessity, but because of a prudent decision being made on where support is required.

I could go much longer, but the Chair would get upset.

The Chair: You don't want to get the Chair upset.

Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to turn to the question of Canada's submarines. I have a base in my riding where two of them are based, the repair and maintenance centre, so it is something I am interested in, both in general policy but also specifically.

We had a pretty good record in 2017 and 2018. HMCS *Chicoutimi* did an excellent job enforcing sanctions against North Korea, and we had HMCS *Windsor* doing Atlantic operations with NATO. Last year, we didn't have such a good year, with zero days at sea. I know the expectation. Vice-Admiral McDonald said that the subs will be back in the water and things will be much better this year.

My question is really about replacement. At that time, Vice-Admiral McDonald said we have programs in place to keep the subs operational until the mid-2030s, but the defence policy put forward called for replacements not until the 2040s. Therefore, what we're seeing now is a gap already emerging. If we are actually going to get new submarines, and I do believe we should because they are an important part of the Canadian navy, don't we have to start that process pretty soon? Otherwise, that gap is going to get bigger and we won't really have operational submarines.

• (1640)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'm glad you raised this. Canadians sometimes don't fully understand the need for submarines. It is very simple: If you don't have submarines, you don't have sovereignty. Right? You need to have submarines to provide that sovereignty, especially in the three oceans that we have, and with the impact of climate change, things are opening up. Our subs indeed need some significant investments and they will get them.

We did have the operations that were conducted, but we must be mindful that those were significant. We'll have to go back a very long time to when subs were deployed that far. The subs need to get into a regular maintenance cycle as well and that's what you saw there. They will be deployed, but the bigger projects for the upgrading of submarines are going to happen. A decision was made by the navy to upgrade these submarines because they provide a very important and unique capability that is needed. Based on what the navy's needs were to upgrade, that decision was made, and we will be looking at what the future replacement needs will be.

Let's not forget that we also have to look at a lot of the technology we're working on. Through this time, there's some interesting and very good research that's being done to look at not only what the needs are going to be, but what the capability is going to be in the future.

They do play a very important role, and all of this is going to be looked into as we have the greater long-term discussions about NO-RAD modernization.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Is there a team working on this now?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We have a team. The navy does look at its entirety. We do have the projects actually on the books for this.

The reason I mention that is I had to be educated on this personally to increase my understanding of this. I had very similar questions. The navy convinced me of what needed to be done. It's something that we're managing very directly.

It's not about just launching a project. It's about making sure that you get it right so that at the end of the day, when you launch your RFP, the requirements are done appropriately. A lot more work still needs to be done on this.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dowdall.

Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today with your team. It's a fantastic opportunity to have this chat.

Lieutenant-General, all the best in your retirement. I'm kind of jealous. It has to be a nice feeling right about now, going into summertime. Some days I want to retire.

First of all, I'll just say that it's unfortunate at times that we have to choose between the equipment we need and the individuals in our military. I'm really happy to see in these estimates that you included the \$148.6 million to help victims of assault or harassment. It's important that we invest in that, so kudos for that.

What I'd like to speak about, and perhaps you could update me on, is that I know that 15 military personnel committed suicide in 2018. I have some figures from 2010, when you did a study, which was fantastic news. However, there were some incredible numbers. Female veterans were 81% more likely to commit suicide than non-veterans, and more than 155 active service members have taken their own lives since 2010.

National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada built a new suicide prevention strategy in late 2017, which I think is fantastic news. I don't have the new numbers, and that's one of my questions. The strategy included promises to improve the services and support available to our current military members and veterans in the hope of increasing awareness and reducing the number of suicides in all the populations.

You made a great comment on January 9, “We must always strive to do better.” You said, “Every time we lose a member of our Canadian Armed Forces to suicide, it is felt by us all. One suicide is too many.” I agree and I am sure everyone in this room has the same understanding.

Since that time, have there been any checks and balances? I haven't seen a report or heard anything as of yet. How are we doing now? Are we investing the right money? If we want men and women to continue to join and have a career in the armed forces, we have to make sure we have those supports.

First, could you tell me that?

I have some follow-up questions as well.

• (1645)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: It's very important that we highlight this absolute tragedy.

I've said it before, and I think everybody can agree that one is too many. We take this extremely seriously. The senior leadership, including me, gets an immediate update if something happens, so they know we know what's happening, and so we get the updates on the action to make sure the families are also looked after.

At the same time, I have regular updates, looking at what we have learned from the board of inquiry, what changes we need to make, what decisions we need to make to direct changes, or that the chain of command is already looking at things. It also comes down to what type of support we're providing for the families.

Yes, to your question. It always has to be an ever-growing process moving forward, so we are constantly learning.

This is one thing we've been looking at when somebody joins. We look at building resiliency from day one. How do we train our people? Do we have the right mechanism? Are we building that mental resiliency? Do we have the appropriate supports for a young family? We are looking at all those things. This is why the military family resource centres are very important. The joint strategy with Veterans Affairs on suicide prevention is extremely important.

We are putting all the steps in there. This is where I'm absolutely open to everybody. If there are any new ideas or research, we're happy to take a look at it. We should all be concerned about this, looking at and making any necessary changes. I'm very open to ideas.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: Could you say what the numbers are now? Are we seeing a change? Are we going in a positive direction, so there are fewer?

There was one the other day on my base. Again, I have one of the largest training bases in my riding. It's great to have those resource centres, but are psychological services located there? I know in my case, they have to drive, usually to Toronto. It's an hour's drive. If someone is not already stressed, driving to Toronto is enough to make them extremely stressed.

I'm just curious if you've looked at options like that. How can we find that information and see those changes? I certainly want to do our part. Maybe we have to think outside the box, but if we can

make any investment—and we want to invest in our people—we have to be behind this 100%.

Do we have psychological services available at every base in Canada?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We do have support—I want to make sure that this is the exact goal. I'm confident that we do have it, but I want to make sure that I answer your question definitively. That's exactly what we want. It's not just about the bases. We have a lot of other areas that we need to support.

Last year there were 19.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: Nineteen suicides last year?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Yes, it's about the same. We're also looking at breaking it down by region. We want to be able to see any type of patterns we need to identify. I don't want to get into too many details here for privacy reasons, whether it's Rangers or a certain area. What was happening in the area? What was the command structure? Was anything going on?

We're looking at the wider aspect and drilling down to the needs and micro needs. I can assure you, in this case, we'll put in any type of resources that are necessary. We also have to look at other things as well, the steps we're taking. Peer support plays a very important role. I still stay in touch with certain people who need the support. I attend Soldier On events, which I did just recently, making sure that those programs are well supported.

VAC also supports programs, for example, the veterans transition network that was started and expanded in Vancouver. They also provide a lot of support.

It's making sure that we're as wide-reaching as possible, but also are able to support at the micro-level while looking at whether we have any regional issues as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Madam Chair, thank you very much.

Minister Sajjan, welcome back, and congratulations on your continued role as Minister of National Defence. Thank you for your service, and that of your senior management colleagues. A very special thanks to Lieutenant-General Lanthier as well. Very best wishes on your next steps.

Minister, you put it in very compelling terms, and I would like to focus my time on UN peace operations. You spoke about CAF capabilities and contributions. That's a very good way to remember the framework.

Vote 1(b) in the supplementary estimates asks for adjustments of just over \$349 million. I wanted to use the occasion to get you to comment on our peace operations, particularly Mali and Uganda. This committee had the chance to visit and you had as well. Members of the committee went to Bamako and Gao last year and saw the tremendous capabilities of the women and men who served, including very cutting-edge work in bringing plasma into theatre. We had occasion to speak to a young female officer who explained to us just what that meant in our capacity to save lives.

How are things going on the concept of smart pledging our deployments and missions? What lessons have we learned? What's your vision for the future of UN peace operations and our contributions to them?

• (1650)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The investments we're making are for the mission we just completed in Mali. We do have some support personnel still there, as well as a tactical airlift capability that we're providing out of Uganda.

The vision that we have put forward is a whole-of-government approach. Rather than just saying what we're willing to provide and letting the UN then figure out where it's needed, it's always been—whether it's part of a coalition or even NATO—us asking what those needs are and how we can provide support. That's why the smart pledge concept was very important, because it's what was asked for by the United Nations.

I would remind the committee of what the smart pledge concept is all about. All the missions have high-level capabilities that only select nations can provide. Through that, if one nation is providing all the high-level capability, it can become a burden to one nation. Smart pledge is about nations coming together on a one-year rotation, so that a mission will always have that capability.

When we stepped up for the first pledge there, we worked with the United Nations and Romania to bring them online. I've had discussions with the two undersecretary-generals at the UN regarding which nations will be coming forward next. The goal is to get four to five nations to sign up, so we can get into a rotation. Once we have the confidence through the UN that we'll have four to five nations as a part of it, then we as a government can consider getting into a rotation.

In those particular areas, it shows what capabilities can be impacted. Medical evacuations, it may seem, don't have a direct impact on operations. However, as you and the committee were briefed, how we move blood is related to the distance that we could fly, because it wasn't in a helicopter's range. It was related to the transportation of blood. Having the medical personnel on board allowed the patrols on the ground to go further. That was a way of actually making the mission far more effective. That's how we passed that experience on to Romania.

We're now working with the United Nations on some of the other smart pledge concepts. As I have stated, we need to make sure that

the mission is right, the troops that we have provided are going to have the right impact, and they will make the decisions accordingly, because at the end of the day, this is about improving the mission, not just about us getting a check in a box.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Could you elaborate a bit more on the whole-of-government approach? This is incredibly important in peacekeeping operations, including the tail end and the wind-up of a mission, and the governance work that takes place once the political space has been opened up by a military mission. What does whole-of-government mean?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'm glad you mentioned that. This is a concept that Canada has been trying to implement for some time. Other nations have also come on board.

The military buys the time for the other work to be done. You need to put the right development money and capacity building into the region as well. At the end of the day, you're trying to address the root cause of the conflict. In each area, the root cause is going to be different, so we need to put in the right enablers. If we can't do it alone, the military buys us time.

I can give you an example. In Mali, through development programs, we were investing through a German project to take a desert and turn it back into a place where you could actually do agriculture. That is a way of not only providing food to people but also teaching youngsters how to take that on.

At the end of the day, you need the employment. The significant unemployment rate for youth is staggering, and the percentage of youth under 20 is also quite staggering, so that aspect of providing those jobs is absolutely important, while we deal with trying to provide that safe space in the wider region.

• (1655)

The Chair: Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Minister, on January 27, you answered Order Paper Question No. 184. It asked about the number of projects in which National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces are currently behind schedule. The response was there are 117 projects that are delayed. Yet, the spokesperson from your office said that 90% are delivered within budget and scope. That's an old statistic that goes back to 2017.

Why haven't you updated that statistic, and why are you misleading Canadians by putting out that information?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Bezan, we are absolutely not here to mislead Canadians. We are here to move the projects forward as quickly as possible. I would be happy to provide any information. I've been very open with all members in trying to take these issues into account, and improving how we work at National Defence. I would be happy to get you the updated information.

Mr. James Bezan: If you could actually update that information—

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: What particular projects are you asking about?

Mr. James Bezan: Projects as percentages—

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Which projects—capital projects, infrastructure projects...? For example, you talked about delays. That's a very wide aspect of looking at it, because you have to drill down to each one. In some cases, for example, a project is delayed because we want to make sure the requirements are met. The point is that we want to move forward as quickly as possible, but at the end of the day get the actual project that we—

Mr. James Bezan: If you could provide that information to the committee, I'd appreciate it.

I want to move on. Your department has now spent \$3 billion on buying 25 rusted-out old Australian fighter jets. You're upgrading the avionics and more fighting capabilities on 54 CF-18s. That's \$3 billion without one new fighter jet. How many fighter jets could you have bought for \$3 billion?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'm happy to have a discussion on this with you again, Mr. Bezan. I will say to you directly, as before, that we wouldn't have had to buy used jets if those jets had been replaced a long time ago.

Mr. James Bezan: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: No, no, let me answer your question here, okay?

There's a reason these jets are important. We could have easily started the competition and carried on with this, but we have missions to fly. As you know, we talked about the importance of sending a message to Russia. Look what's happening in Ukraine. We're back into air policing at NATO. We're doing more intercepts. Plus, our folks have to train.

So as we invest—

Mr. James Bezan: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] CF-18s in combat, and they were actually fighting in Iraq and Syria.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: There's the importance of investing in the current fleet as well. If they had been replaced a long time ago, we wouldn't be in this situation.

Having said that, the competition is moving forward—

Mr. James Bezan: With a delay now of three months.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: —and we're committed to purchasing 88 aircraft. This is a very complex process. We need to make sure it goes well so that we actually get the aircraft we need.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Minister, you talk about 88 planes. You have this so-called capability gap—why we need 88 planes—so why are you upgrading only 54 of them? Out of our current CF-18s, you're upgrading only 54. Your numbers don't match. If we only need 54 upgraded to actually go out there and do the job, then why are you buying 88?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I talked to you about this before.

As we're using the aircraft, the new aircraft come online. The air force is working out the mathematics of taking delivery of the new-

er aircraft and transitioning out. All that is being worked on while we actually carry out those missions.

I've been seeing some of the work they've been doing, putting a lot of science behind it, and I'm very impressed with the work the air force is doing and how that transition is going to go.

Mr. James Bezan: What's the survivability of our CF-18 fleet that we currently have? When did you get briefed by the RCAF that we needed to upgrade avionics? Why aren't we upgrading the jammers that are on them as well?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: When it comes to the briefings—this is one of the main projects I started on from day one—and the upgrades that are occurring, I'll give you an example. The investments we're making are not only to upgrade the radar systems; we're also looking at the weapons systems. Everything comes with a package. You can buy, for example, a new helmet, but it has to come with the right system.

That's the stuff I dealt with when I came in. You should know this, because you were the parliamentary secretary for national defence back then, right?

At the end of the day, I think you and I both agree that we do need to replace these, and we need to do it well. Because we have missions to fly, with the projects we're doing right now, we're putting the appropriate investments into the current fleet so that we can continue to fly those missions. But for the replacement, the project itself, the competition has to go well, because this is a very significant project.

• (1700)

Mr. James Bezan: On the competition, we've had another delay by three months because one of the bidders didn't do their homework. Is it fair to the other competitors in this that you keep moving the yardsticks, and by delaying it we're delaying actually making the decision on what new fighter jet we're going to give to our air force?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First of all, the decisions made for this are done through PSPC. In terms of managing the project, it has to be very independent, making sure that the competition is respected. The decisions are made for the integrity of making sure that this goes into a competition....

Keep in mind that I personally would rather make sure, as the Minister of National Defence, if we're giving an opportunity of three months out of how long it's taking to replace our aircraft, that we get the right aircraft. These are decisions that are being made. My goal out of this is to get the aircraft as quickly as possible, but it has to be the right one as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to thank you, Minister, for being here today and for being so forthcoming in your answers.

I also want to extend the same gratitude to Lieutenant-General Lanthier for his service and to all of those who serve. I'd like to add their families to that, because we know that when members serve, their families serve along with them.

That brings me to the nature of the question I would like to ask. It's around Seamless Canada, which you mentioned in your opening remarks. We know it's very hard on military families when they are relocated. What are we doing, and how are we working with provinces, to try to ensure that the transition, particularly if it's across provinces, is as easy on families as possible?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: You hit on something that's very important. I'll say this again. Regardless of what position we or any Canadian holds in society, when something is not right at home, how can one concentrate on their work? Apply that to the context of the military where we ask them to do challenging things and very dangerous work. We want to make sure that they know their families are looked after.

In full transparency, even though I have served in the reserves and I have done a lot of overseas deployment, when I became the Minister of National Defence I got to see the really direct impact that relocation has on regular force families. The challenges are everything from a driver's licence, medical card or accreditation for a spouse.

We wanted to solve this, but this is one thing where.... Because we were very open to ideas on what we needed to do, Seamless Canada was actually a project codeveloped with the provinces, bringing in all the represented territories. Instead of going piecemeal one by one, we came together to have a look at what we have worked on. Through this, some provinces have already come forward saying they want to provide more doctors or try to deal with driver's licence issues or medical card issues. It has a significant impact. We actually brought spouses in to talk about their challenges.

We need to look at making this even better. I was speaking with the representative from Manitoba. The goal is, rather than just waiting for one meeting, to start looking at putting working groups together, so that when we come together we can talk about the progress that we have made. What are those challenges? How do we move forward? Where do I need to engage and get some changes done? Ultimately, this does have a significant impact on families.

We are working on a few initiatives, but I have a little more work to do with my team before we move forward on it.

Thanks.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Many spouses have multiple members of the family serving, but for spouses that are not also military we know that spousal employment can be very challenging. Lawyers have to go back and learn the bar in another province, for example.

There are a number of things that can be difficult in terms of the spouse's career.

You mentioned the Military Spousal Employment Network. Can you explain what that is?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Regardless of what profession you might be in, when you move you may not be able to get a job in that field, so we have various networks in the military, especially for the reserves, called the Canadian Forces liaison council. It leverages the organizations that we have with businesses to say, when there is a challenge that a regular force member family has, how they can be more supportive. Businesses see a spouse of a military member and they'll take them in.

We did the same thing for our doctors. My wife actually did this. They started a network with other doctors to educate them to accept a military family that is moving and has to switch doctors, to make their life a little bit easier. That is also part of this.

We have a few more initiatives that we want to do to further improve this.

● (1705)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: It can be a challenging time when people retire or end their service. What kinds of supports are there for transitions?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The transition is never easy for those who have gone through it. We sometimes see negative impacts as well.

To also answer the other member's questions regarding the support that we provide.... When we look at supporting families, it also provides direct support for the families because sometimes there are family challenges that can create other mental health challenges for members.

The transition group is something that we created. It's a command that does just that. It looks after our people to transition them out. The goal of this is when you're going to transition, it connects directly through Veterans Affairs programs to do everything from making sure the pension cheque and all the paperwork is done to identifying what programs they need. Also, if there is any retraining that needs to be done, there may be a VAC program. There is the new education benefit program that we have put into place and they could take advantage of that.

We're looking at trying to improve that as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Boudrias.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Boudrias: Since I have only three minutes, I'm wondering whether I should talk about fighter jets or C6 general purpose machine guns. I'll choose the fighter jets.

As part of the procurement programs, calls for bids have again been postponed, rewritten and amended. However, a new clause or criterion now imposes the Five Eyes. This has led to the exclusion of partners, NATO manufacturers. They have withdrawn and they won't be bidding on future contracts.

In the case of this combat aircraft, the fighter jet, won't the situation restrict choices within a very limited market? This could affect operations and taxpayers, given the total and final cost.

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First, this is nothing new. There are NATO requirements and Five Eyes requirements, and let's not forget our most important requirement, our own Arctic sovereignty through NORAD, the only binational command in the world that allows us to be able to respond to this.

This is extremely important. These requirements that are put into place are absolutely essential. This is not about pointing fingers at any one aircraft or company. This is literally about making sure the requirements are met. As you can see here, we do have companies still in the process. At the end of the day, for me, this is a complicated project, but I have to keep it very simple. The requirements that we have set out are absolutely necessary for us to be able to meet our mission, and the companies have to demonstrate that.

We'll have a fair competition for this. If you see what's happening up north, based on the picture I provided, all the requirements need to be met, not only for Five Eyes but also for our NORAD compliance as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Boudrias: We agree that the C6 general purpose machine guns should be replaced, but isn't \$27,000 a unit a little expensive?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: As you know, they needed to be changed and they have been changed. The C6s are starting to come into service.

I want to go back into it. A project like this is something we're able to move on very quickly. Anti-armour capability, that was taken out because of trying to save money.

Talking about the C6, yes, that's something that was brought in very quickly and it's happening, but anti-armour... These are little capabilities we don't talk about. We talk sometimes about the big projects.

The first time I went into Iraq to visit our troops, the only anti-armour capability we had was a Carl Gustaf at that time. We had a government.... I won't point fingers, but we always have to take a little dig at one another.

Anti-armour capability was taken out. I'm sure it wasn't assessed at that time when the capability was taken, but we were dealing with some serious issues with those types of vehicles. Then we made an immediate decision to make sure we did an emergency buy to get the anti-armour capability in, not only for our special forces but also bringing this capability back into the Canadian

Armed Forces. Now they're going through the various trials to select which one they want.

Whether it's the C6, anti-armour capabilities, bringing mortars back.... Let's not also forget that we're bringing back air defence capability as well. The reason I say "capability"—and I don't know what the selection is going to be—is so that we can actually defend ourselves and not have to rely on our allies to provide air defence for us when we deploy.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'll stick with fighter jets briefly. I have the same three-minute slot here to deal with.

In the competition, New Democrats had been suggesting there should be some premium given for actually producing the jets in Canada. The criteria that went out don't seem to have done that. They talk about some transfer of technology. It seems to be a good idea, if we're going to spend all this money on jets, that we maintain the Canadian aerospace capability that would allow us to maintain and upgrade them in the future.

Can you tell me what weight is actually being given to either production here or transfer of technology here, so we can continue to support the jets once we buy them?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First of all, on our Canadian defence procurement, we want to make sure that Canadian companies benefit and Canadians benefit from jobs. The surface combatant project is a good example of many of the projects, where every dollar that is spent on the project is an investment into Canada.

When it comes to the fighters, we obviously don't have that capability. That competition is very important. That capability piece has to be number one, making sure that the Canadian Armed Forces has that capability. We also look at the ITB, the direct benefits to Canada. There are direct benefits to Canadian companies.

Also, I want to emphasize that we do have great companies that provide the internal capabilities to various procurement projects, not just for us but also to our allies. When we look at, for example, a ship, I don't look at the hull or the airframe; we look at what goes inside it. That is probably the most important piece. We have a lot of Canadian ingenuity that can take advantage of that, and they will.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: I'm very concerned right now, especially in light of the Auditor General's latest report in fall 2018. The report states that the situation is overwhelming owing to a shortage of pilots and technicians.

Canada must now fulfill its obligations. However, not much seems to have been done in terms of recruiting technicians and pilots. The department must also have the necessary funding for this.

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: It's something that we identified very early on. This is not a problem just for us in the military; it's a problem in the industry as well. I have many discussions with the Minister of Transport on this.

We adjusted our recruiting targets to start recruiting pilots very early on, even while the defence policy analysis was going on. For example, one of the reasons we need more pilots is that we're buying more aircraft. Originally the plan in the previous government was to buy 65, but we needed 88 based on our analysis. We have new search and rescue aircraft that are coming, so we have put the right investments in to start recruiting more pilots.

We're putting emphasis on retention as well. We're also looking at how we can use the air reserves a lot more. This is something that I believe has been underutilized, so the air force has been looking at new things.

With the mechanics, it's the same thing. We knew that we were going to be needing four more mechanics, and the recruitment is happening for that.

The final piece is that we do have to start looking at incentives for some of these critical trades. There's some work going on to look at the trades that are under stress and what we can do to support them so that we can either recruit or retain them better.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: I'm still concerned. We're talking about pilots, but you know that some of them can't even complete their 140 flying hours a year because there aren't enough technicians to keep the planes flying. We seem to keep going in circles. There will also be cost overruns for the Australian planes if we have trouble getting there at the right time, and the delays will get worse.

You spoke of the pilots, but what about the technicians? The new delivery of Australian aircraft will take place in 2025. Why do we need to fly the aircraft? We could keep them on the ground so that the technicians can take care of the current planes, and we could use these planes for parts. I'm wondering about these things.

It's like a bottomless pit and it's costing us a great deal of money. I'm concerned about the additional money. I'm wondering whether we can achieve our goals.

• (1715)

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The investments that we're making into these projects include investment in our people as well to make sure that we have the right number of pilots and technicians for the aircraft we have. That's the plan that the air force has been building. That includes the transition into the new fighter fleet as well.

It is quite complex because we look at not just the mechanics and pilots but also at how the training goes as we fly those missions. It is a fine balance that we are doing, but this is a challenge that we have been given.

When it comes to the investments, we're willing to make those investments so that our air force has the capability to continue to fly that mission, and it includes flying more as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: It would be worthwhile for the committee to know how many pilots and technicians are really needed, and how many pilots are ready to go into combat right now. We're lacking data. Things should be clearer in this area. What's the average number of flying hours for pilots over the past year? We never know where things stand. For example, how many pilots and technicians do we need right now? Can you give this information to the committee?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We can get the information regarding not only where we are, but more importantly, where we're going, what we need and how we're going to get there. We'll get you that information.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Madam Chair, thank you very much.

I'd like to pick up on the point of the pilot shortage, Minister.

To what extent are we investing upstream in the cadet program, particularly the air cadet program? Is there an opportunity there to generate even greater interest in the profession of flying, the discipline of flying, and the skills related to it and to focus on the intake that way?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The reason I'm chuckling on this is that our cadet program is absolutely amazing. Even in my own riding, I have an air cadet program that started with just a few cadets and it's just ballooning. The diversity that you see there is absolutely amazing. I actually have asked the leadership: How are the cadets getting this? They're representative of their community, and there's interest there.

We do have to be mindful that the cadet program was purposely separated from the military, but at the same time, I think the military is like any other profession, and we need to be able to showcase this.

Part of it is bringing some of the programs back into it, for example, some of the glider training and the summer camps as well. The more you do in real activity into that leadership program, the more it allows them to learn about potential opportunities for them in the future.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Minister, thank you for that.

The other synergy that exists, if that's the right label, is that we also have a civilian pilot shortage. The attraction there is that civilian airlines love to hire military pilots because of the standard of training, the flight hours and the quality of flight hours.

Is there more that we could do to signal to young pilots—and I'll take you in moment to the diversity and inclusion question that's added to this—to look not just at a military career but at a subsequent civilian career that could lead to management positions in the aviation sector and all kinds of other opportunities as well, including rotary wing flying?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Showcasing that opportunity is very important. One thing I will stress that civilian aviation can't do is fly the type of missions that are flown in the air force. Everyone thinks about fighters. I've actually gone to the school where they teach our pilots. I don't know what's going to happen when the new *Top Gun* comes out, but a lot of people want to be helicopter pilots. I'll be honest with you; when I fly in the Chinook, I'm amazed. It's one of my favourite aircraft to be in.

When I have the opportunity to fly with our Hercules pilots in operational aircraft, I ask them why they are doing it and what the issues are. Their response will answer your question. They say, "Sir, we can't do this anywhere else. We're flying into small landing areas in Africa. When you get to do real things, that's what keeps us in."

When we're doing more with our air force around the world and utilizing it—and, boy, are we ever—that's a retention tool as well.

To be honest with you, I get to meet people from all over. I am even seeing significant improvement in diversity as well, the more we reach out. I think it is an untapped resource that we're getting better at.

• (1720)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Minister, I want to pick up on that very point and take you back to our visits to the Mali mission. I mentioned a young female officer who was in conversation with us on the medical questions that she put to us and the solutions that were put forward in the sense of bringing plasma into theatre. She's a female officer, part of the flight crew of a Chinook helicopter.

What do we need to do to gain even greater interest from women, from minorities, in the Canadian Forces? Maybe we need to look at very specific examples like that one.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: There are many things that we are doing and many things that we still need to do. We need to get the message out. A huge priority is fixing the culture inside the Canadian Armed Forces, which we are working on 110%.

Women need to be able to see themselves and think, "I, too, can do that." That's what we need to do. We need to encourage our leadership—like General Carignan, who is at NATO—to share their experience—Chris Whitecross and especially our NCOs. I've served with many of them. Sometimes they're reluctant to share their stories because they don't want to talk about what they've done. They think they are just part of the team.

There are a lot of things that we can do. We're going to be looking at ways to improve that. We're trying to put some science behind this as well.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: As you mentioned, that includes reservists as well. They are much closer to us, as MPs in the community, to use as channels for telling stories.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We need to look at how we optimize the reserves even more to make them more operationally effective.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you, Madam Chair.

On Saturday, there were two Russian Bear aircraft flying in U.K. airspace, in Irish airspace and intruding into Norway's airspace. We had the oil market tanking with the price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia. On Monday, we had more Russian planes in Canadian airspace and U.S. airspace, tying up four fighter jets, two Canadian and two American. Then we have today the WHO's declaring a pandemic. It's just when our attention is distracted with something else that Putin always seems to make a move.

I'm looking through the estimates, but I don't see any money in here to upgrade our NORAD, our northern defence detection capabilities. That's what General Vance said is the greatest threat right now. Where's the money for our modernized NORAD?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First of all, if we go back into the defence policy, we committed to upgrading NORAD because it's a significant project. The only reason it wasn't done is that it's going to take greater study with the U.S. to decide what needs to be done.

The defence policy was about putting a plan in place where we actually have all the money that's there. What we didn't want to do was put out a plan that didn't have the money in it. That's why it was in the defence policy that we were going to get it done, and now it's in my mandate letter.

Having said this, now we have launched internally the plan towards how to get there. Let's not also forget that we've already made investments into the early investments to set ourselves up. We launched three satellites last year that would have been up a little bit sooner, but the company wasn't able to put them up. We have two more satellite projects. We're putting the right research and development up in the north. We're doing some cutting-edge research up in the north to take advantage of that. With regard to the Arctic and offshore patrol ships, we've now decided to purchase a sixth. The first one is going to be delivered to us as well.

There are the exercises that we're also conducting up in the north. Let's not forget the work that we do with CSE on the cyber side.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I wanted to talk about the north warning system, though.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Exactly—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: You talked about satellites.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: You said NORAD, though.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We know that with the curvature of the Earth, the satellites can't beam it down to where we need it in time. What about the infrastructure on the ground that we need to detect what is coming overhead before it actually gets here?

• (1725)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The north warning system is....

We will be investing in that as well, but—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How much?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: In addition to this, we also have to take a look at.... What I'm trying to do is actually provide additional information that I think is far more relevant.

We have to start looking to the future. What technology is going to replace the north warning system? Right now, some very good work is being done to look at what the next technology is that NORAD modernization will allow us to take advantage of. We invested in the old domain awareness system and satellites. Even from a search and rescue perspective, we're investing in new satellite technology that will help with search and rescue.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: In addition, you will be putting infrastructure on the ground, but you mentioned earlier that you're trying to get away from the diesel fuel and diesel operations with respect to electricity generation.

Would you be looking at the small, modular reactor technology, which is emissions-free, and having that to power your early north warning system?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: When it comes to how we power our system, it is extremely complex work. That type of advice will come from our specialists, our experts and especially our scientists.

These are the challenges that we have thrown out. What's important to us is that we want to move toward greener and cleaner technology, but making sure that we have the capability to deliver for our Arctic sovereignty is extremely important.

Let's not forget the Canadians who live up there. Our sovereignty is making sure that we support them as well. The exercises that we conduct, when it comes to search and rescue, other types of response, how we live up there, and investing in their equipment, are all happening as well.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: The north early warning system is all part of that.

You had committed a rapid response force to the UN. Has that been stood up yet? Where are we with that?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Are you talking about the quick reaction force?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Is it still going to happen even before the vote—

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: No, we have not committed to that.

As I stated, when we select missions as a government, we need to do the full analysis. If we make a decision on where we are going and what we are doing, we have to make sure that we're going to have the right impact, so that work is constantly ongoing with the UN.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: So the Security Council—

The Chair: There is time for one quick question.

Monsieur Robillard, you get it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister Sajjan, can you give us some information on the importance of the veteran's service card?

Veterans Affairs Canada is transferring \$1.5 million to National Defence to implement phase 3 of this initiative.

Why is this phase important? How will it help our veterans?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The Veterans Affairs card is something that our veterans have asked for, and what we've done has actually improved it. I don't have a copy of what it looks like.

Because we knew there was going to be a high demand for it, we had three phases of how to get it delivered. Phases one and two are complete. Everybody who retires now gets their card before they leave, and anybody who has retired beforehand is applying. We have a significant number of people who are applying, and we are working through that list to get it done.

It also identifies the years of service provided. It's an important recognition that they can have, but the nice thing about it is that it's back; it's newer and improved, and we're on the final phase of this.

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our thanks to you, Minister, and your esteemed team. Thank you very much for coming today. It was very enlightening. I think everybody took away some good information.

As a last-minute reminder, please have your witness lists in for the mental health study by the close of business on Friday.

With that, we will adjourn.

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