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Chair: The Honourable Jim Carr



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Good morning, everybody, and welcome from blustery, stormy, frigid Winnipeg, although it's quiet on the streets.

I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number four of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

I have a long list of public health protocols that I read before every meeting. Can I have the permission of the committee to dispense with reading them all verbatim? Good. I will just say that when you're speaking, please speak slowly and clearly, and when you are not speaking your mike should be on mute.

I remind everyone that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair. With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk, to the best of his ability, will advise the chair on whose hands are up, and we will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Colleagues, we now move to committee business. Your subcommittee met last week to consider the business of the committee and has agreed on a number of items. You all received by email a copy of the first report of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. As mentioned in the report, the analysts have prepared a work plan that included one-hour panels of three witnesses in order of priority, which was distributed to all members.

Does the committee wish to adopt the report?

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): I so move.

The Chair: I see thumbs up everywhere.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I would like to ask the committee to consider the adoption of a budget for the study of gun control, illegal arms trafficking, and the increase in gun crimes committed by members of street gangs. You have all received that by mail. It covers costs related to our meetings.

Do I have an agreement on the budget? I do. Thank you, everybody.

Pursuant to the order adopted by the House of Commons on Tuesday, December 7, 2021, the committee is resuming its study of gun control, illegal arms trafficking, and the increase in gun crimes committee by members of street gangs.

With us today by video conference from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is Michael Duheme, deputy commissioner, federal policing; Stephen White, deputy commissioner, specialized policing services; Michel Arcand, assistant commissioner, federal policing criminal operations; Don Halina, director general, national forensic laboratory services; and Kellie Paquette, director general.

From the Canada Border Services Agency, we have Fred Gaspar, vice-president, commercial and trade branch and Scott Harris, vice-president, intelligence and enforcement branch.

From the Customs and Immigration Union, we have Mark Weber, national president.

From the National Police Federation, we have Brian Sauvé, president.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks by each of these organizations, after which we will proceed to rounds of questions.

Welcome to you all.

I now invite the RCMP to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

The floor is yours.

• (1110)

Deputy Commissioner Stephen White (Deputy Commissioner, Specialized Policing Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, and good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Stephen White, deputy commissioner for specialized policing services. As was just mentioned, I'm joined today by Michael Duheme, deputy commissioner, federal policing; assistant commissioner, Michel Arcand, federal policing; Director General, Kellie Paquette, Canadian Firearms Program; and chief superintendent Don Halina, national forensic laboratory services.

It is our pleasure to address you today to explain what actions the RCMP is taking to address gun and gang violence including the smuggling and trafficking of firearms.

As are all Canadians, we are deeply troubled by the impact of gun and gang violence on Canadians and on our communities across the country. Reducing this violence is, therefore, a priority for the RCMP not only in the communities and areas we serve but also more broadly across the country as we provide critical front-line operational services to law enforcement agencies across Canada to aid their efforts to tackle gun and gang violence.

[*Translation*]

In this way, the RCMP's mandate to address gun and gang violence, and firearms smuggling and trafficking, is both comprehensive and complementary.

[*English*]

Every day, the Canadian firearms program, the RCMP's forensic laboratories, Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, or CSIC, and our federal policing program work collaboratively and with law enforcement agencies right across the country, including where the RCMP serves as police of jurisdiction, and internationally to support the identification, arrest and prosecution of criminals and criminal groups that seek to commit gun- and gang-related crime.

From the CFP's Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre and its firearms technical and enforcement experts that aid investigations and the prosecution of persons and groups involved in the criminal use of firearms; to the forensic laboratory's ability to restore serial numbers that aid tracing efforts as well as link seemingly unrelated criminal cases to a single firearm; to CISC's intelligence holdings on known or suspected criminals and criminal groups involved in serious or organized crime that are accessible to over 380 federal, provincial and municipal law enforcement and public safety members across Canada; and to federal policing's efforts to target transnational organized crime networks that exploit our borders, including firearms smuggling, the RCMP continues to help address gun and gang violence across Canada and the illegal movement of firearms into our country alongside our federal, provincial, municipal and international partners, including the CB-SA.

[*Translation*]

The RCMP works with a number of police services from indigenous communities along the Canada-U.S. border to help address organized crime, and the smuggling of guns and other illicit activities. These partnerships help target criminal networks that exploit—

[*English*]

Mr. Ron McKinnon: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we're not getting the translation.

The Chair: I'm getting it. You're not?

Mr. Ron McKinnon: I'm not, no.

• (1115)

The Chair: Okay.

Clerk, we have a translation issue.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Chair, the French and the English were at the same volume. It was hard to hear one language over the other.

The Chair: How about other members? Were you getting translation but it was garbled?

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Chair, I was getting it the same way as Mr. MacGregor, with English and French at the same time.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: I was getting the floor in French, but the translation was also coming through in French. I had set it up as English on my Zoom.

Maybe we can just try again. Perhaps it's been sorted out.

The Chair: Okay.

Well, let's keep going. Members will let me know if there's still a problem, and we will pause until it's been corrected.

Please proceed, sir.

D/Commr Stephen White: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Wassim Bouanani): If I may, Mr. Chair, perhaps I can suggest to the witnesses that they select the floor option when they speak, and not the English or French.

The Chair: With the interpretation icon, you have three choices—the floor, English or French. The clerk is suggesting that you have it on floor.

The Clerk: That's correct.

The Chair: Okay.

Proceed, sir.

[*Translation*]

D/Commr Stephen White: Thank you.

These partnerships help target criminal networks that exploit the border to smuggle illegal goods, including firearms.

[*English*]

We also work in close collaboration with our U.S. law enforcement partners to combat cross-border threats, including firearms smuggling, through several well-established operational partnerships, while at the strategic level the RCMP is a member of the Canada-U.S. cross-border firearms task force announced earlier this year.

CBSA is leading efforts for the Canadian side of this task force, and the RCMP will be at the table. Taking part in this initiative will assist the RCMP in pursuing criminal investigations, in partnership with our U.S. law enforcement partners, that involve cross-border smuggling. A recent example of our efforts was on November 26, 2021, when members of the integrated RCMP Cornwall border integrity team, working with several domestic partners, seized 53 restricted and prohibited pistols, six prohibited rifles and 110 high-capacity magazines. It is believed these firearms were destined for criminal networks and illicit gun trafficking groups.

The RCMP is also benefiting from recent investments to enhance our ability to tackle gun and gang violence and firearms smuggling. In 2018-19 the RCMP began receiving \$34.5 million over five years to expand the services available to law enforcement by enhancing several capabilities to better combat the use of illegal firearms and improve the national collection, analysis and sharing of firearms-related intelligence and information. Further, the RCMP is providing specialized training to law enforcement agencies on firearms identification, regulatory requirements and new technologies and emerging trends in firearms trafficking and illicit manufacturing.

The Chair: Can you start to wind down, please, Mr. White?

D/Commr Stephen White: Yes, I'm almost finished, Mr. Chair.

Additionally, and beginning this fiscal year, the RCMP will receive \$40.3 million over five years and \$5.5 million in ongoing funding to address firearms smuggling, including investments to support CISC's new Canadian automated criminal intelligence information system that will help all law enforcement in Canada to target and disrupt criminal activity.

As well, the RCMP will further receive an investment beginning this fiscal year of \$15 million over five years to increase our capacity to trace firearms, and identify the movement of illegal firearms into and within Canada.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to be with you today. We welcome your questions.

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

I now invite the CBSA to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Scott Harris (Vice-President, Intelligence and Enforcement Branch, Canada Border Services Agency): Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Thank you for inviting me to participate in the meeting today.

My name is Scott Harris. I'm the vice-president of the intelligence and enforcement branch. I'm pleased to be here, on behalf of the president, to answer your questions about the significant steps that the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, is taking to prevent illegal weapons from entering Canada.

[English]

I am joined today by Fred Gaspar, vice-president of commercial and trade.

The CBSA ensures compliance with existing laws, regulations and orders, including the Customs Act, the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code, and any and all of the laws that prohibit, control, and regulate the importation of goods into Canada.

In these efforts, the CBSA works closely with other law enforcement agencies, such as the RCMP; the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; U.S. Homeland Security; and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

My organization also stays current on global trends and patterns to ensure border service officers know about new concealment methods. Officers use a variety of detection tools, techniques, and the latest scientific technology to prevent contraband from entering Canada.

In 2018, the government provided the CBSA with \$51.5 million over five years with \$7.5 million in ongoing funding to enhance its capacity to take action on guns and gang violence. This funding has allowed the agency to increase its operational capacity to screen passengers, and examine commercial shipments for all contraband, including illegal firearms.

The CBSA firearms strategy focuses on identifying criminal networks and trafficking routes in order to prevent illicit firearms from crossing the border, and to disrupt the smuggling done by criminal networks. It's heavily focused on partnerships, involving law enforcement partners, both domestically and abroad, to keep our communities safe.

In 2021, the CBSA national firearms desk was established. This desk brings together CBSA partners working to combat firearms smuggling in order to maintain a real-time, national border-focused threat picture of illicit firearms in Canada and their movements across our borders.

Our efforts have been paying off. In 2021, over 1,000 firearms and firearm parts were confiscated in 409 seizures. Included in this count were 233 seizures in Ontario, 88 in B.C., and 21 in Quebec.

• (1120)

[Translation]

The work done in Quebec is an example of the CBSA's important collaboration with its federal and provincial partners. The CBSA's Quebec region also works closely with various law enforcement partners across the province to further investigations into illegal cross-border firearms movements. In February 2021, the arrest by the RCMP of a resident of L'Ancienne-Lorette, Quebec, along with the seizure of homemade bombs, firearms, silencers, magazines, volumes of ammunition and prohibited weapons, resulted from an initial CBSA intercept and seizure of a prohibited silencer being illegally imported into Canada.

[English]

Our officers exercise their professional judgment in a highly complex environment, and are well supported in their training in order to apply these measures. I'm very proud of the work CBSA staff have done, and will continue to do to protect Canadians from the scourge of illegal firearms, and their detrimental effects on our communities.

[Translation]

I'll be happy to answer questions from committee members about this significant issue, regarding the operational and implementation aspects of our activities.

[English]

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

I now call on Mr. Weber and invite him to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Mr. Mark Weber (National President, Customs and Immigration Union): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you here today.

My name is Mark Weber. I'm the national president of the Customs and Immigration Union, which represents personnel working for the CBSA. CIU has a long history of involvement in border security issues on behalf of its members. We're pleased to participate in this panel.

Regarding the matter at hand, I'd like to bring to the committee's attention three areas of particular importance within the scope of border operations. First is long-standing and widespread understaffing at the CBSA. Second is important operational gaps impacting highway, marine and rail modes. Third is the pressing need for increased reliance on CBSA officers' unique expertise, including between ports of entry.

Since the implementation of the 2011 deficit reduction action plan or DRAP, which resulted in a loss of more than a thousand positions at the CBSA, CIU has been vocal about the plan's negative impact on overall operational capabilities. Most ports of entry are chronically understaffed and officers are overworked. With few officers present on the front lines, we believe our ability to effectively intercept smuggled goods such as illegal firearms has been severely affected. While in recent years the agency has expressed its desire

to boost recruiting numbers, the situation endures, weakening Canada's border control.

Recently, we've seen the agency commit to a number of initiatives in response to the challenges posed by illegal firearms, including an increased number of detector dog teams, new mobile examination vehicles, equipment, etc. While this is all very positive, it must go hand in hand with adequate staffing numbers. Technology must be used to assist, not to replace, our actual presence in the field.

Beyond staffing problems, there are glaring issues in several modes of operation at the border, which, in the union's opinion, severely undermine Canada's ability to control the flow of illegal firearms.

At the highway level, many CBSA locations have limited hours of operation. CBSA officers are also restricted in their ability to act outside of ports of entry and must rely on other agencies, mainly the RCMP, to address issues related to so-called "port runners" or other criminal activities occurring in-between ports. This slows down our general ability to react in a timely fashion to problematic situations and it weakens the integrity of our border.

More generally speaking.... Excuse me. Sorry, everything just shut down on me. I have a black screen. Just a moment.

• (1125)

The Chair: We can see you and we can hear you, so I would suggest you just proceed.

Mr. Mark Weber: Okay. I'll keep speaking.

At the marine level, the overall reporting infrastructure is both insufficient and outdated. Once again, officers lack the necessary tools and authority to intervene, impacting their ability to intercept dangerous goods.

Perhaps most glaring of all are the rail mode operations, where, according to the union's own data, as of 2019, only one one-millionth of all rail cargo was effectively being examined. The reality is that our current operational abilities in the rail field are virtually non-existent. Canada has almost zero examination capabilities directly at the border, due in part to geographical issues, inadequate tools and political decisions not to force rail carriers to supply the necessary facilities. In other words, there's almost a zero per cent chance that any illegal weapons entering the country via rail will ever be found. All these operational gaps find themselves compounded by the aforementioned staffing shortage.

The message is clear: As things stand, not only is Canada's ability to prevent smuggling lacking, but its capacity to gather reliable and sound data is also inadequate. In our view, if the Government of Canada is serious about addressing the problem of illegal firearms smuggled across the border, the mandate of our border officers must be expanded to assist in patrolling between crossings.

It's a well-known fact that the border between Canada and our neighbours to the south is the longest undefended border in the world. While this is certainly a testament to the good relations between our countries, it also comes with its own unique set of security challenges. To mitigate these, we invite the Government of Canada to empower its CBSA officers to further help curb smuggling activities into Canada from land or sea routes, including between ports of entry.

Ultimately, we'd like to see the CBSA upper echelons rely more effectively on our members' unique expertise in the field of border security when it comes to policy decisions. Too often management will take a course of action that either does not take into account or blatantly disregards the realities in the field. We believe this could often be corrected through meaningful consultation with and the effective involvement of our members. We all have a stake in protecting our communities from harm, and that includes from gun violence.

In conclusion, it's my hope that the union's input will assist the committee in this important work. I thank you and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Congratulations, Mr. Weber. You were five minutes to the second. It's an example for everybody.

Mr. Mark Weber: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Sauv , I now invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes, including right on the schnozz. The floor is yours.

Mr. Brian Sauv  (President, National Police Federation): Thank you. I apologize for the delay. You have an excellent IT department, which got me in.

Thank you for inviting me to appear today. I'm Brian Sauv , president of the National Police Federation, the sole certified bargaining agent representing close to 20,000 members of the RCMP across Canada and internationally.

I'll begin by acknowledging that I'm speaking from the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

In 2020, StatsCan reported over 3,500 firearms offenses, a 15% increase over 2019 and 84% greater than 2010. Canada has long prided itself as a safe, non-violent country, but firearms offenses and gang-related violence are on the rise.

Although nationwide data must still be collected, it is the experience of law enforcement that most of these guns are illegally obtained. For example, three of the firearms used during the April 2020 mass shooting in Nova Scotia that killed 22 people were illegally acquired from the United States.

Unfortunately, there's no easy fix to gun violence, and we need enough resources and dedicated units to lead investigations focused on curbing illegal activities. Today, I'll address three aspects related to gun crimes, with more detail on our recommendations in our submission.

First, we must address the RCMP's human and financial recruitment challenges. The RCMP plays an integral role in preventing gun violence, working alongside other agencies such as the CBSA and our municipal and provincial police counterparts. Over the past

number of years, the RCMP has experienced new challenges such as staffing levels, recruitment and member well-being. All areas of policing, though, have experienced a significant increase in demand for services beyond crime prevention and law enforcement. Illegal firearms, gun crimes and violence remain top priorities for police, but to effectively address these issues, both police and social services need increased resources.

Second, the federal government should develop a national operational investigative program for illegal firearms smuggling: a unified program offering support, control and investigative tools to curb illegal firearms in Canada, and concentrated in one place. Evidence-based firearm controls are vital to ensuring that the ownership and use of firearms is as safe as possible. Resources should prioritize the criminal use of firearms, with a coordinated strategy that effectively combines prevention, law enforcement and social programs.

This program could also tackle gun smuggling. While border integrity teams work to intercept illegal firearms, current programs such as the national weapons enforcement support team seize hundreds of illegal firearms annually but must be fully supported to tackle the flow of illegal guns across the border.

The 2018 federal budget invested \$327 million over five years to establish the initiative to take action against gun and gang violence. Of that, \$34.5 million went to the RCMP to support the new integrated criminal firearms initiative, and we welcome this investment, but these initiatives will only be successful with proper funding to investigative units that focus on gun smuggling.

Third, we must understand the link between gang violence and criminality. Budget 2018 also allocated \$214 million over five years to provinces to combat gun and gang violence. Our RCMP members work tirelessly to counteract gang recruitment, one example being the Surrey RCMP's "Shattering the Image" anti-gang program, which has proven quite successful. However, new funding and resources are still needed to expand existing programs and launch successful models in other regions.

As gun-related crime increases, the NPF encourages this committee to review the results of these initiatives and build a strategy to address and fund similar programs. Community programs, along with law enforcement, should be evidence based and results oriented. The 2018 summit on gun and gang violence concluded that a holistic approach to these issues is needed, and we agree. Addressing gang violence needs a committed, well-funded, multi-pronged approach that includes community programs.

At the same time, vulnerable communities also require protection from violent criminals, and well-resourced, well-conducted investigations, along with sentencing, will help drive deterrence. The government must address these issues and work in partnership with the RCMP and other agencies to develop adequate and efficient programs to guarantee the safety of all Canadians.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.

• (1130)

The Chair: Mr. Sauvé, you were on the top. Perfect. Holy smokes. If all witnesses and members were as punctual as this, life would be an easier place.

I would now like to open the floor to questions. For the interest of our witnesses, we have a number of rounds. This is all predetermined by a consensus of committee members. The first round is six minutes for each of the parties represented, and I would like to start by giving the floor over to Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Dancho, the floor is yours.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses very sincerely for all of the hard work they have been doing over the last number of years to keep Canadians safe. We are certainly depending on you. With the rise in violent crime, gun violence, gang violence, and drug deaths related to drug trafficking, Conservatives are extremely concerned that the trajectory is going in much the wrong direction despite the tremendous efforts by all of your agencies and unions and union members.

From the testimony what I'm hearing overall is that the problem, certainly with the rise of gang violence and gun crime, is from gangs. We know that is deeply driven by drug trafficking. We also heard a significant amount of testimony about the problem of gun smuggling across the border.

Mr. White, in your opening remarks you talked quite a bit about this, and it sounded like gun and gang violence are quite interrelated. Can you confirm again that gang violence is largely driven by drug trafficking and that gang violence is the primary contributor to gun violence in Canada?

• (1135)

D/Commr Stephen White: Thank you very much for your question.

Our intelligence and investigative work clearly indicates that one of the primary activities of street gangs is drug trafficking. In recent CISC work looking at street gangs, the estimate was that over 400 street gangs are operating in Canada. The vast majority of them use

violence to further their criminal activities. A lot of their activities are very high visibility crimes, I'd say, like shootings. Some of their main activities are drug trafficking. It branches out as well to human trafficking and sex trade offences.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

What recommendations have you made to the government to combat these issues that you just outlined?

I'm sure you've made many, so if you can be concise that would be great.

D/Commr Stephen White: We're always working very closely with our government partners to try to identify new initiatives and activities that can help combat this.

Some things we are currently highlighting with regard to gangs and firearms violence are to increase the tracing of firearms and to develop much more robust intelligence sharing across all police services right across the country. Those two things are critical. We are receiving some additional funding and resources for tracing to enhance our activities in that regard. As well, we recently received funding to build the new Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, which is going to be used by all police services across Canada to develop, first of all, much more robust intelligence and to be able to share that in a much more modern and effective way.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Great. Thank you very much.

My understanding is that Ontario is the only province that has actually legislated that all firearms obtained in violent crimes need to be traced. Is that the case?

D/Commr Stephen White: To my knowledge, yes. I'm not sure if there are others. I think every province, to some degree, has a significant interest in tracing firearms. The reality is that of the number of firearms that were seized last year across the country—well over 30,000—the national tracing centre under the Canadian firearms program traced just a very small percentage of those handguns and other firearms.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Right. My understanding is that in the other provinces outside of Ontario, they will trace a firearm if it's relevant to solving the case, but police resources are very strapped as many witnesses have outlined already today. So it seems that it's something they'll do if they have to. As you mentioned, tracing seems to be a critical part of determining where these firearms come from that are used to commit violent crimes in Canada.

How long does that tracing take? For outsiders we're not even really sure what that means, and that's through the RCMP lab. Is that correct?

D/Commr Stephen White: Actually, that's through the Canadian tracing centre under the Canadian firearms program.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Yes, that's what I mean.

D/Commr Stephen White: It depends. At the tracing centre they try to go back as far as they can with regard to a firearm—right back, if they can, to the manufacturer, to the distributor. If it's an American firearm...distribution in the U.S. If it went from a retailer in the U.S. they go all the way up into possibly how it entered Canada, if it entered legally, if it was distributed from the retailer in Canada possibly to owners.

I would say, and I think I said it previously, that the process can be complex depending on how far you are able to go back and trace.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So when you trace them to the United States—almost all of the testimony we hear refers to gun smuggling from the U.S.—it would seem that, if we can trace the guns there, then we can better collaborate with our American counterparts. However, my understanding is that it takes a lot of resources and many days, upwards of even 200 days, to properly trace a firearm, and not all are being traced.

Would you say that more resources from the federal government specifically for tracing firearms would help you to be more effective in ultimately solving the issue of gun violence from gang activity in Canada?

• (1140)

D/Commr Stephen White: Absolutely. As I mentioned, we recently received some additional funding for tracing, so we're going to add some additional resources to the tracing centre.

In terms of the overall impact on guns and gangs, tracing provides potential evidence on the sources of the specific crime, guns, and also develops very strategic and tactical intelligence. It's really that strategic intelligence that provides understanding of sources of illegal firearms, as well as patterns related to type and make as well as possible smuggling and trafficking routes and intelligence.... But to be able to do that, you have to trace a large number of guns to develop those trends and those patterns to try to identify those specific locations that are preferred for smuggling.

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

Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. McKinnon, we go over to you for six minutes, more or less.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to start with Mr. Weber.

Mr. Weber, you referred to the deficit reduction plan in 2011 as one of the causes of staff reductions, and you indicated that staff reductions are one of the particular problems with the interdiction of arms at the border.

I note that, since we took office in 2015, we've added 600 full-time equivalent positions. I'm wondering if that has helped the matter. Further to that, how much more do you think is required?

Mr. Mark Weber: The numbers that are being added, as far as we can tell, are covering attrition, so the actual overall number of frontline officers is not currently going up. We still have several ports that are running pretty much predominantly on overtime. In

places like Windsor, it's almost unlimited, and at Lacolle, with what they have to process with the asylum seekers coming across Roxham Road, we're sending officers there from across the country to help with the volume.

Staffing-wise, if you ask me how many more would help, I think an extra thousand officers would be a good place to start. That would be a realistic number.

I think there's also work that could be done in how hiring at the CBSA is done. It used to be a nine-week program. The recruits were paid, and they were hired within their own region. They've changed that to a national program where they're not paid, and once recruits finish the program, they are sent all over the country. That greatly reduces the pool of candidates. We see many quitting during the program or shortly afterwards, which creates a system where, once their one year of apprenticeship is up, a good percentage of these officers then have to try to get back to where they are from. It's a system that seems to be designed to drag things out as long as possible and get officers working in places where they don't really want to be. I think that's an obvious and easy way that we could help our staffing.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you, Mr. Weber.

I'm going to segue to the RCMP.

Mr. White or other members of the RCMP, Commissioner Lucki, when she appeared before this committee in December, I believe, indicated that 73% of firearms used in violent incidents were deemed sourced within Canada and that 27% were smuggled.

With the bulk of those being domestically sourced, I'm wondering if we could drill down a bit more into where those firearms are coming from domestically. Are they straw purchases? Are they thefts of legally acquired weapons? Perhaps you could speak to that for a bit.

D/Commr Stephen White: Thank you very much for your question.

I would just reiterate what was discussed at the previous committee meeting.

There were over 30,000 firearms seized last year, in 2020. We received tracing requests for 2,094 and were able to successfully trace 1,472. Seventy-three per cent of those were deemed to be imported legally or manufactured in Canada, and 27%, as mentioned, were smuggled or possibly smuggled. Of that 1,472, 71% were long guns and, of these, 85% were domestically sourced, while 29% were handguns, and 58% of those handguns were identified as smuggled or possibly smuggled.

I don't have any further details with me. If you're asking about their being traced back to particular provinces, I would assume that the largest populations in Canada, by city, are where most of the handguns, for example, are seized. I would think that most of them would be traced back to those locations.

• (1145)

Mr. Ron McKinnon: I guess what I'm looking for with the 73% is, how did they get into the hands of people who are committing these offences? Are they in the hands of people who have acquired them legally, or are they stolen weapons, or have people bought them from a straw purchaser? Could you give us some indication if you have that kind of information?

D/Commr Stephen White: Yes. Obviously, the majority of them were long guns, rifles. For a lot of them, depending on the nature.... You have to go back to the source of the investigation. A lot of them could be legally purchased and acquired and used in a crime. Some of them could be straw purchases. Some of them could be lost or stolen firearms that were subsequently obtained and used in criminal activity.

Unfortunately, I don't think we have those stats as part of the tracing centre, but I would invite Kellie Paquette, the director general of the firearms program, to answer if she has anything additional to add.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Please go ahead.

Ms. Kellie Paquette (Director General, Canadian Firearms Program, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): No, I don't have anything to add except possibly that we're looking at the national picture, but if you start looking at each province, as you've indicated, you'll see different variations on how many of those are lost, stolen or smuggled. But we are seeing all of the above happening, as Mr. White indicated.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you. So—

The Chair: Mr. McKinnon, how do you want to use your last five seconds?

Mr. Ron McKinnon: I'll give it back to the committee. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We'll move to Ms. Michaud for six minutes.

The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being here and for their comments on an issue that concerns us significantly. I specifically want to thank Mr. Weber for pointing out the problems, particularly within the Canada Border Services Agency.

Mr. Weber, you spoke about a lack of resources and an extra workload. You answered my colleague's question by saying that there should be about 1,000 additional officers.

Is a labour shortage preventing the agency from having enough officers, or is there not enough money to hire them?

Mr. Mark Weber: Thank you for your question.

Given the complexity of the issue, I'll respond in English, in order to be as clear as possible.

[*English*]

In terms of whether the CBSA has the financial ability to hire a thousand more officers, that would not be for me to answer. What I can say is that the system of hiring that's in place now is very different from what it was a few years ago, and it makes it much harder to get those recruits through the program.

They've doubled the length of the program, and recruits are no longer paid to go through the program. Recruits, rather than going back to the region they were hired from, are now sent anywhere across the country, to eventually then try to get deployed back to where it is they came from. When you present that to someone as a career path, for instance—"come work for me for free for 18 weeks and you'll have a job, but we're going to send you anywhere we want to across the country"—it's far less attractive than what it was previously.

It's all that extra time to get them through to be full border services officers who are able to be on the ground and working.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

I've been following this issue closely recently. I saw an interview in which you proposed several solutions, including expanding the mandate of border officers. The fact that they can't move between ports of entry seems to be an issue. You think that this might give them the ability to seize more weapons.

In 2020, you sent a letter to Mr. Blair, who was Minister of Public Safety at the time, proposing a specialized border patrol. It reminded me a bit of the Bloc Québécois's suggestion to the government a few weeks ago to create a partnership or a special squad involving different organizations that could work together to seize more firearms.

Do you think that this proposal is similar? Also, have you received a response from Mr. Blair?

• (1150)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Weber: Thank you for the question.

No, we've not received an answer. You've identified a lot of the concerns that we brought up as well.

If I could provide an example of port runners currently, if someone drives through the port, we have no ability to stop them. All we do is call the police and hopefully the police apprehend them somewhere down the road. Those are simple things that would only require simple legislative changes to allow us to effect change and stop that kind of smuggling from happening.

With regard to patrolling between our ports of entry, our understanding really is that the interdiction to patrolling between the POEs is based on a 1932 order in council, and that it would only take really minor amendments to the existing legislation to make it possible for us to do that.

The point we're trying to bring across is that the men and women who do this work all day, every day are the experts because all they do is try to find smuggling. They know how it's done. They've seen it hidden in any manner you can imagine, but that's simply not being used between ports. We think that's a real waste of resources in a way.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: It seems quite obvious.

You were talking about maritime and rail infrastructure that's either insufficient and outdated or completely non-existent.

Do you feel that you have the government's support to carry out these patrols or to perform more work? Or do you feel that the government doesn't really know that, if it were to devote more resources to the rail and maritime component, this could improve the situation?

[English]

Mr. Mark Weber: I can't speak for them. I'm hoping my presence here will help with that awareness.

We have significant gaps, I would say, in rail likely more than anywhere else. Currently, we don't really have rail examination capabilities at first port of arrival in Canada. Trains that, for instance, used to be looked at in Fort Frances, Ontario, when coming into Canada, now are being looked at 400 kilometres away in Winnipeg. This means that the train enters Canada and then travels over 400 kilometres, unfenced and unsecured, to get to somewhere in Winnipeg where we don't really have the facilities to do a full search and we usually don't do the search anyway.

Many locations are not conducting any kind of cargo screening of rail. Most locations don't even do complete crew reporting. In Fort Frances right now, there's over a million dollars in AMPS—we call them AMPS, administrative monetary penalties—sitting on a manager's desk that are not being applied. We find that the latitude given to rail carriers is far and above anything that's given to any other kind of industry, such as trucking or air. The CBSA has not forced rail carriers to provide rail inspection facilities at the first point of arrival. This is despite their legal ability to do so under section 6 of the Customs Act. That's really the same act that enforces private bridge operators to build CBSA offices if they want to operate a crossing. The CBSA enforces it there, but with rail it doesn't seem that anything is being enforced right now.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Weber, and Ms. Michaud.

I'd like now to turn to Mr. MacGregor for his six minutes.

The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you to our witnesses for aiding our committee in this important study on firearms and their trafficking.

I'd like to start with the RCMP, following Ms. Dancho's line of questioning on the Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre. It does exist to process requests that can assist national and international law enforcement agencies in their investigations. There has been some discussion about the resources the tracing centre has.

Mr. White, seeing that you're here in a virtual room with policy-makers, I'm wondering if there is anything else required from a regulatory or legislative standpoint to strengthen the tracing centre and maybe to bring the subject a little more strongly under a federal wheelhouse, if you will.

• (1155)

D/Commr Stephen White: Thank you very much for your question. It is a very important issue, and we are working towards that. We've engaged with the firearms subcommittee of the CACP to start having those discussions. We're getting great support from them hopefully to initiate across the country, with police services, education and awareness, the importance of tracing firearms, to really try to significantly increase the number of firearms that are coming in for tracing, especially all of the firearms that are seized or.... You know, even if these are not moving forward for prosecution and they may still have some valuable intelligence with regard to criminal activity, even getting all of those firearms in for tracing as well would be very beneficial.

I'll use this example, because we have one of our experts here today from the labs, which is that the same thing goes for firearms cartridge casings. You may have a shooting in a particular city or location, anywhere in the country, with no victims or suspects identified. Police do recover cartridges from that shooting and send those in so that we can do the same thing and try to examine, assess and possibly trace those cartridges to other shootings across the country.

Think of the intelligence if you have a gang shooting in Toronto. You have a cartridge from that shooting, but you don't have the firearm. You upload that into our ballistics system, through the forensic laboratory systems. You get another shooting a month later out in B.C. You get another cartridge casing, but you have no firearms. You upload that. You get a match between those cartridges. That starts to build really, really good intelligence. If a gang shooting in Toronto and a gang shooting in B.C. have the same firearms, obviously you now have linkages between those two provinces.

So it's about more tracing of the firearms that are seized and more tracing of the assessments and analysis of the cartridges seized from shooting scenes as well.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that information.

On the subject of cartridges and ammunition in general, we've been talking a lot about firearms. I've seen in the news lately that some people have become quite innovative and are starting to 3-D print firearms components to put them together. A firearm is a relatively simple device to put together. You need to devise something that can strike a cartridge to fire a bullet.

Can you tell the committee a little bit more about the smuggling of ammunition and what your efforts have been like in that regard specifically?

D/Commr Stephen White: Yes, we have had seizures of ammunition. I think in my opening comments I referred to a seizure of ammunition.

I'll pass this to Deputy Commissioner Mike Duheme and Assistant Commissioner Michel Arcand. Perhaps they can comment on some of the seizures they are doing from federal policing at the border with the border integrity teams, if they are seizing amounts of ammunition.

Deputy Commissioner Michael Duheme (Deputy Commissioner, Federal Policing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Steve.

Sir, just to come back to some of the questions, detecting the source of illegal firearms is difficult, given their clandestine nature. We don't seize everything that's coming in-between the ports of entry.

When we're talking about firearms, I'd like to widen that to other pieces that are attached to the firearms, like an extended magazine, which is illegal in Canada. We've also been seeing far more imports of silencers that originate from China that people are ordering, and that are also prohibited.

To your question with regard to the 3-D printer, owning a 3-D printer is not illegal, to my knowledge, but in searches—in Quebec, for sure—we have come across people who with the 3-D printer have printed the bottom part of the handgun. It is a concern. There's no legislation around 3-D printers, which could have many uses, but we are seeing an increase in the number of silencers and in the fabricated pieces of weapons by 3-D printers.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you so much.

Do you have anything else to add with regard to the ammunition piece? I have about 20 seconds left.

D/Commr Michael Duheme: The only thing I can add, sir, within 20 seconds, is that we've done several searches over the past year where we've seized a considerable amount of ammo stored by certain individuals. Again, you buy a box of ammo here, a box of ammo there, and eventually it starts building up. That's also difficult, I think, to control.

• (1200)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you both very much for being so attentive to our time.

That's the end of the first round of questions. We'll move right away into the second round. It will be either five minutes or two and a half minutes, depending on the party.

Mr. Van Popta, you have five minutes. The floor is yours, sir.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being with us here today to help us through this very important study, helping Parliamentarians develop good policies to keep Canadians safer.

I'm going to start with Mr. Webber.

Thank you for giving your evidence. If you were given the opportunity to reallocate the resources that you already have, what steps would you propose in the immediate future to come up with some solutions that would be helpful for you and your members to do your work more effectively? I'm thinking particularly of land border crossings.

Mr. Mark Weber: Thank you for the question. Definitely more people would be needed at land border crossings. As I said, we have borders that couldn't operate without overtime. For rail operations, where we really have no ability to do any kind of searches at our borders, I think the infrastructure would have to be built, along with putting people there to actually work it.

Another solution would be looking at having us use the facilities that are available on the U.S. side to do that work, if they would allow us to do that. Those would be the two main places that I would start. I would say marine as well could probably use a boost staff-wise. There would have to be some money spent on upgrading the telephone reporting systems, which are outdated. A lot of them are in areas where, even if someone were to report and we wanted to see them, they are hours away from anywhere we could get to, to the point where we're not actually going to go out and see them, which begs the question, why do you have a telephone reporting centre there?

I think that kind of infrastructure work would have to be done along with adding personnel.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I was quite disturbed by your comments about inability to inspect trains as they come across land border crossings. I think you were saying that zero per cent, basically nothing, was being done there—that there are no investigations done at all.

What's the solution there? Are we looking for better technology for automated inspections or is it just more human resources?

Mr. Mark Weber: It's more human resources and building the infrastructure to allow us to do those searches.

Currently, at most crossings in Canada, there is nothing there for us to do the search. We have to take the car off. It's more than just opening the door and having a peek inside. It's quite a bit of work to get that done. It's unfortunate that this has not happened before now, but it's something that our members have been highlighting to the CBSA for many years. We have people who target rail, and they know that their targets will never get anywhere because the car is not actually going to be opened and looked into. It's all about getting data.

If you look at gathering data, it's the looking. Gathering data has been crucial throughout the two years of COVID. The gathering of information has been essential in getting a clear picture of the extent of the pandemic. Testing less would only have resulted in being ignorant of the full extent of the problem, perhaps wrongly assuming that it was not as widespread.

I look at testing like searching; if we're not looking, we're not going to find things. If you don't look, you don't really know what the extent of the problem is. We need people to actually be looking and searching.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you for that.

You had made reference to CBSA officers' inability to inspect between border crossings and that you rely on the RCMP for that. Perhaps you could expand on that a little bit. Is this something your members would like to take on if they had the resources available? That of course leads to another human resource challenge: You don't have the people to do that.

Mr. Mark Weber: Absolutely, that is a role that we would like to participate in. We're not saying that we want to participate in it to the exclusion of the RCMP, but to participate more than we are doing now. Our involvement is very little, I could say, in marine mode. Even when we're invited out with the RCMP, the CBSA's response is, "No, you're not going." The attitude seems to be very much that you are to sit at your port of entry, and anything outside of there is not your problem. Phone someone.

I don't think that's the way to run a border. We're the Canada Border Services Agency. I think morale-wise you can't imagine what it does to our members to see a car fly through and to be able to do absolutely nothing about it, but make a phone call. That's our border, and we protect it. I don't think that's the right way to go about it.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

Mr. Mark Weber: You have 10 seconds. How would you like to use them, Mr. Van Popta?

• (1205)

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I will thank the witnesses once again for coming here and sharing their wisdom with us.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Yes. I would like to thank them too.

Now we go to Ms. Damoff, who has five minutes.

The floor is yours.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thanks so much, Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for your testimony, for your hard work and for the very practical suggestions you've already given to our committee.

I have a couple of fairly straightforward questions for the RCMP. The first is how many handguns are currently in circulation and how many individuals have a licence to own a handgun? I know those two numbers will be very different.

D/Commr Stephen White: Approximately 2.2 million individuals currently hold a valid firearms licence and approximately 4,100 businesses are licensed in Canada.

In terms of the number of firearms—

Ms. Pam Damoff: No. I want to know about handguns.

D/Commr Stephen White: Yes. I'll add that in.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

D/Commr Stephen White: In terms of overall firearms, we have a total of approximately 1.1 million registered firearms, and 96.7% of them are handguns. Basically, approximately one million

handguns are registered in Canada. I think there are approximately 275,000 owners of those one million registered handguns, but I will defer to Ms. Paquette to confirm that.

Ms. Kellie Paquette: You are correct: it's 276,000.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's great. Thank you.

I worked on Bill C-71 at committee. Prior to Christmas, we passed a motion to refer the regulations back to have them come into force. One of the things was that it would require someone selling firearms to check that the person purchasing a firearm from them had a licence. I was quite shocked that we weren't already doing that.

Can you confirm that these regulations we've put in place require someone selling those firearms to check that a purchaser of a firearm has a valid licence?

D/Commr Stephen White: Yes, that is correct. The seller of one of those firearms must verify that the person they are selling to has a valid firearms licence.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. The regulations as they're worded state they must check.

D/Commr Stephen White: Yes. I'll just ask Kellie to confirm that.

Ms. Kellie Paquette: Yes. That is correct.

Ms. Pam Damoff: What happens if the seller doesn't check and is selling firearms?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: It's an illegal sale.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

One of the things that I was quite concerned about when I met with the Danforth families was that the firearm used in that shooting, while it was illegal, had started out as a legal firearm in Saskatchewan. They told me that the magazine purchased for that firearm was legally purchased in the Durham region.

Do you require a licence to buy a magazine for a firearm?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: No.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You need a licence to buy ammunition, but you do not need a licence to possess ammunition. Is that correct?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: That's correct.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Awesome. That's very helpful.

You mentioned these joint task forces that are working across police services on the guns and gangs issue. Are you including first nations police services in those task forces?

D/Commr Stephen White: We have some great partnerships with all police services and enforcement agencies across the country, but with regard to these integrated enforcement teams, they're working very well and do include indigenous police services.

I would ask Deputy Duheme to expand on that, because federal policing has some great partnerships with them on the border.

D/Commr Michael Duheme: Thank you, Steve.

To your question, ma'am, yes, we do have good relationships with indigenous communities throughout the country. Mind you, it might vary from the others.

When we're talking about along the borders, we have a good relationship. I will give you an example in Quebec with the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service. There's an integrated team in the indigenous community that works together to deal with anything that's coming in, including contraband such as drugs, firearms or human smuggling. It is nice and quite tight-knit.

I'm excluding our American partners right now, but there's a whole net of partners working together to combat the contraband phenomenon, regardless of what's being smuggled.

• (1210)

Ms. Pam Damoff: I only have 15 seconds left.

How long has that task force been in place at Akwesasne? Do you know?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: I would have to follow up with you on that. I'm more than happy to do that. I don't have the exact date.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Do you know if it's new, or if it has been around for a while? You let us know.

My time is up.

D/Commr Michael Duheme: It's been around for several years.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, everybody, for being so conscious of the time. I know how precious it is.

I would ask Madame Michaud to tell us what's on her mind for the next two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to pick up on what Mr. Weber was discussing earlier, but I'd like to hear the Canada Border Services Agency officials talk about how to expand the mandate of the officers.

Do you support this idea? Do you think that this could really help in the fight against firearms?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Harris: On behalf of the CBSA, I would say that our perspective on the issue of mandates is one that would take a comprehensive response, in partnership with many people, to effectively address firearms smuggling. As was mentioned, the CBSA currently has the mandate and the authority at the port of entry. The RCMP has the mandate between the ports of entry. We work hand in hand on a daily basis to bring together our expertise in combatting this problem.

We currently have over 13 joint force operations with the RCMP, and other police or jurisdictions across the country, that are yielding results. Our approach is an intelligence-based one, so it's imperative

that we work very closely with those who have mandates for Criminal Code infractions and, importantly, for organized crime in order to identify the trends that are happening, so that we can intervene as surgically as possible to deter firearms from crossing the border.

Overall, we are working closely with our partners to leverage our mandate, as well as their mandates, to the greatest effect for Canadians. That said, we continue to review our mandate. We continue to review our requirements, and we'll continue to do so as we move forward.

The Chair: Madame Michaud, you have 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Okay. I'll ask my question now and maybe it will be answered later.

You're talking about working with the different police services. Do you feel that the partnership is sufficient at this time? Do you think that it could go beyond simply sharing information?

Maybe we aren't being told everything. However, it seems that the partnership is often limited to sharing information and intelligence. Do you think that there's room for more collaboration?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Harris: Do you want me to answer now, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, you have 10 seconds.

Mr. Scott Harris: We do both. We have operational collaborations and we have information-sharing collaborations. It's about applying the right tool at the right time, given what the intended goals of the collaboration are.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, you have two and one half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. White, I would like to just quickly continue with Ms. Damoff's line of questioning.

Regarding the verification of a licence during that transaction, can you provide a bit more detail? How is the identity verified, i.e., the date of birth, whether the licence is valid, and so on? I would like a bit more information on what the RCMP is actually doing when that request comes through.

D/Commr Stephen White: Yes, there is an established process for that. I'll turn to Ms. Paquette to provide a little more detail.

Ms. Kellie Paquette: If licence verification proceeds as written, the seller will be required to verify that the buyer has a valid licence for the non-restricted firearm prior to the sale, so they have to visually collect that. That includes the picture, as well as the information on the licence.

Once that's confirmed, the seller will then be responsible for submitting a request to the registrar for a licence verification number. If the licence is valid, the seller will receive a verification number. The verification number will be valid for a maximum of 90 days. Therefore, if the transaction does not occur within the 90 days, the seller will be required to request an additional verification number.

• (1215)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Am I to understand the seller has to be satisfied with the visual representation? Is it up to the seller to verify that the picture on the licence matches the image of the person who's doing the buying?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: That's correct. That's the first check. Then once the seller is confident the buyer is the same person visually as on the licence, then they will request verification of the licence through the registrar.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: How does the RCMP verify that the seller is doing the correct visual matchup? Is this based on an honour system? Do you have some way of following up to make sure that nothing nefarious is happening?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: At this point it would be based on that seller being responsible for that visual inspection of the licence.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for clarifying this.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will give the floor to Mr. Shipley, who will have five minutes.

Over to you, Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is going to start with a little bit of statement. It sounds like, for lack of a better term, that we're trying to find the proverbial needle in a haystack. The sheer amount of goods that come over the border is mind-boggling, and then we hear some statements like Mr. Weber made earlier, that one-millionth of the rail goods are inspected and there's virtually a zero per cent chance of catching even a little of these arms that come over.

I'd like to know about the collaboration. I think a lot of the problem is that because we have such a massive border, it is about finding these arms before they come up.

I'd like to know from a few different agencies, what collaboration is there with the States to prevent these arms from getting up to our border? Is that being worked on and is it something that we could be improving more readily? Perhaps we can start with our border services agency on the collaborations with their partners in the United States.

Mr. Scott Harris: CBSA works very closely, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, with the U.S. agency for firearms and Homeland Security and others. In fact, in 2021, we established a cross-border task force on firearms that involves CBSA, the RCMP, as well as the ATF, HSI, and other American partners, CBP specifically, specifically to tackle this issue together to leverage our respective knowledge bases in terms of not only intelligence, but also our ability to intervene.

Border enforcement isn't something that just happens at the border; there are measures we take before the border, there are measures we take at the border, and there are measures we can take after the border. It's imperative that we bring together the resources from all of those partners to address that. That's what we're doing.

One of the first products this group is currently working on is a joint threat assessment that will help to more precisely target and identify efforts that can be undertaken by the respective agencies, either together or in their independent mandates so that we can fully work together, respecting obviously that we do have differences in legislation and other things that we have to be mindful of.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Perhaps one of the representatives from the RCMP can touch on the collaboration going on. It would be nice to know about.

D/Commr Stephen White: I'll lead off and then invite Deputy Duheme afterwards.

As Scott just said, we have great collaboration with the same partners that he just mentioned in the U.S., including Homeland Security and ATF. On top of that we also have great collaboration, joint investigations with agencies like the Drug Enforcement Agency, for example. A lot of organized crime groups, once they've established successful smuggling routes across the border, even though their mainstay may be smuggling illegal narcotics, may also use those same smuggling routes for smuggling other contraband such as firearms. Sometimes we can get great intelligence out of organized crime investigations working with those types of agencies as well.

Mike, do you have anything to add?

• (1220)

D/Commr Michael Duheme: From a federal policing perspective, it's not only nationally, provincially, and with municipal partners that we're working the border, but also internationally with our Five Eyes partners. With the U.S. counterparts we have several integrated teams that are set up throughout the border to address sharing of intelligence, to investigate and whatnot. You did say "needle in a haystack". We do have one of the longest international borders in the world with different types of geography as you go from the east coast to the west coast that make it more complex, but there are really good relationships going on with all agencies and countries.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that.

Chair, is there still time remaining?

The Chair: Yes, you have one minute.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for those answers, gentlemen.

On March 31, 2021, the Liberal government announced that CBSA would be tasked with creating a joint task force with the relevant U.S. agencies to address drug smuggling.

Was that specific task force established, and how is that operating?

Mr. Scott Harris: Yes, this is the task force that I was just referencing, with the partners that I've identified.

They are working together quite closely. It has been operating since the fall. They are working on a joint threat assessment in the firearms base at the current time, which we expect in February of this year.

The Chair: Mr. Shipley, you have 15 seconds.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Mr. Harris, I'm hoping there would be some successes out of that. For that task force, if we could hear about any successes, now or down the road, that would be great.

Mr. Scott Harris: Absolutely. Thank you.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Zuberi, we'll go over to you. The floor is yours for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here and for the work that they do to protect Canadians.

[*English*]

We've been hearing a lot about gun violence in Montreal. Are there any hot spots in the country, in particular when it relates to gun violence and illegal arms trafficking? Can you quickly just speak to that global point?

D/Commr Stephen White: I mentioned earlier the larger municipalities. If we look at the firearm seizures, especially handgun seizures across the country, just because of population, the biggest seizures, and I guess firearms-related homicides—which is a significant indicator of violence by gangs and organized crime—in 2020 were in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa. I think that's just based largely on their population.

Toronto had the highest number of victims, the highest number of firearms-related homicides, in 2020, followed by Montreal, Vancouver and Calgary. In 2019, that was very similar, so that's an indicator of where a lot of the gang violence and firearm homicides are taking place.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you, Deputy Commissioner.

[*Translation*]

The Quebec government, in September 2021, announced Operation Centaur.

[*English*]

Can you explain to the committee the RCMP's involvement in this operation?

D/Commr Stephen White: Absolutely.

Mike.

D/Commr Michael Duheme: Thank you, Steve. I will take that one.

The federal policing has an important role to play when it comes to firearms. In terms of the feed-in that we're providing to projet Centaure, we have several resources that are embedded with projet Centaure from an analytical point of view. At the senior level as well, if I remember correctly, we are part of the operation's strategic committee on that. We try to tie in our expertise in the work we do with our partners on the border to feed into Centaure what we're seeing border-wise.

If there are seizures between the ports of entry, there's communication directly with Centaure, and whatnot, to exchange that information. I'm referring to the U.S., but that's even on the international scene.

We are fully engaged with projet Centaure and mindful that it's a provincial initiative, but the federal aspect comes in and we're looking at it from a federal perspective of what more we could add to projet Centaure.

Last I heard, things are going very well with regard to projet Centaure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

[*English*]

We heard some testimony earlier around staffing at CBSA. I put this question to the CBSA officials, please, for clarification.

From the information I have, as of 2015-16 there have actually been 600 additional full-time employees added to CBSA. Can you confirm whether that's actually the case?

• (1225)

Mr. Scott Harris: Yes, that is the case.

Between March 2016 and March 2021, there has been a 4.5% increase in our workforce, 622 FTEs that have been onboarded across the agency to respond to emerging initiatives. Some of those that were mentioned earlier include to support irregular migration efforts, as well specific investments related to firearms and guns and gangs that have come on board.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Okay.

We've heard in testimony so far that CBSA right now doesn't have the ability to patrol the border with the RCMP.

Can you explain to us how that can help to deal with gun trafficking? Can somebody explain that with clarity, why that would be important, aside from the fact that it's not the case currently?

Mr. Scott Harris: As I said before, we have the mandate primarily at the ports of entry. The RCMP have the mandate between the ports, so I would probably defer to them to speak to those efforts between the ports.

From a CBSA perspective, I think we want to have an intelligence-led approach to this and bring to bear our resources where they're most appropriate. This is so we're targeting those routes that we're identifying, as well as the actors that are involved in the smuggling of firearms, so we can effectively interrupt it not only at the border, but more importantly disrupt the activity on a more long-term basis, preventing it from getting—

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: If I may, is CBSA more skilled in this particular aspect of crime prevention?

The Chair: Provide a very short answer, please.

Mr. Scott Harris: I would say that our expertise is in the area of customs and the application of the laws in that space, whereas the RCMP have the expertise in the Criminal Code.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, colleagues.

This ends the second round of questioning. We'll now move directly into the third round, which is a combination of five-minute and two and a half-minute slots. It begins with a five-minute slot for Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Lloyd, the floor is yours.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My primary questions are going to target Mr. Weber, Mr. Halina and Madam Paquette.

In terms of gun control, when we're talking about creating more paperwork, it's really only going to create a marginal and small impact on crime. When we're talking about increasing personnel, which has been a large recommendation today, we know how expensive that can be. We know we have an aging population. It's going to be incredibly hard to train, source and retain new people. I think we really need to start looking at alternative solutions along with those solutions. I really haven't heard about any alternative solutions except for nebulous technology things, so I'm going to focus in on technology.

Mr. Weber, you were talking about how it's virtually impossible to monitor the rail lines. I'm aware of a company in Canada, Patriot One Technologies, that's using artificial intelligence and radar scanning as a way to identify, through artificial intelligence and radar, when there are concealed weapons being involved. It has clients across the United States, including the United States government, major casinos and schools.

Is there any effort, funding or planning being put forward by border services to utilize these technologies as a force multiplier for personnel?

Mr. Mark Weber: Thank you for the question.

That I'm aware of, no.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay. It's disappointing. I'm not blaming you, but it seems like you're talking about how almost useless it is to have a telephone at ports of entry for people to make reports. This is an analog solution when we're living in a digital world. I think we need to be looking at digital solutions like artificial intelligence and blockchain technology.

To talk about blockchain technology, I'll be transferring over to Madame Paquette. As a gun owner myself—registered and non-registered—we have all this paperwork. We're content to do the paperwork, but gun owners are only seeing very marginal.... We're not really seeing how this is preventing criminals, who we know don't do the paperwork....

I was recently reading a paper from 2017 by Thomas Heston from Washington State University, which talks about the possibility of using blockchain technology as a way of creating private ledgers to track the sale and ownership of firearms. I see this as a way that we could possibly create a cost-effective gun control solution while making it less onerous for legal firearms owners.

Is the Canadian firearms program researching blockchain or how to use blockchain for any purposes?

• (1230)

Ms. Kellie Paquette: I would have to validate with the technical teams. I will take that back to make sure we are looking at that.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: No offence, but I'm just a little bit disappointed that people talk about technology, but the latest technology we're seeing in front of us on a day-to-day basis doesn't appear to be being integrated. I want to see more vision from this government in terms of ways we can make this more effective while making it less onerous on gun owners.

Mr. Halina, you're with tracing and laboratory services. I know you guys have a ballistics lab. Are you contemplating using any blockchain technology or artificial intelligence to track firearms?

Mr. Don Halina (Director General, National Forensic Laboratory Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): For clarity, we do the forensic analysis of firearms on behalf of law enforcement agencies across Canadian with the exception of Ontario and Quebec, which have their own provincial labs.

We're not involved in the tracing of firearms. The one aspect where we are involved is the serial number restoration. We use a lot of different technologies to advance restoring obliterated serial numbers and then we pass on that information to the Canadian firearms program for tracing purposes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

Madame Paquette, going back to you, have there been instances where the Canadian firearms program has been hacked and firearms owners' private information has been leaked?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: Not that I'm aware of.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Is that a concern that you have, or are you taking proactive measures to prevent that from happening?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: Yes, we are always looking at that to make sure that it is top of our mind to protect the information of the licence-holders.

I want to add on technology. With the recent investments, we are going to be redeveloping our national systems, looking at the utilization of the current technologies.

The Chair: Mr. Lloyd, you have about eight seconds.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'll let it go there.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Noormohamed, on the other hand, you have five minutes in this round. The floor is yours.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, thanks to all those who have joined us today.

I'd like to ask my question of Deputy Commissioner White, if I might. In the testimony today, we've heard—and correct me if I'm wrong—that 73% of the crimes that are being committed are done so with legally obtained weapons or weapons that could be traced back in Canada. On the back of that, I'm wondering if we are making the right investments in making sure that we are figuring out what could be done about the introduction of those weapons and understanding what might be done about those weapons versus focusing on the border, where some folks seem to think we should be really leaning in. I'm wondering what more we could be doing or what you think we should be doing to be leaning in on these domestically obtained weapons, or likely domestically obtained weapons?

D/Commr Stephen White: For the domestically obtained, obviously, again, it's going back to working with the police agencies that seize those firearms to identify the full details of the circumstances around that firearm, even though it was a legal firearm in Canada: who had it at the time it was seized by police and whether it was seized as part of a criminal investigation or other circumstances.

As for tracing that we talked about—and this is one area we're looking to go—it is about tracing a firearm back as far as we can, but also working with the police agency to get full details of the incidents when they seize that firearm and bring all that information together. They give us a much more strategic understanding of how all of those firearms are being used in criminal activities or being seized across the country.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Let me build on that. My friend Mr. Lloyd mentioned that as firearm owner, has registered and unregistered weapons. What would be the chain of events if Mr. Lloyd's unregistered weapon were somehow found to have been part of a

criminal activity or a crime? What would happen in terms of the work that you have to do?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

There's the substance of the question, but looping me in here into it is very inappropriate, Mr. Chair. I would ask that the opposite member would rescind that.

• (1235)

The Chair: I think the question, without the reference, can stand on its own.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: No offence was intended. I'm certainly happy to rephrase the question.

If an unregistered firearm were used, what would that do to the workload and the work that you would have to do to be able to trace that weapon?

D/Commr Stephen White: Obviously, there's more work from tracing it back because it was an unregistered firearm. With the serial number, we can trace some of it back. The big piece here would be working with the police agency to determine the circumstances of the criminal investigation that resulted in the seizure of that firearm and whether that firearm was registered as being lost or stolen at some point in the past. The work required could vary, depending on the nature of the criminal investigation the firearm was seized in and the circumstances of the firearm, whether it was lost, stolen or possibly diverted at some point as well.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I have another question for you, recognizing I'm running out of time here. With the number of non-registered firearms you are seeing, do you think we should be putting more emphasis on trying to figure out how to address that matter? What would you recommend by way of feedback or advice to folks who have non-registered firearms who may not have them for illegal purposes?

D/Commr Stephen White: Again, there are a number of circumstances with that. We'd look at it. Were unregistered firearms seized? Could we trace it back to it being part of a straw purchasing activity, whereby a legal licence owner is going and purchasing unregistered firearms legally and then diverting those, for example, into the illicit firearms market?

I will ask Ms. Paquette if she has anything to add.

Ms. Kellie Paquette: No. The only thing I would add is around the tracing and the Internet investigations that are also completed as part of our package when we get that firearm.

The Chair: Mr. Noormohamed, you have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I will give those back to the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Then we'll segue right into Ms. Michaud, who has two and a half minutes.

The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

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

I'll speak to Mr. White from the RCMP.

Mr. White, in your opening remarks, you spoke of the seizure of 53 pistols and 6 rifles. That seizure took place in the past year. It's hard to say whether it's a good seizure, because we don't know how many firearms were brought across the border or how many will end up on the streets of Montreal.

A few days ago, the investigation office of the *Journal de Montréal* revealed that about 2,000 illegal weapons are circulating in Montreal alone. According to our figures, this seizure seems minimal.

Why are there so few seizures at the border?

D/Commr Stephen White: In my opinion, we conduct seizures at the border quite regularly.

Mr. Duheme, did you want to add something?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: I am aware of this article in *Le Journal de Montréal*. If memory serves, this seizure was made between ports of entry. This is a route that people use to smuggle contraband into Canada.

As I explained earlier, when we're between ports of entry, it's a challenge, given the geography and the length of the border.

I have nothing to say about the impact of the 53 firearms, because I can only make assumptions. Yet we know that these firearms entered the country illegally.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: You talked about the complexity of the territory and the length of the border. As we know, there are many firearms that come through Akwesasne territory. Earlier, you talked about working with their police department, but I feel that more could be done.

Do you have any indication of how many guns transit through this territory on a daily, weekly or monthly basis?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: No, I do not.

The Akwesasne route has been known to smugglers for a long time. However, I can assure you that we are working closely with the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service, the Sûreté du Québec detachment in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield and the one in Cornwall, our American partners at U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and our integrated teams.

• (1240)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, it's over to you for two and a half minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Maybe I'll give Mr. Sauvé a chance to answer some questions here.

Mr. Sauvé, in my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford out here on Vancouver Island, we are 100% policed by the RCMP. I know, from the good relations I have with many members, the difficult job they do every day. They have certainly reiterated many of the staffing and resource challenges you mentioned in your opening statement.

Indeed, with the raging opioids crisis that's going on in my community, many are being called to intervene in a lot of mental health and addictions work, because we don't have those other resources either.

You mentioned the successful Surrey RCMP “Shattering the Image” anti-gang program. Previously, your organization has called for legislation to effectively address gang diversion.

I don't have much time. I have about a minute and a half. Can you maybe elaborate a little bit more on how that anti-gang program has been successful and some of the key details and legislation you're referring to? The Criminal Code often comes into effect after the fact. I'm more interested in what kind of proactive policies and legislation we can be enacting at the federal level.

Thank you.

Mr. Brian Sauvé: Yes. I mentioned the Surrey RCMP “Shattering the Image” program. Obviously, there are a number of them. One of the other ones is the end gang life program of the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit in British Columbia. It has to do with a lot of community outreach and education.

Ultimately, they are extremely blunt in the message they deliver through public advertising, Twitter, youth outreach and school liaison programs. If you see some of the CFSEU ads, it is blunt advertising, that speaks to the target audience of youth looking to get into the “classy” life of crime and organized crime. There are pictures of caskets and little stories and snippets.

From that perspective, it's really about engagement and the partnership of law enforcement agencies with those community outreach programs and ensuring there are some metrics in place to make sure that we're spending our dollars wisely and pushing the right message that is having an impact.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will ask Mr. Shipley to begin his five minutes. He has the floor.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you, Chair.

I'm not a gun owner myself and don't profess to be an expert on guns, but there have been some tragic events lately south of my riding in the GTA area, and more so right in Barrie recently, where a young teen was shot to death.

With the influx of handguns, I sometimes wonder where these young teens have been getting the money to purchase them. If so many are coming across the border—maybe someone from the RCMP would happen to know this—what do illegal handguns cost on the black market?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: I can't speak specifically for the Toronto area, but in the conversation with Madame Michaud earlier, in the article she was referring to in *Le Journal de Montréal*, the local paper in the city of Montreal.... My recollection—and I'm not going to say just handguns, but firearms—is that it varies from \$1,000 to \$8,000. Madame Michaud can correct me if I'm wrong, but that's my recollection.

For an illegal firearm on the market, that's the going price in Montreal and, I'd venture to say, in the province.

Mr. Doug Shipley: That brings up some questions about where young teens aged 13 and 14 are getting \$1,000, even on their own.

Perhaps this may lead into it, and maybe one of our counterparts from the RCMP can answer. I'm not sure whom exactly to direct this. How large of a role do gangs or organized crime play in the cross-border smuggling of firearms, and what is the best way to combat this?

• (1245)

D/Commr Stephen White: Go ahead, Mike.

D/Commr Michael Duheme: To your question, sir, I would say a huge part of that, anywhere there's some monetary gain to be made.... They're bringing it in for the sole purpose of reselling it to people. The information I've seen is really towards the street gangs that are bringing it in, and then selling it to people, like the examples you provided in Toronto.

I'll pass it over to Steve, if he has more statistics from the CISC.

D/Commr Stephen White: Thanks, Mike, for that.

You just look at the landscape for organized crime, and I would invite everyone to look at it.

Last week, we released a public report on organized crime in Canada. The purpose of the report is to help raise public awareness of organized crime groups operating in Canada and really give us, law enforcement and the government, that perspective.

As a snapshot, CISC, Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, estimates there are 2,600 organized crime groups known and believed to be operating in Canada. CISC assessed 469 of them during its threat assessment last year. A number of them were identified as high-level threats and very much heavily involved in the narcotics trade. I think 250 organized crime groups were assessed as being involved in the fentanyl market and 300-plus organized crime groups were involved in the methamphetamine market.

With the drug trafficking environment goes the use of firearms by organized crime groups or by gangs somewhat recruited by organized crime groups to assist with street-level distribution and

street-level trafficking of drugs. That's where you can go back to where they're making the money. That's where the money comes in.

A lot of gangs are supported and financed by the work they're doing on behalf of organized crime groups.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that, Mr. White.

I'm going to ask a very pertinent question. Do you believe, then, that we have a handgun issue or an organized crime issue in Canada?

D/Commr Stephen White: Both.

Mr. Doug Shipley: And neither is more present than the other? Is one not leading to the other, or do they both go hand in hand, for lack of a better term?

D/Commr Stephen White: It's the nature of the activity if they're both involved, and whether there are gangs or higher levels of organized crime. That's what leads to the use of firearms and the need to acquire illegal handguns or illegal firearms.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Mr. Chair, is there still some more time to switch my line of questioning?

The Chair: You have 50 seconds.

Mr. Doug Shipley: I have some questions for Mr. Sauvé.

Mr. Sauvé, I read your bio. I know you've been a member for a while, and now you're the president of your association.

I'd like to get some feedback from your members if I could. I'm sure you deal with them quite often. According to your members, what would be the best organizational changes the RCMP could make to better combat illegal gun smuggling?

Mr. Brian Sauvé: With only about 30 seconds to answer a 30-day question, that's a difficult one.

Honestly, at the moment, I spoke earlier about resources. We have some excellent provincial-municipal partnerships with the CBSA, but resources are the big thing. I think you're hearing that across the board, whether it's from CBSA or if you talk to municipal and provincial police services. Things are falling through the cracks, because our priorities are 911 at the moment versus proactive larger-scale issues.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

For the last slot in this round of five minutes, I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Chiang.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everybody. Thank you for participating and giving us your valuable time.

My question is directed to the RCMP. We have heard about the importance of intelligence gathering or intelligence sharing between law enforcement services. Can you elaborate on the importance of this co-operation and provide any ideas you have to increase co-operation between the various departments?

D/Commr Stephen White: That's an excellent question.

The answer would be that it's critical. The more intelligence and the better intelligence we can share between law enforcement agencies right across the country, the better understanding we'll have of the criminal landscape and the more insights we'll have of how we counter that.

The one big gap that we have had for a number of years is the national criminal intelligence system. It's a system that is used by every police service and law enforcement agency in the country. That system is built on a platform that is decades old and no longer serves the very effective purposes of exchanging, developing and sharing intelligence between police services.

We just received a significant investment from the government to build and roll out a brand new, modern and robust Canadian automated criminal intelligence information system with very modern and advanced analytics. That is going to significantly advance the volume of intelligence and the nature of that intelligence that we're going to be able to develop and share a lot better than we have been able to in the past.

For me, the development of that system is going to be a bit of a game changer in the sharing of intelligence.

• (1250)

Mr. Paul Chiang: In the past, I heard that various agencies worked in silos. Based on what you're saying, are those days gone? Is the intelligence sharing more elaborate now and is there more co-operation between agencies?

D/Commr Stephen White: It is, but there's always more work to do with regard to continuing to encourage all police services to share as much intelligence as they can, whether it's with regard to organized crime, firearms, or other illicit activities. We need everybody to be sharing in a very robust manner. I'm very hopeful, as I mentioned, that once that new system that is currently being developed does come online, it will facilitate that.

Mr. Paul Chiang: My follow-up question is for the CBSA and Mr. Harris.

You provided information about the cross-border joint task force that was established last year. Could you elaborate some more on the work that has been done? Has it been fruitful? What are you doing with the JTF?

Mr. Scott Harris: The committee started meeting as of the fall and bringing the partners together, specifically for the purpose of identifying these patterns and threats that you're talking about, namely the intelligence—not only the sharing but also the actual consolidation of some of that intelligence, so that people can have a

more sophisticated understanding of what it all means and how we can choose to intervene in it. Some of that work will come together, as I said earlier, in a report later this year, which will bring that together.

To your point, the task force is also a forum for continued collaboration to provide a venue to ensure we don't get lost in collaborations that maybe aren't as effective. We now have a forum to pave over those relationships. Given the complexity of mandates on both sides of the border, it's imperative we have a venue to do so.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you very much, Mr. Harris.

I'm going to ask an open question for whomever would like to answer it.

In regard to gang violence, I've heard there's an increase in it. Is that to do with the economic situation in our country or is it the gang violence that has traditionally been going on and has increased at this time?

D/Commr Stephen White: I'll start off.

I think it's always been going on. There have been increases and decreases over the years. It is reflective of a number of things in terms of gangs.

For example, there are recruitment efforts and more relationships and liaisons that you have between street gangs and organized crime groups, especially in the urban areas, as that's where more street gangs tend to evolve, and there's competition between each other, so it depends on the drug markets in those areas as well. A lot of factors come into play in terms of determining the level, scope and intensity of the violence related to street gangs.

One thing I can say—and I think I said it earlier—is that street gangs traditionally tend to be much more overt and in the open with regard to their violent activities.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That completes this round of questions, and we'll move to a fresh one.

The opening floor goes to Ms. Dancho, who will have five minutes.

The floor is yours.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a few questions for the CBSA.

Mr. Harris, you said in your opening remarks—and if you could just verify the numbers—that it's \$51.5 million over five years and an additional \$7 million in addition to that over that period as well, specifically for gun smuggling, so it's \$60 million for gun smuggling over five years. Is that about right?

Mr. Scott Harris: Yes, it was \$51.5 million over the first five years, and then \$7.5 million ongoing, so that will be money that continues into the future.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay. It's a little bit of a boost plus a five-year spread-out. Got it.

Mr. Scott Harris: That's right.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's specifically for the task of combatting gun smuggling, correct?

Mr. Scott Harris: Yes, guns and gang violence.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's right.

Mr. Scott Harris: I would add that we also had a recent announcement in budget 2021 of a five-year investment of \$38.5 million, with an ongoing amount of over \$6 million as well. That will supplement those efforts as well.

• (1255)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay. It's just under \$100 million, not \$90 million, all things considered, over about five years additionally.

Mr. Scott Harris: That's right.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's great news.

You would say that this additional injection of taxpayer dollars is going to be well spent and contribute to combatting gun violence at our border—in essence, the gun smuggling and the gang activity coming across the border.

Mr. Scott Harris: Yes, it targets a number of different activities that we'll be undertaking, some of which obviously have been ongoing since 2018, including to the point of adding technology, of introducing new technologies and exploring new technologies that can enhance our capacities, and of enhancing drug detector capacity and training capacity, as well as expanding and enhancing our intelligence and investigative capacity.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay.

Do you believe that the imminent federal so-called gun buyback program is going to stop gun smuggling or contribute to stopping the smuggling of guns coming from the U.S. into Canada? Do you think the Canadian buyback program will help that in any way?

Mr. Scott Harris: From a CBSA perspective, I think the challenge of combatting firearms is multi-faceted and is going to require a whole-of-government response. It's going to take many facets to do that. CBSA is very focused on ensuring that we use the resources we've been given and the investments we've been given to the greatest effect. That's our current focus. It's to move forward with using our mandate appropriately.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Right, and do you feel that any provincial handgun ban in Canada would stop handguns from being smuggled from the U.S. into Canada? Do you think that would be effective?

Mr. Scott Harris: I can't speak to provincial regulations or legislation to this effect. As I say, we work closely with our provincial partners and our territorial partners and will continue to do so to leverage our mandate to support their efforts to combat firearms smuggling.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Right. I think my point is really that it sounds like there are some investments being made, but there are billions and billions of proposed dollars that will be spent on a so-called buyback program, as well as a proposed potential provincial handgun ban, and I'm not getting a clear sense from you that that's going to have a clear impact on one of the primary causes of gun smuggling from the U.S. border into Canada.

I did want to go to Mr. Weber. I would like to—

The Chair: I'm sorry—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, can we pause the time? There's something—

The Chair: Yes, there is. We will pause the time. Someone in on “unmute”.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: It's Mr. Chiang, I think.

Mr. Chiang, if you can mute yourself, that would be great.

Mr. Webber, your entire opening remarks were about strapped resources for hard-working border agents who are having to patrol, as you said, the largest undefended border in the world with one of the countries that has some of the most firearms per capita in the world. Obviously, we're seeing that huge impact on gun violence in Canada coming from gun smuggling from the United States.

Could you give us a couple of ideas of what your officers would be able to do with an additional \$1 billion, \$2 billion, or \$3 billion? What would that mean to your officers for patrolling our border and stopping gun smuggling?

Mr. Mark Weber: Thank you.

I heard the comments about increased technology and putting some of the money towards intelligence, which makes sense, but all of that doesn't achieve anything unless there's someone there to actually do the search, to open and look into the rail car. That's really what we're lacking.

We seem to be gathering data, and when you look at a mode like rail, we have absolutely no ability to look into anything, so I think building that infrastructure and having the people to actually find the guns are where some of that money needs to go.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Right. You had mentioned that your capacity to look at the millions of tonnes of cargo that come on rail into Canada from the U.S. every year is one one-millionth of what's needed. Is that correct? Is that the capacity you have?

Mr. Mark Weber: Yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Essentially, as you mentioned, you have zero capacity to check rail. Is that correct?

Mr. Mark Weber: That's correct, yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: How many more border agents would you say we would need to significantly increase monitoring of illegal activity related to drug and gun smuggling?

Mr. Mark Weber: To include in that patrolling between borders...?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Right.

Mr. Mark Weber: I think you could safely be looking at an extra 1,000 or 1,500.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next I will call upon Mr. McKinnon to begin his five-minute line of questioning.

Mr. McKinnon, we go over to you.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you, Chair.

There's been considerable emphasis today on border issues, but according to the numbers we heard earlier, domestic sources of firearms are three times greater than those coming across the border. It seems to me that that would be a place we should be taking a hard look at.

Now, admittedly, those numbers are based on what appears to be a small dataset, and I would certainly underscore the remarks earlier, I believe by Ms. Dancho, on the importance of increasing tracing so we can get better data.

I guess my question is for both Mr. Sauvé and the RCMP regarding what more we can do to reduce the domestic sourcing of these firearms for criminal or violent activities.

Let's start with the RCMP, please.

• (1300)

D/Commr Stephen White: Go ahead, Mike.

D/Commr Michael Duheme: If I may, I'll go back, Mr. McKinnon, to an earlier comment by the president, Mr. Brian Sauvé. It starts with education and outreach. You could take down a criminal organization tomorrow, and there will be another one just waiting to fill that spot.

I think it has to be done in tandem. One way is that we really have to focus on the educational piece, that awareness piece, that outreach piece, to have an impact while the law enforcement is working on the other piece with organized crime.

We've seen it many times: You take one organization down, and there's another one in line to take that job, to take that position, and it's just a domino effect.

For me, one of the key initiatives would be those outreach prevention measures and getting those out to the younger people, the people who are thinking about joining these organizations.

D/Commr Stephen White: I would just add to that, Mr. McKinnon.

A key issue with regard to domestic firearms being diverted into the illicit firearms market that I mentioned earlier is straw purchasing. We have been seeing this for a while, and it is continuing—someone with a legitimate firearms licence going out and purchasing multiple firearms legitimately, unregistered, and selling those into the illicit firearms market.

We have recently put in some new enhancements to get better at identifying and working with businesses to detect that, so we're hoping, moving forward, that we're going to have a much better relationship with the businesses to be able to identify those straw purchasers who are operating.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you.

I'm going to stay with you, Mr. Sauvé. Your members of the National Police Federation basically are dealing where situations where they are the police of jurisdiction.

I'm wondering what kinds of jurisdictional issues there are when it comes to interdiction of firearms and so forth in working with the RCMP, and whether there are issues that we can address or need to be aware of.

Mr. Brian Sauvé: When doing some research on this before we created our position statement two years on gun violence in Canada, I haven't heard of any challenges of inter-agency co-operation, whether it be with municipal or provincial police services, the CBSA, or even Corrections Canada. However, there have been challenges with respect to legislation and improving the Canadian firearms program, for example, requirements for police agencies to submit firearms that are found or sent for destruction for tracing. Right now there is no requirement for that.

If an estate is settled and there are five guns in it, even though they may be unregistered and get turned over to the police of jurisdiction for destruction, we don't have a requirement for that police of jurisdiction to send those guns for tracing. Could we change that? Could we improve that system? Could we make different resource and technology improvements for the firearms program to be able to track guns in Canada that are not registered and perhaps outside of the mandate?

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you.

I suspect that's the end of my time.

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds if you want them, Mr. McKinnon.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: I'll donate them to the cause.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

We will go to Ms. Michaud for a two-and-a-half minute round.

The floor is yours.

[Translation]

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

I'm going to pick up on my discussion from earlier with Mr. White about the more well-known territories, the ones that have been known for the last few years to be good places for smuggling. The smugglers, who know them well, are very well organized in smuggling illegal firearms through them.

Even though the government is making considerable efforts and investments in this regard, through the media, we still hear traffickers boasting that the border is a sieve, that it is extremely easy to smuggle illegal weapons across it, and that smugglers travel all the way to Montreal, for example, to get these weapons into the hands of street gangs or young people.

In your opinion, what more needs to be done to ensure that this will one day stop? Even if there is no magic solution, I am sure that solutions can be put in place.

This is an extremely complex problem and beyond collaboration, partnerships and investment, what can really be done to find a solution?

• (1305)

D/Commr Stephen White: Thank you for your question.

Mr. Duheme, did you want to talk about the border?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: Of course. Thank you for your question.

I will repeat what I said earlier, madam, out of respect for the people who do this work every day. The atmosphere between the various stakeholders and the partnership is excellent. Capacity is always an issue, given the length of the border that has to be protected between the ports of entry.

I can tell you that the federal police have secured funding for a team to work on the entire Canadian border, optimizing the technology at certain locations and the resources required. Currently, the technology is used sporadically from the east coast to the west coast.

I mentioned earlier that the issue of geography is also problematic. We don't have all the appropriate infrastructure to receive the technology we want. That is a challenge. So we need to start placing a heightened emphasis on the technology and building focused teams to address that issue.

I would also like to highlight the excellence of our collaboration with the Americans on the technology side. Indeed, there is great co-operation and coordination with regard to the installation of technology.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, I will now turn to you and offer you two and a half minutes.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: How generous of you, Mr. Chair. Thank you so much.

Mr. White, I think in a previous exchange there were some questions asked about the proposed mandatory buyback program and whether such a program would be effective. The theme of my question would really be what we can learn from other jurisdictions around the world. Who is engaging in policy that's having verifiable effects?

For example, on a mandatory gun buyback program, Australia had phenomenal success. They had measured reductions in both homicides and suicides after they engaged in their mandatory gun buyback following the Port Arthur massacre.

With respect to illegal firearms trafficking, gang violence etc., are there any jurisdictions around the world that Canada could take some serious policy lessons from, where the measurable metrics are all heading in the right direction? I think it's incumbent upon us as policy-makers not to operate in a silo but to learn from best practices. For the committee's benefit, maybe you could identify some

jurisdictions that are having measurable successes and what policies are leading to those successes.

D/Commr Stephen White: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Unfortunately, I haven't done that type of research. I think that question may be more for policy individuals in government who may have done that research, but I am aware of the New Zealand example. Obviously, the geography of New Zealand is very different from Canada's, so I wouldn't be in a position to transition what happened there to Canada's environment. Unfortunately, I don't have that research.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm cognizant of the fact that we share the border with the United States, one of the biggest weapons manufacturer in the world. Would you say there are, in fact, officials at Public Safety Canada who are engaged in this research? Are you aware of it going on? I just want to be aware of that.

D/Commr Stephen White: I am not aware to what extent they have done that research, but that could be a place to check.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay—

D/Commr Stephen White: Mr. MacGregor, you've got 10 seconds to spend.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I will donate them back to you, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Holy smokes, we may get up to a minute. Everybody is being so generous.

Now we will turn the floor over to Mr. Shipley for five minutes.

Sir, the floor is yours.

• (1310)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'm taking it, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Yes, I was just going to say, Mr. Chair, that Mr. Lloyd will be taking my time.

The Chair: Sure, go ahead, Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: My question is for Mr. White. We're hearing a lot about the 73% number in 2020. Would you say that with the COVID restrictions preventing all but essential workers from crossing the border, that had a major impact on the statistic?

D/Commr Stephen White: That's a very good question. There are two things I would say there. First, we haven't finalized our statistics on the number of seizures for 2021, or done that analysis. Two, the 2020 numbers that I talked about were a very small subset of the total number of firearms that were seized and a small subset of the number of firearms seized linked to criminal investigations as well.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Would you say that's a statistically useful number, or are you saying that it's such a small subset that it's not really that statistically useful to you?

D/Commr Stephen White: No, it is a useful number. It does provide some insights, but I think we would need to do more tracing on a larger scale to really get some very good insight of patterns and trends.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Would you say that, if you were to take that number and apply it to other years, the number would be above average?

D/Commr Stephen White: We've seen an increase in recent years. As I said, the number traced last year I think was around 2,000 in 2020. Our initial look at the 2021 numbers was there were well over 3,000 requests for tracing, so we are receiving—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Is that statistically high or is it low for domestic sourcing?

D/Commr Stephen White: We don't yet have the tracing results for 2021 broken down yet in terms of—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Based on 2019, 2018, 2017, is that 73% consistent with data for previous years that have domestically sourced?

D/Commr Stephen White: I think it is pretty consistent, but I'll refer to Ms. Paquette, if she has any additional insights.

Ms. Kellie Paquette: Unfortunately, with regard to tracing to this level, we've only been collecting this information for a few years now. It does vary from year to year.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: The number based on the years, or a low number?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: Sorry?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Is it a high number or a low number?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: We saw 60%, but we haven't seen a higher number than the 73%. Again, it's based on a very small subset. These figures vary significantly by type of firearm, by region and by year. So this is a national picture. For example, while 85% of the traced long guns were domestically sourced from a national perspective, the handgun figure for Ontario shows 79% of traced handguns were foreign sourced.

It really depends on if you're looking at a region, a firearm or the year.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

Ms. Kellie Paquette: I do believe this number is very high.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: However, handguns by their nature are much more smuggleable, if that's a word, than long guns, correct? Would you say there's a much higher proportion of handguns being smuggled than long guns?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: It depends on where you're looking at the statistics, yes, but they are much smaller, so they're easier to smuggle.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Looking at this philosophically speaking or in terms of the laws of economics, if you make something more difficult to get, it just raises the price, which creates an incentive to get that item.

I worry that we could harden the border, but we're going to see the laws of economics play out there. Is there maybe a way to reduce the demand on the consumer side for people who are criminals or could become criminals? What are the best ways we could reduce the demand for illegally trafficked firearms?

I guess Mr. White or Mr. Sauvé might be the best person to respond.

D/Commr Stephen White: That's something I would have to take away for some additional follow-up.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Sauvé, you noted in your NPF report that you don't believe that spending.... Maybe it wasn't you, but your re-

port in previous years said that the money being spent on the buyback program isn't the best use of funds and that there are alternatives. One of the alternatives you posited is hiring more RCMP officers for specific tasks like involving tracing.

What are some ways you think that we could reduce the demand for illegal firearms, whether they're domestic or smuggled from abroad?

• (1315)

The Chair: We're out of time, but Mr. Sauvé, but I'm going to give you 20 seconds to answer that question.

Mr. Brian Sauvé: Certainly.

Our challenge with the buyback program is that, once again, it's increasing the mandate of an overstretched police service that doesn't have enough boots on the ground to do what it's doing today.

As far as eliminating gun crime in Canada is concerned, that's the \$64,000 question, and really it starts with a concerted approach by law enforcement community agencies doing concerted outreach with measurable metrics at the end to take the shine off that attractive lifestyle.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

For the last slot in this round, I will turn to Ms. Damoff for five minutes.

Over to you.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thanks so much, Chair.

The RCMP mentioned the straw purchases. I'd like to go back, if I could, to the regulations in Bill C-71. When someone has come in to purchase a firearm and they have a licence, the seller is calling the RCMP. Do our regulations require that the RCMP check to see that it is a valid licence and make sure that it's not counterfeit?

D/Commr Stephen White: Yes, they do. I'll pass it to Kellie to expand on that.

Ms. Kellie Paquette: Currently, restricted and prohibited firearms do require that validation of a licence. Through Bill C-71, as you've identified, for non-restricted firearms, it would be a requirement to have a valid licence and the registrar would validate that.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I recognize that a licence is required. My question was just whether the RCMP is required to validate the licence.

Ms. Kellie Paquette: Yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: So you're required to validate the licence. Are there any other things that you do before you pass on the number to the seller, or is it just strictly a licence verification?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: It's a licence verification.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I want to switch gears a bit, and again I want to direct this to the RCMP. We know that people are not born criminals and we've talked a lot about enforcement, but we haven't talked a lot about the prevention piece. We're going to hear from other organizations that are doing a lot of the work on that. As one of them said to me, if there are no young men joining gangs, there are no gangs.

We're also going to hear from a woman who was a gun runner in one of the gangs. You mentioned human trafficking and we've talked about drugs, but are you seeing younger people being drawn into gangs? We're seeing 13-year-olds being used in gang and also women, so basically some of the most vulnerable people are being drawn into gangs. I'm just wondering if you could comment on that a little.

D/Commr Stephen White: My first comment would be I think there have always been vulnerable people being drawn into the gang lifestyle. I don't have specific stats with regard to ages or gender, and I'm sure it varies across the country.

What I would say, and it's been alluded to here today, is there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing the gun violence and gangs that we've been talking about. Whether it be lower-level street gangs or more sophisticated organized crime groups, it does require a whole-of-society approach, and it's going to start with education and prevention early on to ensure that we address the root causes that lead people to join gangs in the first place. Then it's all about, as well, having exit strategies for people in those lifestyles to lead them toward a healthier lifestyle. With that, as well, does go a very robust law enforcement role as well.

Mr. Sauvé talked about it earlier—the Surrey gang prevention initiative—and I think that is a perfect example of a lot of the things we need to be doing. Their gang intervention and exiting team consists of police officers and civilian case managers who provide outreach, safety, planning and resources in a non-judgmental manner to people who have been and are involved in gang activity. They provide counselling, life coaching, education, employment programming and mental health supports if they're required.

In the few years that program has been in existence I think they've had 23 individuals who have successfully exited the gang lifestyle. It's a good start for that program and I see a lot more opportunities for similar initiatives across the country.

• (1320)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Sauvé, I have only 45 seconds left, but perhaps you could comment a little bit on that program. My sense is that the resources across the country to expand that program are sorely lacking for people who want to exit gangs. Could you comment on that, just briefly?

Mr. Brian Sauvé: I would agree with you. Resources are sorely lacking. It's really part of a broader discussion. We're talking here about Canada's social safety network, with the police being the last first responders standing. We should be having a discussion on it. How big a social safety network do we want? Who's going to fund that? How are we going to ensure that those funds are appropriately placed and that there's an actual success program in place? That's where Surrey's end gang life program is successful. They measure it.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now move into the next round of questions.

A five-minute slot is to be led off by Ms. Dancho.

The floor is yours.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sauvé, I'd like to ask you some questions on a few things you mentioned. You touched on in your opening remarks, and just a few minutes ago, the fact that police resources are very strapped. You're concerned that a few of the measures put forth by the government will further strap your already limited police resources. Of course, you represent 20,000 RCMP officers.

Could you shed a little bit more light on the impact to our already strapped RCMP officers regarding the buyback proposal and the potential provincial handgun ban? What impact will that have on police ability to do their jobs and combat gang violence, drug smuggling, gun smuggling and the like?

Mr. Brian Sauvé: Thank you for the question. It's a really good one. I don't think you would speak to any police association leader out there today who would talk about having adequate resources, whether it would be Vancouver, Calgary or the OPP. Recently, the OPP published a report that said they were a thousand officers short. So it's not unique to the RCMP. I have to make that very, very clear here.

Part of it has to do with improving the lustre of a career in policing and public safety, whether it's from the RCMP or any municipal police jurisdiction. When I speak about adding resources, a lot of it has to do with looking at the current state of affairs in the RCMP. If you look at our budget submissions—the third one is upcoming—COVID has had an impact on our recruitment and our graduation of recruits. We graduated only 16 troops in the fiscal year of 2020-21. We were supposed to graduate 40. A lot of it is because of shutting down for COVID and then a staged reopening of the depot in Regina. That has led to almost a 1,200-member deficit across Canada. When you talk about 20,000 police officers in our bargaining unit, we're talking about 5% right there. We're not talking about hard vacancies or soft vacancies for family-related leave or daily injuries.

Then add in the buyback program: Who's going to go and pick up those guns after they've been sold back to the government? It's going to be your police of jurisdiction. Do we have the resources to increase that mandate and do that? I don't think we do. So it's a challenge.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Understood.

You also briefly mentioned in your opening remarks your third pillar, I think, specifically about gang violence and criminality as the main causes of gun violence in Canada. You mentioned that sentencing will help address gang and gun violence. Can you elaborate on what you meant?

Mr. Brian Sauv : Well, I think strong sentencing, which goes to challenges that we have within Canada's legal system, and the appearance, if you will, of a revolving door.... Whether that comes from a lack of pretrial custody beds, or whether that comes from a lack of Crown counsels being able to do efficient JJP hearings, or whether that comes from a lack of provincial or Federal Court judges, I don't know, but the appearance to a lot of people who reach out to us and speak to our members is that there is a bit of a revolving door.

So are we talking about pretrial custody or are we talking about mandatory minimum sentencing at the end? The discretion for provincial court judges or appellate court judges to be able impose those is a deterrent, but to commit a crime on a Friday and be out on a Saturday morning to commit the same crime Saturday afternoon—that, I think, is what the Canadian public is seeing. How do we, in part, change within that system?

• (1325)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Recently, the Liberal government brought forward Bill C-5, which addresses, as you mentioned, mandatory minimum sentences. For those who don't know what that means, a mandatory minimum means that if you commit X crime you go to jail for a minimum of x amount of years or days or months. That's what a mandatory minimum sentence is, from my understanding.

So you're saying that you're already right now, without this Bill C-5, which will eliminate mandatory minimum prison time for extortion with a firearm, robbery with a firearm, firing a firearm that tends to injure someone.... It eliminates mandatory minimums for those crimes. You're saying that even without the elimination of those mandatory minimums with gun crimes, the RCMP are seeing now a revolving door; violent crime is committed Friday, like you said, and they're back out on the street committing crimes two days later.

Mr. Brian Sauv : I think that if you were to ask the average Canadian, as we are hearing a lot in our tours in Alberta, looking at the provincial policing services, a lot of Albertans would say with respect to rural crime that we need to fix our legal system, however that looks, versus talking about different areas.

Part of that legal system may be a charge diversion. It may be early intervention. It might be more restorative justice. It might be more healing circles. It might be more spaces in elementary schools and high schools, and more career and vocational training. All of this is part of that discussion about the big Canadian social safety network versus relying on the police to solve the problem.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sauv .

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Zuberi, who will have five minutes.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Again, I want to thank all the witnesses for being here. We've been running for two and a half hours. We haven't yet had a bathroom break, but we only have half an hour left to go.

I want to touch base with the RCMP. Can you please elaborate on whether there are any gaps in the legislation that you see right now when it comes to laying charges against gangs?

Would you like to speak to that point?

D/Commr Stephen White: I guess my perspective, in terms of laying charges, is that we have a full slate of offences related to firearms in terms of street gangs and organized crime. We have organized crime offences that can apply equally to both gangs and organized crime groups.

We have a fairly comprehensive suite of offences that are available to us.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: How about when it comes to prevention? Would you like to speak to that point too?

D/Commr Stephen White: Yes. In terms of prevention, as I mentioned earlier, in my last intervention, we need a lot of education, a lot of awareness, a lot of working with community groups and back to the CFSEU program that they are leading. They're working with a lot of community groups both to try to prevent individuals from joining gangs and, if they have joined gangs, to provide very robust and comprehensive exit strategies and work very closely with those individuals to help them exit the gang lifestyle.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I would say that's extremely important. It's not just a case of using a hard stick but also getting pathways so that people can exit lifestyles that are not productive in society.

D/Commr Stephen White: It's extremely important.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: On that point, when it comes to mandatory minimums, how do they impact or potentially not impact, or are not helpful when it comes to dealing with the issues we're talking about, gun violence and illegal arms trafficking?

D/Commr Stephen White: What I would say on that, in terms of a comprehensive criminal justice system, whether it's dealing with firearms, organized crime or gangs, law enforcement.... Enforcing laws is a very big part of that, but equally big is the full continuum of Canada's justice system. We, as law enforcement, have to have confidence that the sentencing decisions rest appropriately with our courts and judicial officials.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I'd like to open up the floor to the panelists. If there are any novel points that you haven't raised thus far, perhaps you'd like to raise them.

• (1330)

D/Commr Stephen White: I would like to add something, if we have the time.

Earlier, we touched briefly on the work of our forensic labs and their ability to match cartridge casings in criminal activity. They equally have the ability to match a firearm from one crime scene with a firearm from another crime scene. With regard to gang activity, for example, where firearms are probably often involved in multiple firearms-related incidents, having that technology and the ability to do that....

There are two key pieces to that. One is the IBIS, the integrated ballistic information system. We have a limited number of systems across the country. These are the frontline systems that are able to upload those cartridges into the Canadian ballistics identification system, which enables us to search across the country. It also enables us to work with our counterparts in the U.S. to possibly do traces and matches of cartridges and firearms in the U.S.

We're hoping to move forward to increase the number of those systems across the country. The larger the network we have across the country, the easier it's going to be for police services to enter those items into a system locally and upload it into the national system. That's something we're working on, and we're hoping we'll be able to make good progress with that as well.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: That's excellent. Thank you, Mr. White.

I'd like to conclude by saying thank you to Mr. Weber, Mr. Sauv , Deputy Commissioner White, Mr. Harris and all the others for being here. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll turn to Ms. Michaud for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead whenever you're ready.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to address Mr. Sauv  and just mention that I have tremendous respect for all security officers, RCMP officers and officers of all other police forces. We see many of them on Parliament Hill these days, and they are all impeccably professional. I have great respect for the work they do.

We are really trying to see, from your point of view, what the solutions are, and what more should be done. You brought forward some interesting proposals, especially in your opening remarks. You talked about more resources, collaboration, and prevention. We discussed that a bit.

Could you give us a little more detail on the national operational investigative program for firearms smuggling that you are suggesting? How do you think prevention in general could further help solve the problem?

Mr. Brian Sauv : Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

I apologize, I prepared my testimony in English. Therefore, all the answers that spring to mind are in English.

[*English*]

To avoid the bastardization of the French language, I will answer in English.

The idea behind a national operational investigative program for firearms in Canada is to coordinate. Whether you're talking about prevention programs, or whether you're talking about enforcement programs, or whether you're talking about community programs, we don't yet have in Canada anyone who is coordinating all of that. Whether it's the Canadian firearms program.... there's very little coordination of everything. As I mentioned earlier, there's no requirement right now for municipal, provincial, or even the RCMP de-

tachment to send guns for tracing unless they need to be used as evidence in court.

Do we need to change how we approach that and how we look at it? It might not have come across properly, but, for example, I've been on a number of files in which an estate is being settled. Person X dies and it is discovered that they had three firearms that were not registered. There's no requirement for me or the police officer to send them for tracing to find out if they were used in crimes. I can send them for destruction. There are different things like that.

As far as outreach goes, I think Canada needs to get better. We as Canadians really need to get better about taking the lustre off of a life of crime. What does that mean? It could be something as simple as violence in video games. I don't know, but does that have an impact on our children and how we bring them up? A lot of things we can do better, and we really need to look at the broad picture.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will move to Mr. MacGregor.

The floor is yours for two and a half minutes. Take it away.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the RCMP, and I'm not sure which member would be best suited to answer the question. In today's meeting we have occasionally touched on the links between the firearms trade and the drug trade. We know the opioid crisis is leaving a wake of carnage for so many families. In fact, in my home province of British Columbia, the life expectancy has actually decreased because of the number of people who are dying from the supply of toxic street drugs.

To the RCMP, can you touch on what the introduction of fentanyl and carfentanyl has done to the drug trade and what the effects have been on the people who are trafficking in drugs? Has it impacted their need for firearms? Is there a marked increase for turf such that they are trying to control ports of entry, places where it's being distributed and so on? Can you touch on that link a little bit more?

• (1335)

D/Commr Stephen White: Thank you for your question.

I would say that traditionally with regard to gangs and organized crime being involved in drug trafficking, that has always led to accompanying firearms. With regard to the transition to, I'll use fentanyl and methamphetamine, for example, there are huge markets right now in Canada for those drugs. There continues to be a huge market for cocaine, which has always been more of a staple for organized crime groups in terms of drug importation and distribution in Canada.

As I mentioned earlier, we've seen a big transition by a lot of organized crime groups moving into the fentanyl market and moving into the methamphetamine market. I mentioned a CISC public report that recently came out, which identified that there were in excess of 250 organized crime groups across the country that have transitioned into being involved in the fentanyl market and over 300 organized crime groups that have transitioned and are now heavily involved in the methamphetamine market. It's a big market, and whatever the drug is—whether it's cocaine, fentanyl, or meth—if the demand is there, you are going to get groups that are moving into it, both gangs and organized crime. With that comes competition between gangs and organized crime, and that does foster a potential increase in violence.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lloyd, we'll go over to you for five minutes whenever you are ready.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Chair, I think I'm taking the next time slot.

The Chair: That's all right.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you for all the very good and useful evidence that we've received so far.

There's been a line of questioning about the source of firearms used in crime. I'm concerned about how good this data is, how good our tracing tools are and whether it's even mandatory for the police forces across the country to submit the firearms used in crime to tracing to discover the source of them. I understand that it's not a mandatory requirement.

Mr. Sauv , I'll probably go over to you. In your evidence, you told us about the concept of developing a national operational investigation program.

How do you think that this additional tool could be useful for us to get better data about the source of guns used in crime?

Mr. Brian Sauv : I realize that this could be considered ironic because you have a labour union here that's asking for more members. One of the challenges that we see in gun crime in Canada is actual coordination. As an evidence-based union, we try to bring forth positions that are based in evidence. With all the data that we've been able to collate, it's challenging to put it all together.

Being able to have a coordinated centre.... I understand the idea has been studied a little bit from the RCMP perspective, but it's never materialized. It would be to be able to coordinate efforts from integrated border enforcement teams and national weapons enforcement support teams, the Canadian firearms program and the chief armourers to bring us some data, so that policy makers such as yourselves will have one source to be able to make best decisions from as you move forward.

What's worked? What hasn't worked? Where should we devote more funding? Where should we devote more outreach? Those types of things are what we need to look at from an NOIP perspective.

• (1340)

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Good. Thank you for that.

Do you have any comments about the suggestion that police services across the country should be mandated to submit the firearms they seize for tracing? It's not just voluntary and it's not just to investigate that one particular crime, but for data-keeping purposes.

Mr. Brian Sauv : I think that would be a best practice.

Perhaps before firearms are sent for destruction, they should be recorded. They should not necessarily be traced, but perhaps recorded and test-fired and all of that great stuff.

I realize that now I'm making a suggestion that increases the mandate of the Canadian firearms program. In concert with that, I'd say you'd have to increase the resources allotted to the Canadian firearms program in order to meet that mandate.

Yes, I think it would be a best practice.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

I'm going to pivot over to Mr. Weber.

You gave us a lot of very useful information in data about the operation of border security and the co-operation between the RCMP and the CBSA. Could you expand on that a bit and perhaps also reference the levels of co-operation between CBSA and the American Homeland Security?

Mr. Mark Weber: I think some of those questions would be best directed at the CBSA, but I can answer some of that.

I do know that there is coordination. Our integrated border task teams—our IBET teams—work together and do some work on patrolling the borders between ports.

From our side, our members have very little ability to participate in much of anything outside of our specific ports of entry. Having increased participation outside of the port is really one of the things we'd like to see addressed.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Maybe somebody from CBSA could jump in as well on the level of co-operation between CBSA, the RCMP and also Homeland Security.

Mr. Scott Harris: I can speak to that.

We have an excellent working relationship with both agencies as well as other related partners such as ATF, CBP, and local police of jurisdictions in various parts of this country and on the other side of the border. As was just mentioned, we have our integrated border enforcement teams.

A number of our resources are involved in these teams—not just the individuals working at ports of entry, but also our intelligence staff and others. Again, it's to ensure that we are sharing information, but also to coordinate on enforcement activities where we can, so that we leverage that intelligence to produce meaningful outcomes.

We do a number of referrals every year to police partners on both sides of the border, which has led to investigative actions that are away from the port of entry. We often talk about the number of seizures that we make, but CBSA plays a significant assisting role in stimulating follow-through that leads to investigations, arrests and seizures inland. A number of those have been profiled in media releases, such as operation Centaure, as has been mentioned a number of times. I would say there have been operations like that in every region across Canada as a result of those partnerships.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

The Chair: No. You're just right.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: All right. That's what I thought.

The Chair: I would now like to ask Mr. Noormohamed to take the floor.

You have five minutes, whenever you're ready.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To Deputy Commissioner White, I understand from a previous study that Crown prosecutors have not always prosecuted charges that are laid on reserve. Can you share your experience with this and any recommendations around that?

D/Commr Stephen White: I don't have a lot of specific insights on that. I think what I can say is that, right across the country, we work in terms of prevention and, depending on the circumstances of the investigation, individuals who are charged, and the nature of the circumstances under which they are charged, we look for alternatives to resolve the situation beyond prosecuting criminal charges.

That's something we've always worked with. When the right opportunity and the right circumstances are there for us to work together with the prosecutors, we look at a very effective resolution without proceeding to criminal charges and prosecution. However, it all depends, as I say, on the nature of the circumstances of the incident and the individuals involved.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

I just might switch to Mr. Sauvé.

You spoke a lot about the impact of community outreach, healing circles, restorative justice, education and opportunity as a great way to prevent a lot of the crime we've been seeing, particularly gun crime.

Can you share a little bit about the impact generally that your members have seen when these programs have worked and when these programs are well funded and your views on the type of positive impact this can have in communities?

• (1345)

Mr. Brian Sauvé: Thank you.

That's actually a good question. What is rarely spoken about in law enforcement public proceedings is that our members serve in some of the most isolated posts in Canada. Sometimes they are the only representatives of the Government of Canada in those communities.

Even in larger centre like Burnaby, Red Deer or Fort McMurray, these programs can be life-changing for those impacted by them. They can create a lifelong bond between a public safety professional, whether it's a member of the RCMP or the Calgary Police, and that affected person. They change the image of public safety and policing for that person, which is an important aspect for all police services and even public safety agencies in Canada.

If we want to address the recruiting crisis that everyone is seeing, we have to put some shine back on those buttons on those uniforms. How do we do that?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you very much.

I will go back to Deputy Commissioner White. Having heard this from Mr. Sauvé, when you think about the role RCMP and law enforcement agencies can play broadly in increasing engagement with communities to work on prevention, particularly around the use of firearms and some of the crimes we've been seeing, what would you say are the major areas of opportunity that lie within law enforcement agencies, particularly the RCMP?

D/Commr Stephen White: I think everyone is aware that the RCMP has policing jurisdiction across a good part of Canada, actually, including all provinces except Ontario and Quebec, all territories, 155 municipalities and approximately 600 indigenous communities, as well as the contracted policing of jurisdictions. In all of those areas, we work very closely with our municipal, provincial and territorial policing partners and community partners.

To add onto what Mr. Sauvé said—and he had very good insights—whether it's restorative justice or other programs, we're fully supportive of coming up with the right and the best solution for everyone involved, especially the individuals who are involved in a criminal activity, the victims and the communities. We try very hard, through a number of means, to get the right balance for everybody, because it is about looking after the individuals in those communities right across the country. We have a big role in making sure we come up with the right solutions and right resolutions.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, how am I doing for time?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I will donate that time back to the cause.

Thank you very much to all the witnesses who have spent great time with us and, I think, really helped expand our understanding.

The Chair: Colleagues, we are 12 minutes before the top of the hour. We can proceed in one of two ways.

One would be to say that this has been an excellent conversation and adjourn the meeting now. The other would be to divide the remaining time and give each party another two minutes. I'm in your hands. Do we have a consensus to adjourn the meeting now? Let me just see. There are a couple of thumbs up.

In that case, it's left up to me to thank the witnesses so very much. You have been very generous with your time, and it's clear to all of us that your lives are immersed in these issues. You can see it from every angle. You are living what, for many Canadians, would be a very tough life and a tough job. It's up to us as policy-makers and decision-makers to give you the best tools we can for you to

combat gun and street violence in this country, especially among young people who find themselves in these gangs. We need to treat this issue with the seriousness it demands, which has been present during these three hours of questions and answers and presentations by all of you.

On behalf of the committee, representing the House of Commons, I thank you for the work you do for our country. I thank you for the generosity of your time this morning.

The meeting is adjourned.

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