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• (1650)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): We have quorum. With that, I'll bring the meeting to order.

We've now completed our sound checks and our weather report from one end of the country to the other. I think we should publicize that on CBC, so that we all know what the weather is across the country.

Colleagues, we are now an hour and 20 minutes behind where we were supposed to be. I propose that we complete at least the first hour and then I'll seek guidance from colleagues as to how to complete the second hour.

With that, I'm going to call on Minister Blair, who is clearly one of the most popular ministers before this committee. I'm hard pressed to know why he is quite so popular, but I'm putting it down to his charm and his good looks.

With that, I'm going to ask Minister Blair to truncate his remarks as much as possible so that we can try to get back on our timeline.

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll accept your remarks with respect to charm, but I'm afraid, with respect to looks, it's contrary to the evidence before us.

I'd like to thank the committee for the invitation today, and I'm pleased to present the 2021 supplementary estimates (C) and the 2021-22 main estimates for the public safety portfolio.

I'm very ably joined today by a number of my colleagues. Respectfully, in the interest of time, I will not introduce them, but I'd like to take the opportunity to acknowledge that, during these incredibly difficult and challenging times over the past year, they've all stepped up to the plate. They've been working diligently to keep our borders, communities and correctional institutions safe as well as to protect our national security.

Today, Mr. Chair, I believe these estimates reflect that work.

I'll go through the supplementary estimates (C) for 2021 in order to present these items chronologically. The approval of these estimates will result in funding approvals of \$11.1 billion for the public safety portfolio, and that represents an increase of 3.3% over total authorities provided to date. I will briefly share some of the highlights here as they relate to how we manage our critical services during the pandemic.

The first is \$135.8 million for the Correctional Service of Canada for critical operating requirements related to COVID-19.

The second is \$35 million for Public Safety Canada, to support the urgent relief efforts of the Canadian Red Cross during the pandemic. Mr. Chair, as you know, the many volunteers and staff of the Canadian Red Cross have been there to support Canadians from the outset of this pandemic, including at long-term care homes right across the country.

I would ask this committee to join me in thanking them for all their service and for providing help where it was needed most. I'll also note that this funding is in addition to the \$35 million of vote 5 funding to Public Safety from Health Canada to support rapid response capacity testing being deployed to fill gaps in surge and targeted activities, including remote and isolated communities.

Included in these supplementary estimates is funding to enhance the integrity of our borders and asylum system while also modernizing the agency's security screening system. This funding will ensure that security screening results are made available at the earliest opportunity under a reformed system.

I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight that CBSA employees have done a remarkable job in keeping our borders safe in response to COVID-19. I'd like to take the opportunity as well to thank them for their continued hard work in keeping Canadians safe.

We're also working through these supplementary estimates to increase funding to end violence against indigenous women and girls and to provide essential mental health services.

For the RCMP, we are investing significant funds through both the supplementary and main estimates to support improvements to the federal policing investigative capacity by bolstering its capability with additional policing professionals, investigators and scientists. This will be used to deal with federal policing initiatives, which include responding to money laundering, cybercrime such as child sexual exploitation, and national security such as responding to terrorism and foreign-influenced hostile activities.

Mr. Chair, if I may, I'll turn to the 2021-22 main estimates. The public safety portfolio, as a whole, is requesting a total of approximately \$10 billion for this fiscal year. As I've previously noted, the portfolio funding has remained stable over the last few years. I will endeavour to break down the numbers by organization.

Public Safety Canada is seeking a total of \$1.1 billion in the main estimates. This represents an increase of \$329.9 million, or 45.5%, over the previous year. The bulk of this increase is due to the grants and contributions regarding the disaster financial assistance arrangements program, or DFAA. It's an increase in funding based upon forecasts from provinces and territories for expected disbursements under the DFAA for this fiscal year. This represents a critical part of my portfolio as minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

In these main estimates, increases also include \$15 million for incremental funding to take action against gun and gang violence. As this committee knows, I introduced Bill C-21 in the House not very long ago, a bill designed to protect Canadians from firearm violence and to fulfill our promise of strengthening gun control.

Mr. Chair, I know that this committee will have the chance to review that legislation at some future date, and I look forward to discussing it with them at that time.

I want to focus on a number of ongoing issues and our responses to them, starting with Correctional Service of Canada, which is seeking \$2.8 billion this fiscal year, which represents an increase of \$239.8 million or 9.4% over the previous year. This net increase is primarily due to a net increase in operating funding, which includes an increase for transforming federal corrections as a result of the passage of the former Bill C-83, which introduced the new structured intervention unit model.

• (1655)

That bill represents a major change in the way our correctional institutions operate, and recent reports have been clear that more work must be done. Funding is just one part of the solution. With the creation of data teams, efforts to replicate best practices nationally and enhanced support from independent, external decision-makers, I am confident we will deliver on this transformational promise.

I want to again acknowledge the troubling findings that were made in the Bastarache report, which I know this committee has examined and reviewed with concern. We are seeking funds to establish the independent centre for harassment resolution. This will be responsible for implementing the full resolution process, including conflict management, investigations and decision-making.

Mr. Chair, we know more work needs to be done. I'd like to conclude by noting the importance of our oversight agencies. You will see in the main estimates that we are seeking to increase funding for the Office of the Correctional Investigator, the CRCC and the ERC, the latter by close to 100%.

With that, Mr. Chair, I thank you and the members of the committee for your patience as I delivered my opening remarks. I'm happy to answer questions that members may have about these estimates and the collective work of our portfolio.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you for your timeliness.

With that, we'll turn to Mr. Motz, Madam Khera, Madam Michaud and Mr. Harris for six minutes each, please.

Mr. Motz.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you again, Minister, for being here. It's nice to see you again.

Minister, I'm curious if there's a reason your chief of staff, Zita Astravas, is refusing to respond to an officer of Parliament, that being the clerk of the defence committee, who has made numerous attempts—four, the last I'm aware of—to request testimony about the handling of the General Vance sexual harassment allegations in 2018.

Will you commit today, sir, to ensuring that she appears ASAP?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): I have a point of order, Chair.

The minister is here to speak to the public safety estimates and not about his staff and what they might have done or what they're being asked to do. This has nothing to do with that.

The Chair: I see it as a valid point of order. I usually allow members a fairly wide range.

If Mr. Motz, by some means or another, can tie his question into the estimates, it would be helpful to the chair.

Mr. Glen Motz: Sure. She's part of the team, Mr. Chair, and therefore is part of the estimates. Yes, it is relevant.

I'd like to have the minister uphold the parliamentary rules and democracy in his office. If he can't answer that or refuses to commit, then I guess we have our answer. Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you and I have had a number of conversations about getting some help for Shelly MacInnis-Wynn, the widow of RCMP officer David Wynn who was slain back in 2015. You have promised every time, sir, to get someone from your department to reach out to her and to help her. Over the last year and a half that you and I have had these off-and-on conversations, that has yet to occur.

I'm wondering why we have to keep having this conversation about doing the right thing and having her—and many others like her, sir—access the benefits they're entitled to.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much for that very important question. Of course, I recall those conversations very well.

Fortunately today, I'm joined by the commissioner of the RCMP. As your question directly relates to an HR matter for her department, I would invite her to offer any response.

The Chair: Commissioner Lucki.

Commissioner Brenda Lucki (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Minister.

First of all, obviously my heart goes out to Shelly for the loss of Constable Wynn.

We've received several pieces of correspondence from Ms. MacInnis-Wynn, and we have been dealing with her directly. She has a family liaison in Alberta. There have been quite a few back-and-forths with compensation questions. We have been doing some calculations for her and getting some necessary information that she has been having trouble getting.

There has been a constant back-and-forth, and I think she has pretty well gotten the information she's requested up to date.

• (1700)

Mr. Glen Motz: I won't belabour the point, Commissioner.

Back to the minister, I've spoken to her again as recently as last evening and she does not. It's more than just the RCMP, sir. It rests with you. I would encourage you to continue to follow up with that.

Sir, I want to move on to the buyback. This is the third meeting that you've been in front of us. You've been asked the funding amounts for this firearms compensation program that you have announced. I don't see it anywhere in the estimates. I can't find any estimates here to cover off the cost of this confiscation.

How many billions of dollars do you anticipate this buyback costing the taxpayer, sir?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Motz. It gives me an opportunity to clarify something.

I would just point out that in the legislation we've introduced there are strong new regulations that create a new regime placing additional restrictions upon the weapons that were prohibited by order in council back on May 1. That's what's in the legislation. That legislation's going to be very important to facilitate an efficient, orderly and responsible buyback program, which we've committed to bringing forward. We'll bring it forward when the legislation advances through the House.

I understand you're anxious to see that outcome. I'm looking forward to your support to move this legislation through the House and through committee as expeditiously as possible.

Mr. Glen Motz: Minister, if it actually was to improve public safety, you'd have my full support. It doesn't, so I won't be supporting it.

In June of 2020, I asked you how many toys you were including in this firearms ban. You said that was an absolute lie spread by the firearms owners. I'm wondering what happened. We now have air-soft banned. You're destroying hundreds of companies and thousands of jobs in this country, and the pastime of tens of thousands of Canadians.

Who's safer by this proposal?

Hon. Bill Blair: Canadians are, Mr. Motz.

By the way, when you asked me the question last June, you asked about the order in council. Of course, replica firearms weren't dealt with in that order in council, but they are in Bill C-21. That's in direct response to urging that we've received from police leaders across the country.

Today I spoke to Chief Neufeld in Calgary. On March 4, two of his officers were involved in a tragic incident when somebody pointed what they obviously believed was a real firearm at them. They discharged their weapons. A woman died. There's now an independent investigation going on. It's extremely traumatic for those officers and traumatic for the community as well—

Mr. Glen Motz: Yes, thank you, Minister. I'm fully aware of that.

Hon. Bill Blair: I know you don't want to hear the facts on this, but these represent a danger.

Mr. Glen Motz: Minister, I have one last question for you.

The Chair: Unfortunately, Mr. Motz, you've just gone over the—

Mr. Glen Motz: Chair, a point of order was brought up and my time was used. I still have 40 seconds based on my clock.

The Chair: No, the clock was stopped during your point of order and you're now at six minutes and 21 seconds. I'm sorry about that.

With that, I'm going to move on to Madam Khera for six minutes, please.

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I echo what John said earlier. I feel like you're part of this committee because I see you here so often. It's good to see you. Thanks again for being here.

Minister, we know this pandemic has shone a light on the vulnerabilities that exist in our communities, especially visible minorities, whether they are Black Canadians, South Asian Canadians, Muslim Canadians or Asian Canadian populations. We know that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian racism has been on the rise and has only escalated, even though we know it existed before that. StatsCan reported last summer that visible minorities experienced an increase in harassment or attacks based on their race, ethnicity or skin colour, which had tripled compared with the rest of the population since the COVID-19 pandemic started, with the largest increase among Chinese and Korean Canadian populations.

All that, Minister, coupled with the recent events in the U.S., is very real and very concerning. Can you perhaps talk a bit about the work that you're undertaking to fight violence fuelled by hate, racism and discrimination in all its forms?

• (1705)

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you so much, Ms. Khera.

This is actually a very important question, not just for the public safety portfolio but for all Canadians. What we have seen is a very disturbing and concerning rise in racism, intolerance and hatred, not just in our society but right around the world.

Many of these issues have been aggravated by the pandemic but they don't begin there, so our response has to be very comprehensive. I can tell you that in response to the growing concern across Canada with the very significant and serious increase in incidents of hatred directed towards Asian Canadians—and by the way, I spoke to the chief of police in Vancouver in response to these events last week—I reached out to police leadership right across the country, in every part of the country. I engaged them in a conversation about our collective response to these acts of hatred. The chief in Vancouver tells me they've seen a 770% increase in hate crimes directed towards Asian Canadians. This is completely unacceptable.

I also reached out and spoke today to the executive of the CACP and raised the issue, once again, of our collective response. We spoke, for example, about the tools and resources they need to deal with online hate. I advised them that our government is working on bringing forward legislation for the removal of online harms, including online hate, for the preservation of that evidence and for ensuring that the police and law enforcement have access to the evidence and the tools they need to deal more effectively.

We talked about how certain other measures, including the red flag laws that are introduced in Bill C-21, can be used to deal more effectively with those who are online advocating violence against women and religious or ethnic minorities in this country. They should not have access to firearms. They represent an unacceptable risk. We talked about those tools as well.

I can tell you that, in all of my agencies, this is our most important discussion. We acknowledge that ideologically motivated violent extremism, which includes all of the hatred, biases and intolerances that concern all Canadians—or should concern all Canadians—is at the forefront of this because it represents the greatest threat to the domestic security of all Canadians.

Ms. Khera, there is no place for racism or intolerance anywhere in our society. Certainly, I want to assure you that all of our agencies and departments understand that they have a responsibility to take action. We're looking at all the tools and resources they need to ensure we are able to do that.

Ms. Kamal Khera: Thank you, Minister.

On the same topic, in the main estimates you were seeking increased funding for the security infrastructure program, and I believe we have quadrupled the funding since forming the office. What role does this program play in protecting communities at risk, including the ones I just mentioned?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'll try to be brief, but it's such a great program. It provides resources to religious institutions and community organizations that are at risk, that are vulnerable and that are too often the target of hatred and intolerance.

We have quadrupled the funding for the security infrastructure program, but I will tell you, it's always oversubscribed. We work very closely with all of the organizations that seek this funding. We encourage them to participate. It has proven to be a valuable asset to them, and it helps them improve their security infrastructure. It's a part of society's response and we're going to continue to support those organizations. We also know that our departments and agencies, law enforcement and national security have a responsibility as well, and we're going to step up on every front.

Ms. Kamal Khera: Thank you.

Could you just briefly talk about the issue of oversight? I know you mentioned that in the main estimates, you're seeking an increase in the level of funding [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] investing 3% more than last year. The CRCC, I believe, is 2% more than last year, and the external review committee for the RCMP, I believe, is 100% more than the year before.

In your opinion, why is it so important for these agencies to have this effective oversight? Will you be reintroducing legislation to bring oversight to the CBSA?

Hon. Bill Blair: The answer is yes. The reason, if I may sum it up in one word, is trust. Without the public's trust, without the consent of the people who are policed, who are subject to the actions of our border officers or who are in corrections, we can't serve appropriately.

All of the agencies, the RCMP, CBSA, CSIS and Corrections Canada, understand the importance of maintaining public trust. That's why independent, civilian oversight is such an important component of that. When I say "independent", people don't have an expectation, for example, that police will investigate themselves. That is why I think independent oversight of complaint resolution is the best way to make it effective.

We have begun, with the introduction of—

• (1710)

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're going to have to leave it there.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you may go ahead. You have six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon. Thank you for being here today.

In recent weeks, we have seen a rise in violence against women. In Quebec alone, seven femicides were committed.

Minister, on March 19, you said you wanted to combat domestic violence and violence against women. One way you're planning to do that is covered in Bill C-21, which you introduced on February 16. The idea is to combat firearms smuggling and trafficking by creating “red flag” and “yellow flag” laws. You also talked about initiatives to tackle gun and gang violence to the tune of \$46 million.

Have you already undertaken that spending? Is it covered in the bill? If so, that means nothing will be done until the bill is passed.

Do the existing estimates contain funding to combat violence against women?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Let me assure you that there has been significant spending against violence. I agree with you that violence against any vulnerable population is unacceptable, but violence against women is deeply concerning and what we have seen during the pandemic is an unacceptable increase in gender-based violence, violence directed at women in domestic situations and in society generally.

That's why we have introduced the first-ever federal strategy to address gender-based violence in 2017 and why I am working with the minister for a national action plan to end gender-based violence. We've made a number of very significant investments over the past year. For example, over 1,500 frontline organizations to deliver essential services to survivors of gender-based violence have received significant benefits, with over six million people benefiting each year from the important work of these organizations.

We are also making other significant investments. When the cases of GBV were increasing at the onset of the pandemic, we took some swift action. We provided over \$100 million in emergency COVID funding to more than 1,000 organizations providing services directly to the victims of gender-based violence. There are investments in policing, in security.

We are bringing forward other legislation relevant to this, but we recognize in these circumstances that organizations that do the work in communities on the ground need our support and we've been working very hard to make sure that they receive that support, which is reflected in the budgets that I bring before you today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

The number of violent offences involving firearms has gone up by 21% in recent years, going from 2,861 to 3,503 offences, an increase of 642.

Bill C-21 aims to enhance the capacity of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP, and the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, to combat the illegal importation of firearms. That's great, but according to CBSA's departmental plan for 2021-22, spending is supposed to decrease every year until 2023-24.

How do you explain that? How do you expect the agency to do more with less?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, I understand. Just to be clear, there is a reduction in their expenditures. It's because they have concluded an infrastructure program that was funded over a number of years. That infrastructure program has now been concluded, so we no longer need to continue to fund the implementation of that. That accounts for the reduction.

We have made other significant investments in CBSA. They have had to do extraordinary things during the pandemic, because in addition to their responsibilities for border security and border integrity to determine the eligibility of people to enter, for example, or to detect and stop contraband material, they've had to continue with all of their responsibilities. They enforce over 90 laws. Just last week the RCMP and CBSA were involved in the seizure of 249 handguns, for example, that were being smuggled into Canada from New York state into the province of Quebec.

That was excellent work done by our officials. I offer that example just to provide you with assurance that our agencies remain very much focused on preventing contraband material, particularly in their responsibility to interdict the supply of guns.

I also want to take the opportunity to advise you of my conversations with the United States. I've reached out to the new Secretary of Homeland Security. We are establishing a new bilateral cross-border task force to deal with gun smuggling on both sides of the border. We know that the United States is the source of many of our guns and close collaboration between Homeland Security and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in the United States and our officials in the sharing of information is going to be key to our success in keeping those guns out of Canada.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have a minute left, Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My next question is precisely about the Canada-U.S. border. The government opted to appeal the ruling on the safe third country agreement, which was overturned by the courts. The government has already said that Roxham Road would again become an irregular border crossing once the temporary agreement with the U.S. to curb the COVID-19 pandemic ended.

Minister, has any money been set aside to deal with the flow of asylum seekers and individuals into Canada that will resume once the pandemic is behind us and Roxham Road is open again?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: This is an important issue.

I will tell you that the conditions do not yet exist for a lifting of the restrictions between Canada and the United States at the border. We did implement very effective measures to restrict the movement of irregular migrants at Roxham Road.

At the same time, we're working with the United States. We are in discussions with respect to the future of the safe third country agreement, and as you know, that matter is also before the courts.

We'll proceed with all of those important activities in order to ensure that we maintain the integrity of our borders, and at the same time, remain a welcoming country to those who are seeking asylum and refuge in Canada.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, go ahead, for six minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for joining us today.

We received this week the report from the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP on the Colten Boushie matter, with a number of recommendations.

First of all, how do you, not Commissioner Lucki, plan to ensure that the recommendations are actually implemented? We know there's no real mechanism to report back to the CRCC on the recommendations. How do you plan, as the only real oversight, to ensure that that takes place?

Hon. Bill Blair: That's an important question.

Let me first acknowledge the importance of the report from the CRCC. The commissioner and the RCMP have acknowledged and committed to responding positively to all of the recommendations that have been made.

I don't disagree. It is my responsibility to oversee the implementation of those recommendations and on behalf of Canadians and Parliament ensure that the response is appropriate.

In addition to those very important recommendations arising from that event, let me first acknowledge that the way in which Colten Boushie's family, and Ms. Baptiste, in particular, were treated was unacceptable. We deeply regret that.

Mr. Jack Harris: It's been condemned by Parliament today. There was a unanimous consent motion condemning and denouncing the racism disclosed in the report. It also acknowledged that the report revealed the RCMP destroyed records of police communications the night that Colten Boushie was killed and condemned the

cover-up. We know that. That's a terrible thing, and the House has recognized that.

How are you going to ensure the recommendations are followed? That's the key point there. I don't have much time, as you know, so please don't gobble up the time with other comments.

Hon. Bill Blair: I thought I was responding to your question, so I'll endeavour to try.

I meet on a regular basis with the commissioner of the RCMP. I have a responsibility, and I get regular updates from the commissioner on the activities of the RCMP. We are also very much engaged. I'll refer you back, and I know you don't want to go back to the Speech from the Throne, but we—

Mr. Jack Harris: No, I don't want to go back to the Speech from the Throne. I'm asking you, how do you follow it?

Hon. Bill Blair: We made very significant commitments of reform and improvements in oversight, and we are working forward on those.

Mr. Jack Harris: We see, though, that the principal oversight body at the moment, the CRCC, has a reduction in this budget. The commissioner has complained that she has inadequate funds to do both the complaints that are being brought to her, plus the systemic complaints for which the commission was given the power to undertake in 2014. The Colten Boushie case alone cost \$1.2 million going back to last December, but we're seeing a decrease in her budget year over year.

Why are we not providing the kind of money...? She says she needs about a 50% increase in her budget to do a proper job, but even 30%, which would be \$3 million or \$4 million, would make a big difference. However, we see a decrease, not an increase. Why is that?

• (1720)

Hon. Bill Blair: In fact, you're not correct. The funding for CRCC is actually up over these two.... It's not a great deal, but more funding will be brought forward with the legislation. The reintroduction of our bill for civilian oversight of CBSA will also include significant new enhancements with respect to oversight, timelines and accountability for the RCMP.

All of that work is coming. We've introduced that legislation twice. I'm looking forward to bringing it forward again, and your support as we do so.

Mr. Jack Harris: Speaking of the CBSA, Minister, you mentioned a couple of times the increased interest in border smuggling and enforcement against it, yet the CBSA budget for border enforcement has actually gone down by about \$20 million from two years ago. What we're seeing as well is that, while we know over a thousand CBSA officers were removed from the CBSA by the previous Conservative government, you've replaced maybe 160 or 180 of them.

Where is the increased availability to carry out this anti-smuggling enforcement, which we think is very important, particularly with respect to guns? Where's the money for it?

Hon. Bill Blair: I think it's very important too, and I'm going to invite the president of the CBSA to talk about his staffing and his budget.

Mr. Jack Harris: We can do that in the second half of the meeting, sir. I'd like to know what you can tell us about it.

Hon. Bill Blair: I thought you might want the answer now, and he'd be able to provide you with the particulars of that, Jack.

Mr. Jack Harris: You don't have an answer yourself, then, as to where the money is coming from.

Hon. Bill Blair: I can tell you that the CBSA asked for and is getting, in these estimates, \$30.8 million this year alone for smuggling, in answer to the establishment of the U.S. task force. That's the data I have in front of me.

Mr. Jack Harris: Is that an increase of \$30 million, or is it the total budget for dealing with smuggling?

Hon. Bill Blair: It's broken down in the data, and that's why I asked whether the president could provide and confirm an answer with respect to what it represents.

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: In the 30 seconds, I guess, we might have had an answer, if the minister had one for us.

I don't mean to insult you, sir, but I expected you to be able to tell us whether it was new money or not.

Hon. Bill Blair: Jack, I'm not insulted by your question.

Mr. Jack Harris: I think that uses up my time, Chair.

Thank you for saying that, sir.

The Chair: I found, in my relationship with the minister, that it's very difficult to insult him.

We now move to the five-minute round. We'll hear from Mr. Van Popta, Madam Lambropoulos, Madam Michaud, Mr. Harris, Mr. Kurek and Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Van Popta.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, Minister Blair. It's good to see you here.

I have a question about Canada's other pandemic: fentanyl and the opioid overdose crisis across the country, and certainly here in my home jurisdiction of metro Vancouver. We don't see any real plans for combatting the real problem, and that is the illegal importation of fentanyl into our country.

That's a CBSA question. What are the plans around this, sir?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you. It is a terribly important question, and we have seen an unacceptable increase this year. The numbers were already tragic and unacceptable, and they have gotten worse in this year of the pandemic.

I agree with you, sir. Actually, I spent a fair portion of my life, prior to coming to Ottawa, dealing with transnational organized drug crime, and I'm well aware.

This is not just an issue, by the way, for CBSA, but there are a number of very significant steps taken with CBSA to increase their capacity, not just in people but also in the use of new technologies and new authorities.

For example, one way in which we saw fentanyl was being too frequently imported illegally into this country was through the mail system. We brought forward additional, new measures and controls over that method of importation so that the CBSA can deal with it effectively. In addition [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and those are transnational in nature.

That is the responsibility of the RCMP, and it's why I hope you see reflected in the estimates that we've provided a significant additional investment in the federal policing role of the RCMP. It's that federal policing capacity, which deals with organized crime, drug smuggling and money laundering, that is so important in dealing with this.

Finally, if I may conclude, I've also had conversations today with the executive of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, who expressed very similar concerns but also want to see the government move forward on responding to their plea that this be dealt with more as a public health crisis.

The interdiction of the supply of fentanyl and precursor chemicals, illicit opioids, into this country remains a very significant focus for this government and our agencies, but we're also introducing harm reduction measures so that we can keep people safe. I think the combination of those two things is really important.

• (1725)

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I understand there are many tools available to fight a problem like this, but this problem has been with us for many years. It's not just in the last year. However, things seem to be going in the wrong direction.

I want to focus, again, on the illegal importation. Where are these drugs coming from? Why can Canada not solve this problem? Why can we not get these harmful, illegal drugs that are killing so many people off our streets?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much.

The interdiction of the chemicals used in their production and for dangerous drugs like fentanyl and other drugs is often part of it. It's a transnational organized crime activity. We know, and I've said this publicly previously, that many of the chemicals used in the manufacture of these drugs, and many of these drugs, come from other places in the world, primarily Southeast Asia. I have very close relationships with UNODC, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which is very much overseeing investigations in all parts of the world.

The RCMP is known internationally as leaders in those investigations. We participate with our Five Eyes partners and with other international organizations to interdict the supply. It remains a significant challenge, not just for Canada but around the world. That's why it's also important, notwithstanding our best efforts at supply interdiction, that we also work to reduce the demand for these drugs. For those who are using these drugs problematically, we also have to ensure that we implement strong harm reduction measures based on public health to keep people alive.

As you say, there are many tools, but I want to assure you that's why we're investing significantly in enhancing the federal policing capacity.

Mr. Van Popta, I'm not sure whether you're aware of this, but in 2013 an enormous amount of funding and resources and staffing were removed from the RCMP, and this had a very deleterious effect on their federal policing capacity. We've been working tirelessly over the past five years to rebuild that capacity, because Canadians depend on the RCMP in their federal policing role to deal with that very problem of the transnational organized crime responsible for importing drugs.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I understand, sir.

The Chair: You have about 15 seconds, unfortunately.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Unfortunately, things seem to have been going in the wrong direction over the past five years that this government has been in office.

My time is up. Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister Blair, for being here, and to all the officials who are here to help answer our questions today.

A couple of issues that are of concern to me have already briefly been touched on, but I would like a little more detail with regard to them. Many of the members of the Saint-Laurent community, which I'm a part of and which I represent, are quite concerned about gun violence. It's been on the rise. In my province of Quebec, gender-based violence as well has been on the rise. In the last seven weeks, I believe, seven women have been murdered at the hands of their partners.

Specifically with regard to gender-based violence, I know you spoke about working with the minister to ensure that women get the protection they need. A lot of women are turned away from shelters because there are not enough spaces, and I know that's not necessarily your domain. However, I'd like to know what kind of work you guys are doing together in order to help make women safer.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much. It is a critically important question.

The Minister for Women and Gender Equality, Minister Monsef, and I are responsible for bringing forward the national strategy. We've been working on a number of different elements, and there are very significant components of this. However, you're absolutely right. I think it's important to acknowledge the organizations that

provide shelter and support to women fleeing domestic violence, giving them and their families a safe place to go.

We've actually, just in this pandemic year, expended over \$100 million to support those organizations and to create that safe space for women who are fleeing domestic violence. We also are looking at a number of different legislative responses with respect to online harms, which can include gender-based violence and hatred. We're also, as I mentioned earlier, bringing forward firearms legislation. Let me just speak about that for the moment, if I may.

Every five days, a woman is killed in this country in a domestic violence incident. Over 500 times a year, they are victimized with firearms. We know that the presence of a firearm in a home that is experiencing gender-based and domestic violence.... That's a dangerous situation made deadly by the presence of a firearm, so we're bringing forward new tools. I've been meeting with organizations across the country. Many of them are very concerned about how they could implement those new measures. They see them as valuable and important, but they're going to need support. That's another commitment that we've made: that we'll provide them with the financial and other supports that they're going to need to make this effective to keep people safe.

The one thing I can say, if I may.... You know, I've had a conversation just in your area. I recently had a conversation with both Deputy Chief Carbonneau and Chief Caron of the SPVM to talk about what they're doing with respect to gun violence in their community, including gender-based violence, and the supports that they need. We talked about some of the money that we've made available through the Province of Quebec for municipal police services in doing their work.

We also talked about our commitment to bring forward \$250 million over the next five years to invest in communities, to invest in those circumstances that give rise to gun violence in all of our communities right across the country, and that investment will be in those community organizations that do extraordinary work. I'll be looking for assistance and guidance from members of Parliament from all parties, right across this country, to make sure that we make those investments with the best effect of keeping people safe.

● (1730)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much. I really appreciate that. I'd love to get a call from you so that I can help in that regard.

Another question I have is related to stricter gun laws. Of course, we've announced that's part of the plan and we're moving ahead with this. A lot of illegal guns are brought in from the border. I know that other people have touched on this as well.

What do you have as a plan, Minister Blair, with regard to making it less easy to smuggle guns at the border? I know that the estimates are one thing. Officials may have a certain plan forward, but as a minister, where's your leadership [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] this?

Hon. Bill Blair: It's in a number of places.

First of all, there are three ways in which criminals gain access to guns. They're smuggled across the border, stolen from legal gun owners or gun stores, or criminally diverted—where people buy them legally and sell them illegally. Bill C-21 addresses all three of those ways in which guns get into the hands of criminals.

Specifically at the border, we're increasing the maximum penalty, which I think will demonstrate to the courts Canadians' concern and denouncement of gun smuggling and will hold those individuals and organizations—this is an organized crime activity primarily—to account.

We're also making sure that the police and our border officers have access to the data and information that they need in order to be effective in detecting that activity of gun smuggling. We're adding additional resources, as well, to the police, the RCMP and municipal police services, and to our border services officers.

Finally, I will tell you from many years of experience that, without working collaboratively and co-operatively with U.S. authorities, we can't be completely successful because the U.S. is the source of so many guns. That's why we've reached out to the Department of Homeland Security to establish a new international border crime forum and a bilateral task force to deal with gun smuggling from both sides.

The Chair: We are going to have to leave it there.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

The Chair: It seems like run-on, conjunctive sentences are the order of the day.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you may go ahead. You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I'd like to hear your comments on the situation related to fraud.

According to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, as of February 28, 2021, there were 11,266 reports of fraud and 7,646 victims of fraud. The amount of money lost to fraud was more than \$34.6 million.

Police officials indicate that police have their hands full dealing with just fraud complaints, especially related to the Canada emergency response benefit.

Has any Public Safety Canada funding been earmarked to tackle fraud, go after fraudsters and help members of the public who have been defrauded, for example, by providing compensation or covering the bill for them?

Does Public Safety Canada have a plan to tackle fraud, or does that responsibility fall to the Canada Revenue Agency or another department?

• (1735)

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Let me speak about fraud. Fraud can take many forms, and what we're also seeing is online fraud and cybercrime. Generally we've seen a significant increase and, particularly during the pandemic, I think people have been made more vulnerable. There are a number of very concerning circumstances where seniors and vulnerable people have been targeted with respect to fraudulent activity.

From a criminal investigation standpoint, it is the responsibility of the police of jurisdiction. For example, in the city of Montreal that would be the SPVM. In other jurisdictions, it might be the SQ. In addition to that, the RCMP at C Division in Quebec.... I'll speak specifically to Quebec, but the police of jurisdiction issue is relevant in every case. If it's a tier-one organized crime activity related to fraud, that is the responsibility of the federal police in C Division in the RCMP. All three orders of government and all three orders of police services have a responsibility there.

We are also looking at ways in which we can deal with many of the online harms. The RCMP have been very active in a number of significant investigations, because the source of these frauds is not domestic in many cases. It's actually taking place in other countries and then people are being victimized in Canada. That's where the RCMP plays a very important role in their federal policing role and responsibilities to work transnationally with police of other jurisdictions in other countries in order to address criminal activity that is victimizing Canadians. That is primarily within the public safety portfolio—our responsibility.

There are many implicated agencies in dealing with online harms and threats and criminal activity within the online space, including the finance department through FINTRAC, for example. We're all engaged in this.

The Chair: Okay. We'll have to leave it there.

Mr. Harris, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Minister Blair, you talked about the changes in the SIUs as a result of Bill C-83.

We know from Dr. Doob's most recent report that we still have a situation in the prisons. There is solitary confinement still going on, and to the extent that it meets the accepted international definition, including by Canada, of torture. One in 10 inmates who are subjected to these SIUs are subjected to this.

That's a shocking thing for Canada to find from the report of Anthony Doob. What do you intend to do about that? Are you going to fix this, and how soon?

Hon. Bill Blair: Absolutely, we're going to fix it.

You'll see in these estimates that we are bringing forward additional resources to make sure we can fully implement Bill C-83 and the SIUs right across this country.

Jack, I'm not making any excuses. I accept the findings of Dr. Doob's report. I've met a number of times with Dr. Doob. I've known him for almost 40 years. I have great respect for him. I also have great respect for the external review investigators who have also been looking at these issues.

There are issues of implementation that have been challenging, particularly during COVID, because the requirements for isolation related to the illness have impacted these measures. We remain committed to fully implementing Bill C-83 and ensuring that the SIUs are effective right across the country.

That's why the resources are being made available to Correctional Service Canada in these budgets I bring before you today.

Mr. Jack Harris: I have a related question regarding the correctional investigator, who makes report after report. He told our committee that he keeps making reports, and he expressed great frustration that the reports and recommendations that are made by him and others are being neglected and ignored by CSC, and through that by the ministry.

When are you going to start listening to what these reports have to say and implementing the recommendations? There is a great frustration. You give him a budget, but then you don't listen to him.

Hon. Bill Blair: With great respect, Jack, you're mis-characterizing that.

I meet with Dr. Zinger quite frequently. I have a great deal of respect...and I listen very carefully to him. His recommendations have directly impacted on the work of my department and my work, and I very much value his advice.

I understand that he brings forward some very challenging issues. I think he performs an absolutely essential role in advocacy and as the investigator for corrections. Mr. Sapers before him was also someone whose work I very much valued.

I do listen to him very clearly and, frankly, your characterization of his frustration as being directed at me is a bit of a stretch.

Mr. Jack Harris: Not to you. He didn't say it was to you. He said that the Correctional Service Canada is not doing—

The Chair: I think both of you are going to have to carry this off-line.

With that, we're going to go to Mr. Kurek, for five minutes, please.

• (1740)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Minister, regarding the first vote on the estimates and the question that was asked earlier about whether or not your chief of staff will be able to testify before committee, I want to give you the opportunity to answer a simple yes or no on whether you will bring that forward.

The Chair: Again, we kind of went to that....

Just so that no one will get upset, I've stopped the clock.

I ruled that as being of marginal relevance to estimates. Could you move on to another question, please?

Mr. Damien Kurek: With respect, Chair, I would simply say that the first vote we have is with regard to departmental finances. The office of the minister is one of those line items.

The Chair: Yes, and I suppose we could go into each and every one of his employees as well.

With that, can you move on to a question of some relevance, please?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Okay.

I think it speaks volumes, Mr. Minister, that there's no answer on that.

Minister, the Prime Minister promised in December that a first nations policing act was coming soon. Can you tell the committee today what "soon" means?

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes. Thanks very much. That's a very important question. One of the most important responsibilities that the Prime Minister has tasked me with is the co-development—

Mr. Damien Kurek: Just a date will be fine.

Hon. Bill Blair: I thought you wanted an answer to the question.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Yes. I'm asking when.

Hon. Bill Blair: Could you clarify it?

Mr. Damien Kurek: When is the first nations policing act coming?

Hon. Bill Blair: It will be when the process of co-development with the first nations across this country is complete. That process is already under way. We're meeting. That work is taking place. We will complete that work when the work is completed, obviously.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Minister.

I heard some concerns from frontline personnel specifically at CBSA that they lacked PPE at the beginning of the pandemic. Personnel at CBSA had some real frustrations in the response to COVID.

Most recently, I have heard from a number of folks at CBSA a level of frustration that frontline workers have been given no priority in terms of being given access to a vaccination. Is there a timeline to ensure that frontline workers at CBSA are able to get a vaccine?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'd invite you to direct that question to the provincial authorities. We're delivering vaccines at an accelerated pace to provincial health authorities right across the country. They have that responsibility.

I will also tell you that I think you mis-characterize it. I meet fairly frequently with CBSA officers in many parts of Canada. I hold fairly regular discussions with them. We work very carefully and closely with them to make sure they have the personal protection equipment and all the support they need.

I agree with you. I think they've done an extraordinary job and continue to do an extraordinary job—

Mr. Damien Kurek: With respect, Minister—

The Chair: Can we shrink the answers a little here? The members are getting a little frustrated.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Chair.

With respect, Minister, I think there have been a number of departments and areas of federal responsibility that have ensured that frontline workers.... I would think that, as the front line of our country, it would be a priority to ensure that the staff who are under your supervision would be protected.

Minister, you announced last October that there would be public health screening officers in place at all ports of entry, and I believe you said 190 of them by December of 2020. Yes or no, did that happen?

Hon. Bill Blair: There are two parts to your question. The first part is that the recommendation from the national advisory committee on immunization has identified frontline workers, including border service officers, as a priority in the second phase.

I'm led to believe by the provinces that the second phase should begin very shortly. It's just a matter of—

Mr. Damien Kurek: With respect, Minister, you said there would be 190 screening officers by December of 2020. Were those 190 officers put in place, yes or no?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, I'm not 100% sure what you're referring to there. I can tell you that there are 117 land border entries and four international airports that are—

Mr. Damien Kurek: Okay.

Hon. Bill Blair: —receiving international—

Mr. Damien Kurek: It was referenced in your press release in December that 190 locations would have public health screening officers, so thank you very much for that, Minister.

My colleague from Lakeland, who unfortunately couldn't be here today, asked you about six months ago whether or not you had spoken to the victims of the tragic Nova Scotia shooting. Have you had an opportunity to speak to those victims?

• (1745)

Hon. Bill Blair: In fact, we did respond to the victims of that inquiry and through their counsel. In response, we've established a public inquiry. Once that inquiry gets stood up, it's entirely inappropriate, as one might imagine—I hope you can—for any interference with the work of that public inquiry. It's now in the hands of the commissioners. They have our full confidence and full support in the important work they're doing.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you very much.

Minister, I think my time is running very close to an end, so I will comment that I find it very troubling that you didn't answer the question about one of your staff, who is paid by taxpayers through the estimates we'll be voting on today. I want to know whether you'll ask directly to have that staff member, your chief of staff, respond to a request by Parliament to testify before a committee.

The Chair: I think you made that point.

For a final question, we have Mr. Iacono for five minutes please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the minister and the officials from Canada's health and safety agencies for working so hard throughout the pandemic and regularly appearing before the committee.

Minister, my riding of Alfred-Pellan is hit by flooding on an ongoing basis.

With spring around the corner, could you tell us how the department's funding program helps disaster affected provinces and areas?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: As I said during my remarks, Angelo, one of the very significant increases in the public safety portion of the supplementaries that we're bringing forward is the increase in funds for the disaster relief fund that we make available to the provinces. It's in anticipation of the circumstances that you require. We work very closely with them and provide coordination in response to all of the emergencies that can take place, such as floods and fires, right across the country. We work very closely with the provinces and provide support.

In addition to that, the Minister of Infrastructure has been working with those same provincial and territorial partners to provide infrastructure investments that can mitigate and prevent disasters such as floods. It's not just a response; it's preventative work. We see both as critically important and we're doing the job.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Since the winter was a little less harsh, do you have a sense of what to expect in terms of problems and disasters caused by snowmelt?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: This is an important question. I do receive regular briefings from the government operations centre, which monitors all of those situations carefully.

Mr. Iacono, I agree with you that we've been fortunate in our weather in the past year and a half. Right now there are some areas that are identified as at risk, but it looks like the situation right across the country could be better than we've experienced.

For example, two or three years ago, you'll recall the terrible floods that occurred, particularly right across Quebec, and the terrible fires that took place mostly in western Canada. All of them were hugely impactful. It looks like, with the weather this year, we might be a little lucky, but I never count my chickens before they hatch, so we'll continue to monitor this really carefully.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

You mentioned \$35 million in additional funding for the Red Cross, which has played a vital role since the pandemic began.

How would you say members of the Red Cross answered the call and responded effectively to the crisis?

Will they continue to support residents of long-term care homes and at-risk indigenous communities specifically?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: This question gives me an opportunity to acknowledge the incredible contribution of both the Red Cross and the Canadian Armed Forces. When we received requests back in April from the Province of Quebec and the Province of Ontario regarding the serious outbreak of coronavirus in long-term care facilities, we were able to respond immediately. We did so, first of all, by sending members of the Canadian Armed Forces—over 1,350 of them—into Ontario and Quebec to provide services in 47 long-term care facilities. We then worked with the Province of Quebec and the community to transition to services being provided by the Canadian Red Cross, and it began providing that support in Quebec in July.

To date, there have been over 2,500 Canadian Red Cross personnel [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] sites in Quebec. I think they've done a great job. I've been very grateful for the support we have received from Parliament in funding them, and I'm also very grateful that they've stepped up and provided a great service.

We continue, by the way, to work very closely with the Province of Quebec. Several times the province has asked us to stay and continue to help, and we have done so. Between our government and the province, a lot of very good work has been done to improve the situation in long-term care facilities, and quite frankly we are beginning to see a light at the end of the tunnel. We have always been there, particularly for the Province of Quebec when it asked, and we'll continue to do so.

• (1750)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

You have about 15 seconds, which will not leave time for even throat clearing.

With that, we will bring the first hour to an end. I want to thank the minister on behalf of the committee.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I'm a little concerned whether you or your colleagues on this committee will put the women who suffered harassment from General Vance ahead of your own Liberal membership and ask the minister to answer the question that he was asked twice.

The Chair: I have now ruled twice that inquiry is not material to this particular meeting.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Chair, on point of privilege, I take great offence to anyone claiming that I, or any of my colleagues on the committee, or the minister don't care about the women who have been harassed in the Canadian Armed Forces. It's offensive that any of our colleagues—another MP—would even suggest that we condone that behaviour.

The Chair: With that, I am trying to bring the first hour to a close.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: I am bringing this to a close. You can bring your next point of order after I ask the minister to leave.

On behalf of the committee, we will now move into the second hour.

With that, Mr. Motz wishes to raise a point of order.

Mr. Glen Motz: Yes. I would like to have the committee vote on the confidence of you in the chair to rule that out of order and have a vote on that at this time, please.

The Chair: That's not a debatable motion, so we will go to the vote immediately.

You've heard the terms of Mr. Motz's expression of lack of confidence in the chair on the ruling that was made.

Mr. Clerk, would you call the roll?

Mr. Jack Harris: I have a point of order, Chair.

Is the motion of non-confidence in the chair out of order, or is this a motion to overrule the chair? I have never heard of a motion of non-confidence in the chair. Does that mean you have to resign or something?

The Chair: I think that would be the desire of Mr. Motz. Possibly I mis-characterized it as a motion, but it is a dilatory motion and is not debatable.

Mr. Glen Motz: It's about the ruling.

The Chair: We just simply move to the vote. You have heard how I have characterized the motion, but Mr. Motz has made his motion.

With that, I'm going to call the roll.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Could we ask the clerk to read the question first?

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, can you repeat the question, whatever it is?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Mark D'Amore): It's a challenge to the ruling basically. I will repeat the question.

Shall the chair's decision be sustained? I will proceed to call the roll for those members present.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues, for that ringing endorsement. Maybe I should bring up the impeachment motion now that I'm on a roll.

With that, I am going to turn to my good friend, Mr. Motz, who has six minutes, I believe. I have Mr. Motz, Madam Damoff, Madam Michaud and Mr. Harris for six minutes each.

Unless I'm guided otherwise, we have one hour. Within that hour we also have to vote on the estimates, so I will probably call the questioning to an end around five or 10 minutes prior to the hour.

Mr. Motz, you have six minutes.

• (1755)

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Chair, and to think I was going to compliment you on your activities earlier this week.

Anyway, I just want to assure Ms. Geddes, Commissioner Lucki and a few of the others who are on from different organizations that I won't be questioning you today. I want to focus my questions specifically to Mr. Stewart on issues around public safety.

It's about our emergency preparedness, sir.

The minister has told the committee here just recently that many aspects of the pandemic response are not and were not his responsibility, despite his being the minister for emergency preparedness.

Just to clarify, is the public safety department responsible for emergency preparedness and planning across the government as set out in the Emergency Management Act?

Mr. Rob Stewart (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Yes, sir. It is in many ways, although not entirely.

Mr. Glen Motz: Okay.

The Emergency Management Act states:

The Minister is responsible for exercising leadership relating to emergency management in Canada by coordinating, among government institutions and in cooperation with provinces and other entities, emergency management activities.

My question, then, sir, is this: Was the COVID-19 pandemic ever considered an emergency under the Emergency Management Act?

Mr. Rob Stewart: The answer to that is no, not under the Emergencies Act.

Mr. Glen Motz: The Emergency Management Act...

Even though provinces invoked states of emergency, that did not trigger any federal powers under the Emergency Management Act, not the emergency measures act.

Mr. Rob Stewart: Yes, I beg your pardon. Just to be clear, then, on the Emergency Management Act, it enfranchises the minister to do a number of things, including to coordinate requests for assistance from provinces and territories, which have happened on a numerous basis over the past 12 months. He is the counterpart to those jurisdictions when those requests are made.

Mr. Glen Motz: You thought my question was about the emergency measures act—

Mr. Rob Stewart: Yes, I did.

Mr. Glen Motz: —and it was the Emergency Management Act. There's a huge difference, as we both know.

Mr. Rob Stewart: Yes.

Mr. Glen Motz: There were clear national emergency management plans in place to respond to pandemics in this country. In fact, Canada was at the table with the World Health Organization in 2019 when they did their influenza planning and they prepared those documents.

Can you explain to Canadians why Canada's emergency management pandemic plans have been ignored during this pandemic?

Mr. Rob Stewart: I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to agree with the premise of the question. I don't think the emergency management plans have been ignored. I think they have been functioning as they were laid out.

Obviously, the pandemic is an event of a magnitude that was, in a sense, unprecedented. If you go back to the Spanish flu, perhaps that would be equivalent.

We've had plans in place for interdepartmental coordination, which is what the Department of Public Safety does to work with the Public Health Agency of Canada, other provinces and territories and their emergency management organizations.

• (1800)

Mr. Glen Motz: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Given that, can you undertake to table to this committee the emergency management plans that were in place pre-COVID and then how those were implemented in Canada for this pandemic? That would be awesome. Thank you.

We saw—the news obviously reported it and we all experienced it—the Senate draft reports on the state of readiness in Canada's emergency management systems over the last number of years. Both reports highlighted a lot of issues for us, which have been, again, exacerbated with the pandemic.

Has there been any significant review of the emergency preparedness of Canada launched, sir, since the pandemic hit last February-March?

Mr. Rob Stewart: We have launched work on reviewing our preparedness in a number of dimensions. I would have to say it's at its early stage, because we're still very much preoccupied with responding to the pandemic as it exists today. To say for any second that we have the resources necessary to do both things simultaneously would be a mistake. We are fully occupied with the resources we have in dealing with the various issues we are confronted with, including responding to events in first nations, rolling out the vaccine, etc.

Mr. Glen Motz: Understanding that you haven't had time to look at improving our emergency response and our readiness—and that's something the department will certainly be undertaking, moving forward—has Public Safety been involved in restocking or restoring our early warning system, which we know was shut down by Health Canada prior to the pandemic?

Mr. Rob Stewart: That question needs to be directed to the Public Health Agency, because that's where that early warning system resides.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you. I believe that's my time, Chair.

The Chair: It is indeed. Thank you.

Madam Damoff, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

Commissioner Lucki, my first question is for you, and I don't think you'll be surprised that I'm going to ask you about the report on Colten Boushie's death. You and I have talked about this in the past.

I was pleased to see the report come out. It certainly confirmed what I heard from the family when I spoke to Debbie Baptiste and Jade. The report from the CRCC said that the family experienced racism and discrimination. I really appreciate that you have said you were going to be implementing, I think, 16 of the 17 recommendations.

My question is this, Commissioner. The same day the report was made public, the RCMP union put out a press release, which said that the CRCC report advances a perspective that disrespects our [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Mr. Damien Kurek: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

For the last 10 or 15 seconds, we lost audio in the room. There was no sound for about the last 10 seconds of Ms. Damoff's question.

The Chair: Are we back on?

Ms. Pam Damoff: I don't know. Can you hear me now?

Mr. Damien Kurek: We can now. The entire room went quiet there for about 10 seconds before my point of order.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Was the commissioner able to hear okay?

The Chair: Let's continue and adjust.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Continuing, their press release said the following:

In the CRCC's own words, their finding of discrimination was based on a "social, legal and historical context" including "colonial assertions, stereotypes and a troubled history of police and Indigenous peoples' relations". These broad-brush findings about our Members...is not constructive to reconciliation...

Commissioner, I was shocked when I read their press release. I wonder how you are going to bring your members along to end this systemic racism that exists in the RCMP.

• (1805)

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you for that question, Ms. Damoff.

I listened to Ms. Baptiste and heard what she had to say. I have such a lot of empathy for her family and what she endured. She deserved to be treated with sensitivity and respect and compassion. As the commissioner of the RCMP, it's my job and part of my mandate to ensure that the culture is transformed and that we strengthen our relationships with indigenous people—and in fact with all Canadians, increasing trust.

We've brought in Vision150 with many activities that I've spoken to you about before. One of the more recent things that we have done is bring in an entire equity, diversity and inclusion strategy, for the first time ever in the RCMP. The objective is to change the culture and transform the RCMP. It's key to addressing the racism and the discrimination. Activities include modernizing the recruit-

ment and the training, and we've talked about the cultural awareness and humility training.

Even while this report was being prepared, we were busy working on the recommendations, and in Saskatchewan in April, all of the employees in Saskatchewan will have completed that course. I have set a very aggressive goal for the entire RCMP to complete that course before the end of summer, and already approximately 16,000 of the 30,000 employees have completed it.

There have been, then, many steps.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Yes and, Commissioner, I appreciate the work you're trying to do. Having read the Bastarache report, which I couldn't even read in one sitting, it was so upsetting—and then, you know, with the validation for Debbie Baptiste and what happened to her family in the most recent report from the CRCC—my concern is that if the union is not accepting what is happening, how are we going to move the RCMP to actually...?

Training someone who doesn't want to be trained, or training someone who says that it's disrespectful to their members.... No one is saying individual members are racist, but we are saying that there's systemic racism in the organization, and quite frankly, the officers who treated Debbie Baptiste the way they did were racist towards her.

How are you going to square that, Commissioner?

Commr Brenda Lucki: With a lot of hard work. It's a brand new union. It just recently started. It will require a lot of work with the relationships with the union, obviously.

It's about the leadership and it's about providing that from start to finish, ensuring that when we go to our recruitment, we are bringing in the right people.

We have recently included an implicit bias test in our recruitment strategy, so that people will be tested for that. It continues on through training. We're doing a full review of the training at Depot, including various cultural exercises, so that we can, in fact, not only bring in the right people but train them along the way. That continues throughout their careers.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Are you working with indigenous organizations and peoples to develop the programs you're doing with the officers?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Absolutely. For every decision we make going forward, I have said we will talk with the people most impacted by our decisions.

We've signed MOUs to work with indigenous women's organizations, not only on racism and discrimination but gender-based violence and the things they are most impacted by. Our anti-racism course that we're in the midst of developing is, in fact, with indigenous people, as was our cultural awareness and humility course. It was done in conjunction with those indigenous groups.

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there. Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

The clerk advises me that there is a problem in the room. They are working on trying to fix it, but it's not a problem online.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, you may go ahead. You have six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Kelly, your departmental plan underscores the importance of a safe workplace for employees. As we know, the past year has been hard on public servants, especially those working in penitentiaries, since they didn't have the option of working from home; they had to go into work. Nearly 300 employees contracted COVID-19.

The union representing employees asked for danger pay. Has there been any agreement on that?

Does that money appear in supplementary estimates (C)?

● (1810)

Ms. Anne Kelly (Commissioner, Correctional Service of Canada): The matter has to be discussed with the Treasury Board.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: The Correctional Service of Canada is requesting \$100 million in funding for class action lawsuits.

Can you tell us more about that? What will the funding be used for? Have any suits been brought? Why do you need more funding?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Lawsuits were outstanding, and decisions were recently rendered by the courts. The funding was for us to meet our obligations.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: What were the class action lawsuits about?

Ms. Anne Kelly: They concerned administrative segregation.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Inmates filed lawsuits because of how they were treated. Is that correct?

Ms. Anne Kelly: It had to do with the old model.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to greater funding requirements. In the past year, the Correctional Service of Canada has requested additional funding for critical operating requirements related to COVID-19.

What requirements does the funding cover? Is it to purchase personal protective equipment, for example, or something else?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes, it is to purchase personal protective equipment and enhanced cleaning equipment. It is also to support staff and inmate testing. We have to plan for overtime as well. When employees test positive for the virus, they have to stay home because they are in contact with other people when performing their duties. As a result, a portion of the funding is to purchase computer equipment for staff who have to work from home.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

Ms. Lucki, during our study on systemic racism in policing, we heard from Michelaine Lahaie, of the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP. She told us that the commission needed to be appropriately resourced to conduct systemic reviews and that systemic reviews were being conducted only when sufficient resources were available. She said that she constantly had to

decide between dealing with complaints from the public and conducting systemic reviews.

The commission's funding has increased slightly when you compare the main estimates for 2020-21 with those for 2021-22.

Do you think the increase is enough to ensure the commission can adequately deal with complaints and conduct systemic reviews?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you for your question.

[English]

It's very difficult for me to respond to that because I'm not sure how they allocate their finances and what kind of money they do need.

What I can say is that we obviously rely on them for oversight. It's good for our organization when we have that oversight. Anything that can help them helps us.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I'm going to come back to the CBSA officials. The union has indicated a few times that the agency lacked resources. As I mentioned earlier, the agency's spending is expected to decrease every year until 2023-24.

Nevertheless, do you anticipate hiring more officers since you don't seem to have enough?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: Is this for the RCMP?

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: No, I am speaking to the CBSA officials. The question is for Mr. Ossowski.

● (1815)

[English]

Mr. John Ossowski (President, Canada Border Services Agency): No, we're not anticipating the need for new officers right now. Our focus is on keeping officers healthy. We've obviously been able to keep many of them away from shifts because the volumes simply haven't been there, so there's no need for new officers right now beyond what we would normally staff up for normal attrition.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Did you receive any information from the minister as to how you should allocate resources to combat firearms smuggling across the border?

[English]

The Chair: That's a pretty important question, but there's no time left to answer it. I'm sorry.

Mr. Harris, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

My first question is for the CBSA representatives. Last October, the Supreme Court of Canada decided, in a case called *Fraser v. Canada* (Attorney General), that the RCMP had discriminated against women members of the RCMP who had a job-sharing situation after serving maternity leave. They were not given access to buy back pension for that lost time, although the policy within the RCMP and the legislation provided that for other forms of lack of full-time service. It was considered discriminatory and contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

There's a similar circumstance in the Canada Border Services with women taking advantage of job sharing, and when approached to have this applied to the Canada Border Services pension, a woman was told that this didn't apply because that case was about the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act.

Does the department expect that these women who are affected by this ought to spend whatever time and money it takes to go to the Supreme Court of Canada to get a ruling there, or are you prepared to apply this to the women in the Canada Border Services Agency or retired women, in this case, who are seeking the same application of this law?

I've written the minister on this some weeks ago, and I'm wondering whether you're aware of this issue and whether you plan to reconsider this policy in light of the Supreme Court of Canada decision.

Mr. John Ossowski: I'm not aware of the specifics of that particular case, but this is something that would be determined by the Treasury Board, as it is the employer and sets the rules around this type of access to these funds.

Certainly I can follow up with the Treasury Board on the specifics of this, but there's nothing that we have in terms of a policy per se around this issue.

Mr. Jack Harris: The response that was given was by the CBSA, not the Treasury Board. They say it doesn't apply, so I would like that followed.... I've written to the minister, and I just wonder whether that has been passed down. I know you are here, and according to my notes you have a financial officer here as well, but neither of you is aware of that circumstance.

Mr. John Ossowski: Not that specific case, no.

Mr. Jack Harris: What about the policy?

Mr. John Ossowski: I would defer to my colleague Jonathan.

Are you aware of anything?

Mr. Jonathan Moor (Vice-President and Chief Financial Officer, Finance and Corporate Management Branch, Canada Border Services Agency): Thanks so much for the question.

I'm not aware of the specific case, but as the president said, I think there is a difference between the CBSA and the RCMP in that

all of our staff is subject to the Treasury Board policies and procedures. Therefore, in our case, this is a Treasury Board matter. My understanding is that the RCMP is not subject to the same Treasury Board procedures.

Mr. Jack Harris: This wouldn't be a Treasury Board decision. This is a Supreme Court of Canada decision, sir, and it applies on the basis of the Charter of Rights and the very similar circumstances.

I wonder why it is that you wouldn't have considered applying that policy and would give a perfunctory answer like that.

I will pass on to something else. I wish to go to Commissioner Lucki. I want to ask further questions on the Boushie report that we had this week. Of course, we all know it was disturbing. I appreciate, Commissioner, that you and the RCMP have acknowledged that both systemic racism and actual racism occurred.

I want to ask about a further matter that was disclosed publicly, I think, for the first time this week, although [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] about this for some time. On the night that Colten Boushie was killed, there were RCMP communications in the course of attending at the Boushie family home and Mrs. Baptiste, and those communications were destroyed.

We don't know what was on those communications, but the implication, obviously, is that there may have been matters on this communication that would be of importance to the investigation being done by the CRCC or any other investigation. It sounds that it could easily be something very close to obstruction.

Have the individuals involved in this destruction been identified and dealt with through disciplinary matters, Commissioner Lucki?

• (1820)

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, they have not. By the time the request came from the CRCC, those recordings had already been destroyed. What happened was that those recordings were examined completely by our major crimes investigators, who took carriage of that investigation. A full review was done of all relevant material that came in. There was no relevancy on those particular recordings and there was no evidentiary value, so they were just left where they get stored in the usual manner, and within two years, as per the retentions act, they were destroyed. Then the CRCC asked for them, and that's why we couldn't produce them.

In no way was it a cover-up, but I will say that, as a result of that, I have directed a policy review on that to ensure that a retention in such matters is in line with the reality.

Mr. Jack Harris: You're suggesting that, despite the fact that there was a CRCC investigation going on, the normal conditions applied. Why would it not be saved so that the commission, not your internal investigation, could decide whether it was relevant or not?

Commr Brenda Lucki: They worked, obviously, in silos, and they didn't find the evidentiary value with regard to the Criminal Code case. Therefore, it was left in its normal storage.

Mr. Jack Harris: Neither was the internal report released—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Colleagues, we are now at 6:22. We are supposed to end at 6:49, and we have a vote to take. We are going to run over, almost regardless, so I'm going to say four minutes, two and two, and four and four, starting with Mr. Van Popta.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

I have a question for Correctional Service Canada. We received the report from the correctional investigator, and in that report he expressed some frustration, maybe exasperation, that his earlier recommendation about education and vocational training at corrections wasn't being followed, so he just repeated that same recommendation again in his most recent report.

My question is whether the funding that is being made available now is going to see some results in that area.

Ms. Anne Kelly: The funding that's been made available, if you're talking about IM or IT, was COVID-related. It was for people who worked remotely. However, we take his recommendation very seriously. Actually, we have done some work around education.

For example, we have a digital education program that started at Bath Institution. It's been very successful. We're monitoring it, and seeing if it can't be expanded to other institutions. We do a full review of the employment that we provide. Again, there's a lot of work being done in education, employment and employability skills.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: What's new now that wasn't there that the correctional investigator was responding to? What was his source of frustration that is going to be resolved today?

Ms. Anne Kelly: What the correctional investigator is mentioning...and we're working on a broader digital strategy. We have computers in our institutions. We don't have that many, so we want to get with the times. However, our institutions are quite old, so it requires some infrastructure.

In the meantime, as I said—

• (1825)

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Are you asking for more funding to solve that problem? That is one of the problems that the investigator identified, the outmoded information technology.

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes. He talked about our antiquated institutions, absolutely, but we have taken steps. For example, the digital education program is one step. The other one is that, with COVID-19, we had to rethink how we delivered programs, so we're doing it now virtually. That's something else.

With the correctional investigator, our goal is a common goal. We want to see offenders safely and successfully reintegrate into the community.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Of course, that's what we all want.

I go back to the frustration that he expressed. He had made that recommendation on a number of occasions, and it wasn't responded to.

Is it going to be different this time?

Ms. Anne Kelly: We look at all of the recommendations that the OCI makes, and we act upon them.

As the commissioner, I look at our priorities, the resources and where we're at. Actually, one thing we've done is that we've looked at all the recommendations that were made by the OCI to see what is outstanding, and what hasn't been completely implemented. We've done that work.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: We'll see next year.

So—

The Chair: Mr. Van Popta, you only 10 seconds, unfortunately.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I was going to re-ask the question that Ms. Michaud did not get an answer to, regarding smuggling firearms.

The Chair: She's going to get another shot in about two minutes.

Mr. Lightbound, you have four minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to echo what my fellow member Ms. Damoff said about the culture in the RCMP, so my questions are for Ms. Lucki.

The committee has heard from a number of witnesses, including Justice Bastarache, about the deep-rooted cultural issues within the RCMP, whether it be systemic racism, harassment or sexism.

Ms. Lucki, I'm encouraged to see that you are willing to undertake the necessary institutional reforms. You accept 16 of the recommendations set out by the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP in its report, further to the RCMP's investigation into the death of Colten Boushie.

When you were answering my fellow member's question, I was also encouraged to hear you talk about the Vision150 plan and the equity, diversity and inclusion strategy you intend to implement.

Strategies are nice, but you really have to be able to measure their impact and success.

What tools will you be using to measure the RCMP's progress or lack of progress?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you for your question.

We have a number of ways to measure our progress.

[*English*]

First, as a note, all of our initiatives are on the outside website, the RCMP Vision150 tracker, and we have milestones for each and every one of those initiatives. You can see how far we are going along with them.

Holistically, the markers are going to be a more inclusive, more open and less discriminatory organization that is more transparent and accountable in the bigger sense. We are collaborating a lot with our management advisory board with regard to the actual measures.

One specific thing includes an audit committee doing a specific audit on Vision150. There is a management action plan with specific measurements of completion. Hopefully, we will have everything measured with our success. I guess the biggest measure of success will be that the next commissioner won't have to answer this question at committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: I really like that last thing you said. Believe me, we hope so too.

I have one last quick question.

As the RCMP embarks on a cultural change, the RCMP External Review Committee has a backlog of 300 files. The RCMP External Review Committee received additional funding this past year.

Ms. Lucki, has the number of files awaiting review by the RCMP External Review Committee decreased now that more staff have been hired?

• (1830)

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: That's a great question, but I think, if I can correct you, you might be referring to the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission. It's where most of the backlog is.

We have committed, under my direction and my leadership.... We have the first ever MOU with the CRCC with certain specific service standards, which is six months. We currently have reduced the backlog to 120 files, and we are committed to eliminating that backlog by the end of the year.

In the meantime, every single file that comes in as of April 1 will be meeting the six-month service standard. It is so important that Canadians get a timely response. It's not easy to come forward, in the first place, to make a complaint, and then if they have to wait years for a response, that's unacceptable.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lightbound.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, you may go ahead. You have two minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to follow up on the question I asked Mr. Ossowski about firearms smuggling and trafficking.

Earlier, the minister said that Bill C-21 would help combat the scourge.

Have you received any information from the minister's office about that? Have you put together a plan?

Earlier, you said you didn't necessarily need more staff. How do you intend to combat the scourge?

[English]

Mr. John Ossowski: Thank you for the question.

I think what the minister was alluding to was that, starting in budget 2018-19, the agency received \$80 million over five years and about \$7 million ongoing. There are five activity areas, as you alluded to. One of them is an infrastructure project for the detector dogs, for which we're amping up our capacity.

What's new, since the new administration to the south and what the minister was talking about, is the cross-border task force on firearms. We're working with our Public Safety colleagues in the cross-border crime forum to coordinate activities, to share intelligence and to look at those flows and augment our ability to intercept firearms at the border.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: If I understand correctly, you are working on it, but nothing is in place yet.

Do you know when that will happen?

[English]

Mr. John Ossowski: We've already started, in terms of working on an information-sharing agreement with the alcohol, tobacco and firearms agency. Since this announcement, which was literally within the past few weeks, we've already reached out and started to work with our colleagues to the south and here in Canada to coordinate how we would actually take advantage of this opportunity.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

Mr. Harris, you have two minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to follow up on some of the questions with Commissioner Lucki regarding oversight.

There's been a concern that the public is not aware of much of what's going on and that there's a need for greater transparency. We know that the CRCC is underfunded, according to the complaints commissioner. You have indicated some effort is being made by you to look after the backlog, which is commendable, but there's another issue in terms of transparency.

Last November the Information Commissioner said that the RCMP was neglectful and that 92% of ATIP requests went beyond the statutory due date, and called it a "critical" level.

What's being done to resolve that? That's a pretty important statutory obligation as well. People have the right to information. It's part of the Information Commissioner's job to ensure that happens. What are you doing about that? Is there a need for further resources for that, or is this something that you're not taking seriously?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you for that question. That's a great question.

I have to say that we haven't done Canadians justice in our ATIP program whatsoever. We have an extreme backlog, and we are working with Treasury Board, through a ministerial directive, to come up.... We are presenting a strategy to the minister in the next month and a half.

We have received funding to hire additional resources, and we have changed a bit of our triage process. I've been in a conversation with the Privacy Commissioner twice now. Actually, she's complimented us on our progress week over week, since we put our mind to the matter.

It's a perfect example, Mr. Harris, that the things you measure get done. We have to get better at that, and we will. I am completely committed to better transparency for Canadians.

• (1835)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Kurek, you have four minutes, please.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad to get the opportunity to ask a few more questions.

To the CBSA, I've heard a number of stories from constituents about challenges related to being deported because of paperwork or not being able to get relevant information because of the limitations of government in the midst of the pandemic. I understand about 12,000 people were deported over the course of the pandemic.

Is there a ratio as to how many were deported for public safety reasons versus how many were deported for not having the proper applications, delays in paperwork processing and that sort of thing?

Mr. John Ossowski: So far for this fiscal year about 11,000 people have been removed from the country. I think it's important to understand that anyone who's removed has to have exhausted all of the due process available to them. In the case of somebody from an immigration side, we would support the minister in terms of hearings before the Immigration and Refugee Board. Once they've exhausted all their avenues of appeal, then we would start the removal process. Obviously removals are very slow right now because of airlines and the lack of capacity to travel.

In terms of people with serious inadmissibility, of those close to 11,000 removals, about 350 or so I think are serious inadmissibilities. These could be any number of different criminal offences or danger assessments that have been made and subsequently removed.

A final point on this is that, as soon as somebody is deemed to need to be removed, we are required by law to remove them as soon as possible.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Has a mechanism been put in place to ensure, for those who might fall through the cracks, especially because of challenges in processing paperwork in the midst of the pandemic, both in Canada and other jurisdictions, that there is fair and due process?

Mr. John Ossowski: Absolutely. As I mentioned, the Immigration and Refugee Board is the agency responsible. It's a quasi-judicial tribunal that makes those assessments.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Okay. Thank you for that.

Could you enlighten me on what the total backlog is for deportations of individuals who are deemed to be significant public safety or national security threats?

Mr. John Ossowski: There's not much of a backlog. Obviously it is a dynamic kind of thing, with people coming in and then leaving. It varies, but we endeavour to remove people as quickly as possible. If they were a danger to the public, then we would detain them.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you for that.

There is no specific number that you have that is a backlog specifically due to the pandemic, just to clarify.

Mr. John Ossowski: I can get you that information.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Please, if you could, that would be helpful.

With regard to CBSA, I asked the minister about a specific program to ensure that the frontline staff, literally the front line of our country, and certainly because of the origins of the pandemic....

The government has talked a lot about border security measures, and Conservatives called for some strong measures. Certainly there's a whole bunch of politics in that, but I found it troubling that the minister left it up to the provinces to deal with the vaccine situation for frontline staff. I'm wondering if the CBSA could comment on that, and if there's been any plan or any indication that vaccines will be administered on our border's front lines.

The Chair: We're way past Mr. Kurek's time, and in addition it's unlikely that a civil servant will comment on a minister's answer.

With that, we'll move on to the final four minutes. Mr. Iacono and Madam Khara are going to split those four minutes, apparently.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Kelly, as you know, penitentiaries and detention facilities have not been spared during the pandemic. In my riding of Alfred-Pellan, many cases were identified at the Federal Training Centre and, more recently, the immigration holding centre in Laval. I know you're keeping a very close eye on the problem.

Can you give us a quick update on where things stand in those facilities?

• (1840)

[*English*]

Mr. John Ossowski: I'm sorry. Was that question for me?

The Chair: I thought it was for Madam Kelly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes, the question was for me.

I can certainly give you an update, but I first want to say that staff are doing an extraordinary job as they cope with the pandemic.

As far as the institutions go, we have 13 active cases at the Drumheller Institution, one case at the Stony Mountain Institution, a medium-security facility, and one case at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary, also a medium-security facility, for a total of 15 active cases in the country right now. We have no active cases in Quebec.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: You mentioned what a great job staff were doing. In tangible terms, can you tell us how the \$135.8 million in announced funding will help them keep up the good work?

Ms. Anne Kelly: The \$135.8 million will go towards various expenditures: personal protective equipment, cleaning equipment in the institutions, staff and inmate testing, overtime to cover staff who have contracted COVID-19—which has its challenges—and computer equipment for employees working from home.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Khera, you have the last minute and a half.

Ms. Kamal Khera: Thank you. My question is for Commissioner Lucki.

Commissioner Lucki, in both the supplementary estimates and the mains, the RCMP sought funding for the establishment of the independent centre for harassment resolution, which will oversee the resolution process. Obviously this is seen as a response to the extremely troubling findings of the Bastarache report.

In your opinion, how will this independent centre bring about better outcomes, and what other measures have you taken to respond to the Bastarache recommendations?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you for that question.

The independent centre for harassment resolution is there to, first of all, be compliant with Bill C-65, which came into play in January. It's also to provide a transparent and trusted system where people who want to bring harassment complaints can do so in a safe and non-retaliatory manner, as per Justice Bastarache's recommendations in that report.

It will be externalized. It will be outside of the chain of command as far as the investigators go, who will actually make the finding of harassment or not. That will be done externally, so it will increase the trust amongst our employees in that regard.

The Chair: Okay. I think that brings it to a close.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank the witnesses for their attendance and their service to our country in very difficult circumstances. It's probably not said enough how much we appreciate you, even though we may ask some very direct questions from time to time. You can rest assured that there will be more direct questions that will be asked from time to time.

With that, I will invite the witnesses to leave and ask colleagues to turn to the votes that are before us. I will seek the guidance of the clerk as to how to conduct these votes. We can do it on division or we will call them one by one. It's up to colleagues.

The first vote that's up before us are votes 1 and 5 under Canada Border Services Agency.

• (1845)

Mr. Glen Motz: Chair, if I may indulge you or the clerk, if we are able to lump some of these together, our position will be on di-

vision. We will leave it to the clerk to determine which ones we can group together to have that happen.

The Chair: I'll take guidance as well from the clerk on that.

Mr. Jack Harris: On a point of order, I would certainly agree with that.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, can all of these votes be done on division?

The Clerk: Yes, they can.

The Chair: Okay.

May I then move that all of the votes for the Department of Public Safety, National Security and Intelligence Review Agency, Canada Border Services Agency, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Civilian Review and Complaints Commission, Correctional Service of Canada, Office of Correctional Investigator, Parole Board, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, RCMP External Review Committee and Secretariat of the National Security and Intelligence be moved on division?

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,752,432,513

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$106,457,799

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$572,188,443

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CIVILIAN REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS COMMISSION FOR THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$9,345,025

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Vote 1—Operating expenditures, grants and contributions.....\$2,359,350,375

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$187,796,912

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$181,272,861

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$858,170,860

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE REVIEW AGENCY SECRETARIAT

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$28,490,287

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL INVESTIGATOR OF CANADA

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$4,879,527

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

PAROLE BOARD OF CANADA

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$49,323,723

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$2,642,741,385

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$251,946,081

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$194,973,483

(Votes 1, 5 and 10 agreed to on division)

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE EXTERNAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$5,800,710

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

SECRETARIAT OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$3,409,991

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the main estimates to the House?

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

It's always a good day if you survive a non-confidence and an impeachment vote.

Thank you, Glen, for that.

Mr. Glen Motz: Any time, John. It's a belated birthday present.

The Chair: Thank you, folks. For the next two weeks, whatever it is you do, be safe.

Have a good Easter, everyone.

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