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The Honourable Gwen BonifaceMr. Matthew GreenMr. Rhéal Fortin



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• (1835)

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ)): I call this meeting to order.

Good evening, everyone.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): I have a point of order, Chair. I have no translation.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): All right. We will check with the interpreters.

Everything is working now, Mr. Motz, and I thank you for letting me know.

Welcome to meeting number 19 of the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency, created pursuant to the order of the House of March 2, 2022, and of the Senate on March 3, 2022.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House and Senate orders.

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me, as we may need to suspend for a few minutes to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

Witnesses should also be aware that translation is available through the globe icon at the bottom of their screen.

The co-clerk is signalling to me that all required sound checks have been successfully completed with witnesses who are attending virtually.

I now like to welcome our panel for this evening: Drew Dilkens, mayor of the City of Windsor, and via videoconference, Jim Willett, mayor of the Village of Coutts.

Before we begin, I'd like to ask the following of the committee members. As you know, our routine motion calls for each of the witnesses to have five minutes for their opening remarks. Mr. Dilkens has asked for 10 minutes. As far as I'm concerned, I agree to give it to him, unless any member of the committee objects, in which case we will abide by the provisions of the routine motion.

Do I have the unanimous consent of the committee to give Mr. Dilkens 10 minutes for his presentation?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you.

Mr. Dilkens, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Drew Dilkens (Mayor, City of Windsor): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will try to come in under the allotted time.

Mr. Chair and members of the Senate and of the House of Commons, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

On November 7 I appeared before Commissioner Rouleau and the Public Order Emergency Commission.

The illegal blockade of the Ambassador Bridge in the city of Windsor began on February 7, 2022, disrupted trade and posed a major risk to the national economy.

The blockade also had a profound negative impact on the city and its residents, schools and businesses until the matter was resolved peacefully and the bridge reopened shortly after midnight on February 14.

I want to express my profound gratitude to all members of law enforcement at the Windsor Police Service, the OPP, the RCMP and other policing partners who worked effectively together and did an exemplary job of quickly and safely clearing the illegal occupation and maintaining the security of Huron Church Road for the over \$400 million in goods that travel this crossing each day.

As I testified at the commission earlier this month, I felt that as Mayor of Windsor I had the ear of both federal and provincial government representatives at the highest levels, including Minister Mendicino, Minister Blair, Ontario Solicitor General Jones, Premier Ford and Prime Minister Trudeau. My staff was in contact with and coordinated with political staff across federal and provincial ministers' offices and the security establishment.

At the same time, the Windsor Police Service, the OPP and the RCMP worked through the appropriate chain of command to secure the resources necessary to help clear the occupation in a safe and efficient way.

The system worked as it should in response to this unprecedented blockade, which threatened the economic well-being of our entire country.

The invocation of the Emergencies Act was an unprecedented response, and while I was not consulted prior to the invocation I supported this response as it sent a clear signal that repeated attempts to blockade the Ambassador Bridge after February 14 would no longer be tolerated by Canadian officials.

No doubt this sent an important signal to our U.S. trading partners that Canadian supply chains would remain accessible and Canada would act to ensure the crossing would not be blocked again.

The City of Windsor estimates approximately \$5.7 million in unforeseen costs, including extra policing costs to clear the illegal blockade and address the ongoing need to secure Huron Church Road for the benefit of the entire province, and, frankly, for the entire nation. It is unreasonable to expect municipal taxpayers to bear the financial brunt of emergencies that have provincial and national implications. The city has asked the Ontario and federal governments for financial support since March of this year, and our requests remain unfilled.

While appearing before Justice Rouleau and the Public Order Emergency Commission, I said the blockade of the Ambassador Bridge represented a new type of phenomenon, and while the City of Windsor is responsible for local infrastructure and the Windsor Police Service is capable of providing adequate and effective law enforcement to our community, there is an obvious need for broader collaboration and support from the provincial and federal governments to bolster the safety and security of our borders.

I urge members and senators to support Windsor's proposal for all three levels of government to collaboratively study and develop a long-term sustainable strategy to protect our critical border infrastructure and ensure that all three levels of government work effectively together to prevent and respond to disturbances that threaten to choke our national economy.

The planning process must include border municipalities like Windsor to ensure that any framework appropriately supports local authorities at the front line of emergency response to ensure the resulting strategy prioritizes local and community concerns, provides sufficient resources and tools for municipalities to build community resilience and responds to all hazards that may threaten critical infrastructure on their borders.

This is of particular importance when a federally regulated piece of infrastructure is in a municipal community.

Thank you for your attention, and I'm pleased to answer any questions in support of the committee's mandate.

● (1840)

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Dilkens.

In the end, you took only three minutes and 50 seconds for your opening remarks, a far cry from the 10 minutes requested. I thought I noticed that you were perhaps speaking a little quickly, but I didn't get any comments from the interpreters. Still, I'd ask you to speak a little more slowly. That way we can take the time to listen to you and make sure the interpreters understand your testimony.

We'll now listen to the opening remarks of Mr. Willett, the mayor of Coumts.

Go ahead, Mr. Willett. You have five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Willett (Mayor, Village of Coumts): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, everyone. It's an honour to be here.

I don't have a political statement to give you. I will just quickly run through the bullet points on what went on for the 18 days of the protest and blockade here in Coumts.

My name is Jim Willett. I am the mayor of Coumts. I've been a resident since 2013. I've been a member of village council for five years and mayor for four years.

The village of Coumts, as you know, is located in southern Alberta at the border. Coumts does not have its own amenities, aside from a convenience store, a restaurant and a bank. The village is policed by provincial RCMP. A detachment of four RCMP officers in the town of Milk River services the village of Coumts.

On the afternoon of January 26, I saw a social media post promoting "slow roll" protests in Alberta. On January 27, about two days prior to the border blockade, I saw another social media post stating that there would be an attempt to block the border as part of the protests.

On January 27 I wrote to the Solicitor General, at the time Sonya Savage, to advise her of the planned protest. I got a call the next morning from a spokesperson in the Solicitor General's office, who explained that the RCMP was aware of the situation and I didn't have anything to worry about.

On January 29 the convoy drove up to the Coumts border crossing. I observed the RCMP escorting the convoy to the eventual location of the blockade, the intersection with Highway 500, which is 1.3 kilometres north of the border crossing. Here the convoy made a U-turn and returned back north up Highway 4, but about 45 minutes later, vehicles drove onto the median and ditches and blocked the road.

My first concern and responsibility, of course, was emergency access, both incoming and outgoing, for fire and ambulance service for the residents of Coumts and the surrounding area, as our volunteer fire department covers all the outlying areas here.

After the first couple of days, for about five days traffic was intermittently allowed to have single-lane access at different times north and south, a few trucks at a time. Truckers who had been blocked in were allowed to leave.

On February 3 I visited Smuggler's Saloon and met with protesters. That's not an active bar. I didn't go for a beer. I should add that Smuggler's Saloon is a vacant business that became the de facto headquarters for the Coutts protesters. The protest group appeared quite chaotic and without clear leadership. The spokesperson told me that the protesters did not have a clear plan and that there was no clear leadership structure at that time.

At one point, early on the evening of February 3, 2022, Artur Pawlowski, a pastor from Calgary, came to Coutts and preached a sermon that strengthened the protesters' resolve. As a result, the lane of traffic was open for only a few hours. After Mr. Pawlowski's speech, tractors came in and blocked traffic again.

On February 4 I again attended Smuggler's. While I was there, I met a lawyer who was advising the protesters. They thought they were legal because they were letting traffic through a single lane. He advised them that they were not legal protesters.

I met with protesters a third time, on February 5, when I went to Smuggler's Saloon with Glen Motz, member of Parliament, and Lorne Buis, mayor of the Village of Foremost, Alberta.

I contracted COVID on the 8th and had no more in-person meetings.

I was advised by protesters that after the RCMP's raid on February 14 and the seizure of a firearms cache at a residence, they had met at Smuggler's Saloon and decided to bring the blockade to an end. There were rumours on their social media that the Emergencies Act would be invoked. They were talking about losing businesses and losing the right to travel and so on.

I was in regular communication by phone and text message with Rajan Sawhney, the Minister of Transport at the time. The minister wanted to come to Coutts, but she told me "the boss won't clear it".

On February 4 I had a call with Premier Kenney. The conversation generally related to the pandemic response, the federal government's removal of vaccination exemptions for truckers and how that seemed to be the tipping point for the protests initially.

Most of my village's population is elderly. Many residents found it intimidating to have to go through the protest area to travel to Milk River to access essential services. At times, however, residents had to drive off-road and into the ditch to get around protesters. Several elderly residents were very frightened when they were forced to go through the protest area, or they simply stayed at home.

• (1845)

One resident, a veteran of Afghanistan who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, had to leave town during the protest, as it triggered her PTSD.

During the first few days, the local school bus didn't run as the bus driver was unwilling to make the trip. Similarly, courier services were occasionally unable to cross the protest area. At least one local business, which ships cattle, was unable to operate during the blockade.

The blockade greatly disrupted everyday life in Coutts. The village of Coutts has become more polarized as a result of the protest.

On a personal note, I received one death threat during the relevant time period related to the protest activity, and received a few other threatening phone calls. At one point, I found a truck parked outside of my home, with someone taking photos. I brought this to the RCMP's attention.

If I might take 30 seconds longer, I am also the chair of a regional economic development initiative, and this cost us millions and millions of dollars in cross-border traffic at that time.

Anyway, that's a whirlwind overview of what I saw in my 18 days of protests.

I thank you for the opportunity.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Willett.

We'll now begin the first round of questions.

Mr. Brock, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening and thank you to both mayors for your attendance today and for your participation in this important study.

I would like to start off with you, Mayor Dilkens. I'm going to start off with a statement that seems so obvious, but I think it bears repeating.

As an elected official, as you are and as I am, you represent the people who supported you and voted for you in the same fashion as you do for those who did not.

In your particular case, you represent all the citizens of your city; those who followed health measures and those who protested against health measures. While you may not personally agree with the positions of those who protested, you respected their minority opinions nevertheless.

You did not demonize those individuals. You did not stigmatize those individuals. You didn't call them names. You didn't call them racists or misogynists, or use the type of language that any elected official shouldn't be using to those who you don't agree with, unlike our Prime Minister. Our Prime Minister used that very divisive language. You specifically stayed away from that language and you didn't pour fuel onto the flame.

Would you agree with that statement?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I would say that it was a very difficult situation. If I went back and reviewed the 54 or 55 interviews that I conducted in the course of six days, would there be language changes I would make? Probably. However, the temperature was already hot on the ground.

This was unlike.... I have lived in Windsor my entire life—

• (1850)

Mr. Larry Brock: You didn't make it hotter.

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I attempted to stay away, to not make it any hotter and to try to find solutions to overcome a very difficult situation in Windsor.

Mr. Larry Brock: Right. Notwithstanding—you didn't mention this in your summary—the personal threats against you and perhaps your family, and suspicious vehicles parked outside of your house, those were isolated incidents, and you didn't use them as a springboard to demonize those who were protesting in your city. Is that correct?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: That's true.

Mr. Larry Brock: Right.

With the time I have remaining, I would like to congratulate you on your leadership, because it represented, in my view, a gold standard of how to effectively coordinate all the partners responsible for the successful ending of this protest.

You immediately knew about this event coming. You knew that the slow roll was happening in your city for a number of days. To your point, you picked up chatter on social media. You knew the temperature was rising. The moment the blockade started, you, as an effective leader, reached out to the police chief, or vice versa, and you coordinated a plan.

You asked specifically, “What do you need?” She told you, without any hesitation, “I need resources.” You asked, “How many?” She said, “100”.

You immediately went into a political dialogue with all of your contacts. That probably includes the province and the federal government. You have identified those individuals. I need not repeat that. Through that effective dialogue, you received assurances immediately that whatever Windsor needed, you would get. In fact, within a few days, you didn't get 100 additional officers; you got 500 additional officers.

Is that correct?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: That is correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: Furthermore, the Ministry of Transportation provided you with all the necessary infrastructure. I think they're called Jersey markers or Jersey pylons—

Mr. Drew Dilkens: They are Jersey barriers.

Mr. Larry Brock: Six kilometres of Jersey barriers were immediately dispatched by the Ministry of Transportation. Is that correct?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Yes. That took a lot of effort, because they didn't exist locally. Police, OPP and others had made a determination that they were the appropriate response in order to get the roadway leading to the Ambassador Bridge open and to maintain security.

Mr. Larry Brock: In the time I have—and I don't have a lot, but I will get a second round—I want to jump to the conclusion, the conclusion I want you to agree with, hopefully.

You and your partners, with effective dialogue, with police liaising directly with the protesters, not overtly increasing the temperature, completely removed this protest without resource to anything within the federal Emergencies Act. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Mr. Brock, unfortunately your time is up.

Mr. Dilkens, please answer the question in five seconds.

[*English*]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: The folks were removed before the Emergencies Act was invoked, but something needed to be done to send a signal so that they didn't return, and that was the biggest fear we had on our mind at the time: a return.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Dilkens.

Mr. Brock, I let you go about a minute over.

Mr. Virani, you're up next. You have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to direct my questions to Mayor Dilkens.

I'm going to read to you something that comes out of a document that was provided at the Justice Rouleau commission by the commission counsel. It described what was happening in your area:

The Ambassador Bridge POE is the busiest commercial land border crossing along the Canada-U.S. border and serves as a critical link for trade in automotive manufacturing, technology, other manufactured goods, and perishable goods. The POE handles over \$390 million of trade per day, representing 26% of Canada's exports and 33% of its imports by road.

Does that accurately characterize the economic value and significance of the Ambassador Bridge in your community?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I think that's a fair characterization. Some would even say that the number is higher in terms of trade that crosses the bridge on a daily basis.

Mr. Arif Virani: When the blockades started to be erected, I believe companies started to reach out to your office directly and to the City of Windsor directly to explain the impact that the blockades would have on their lines of business. That included Stellantis officials reaching out to you directly. Is that correct?

• (1855)

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Within the first 60 minutes of the border closing, Stellantis, which is our largest employer and makes the Chrysler minivan and Pacifica in Windsor, reached out and asked what was going on at the Ambassador Bridge.

Mr. Arif Virani: Those blockades, as they unfolded, ended up causing disruptions at various automotive manufacturers, including the cancellation of shifts at various plants in and around the Windsor region. Is that correct?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: That is correct.

Mr. Arif Virani: In the minutes of meetings that were provided to the Rouleau inquiry commission, you described the economic impact as a national security situation. Is that right?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I said it was threat to our national economic security.

Mr. Arif Virani: I believe the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association brought an injunction because the impact was so dramatic on the auto industry, and the City of Windsor joined that injunction as a party. Is that correct?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: We worked with the APMA and the CVMA, the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association, to bring the injunction forward. They were the applicant; we were the intervenor. We knew that I couldn't control police operations. There were things happening at the OPP and the RCMP.

I didn't know precisely what was going on in terms of when people were going to arrive. I didn't have a clear line of sight on the plan. I had people in my community who were asking why the police weren't going in and removing those people, and why it was clicking day after day and the calendar pages were turning day after day. People wanted some action, and the only positive action that I could take was trying to seek an injunction.

The APMA was a wonderful partner. The CVMA was a wonderful partner, because their members felt the economic impact most acutely.

Mr. Arif Virani: You mentioned in your opening statement that the blockade was cleared by midnight of February 14, but the threat was not over as of February 14. Your city itself declared a city state of emergency after the invocation of the Emergencies Act. Is that correct?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: That is correct.

Mr. Arif Virani: The media reported that by February 15, there was an attempt to resurrect the blockade in and around the Ambassador Bridge. Is that accurate?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: That is correct.

Mr. Arif Virani: In fact, I understand that the justice who was involved in that injunction in the Superior Court turned a temporary injunction into a permanent injunction on February 18 in the wake of this ongoing threat.

Is that accurate?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: That is correct.

The City of Windsor then moved to make the injunction permanent. We did that work. Our lawyers helped do that work. Chief

Justice Morawetz granted that application to make the injunction permanent.

Mr. Arif Virani: I understand that you indicated in testimony at the Rouleau inquiry that even with the Emergencies Act invocation, you were concerned that even after the situation was cleared in Ottawa, the protesters would come to Windsor to continue their activities. Was that your concern at the time?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: We had a very heightened state of alert in Windsor once the folks were moved out and vehicles were flowing again. There was a heightened state of alert that there may be recidivism and things may happen again. You may have copycat issues popping up and people coming from other parts to lend their voices and vehicles to another protest.

Mr. Arif Virani: With respect to recidivism, did the invocation of the Emergencies Act, from your perspective, help to curb some of that potential recidivism around the Ambassador Bridge?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I think it sent the strongest signal from the highest government in the land that this was a significant issue and that there would be basically zero tolerance for any continuance of this type of behaviour.

I think it was helpful in terms of sending that signal to keep the Ambassador Bridge open. The resources that were on the ground... Even though the folks were moved out, we still had hundreds of additional people who remained in Windsor to maintain the safety and security of that corridor because of the importance of the Ambassador Bridge to our national economy. I think the Emergencies Act was helpful in—

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Dilkens.

Your time is up, Mr. Virani.

Mr. Green, I'd ask you to take the chair, since it's my turn to ask the witnesses questions.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP)): Okay.

You have the floor for five minutes, Mr. Fortin.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Dilkens, I'd like to continue on with the fact that you got an injunction and then a state of emergency was declared by the City of Windsor, by the Province of Ontario, and ultimately by the federal government. I'm wondering what effect that had.

I feel like I interrupted you earlier. I didn't mean to, but I had no choice because time was running out. I would like you to complete your answer.

So I'd like to know your opinion on the effect of the injunction that your municipality obtained, compared to the effect of the declaration of a state of emergency by the Province of Ontario and the federal government. What impact did each of these steps have on the situation in your municipality?

• (1900)

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I think they all worked in harmony together. All three levels of government stepped up and acknowledged the seriousness of the situation.

The injunction was really the only positive action that I thought we could take to send a signal. It had multiple purposes. One was to send a signal to the public that, at a municipal level, we were taking this as seriously as we could and doing all that we could.

After we made the decision to move forward with the injunction process, the province then declared its state of emergency, which put the people who were conducting this behaviour in significant jeopardy of losing perhaps their commercial vehicle operator registration. They could face significant fines and all sorts of penalties. Even though the folks had been moved out on February 14—

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): If I remember correctly, you liberated the Ambassador Bridge before the federal government declared a state of emergency. Isn't that right?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I apologize. I missed the first part of your question.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): I said that you liberated the Ambassador Bridge before the federal government declared a state of emergency.

Am I mistaken?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: No, that is correct. The folks were moved out before the federal government invoked the Emergencies Act.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you.

I'd now like you to take a minute to tell me about the interactions between municipal officials and the federal government. Did you have frequent contact with federal officials? If so, who exactly did you have contact with?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: The vast majority of my contact was with Minister Mendicino. It was in the form of text messages and phone calls. A lot of it was just status updates. He was asking what was happening on the ground. I would tell him what was happening on the ground. I would try to give him a line of sight on what I was seeing and hearing and what it was like down here, so he could take the appropriate action he thought necessary from his end.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Did you ask Mr. Mendicino to see to declaring the state of emergency?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: No, I did not.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Unless I'm mistaken, I believe you've already provided a transcript of your exchanges with Mr. Mendicino as part of the Rouleau commission. Would you be able to send us a copy?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Absolutely.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Dilkens. If I may, I'll turn to Mr. Willett and ask him a few of the same questions.

Mr. Willett, I'd like to get an idea of how things went in your area. What was done? When was your city liberated—that's one way of putting it—or, rather, when did the protests stop?

[English]

Mr. Jim Willett: The village was cleared early on the morning of February 15. Actually, the protesters began to move out on the evening of the 14th.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): If I understand correctly, that was before the federal government invoked the Emergencies Act. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Jim Willett: Yes.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Which federal authorities did the municipal authorities—you, to be specific—speak with and how often?

[English]

Mr. Jim Willett: I never had any communication directly with federal authorities. It was all through the RCMP.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Who in the RCMP did you speak with?

[English]

Mr. Jim Willett: Pardon me?

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Who did you speak with in the RCMP?

[English]

Mr. Jim Willett: I had a direct person to speak with, Corporal Curtis Peters, who gave me briefings every day. Also, various people at the command centre here contacted me at different times. I don't have all the names.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Willett.

I'm out of time. I will now take over as chair, so that Mr. Green can have his five minutes.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): It's Mr. Masse.

• (1905)

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Yes, that's right. My apologies.

The next questioner is Brian Masse for five minutes.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the committee and witnesses.

To Mayor Dilkens, I represented that area, the area from the Ambassador Bridge to the 401, from 1997 to 2002 as a city councillor, and then from 2002 to now as a member of Parliament. It is 14 kilometres of mixed roadway. That corridor receives upwards of 40,000 vehicles per day.

Can you tell the committee how fragile and delicate that corridor is, and how complex it is, even without a blockade?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: It's a great question.

It's fair to say that Huron Church Road links the Ambassador Bridge at one end to the Herb Gray Parkway—or effectively the 401—on the other, and it's three kilometres from point to point.

It's a municipal road with approximately seven traffic lights, and it was constructed almost 100 years ago. It used to be farmland, and it's evolved over time. You have hotels and motels; you still have some homes whose driveways outlet onto Huron Church Road; you have over 200 businesses and banks and shopping centres that require access. Also, you have Assumption High School, which was directly in the protest area and was not accessible for the week of the protest.

Huron Church is also the primary access road for the vast majority of students accessing the University of Windsor. It is a crucial link for many in the city, and it has built up over time to be quite a trade corridor, doing more than just serving the trucks that access the Ambassador Bridge.

Mr. Brian Masse: On that corridor—in fact, where the protest was, or demonstration, or whatever people want to call it—there have actually been students and parents killed, and it's actually a community safety zone along that corridor.

Can you also outline how fragile the community is next to it? We've talked about the economic impact on the country, but also adjacent is part of the city of Windsor that has some of the highest poverty in the region, and it was cut off from employment and services, including children not being able to get to doctors' appointments.

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Huron Church Road bisects the west side of the city. It's the original part of the city of Windsor. It's also known as Sandwich Town. It's the oldest settlement west of Montreal. It is a student area, but it is also one that has a lower socio-economic background. All of the transit services that serve that area were disrupted, so as you say, Mr. Masse, access to physicians' offices and schools was disrupted. It was a very difficult situation for people who lived on the west side of Huron Church Road, because they

were effectively cut off from the other side, and that included their only grocery store options.

Mr. Brian Masse: How did it make you feel, as a mayor, knowing that essential services were also compromised and that if the appropriate resources weren't put there—again, because this is a trade corridor for all of Canada—people were put at risk, whether that was fire, EMS, rescue services and even general policing? That must have been a stressful time.

Mr. Drew Dilkens: With the closure of Huron Church Road, we had to relocate a fire service—a fire rescue operation—to the other side of Huron Church Road and relocate an ambulance so it could be dispatched and reach folks who needed service on the other side of the road. It certainly caused a number of issues from a municipal operations perspective, and it also impacted a lot of people for the better part of a week.

Mr. Brian Masse: You noted that the cost to the City of Windsor has been \$5.7 million. I've seen the itinerary that was submitted to the ministers. We have not heard....

Quite frankly, I feel betrayed. People lost their jobs and income during this time and did all the right things. Many people came to the protests—we know from media accounts—from outside the area. Meanwhile, if nothing changes, will it be municipal taxpayers who have to pick up the cost, especially given the fact that they've lost out personally and have had loss of their own employment? There has been some minor compensation to businesses, and the Jersey barriers remained for weeks.

If we don't get support for this, then it's going to have to come from city taxpayers to protect the backbone of the nation.

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I appreciate the fact that the federal government stepped up and provided some financial support to the businesses that were directly impacted along Huron Church Road. However, you are correct that the City of Windsor is carrying the full freight of \$5.7 million for the response that was provided, which includes over \$1 million for the Jersey barrier set-up that no one in the city of Windsor asked for. It was the right response and an appropriate response, but it wasn't like I directed that to happen or our police chief or anyone in the police service directed it. Others higher up were making those decisions, but the bill was handed to us. It's been paid, and because of that issue, we are now carrying a deficit of \$5.7 million.

We hope to have a response to our request for consideration, because this was a very atypical municipal response to a situation that I still deem to be a national economic emergency.

• (1910)

Mr. Brian Masse: I also think this sends the wrong message to those who want to copycat or do that. We recently had another convoy come into the city of Windsor, and we still don't have a plan on how to deal with this, so the city has to continue to provide protection from its own goodwill until we actually see an official policy.

Is that it? If this happened again in the upcoming weeks, would we again have to be the ones who step up to the plate, or would we just let chaos reign and not deal with it until somebody else comes in?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: We would have to deal with any situation that comes forward. Windsor police would respond accordingly. Hopefully, we won't see that level of response required again.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Masse. You're out of time.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Senator Boniface, we now go to you for five minutes.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface (Senator, Ontario, ISG)): Thank you to both witnesses for being here. Thank you for the work you do in your local communities.

Mayor Dilkens, I'll start with you. I'd like to understand the process that you went through to get the OPP assistance. Commissioner Carrique was here. I think you chair the police services board as well, so I'm trying to figure out which capacity you were in when you were having those discussions.

Within the act, it says that a municipal chief who "is of the opinion that an emergency exists" in the municipality "may request that the Commissioner" of the OPP give "assistance". What we understood from Commissioner Carrique's evidence, if I remember correctly, is that the request came from your office to the premier and then on down. Am I accurate in that assumption?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Yes and no. There was more to it before it came from my office.

In response to what we were seeing play out on the streets, my natural question to the police chief at the time was this: What do you need to deal with this? She said, "I need more bodies." I asked, "How many bodies do you need, Chief?" She came back and said, "I need one hundred."

I passed that information up the chain to the political folks whom I was speaking with. Then a request came in later that evening, saying, "Can you please put that request in writing?"

I told the chief that there had been a request to put it in writing. She drafted a letter. She and her office sent the letter to the Solicitor General of Ontario's office, and she and her office also sent that letter asking for 100 officers, to, I believe, Minister Blair, asking for RCMP support.

When I got a copy of those letters—I was copied on that email—I then sent them directly to Minister Mendicino and Sylvia Jones. I told the Premier of Ontario that the request was for 100 officers.

The chief made that request appropriately. I was just amplifying what the request was because everyone was asking, "What do you need? What do you need?", so we put it in writing at others' re-

quest. Then someone made a decision that 100 officers were not enough and that 500 would be more appropriate, and they made the efforts to send those human resources to Windsor.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): That's great. Thank you very much.

I was listening earlier to a program, and the interviewee was with, I believe, the auto parts industry. He was saying that the threat to the industry was such that if the border had remained closed, they would end up impacting auto plants as far south as Tennessee.

Can you relay any concerns that you heard from our American counterparts around the risk from not getting parts across the border?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: It's just one of those situations. When you have lived in Windsor for a long time, you fully understand the integration of the supply chains—Windsor being the auto capital of Canada, and Detroit being the auto capital of the U.S.—and how all of those supply chains have built up on both sides of the border for a period of more than 100 years.

The auto industry deals in a just-in-time delivery world, so when there is a closure, it takes no longer than 60 minutes for someone to ask what is going on at the border, because they see the backup in the plant.

It is real. It is felt on both sides of the border, which I think speaks to the fact that you had the President of the United States reaching out to the Prime Minister, and different ministers and secretaries communicating between the U.S. and the Canadian governments and asking what would be needed to clear this, because it was having an impact not just on my local or regional economy, but on Ontario and across Canada.

• (1915)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): The last time I remember a situation of things being backed up like that, I was in my former life, and it was 9/11.

Thank you for that.

Given your experience with the border blockade, Mr. Willett, I'd like to ask you to explain your understanding of how it changed after the RCMP operation found a cache of firearms, ammunition and body armour. Can you tell me how that came about and how that fitted into the time frame?

Mr. Jim Willett: It happened shortly after midnight on February 14. There was a raid on a local residence and on a couple of RVs that were in her parking lot. The people were arrested there, and the cache of firearms was seized.

The protesters—the main group—were like everybody else. The impression I had from speaking with them was that they were as taken by surprise as the rest of us.

They had a meeting early that morning of the 14th. They started packing up at that time and saying that it had gone far from what they had intended, and that they had attracted an element they didn't intend to attract, so during the 14th—

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Sorry to cut you off, Mr. Willett, but Senator Boniface's time is up. I let you keep going so you could finish your answer, but it was a bit too long. Thank you.

Senator Carignan, you may go ahead for five minutes.

Hon. Claude Carignan (Senator, Quebec (Mille Isles), C): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mayor Dilkens, the Ambassador Bridge was cleared before the federal government invoked the Emergencies Act, but also before you declared a municipal emergency.

Can you tell us why you declared a municipal emergency after the bridge blockade had been cleared? How did the city benefit from having the state of emergency in place?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: That's a good question, Senator.

The answer is that declaring a municipal emergency allows the head of council, in this case the mayor, to make decisions very quickly as things change. It could be as simple as saying that we need to redirect a bus route from point A to point B, which would normally have to go through a council process, or that we need to provide certain services that would require a budget and council approval that may not exist, and we may not have a council meeting scheduled for a week or two.

Because of the unknown nature and the fear and the threat that existed after the blockade was cleared, a report went to city council. It recommended that these authorities be rolled up to the city manager, the CAO at the time, Jason Reynar, so he would be able to make those decisions. There were some on city council who felt uncomfortable allowing the CAO that authority, so my declaring a state of emergency wrapped that authority up in the head of council, in the mayor, to be able to deal with anything that was required in the short term.

You'll see that I terminated that emergency within 10 days.

[Translation]

Hon. Claude Carignan: All right. I see.

Can you also tell me why you got tow trucks in Windsor? According to one account, you had tow trucks from the states, but I thought I also saw tow trucks from Windsor towing companies.

Can you tell us what you did to get those tow trucks?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: There was a lot of attention placed on the tow trucks. I appreciate the question and an opportunity to explain.

What happened was that there was the thought that tow trucks were the limiting factor in the city of Windsor to be able to effect a response to have all of the traffic moved. Our friends at CBSA had made outreach and provided a contact: If anything was required to help get tow trucks from the United States, if we needed to clear these folks to get them and the tow trucks into Canada, this was the person to call to help effect that entry into Canada.

The Governor of Michigan, when asked a question about tow trucks, made a comment that she was prepared to send tow trucks over to Windsor to help deal with the situation. I had a conversation, after the governor's comment to the media, with her chief of staff. In fact, the offer by the governor was really just to put us in contact with tow truck companies in Michigan that might have the resources. I wasn't aware that any tow trucks were actually sent to the city of Windsor until we were preparing for my November 7 appearance at the Rouleau commission, where our deputy police chief informed me that about 10 tow trucks did come into Windsor from Detroit. They were parked at a municipal park but were never used in any way.

• (1920)

[Translation]

Hon. Claude Carignan: I see.

You managed to clear the bridge without the help of the Emergencies Act, since it was invoked afterwards. You didn't even need the municipal emergency measures. What made your response so successful, a response which—I repeat—did not require the use of the Emergencies Act?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I think it's fair to say that everyone was aligned in trying to find a response. We didn't have really any amount of infighting or friction. Everyone was trying to work together to do what they needed to do and provide information and communicate with those they thought were appropriate to try to find a resolution to the issue.

All of us in Windsor understood. You don't have to tell people in Windsor what the importance of the Ambassador Bridge is. They know it intuitively. It's the lifeline that puts so much bread on so many families' tables. They know how important it is. They wanted to see a resolution. Everyone on city council wanted to see a resolution. Everyone in city administration wanted to see a resolution. The police were trying to work diligently to get the resources to effect a resolution.

When the OPP were sent to Windsor, the police worked very effectively in a joint incident command set-up at our emergency operations centre to develop the plans and to get approval up the appropriate chains to execute the plans. It worked quite effectively.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Dilkens.

Thank you, Senator Carignan. Your time is up.

We now go to Senator Harder for five minutes.

Hon. Peter Harder (Senator, Ontario, PSG) : Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you to our witnesses. Thank you for your leadership through this difficult period in your respective municipalities.

Mayor Dilkens, I'd like to put on the record the comments made from at least one representative of the Michigan Legislature, who pointed to the disruption at the Ambassador Bridge and said that this is why we have to reshore the auto sector to the United States.

How did that make you feel?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Well, I did see that, and I knew that the situation that was playing out provided the perfect opportunity to present that narrative. The part that isn't getting spoken about a lot that was crucial from our perspective was the work that was going on to secure the \$5-billion investment between Stellantis and LG to build Canada's first electric vehicle battery manufacturing plant, which has been announced and is going to be built in Windsor.

All of that work was going on quietly behind the scenes to put the pieces together. Leadership from Stellantis was watching this situation. We were in daily conversation with the representatives in Canada at Stellantis and LG. We knew what comments were being passed along. We knew that the president of Stellantis globally was in Ontario at the time, meeting with federal leaders and provincial leaders. We knew that what was happening provided the perfect set-up for someone to say that this showed why operating in Canada may be disrupted and it may be safer for them to operate in the United States.

I think that was an undertone to at least our municipal response. We knew how important this investment was for Canada and Ontario, of course, but we knew how important it was for our regional economy as well.

Hon. Peter Harder: Mr. Mayor, one of the organizers of the so-called "freedom convoy" and the founder of an organization called Canada Unity, James Bauder, announced today that he's going to organize a return celebration in February of next year.

Have you heard whether or not this celebration will extend to the Ambassador Bridge? If so, what would you do?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I don't know that any of us would consider it a celebration, but it's worth noting that the legislation that's in place provincially is really important. You'd have to be very committed to losing a lot to participate in this type of activity. In addition, the injunction remains in effect. It is not going away.

Mr. Masse talked about this past weekend, when 200 cars came to Windsor and did a little parade through part of the "freedom convoy". They were directed, very appropriately, on which route they could take.

Police have a zero-tolerance approach for this. I think that reflects the temperature in our community. The community does not want to see this return and wants to see people dealt with very swiftly if they try to block the primary corridor that's putting a lot of bread on families' tables in the city of Windsor.

• (1925)

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you.

Mayor Willett, with respect to Coutts, are you aware of any so-called celebration? How would your community react?

Mr. Jim Willett: I'm not aware of it, other than I heard the same story that you referred to just now.

My community, I guess, would react the same way that they did before. Some people would be out there celebrating with them. I would not.

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Senator Harder.

We now go to Senator Patterson for five minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson (Senator, Nunavut, CSG): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mayor Dilkens, you described the protest as ending peacefully. I'm wondering if you could give us a little more detail. Obviously, you were very involved with those events and with the authorities.

How did it get resolved peacefully? How did that work in Windsor?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Police developed an operational plan that they began to implement on the Saturday, which was around the 13th. They moved very systematically with their public order units and all of the equipment and the resources that they needed.

They were able to move some folks on that particular day. As it started getting darker—maybe two or three o'clock in the afternoon—a local pastor from a local church, who's been disagreeable from the beginning of the pandemic on any restrictions, vaccines or anything like that, put a call out to the congregation. Within 90 minutes to two hours, about 600 additional people showed up. There were kids in strollers and young kids. It was almost unbelievable to watch, frankly.

Police made a very sensible decision to not continue. Imagine however many police—80 or 90 police in a line from point to point—walking up the road, moving forward every 30 or 60 seconds.

They made a decision that was appropriate, which was that they would wait for the kids to get hungry, to have to go to the bathroom or to want to go to sleep. It was February. It was cold. At some point those kids would leave and they would conduct the operation the next day.

That's what they did. They moved in on the 14th very early and moved the rest of the folks out who were still there. By that time, the kids had left.

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Was it without resistance?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Yes. For the most part, I don't think anyone.... There were no injuries that I'm aware of. There were several arrests. I think upwards of 40 arrests were made, but the issue was resolved and the roadway was reopened.

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Mayor Willett, obviously you were also very involved in events near Coutts at the border.

Could you describe how that blockade ended?

Mr. Jim Willett: Just to carry on from what I said earlier, the will went away once the firearms were discovered.

You have to understand the situation here. The main protest was here in Coumts, but the RCMP had put a separate blockade about 12 kilometres up the highway, which kept us from getting a massive influx of protesters. We had maybe 75 to 100 people here at that time, and they wisely made the decision to leave of their own accord.

• (1930)

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Thank you very much, both of you.

Mayor Dilkens, I know you were very busy and engaged, but did you have time to observe the parallel situation going on in Ottawa?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Yes, sir.

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Was there anything to learn from the situation in Ottawa, from your point of view?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I think it's fair to say that we did make some observations at the beginning of the blockade in Windsor, and those were observations from Ottawa with respect to folks who had brought in things like bouncy castles or hot tubs, some of these sort of ancillary things that made it look like it was a fun zone.

Police were very attentive to not allowing that type of equipment to be brought in and made sure that the folks who were there were in their trucks. Some were playing hockey in the street, but that type of equipment wasn't allowed to be brought in, and police really were attentive to that.

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Pardon my ignorance. I have one more question, Mr. Chair.

Could you describe the Jersey barriers, please, for me? What they are? I understand that they were effective. Could you explain why, please?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: The Jersey barriers were probably 30 feet long, and they're just formed concrete barriers that you would see on any 400-series highway from time to time if they're doing construction. It really just created a pipeline from the provincial highway to the foot of the Ambassador Bridge. There was no cross-traffic allowed, so it entirely blocked the city. For folks who were bisected because of that road, the Jersey barriers really caused the bisection to be more amplified because there was no way around them and there was no way through.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Dilkens.

Thank you, Senator Patterson. That's all your time.

We will now begin the second round.

Go ahead, Mr. Motz. You have four minutes.

[English]

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Mayor Dilkens and Mayor Willett, for being here today.

In the spirit of full disclosure, Mr. Willett is a constituent of mine. Coumts is in my riding, much like Windsor is in Mr. Masse's, and I represent that area federally.

Mr. Willett, I'm going to focus on you, if I could, in these questions.

In Coumts, a Mr. Van Huigenbos assumed the role of one of the organizers. He told the Rouleau commission that the message that you as mayor and I as the federal representative were pushing was to clear the road sufficiently to not break any laws, and you can protest all you want. Does that accurately describe the conversations that you may have had with him separately from me and the ones we had with him together?

Mr. Jim Willett: I never had any separate discussions with him, but it is the message that I said from the beginning of the whole protest. I said that you could protest, that you have that right in this country to protest all you want, but don't break the law. That was my message all along.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you.

During the Coumts protest, did you communicate with other protesters besides Mr. Van Huigenbos?

Mr. Jim Willett: I did. I spoke with Alex Van Herk. I believe you're familiar with him. He was kind of the local spokesperson for a long time. There was also a gentleman by the name of Jerry, who was sort of a media person internal to the protest. I never learned exactly how he fitted in.

Mr. Glen Motz: As the leader of your community, and they were in your community, during those communications with any of those protesters, did you call them racist?

Mr. Jim Willett: No.

Mr. Glen Motz: Did you call them misogynist?

Mr. Jim Willett: No.

Mr. Glen Motz: Did you threaten them in any way?

Mr. Jim Willett: No.

Mr. Glen Motz: Why wouldn't you do that? You didn't agree with what they were doing. Why didn't you resort to that?

Mr. Jim Willett: It's not the kind of person I am. I didn't get this old by being stupid. You don't get anywhere calling people names. That is the lowest that you can go in terms of discourse when you're trying to accomplish something.

• (1935)

Mr. Glen Motz: Based on that, and based on what those of us who were on the ground off and on in different places throughout these protests observed, did the comments that our Prime Minister made help the situation in Coumts, or did they further inflame what you were trying to resolve?

Mr. Jim Willett: Mr. Motz, you know the feeling in this part of the world as far as the federal government and the Prime Minister are concerned, so anything that he had to say is always taken to be that everyone feels they're being attacked or that the federal government is stepping on people. That would have been the reaction.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): You're out of time, Mr. Motz.

[English]

Mr. Glen Motz: That's four minutes?

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Yes, your four minutes are up.

We now go to Mr. Naqvi for four minutes.

[English]

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank both the mayors for being here today.

Mayor Willett, I will start with you, and first, thank you for your public service.

Sir, as I was listening to your opening statement, the question that came to mind was this: During the protest, were you concerned about the safety and security of your community and yourself? You mentioned you received death threats, etc.

Mr. Jim Willett: I wasn't so concerned about my safety. That comes with the territory, I guess. I was concerned about the safety of the community. That was my main focus.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Yes, I can understand that.

You sent a text on February 12 to Mr. Graveland, who I understand is a CP reporter. In that text you stated, sir, and I am quoting you:

“Morning, Bill. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

“You need to find someone in a protected position who will call these guys what they are, domestic terrorists. Won't be me. They are right outside my window. I would be strung up, literally.

“Just a thought.”

You were worried about your own safety in that text, but you called them “domestic terrorists”. What did you mean by that?

Mr. Jim Willett: As I said at the hearing of the POAC, I am a Google lawyer, so that means I go to the Internet. I looked up the definition of “domestic terrorism in Canada”, as the government has set it forth, and when you're blocking and harming infrastructure and commerce, that fits the definition.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: You were worried that they causing harm to your community, to our country and to our economy?

Mr. Jim Willett: That's correct.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: On February 14, when the RCMP got warrants and they searched those trucks and found those caches of weapons and other things that could be used for violent purposes, in light of what you said on February 12, calling them “domestic terrorists”, how did you feel? Did you feel that your gut was right, that these people were dangerous?

Mr. Jim Willett: Yes. It's a discussion I'd had earlier with the lawyer I spoke of with the protest group, on the fact that the longer something like this goes on, the more you attract an element you don't want there.

In a sense it surprised me, and in a sense it did not.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Once the protest was cleared up after February 15, I believe it was, how concerned were you that it may come back in your community or in other surrounding ports of entry?

Mr. Jim Willett: Concerned...?

I would not like to see it again. I stated at one point that I hoped everybody learned how to deal with it if it were to happen again.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Do you think the invocation of the Emergencies Act created some buffer in ensuring that those protesters did not come back to your community or the surrounding communities?

• (1940)

Mr. Jim Willett: I would say, from what I heard, it would, yes, because they were talking about it as they left.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It did provide for some deterrence on their part because of the—

Mr. Jim Willett: Yes, I believe so.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Naqvi. You're out of time.

Mr. Green, can you please take the chair?

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): Yes.

Go ahead, Mr. Fortin. You have three minutes.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dilkens, I understand that you asked for 100 additional police officers to bring the protest to an end. You got 500. Do you know where they were from?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: They came from multiple police agencies across Ontario. There were RCMP officers who were sent to Windsor as well. I don't know where their normal detachments are. The OPP, obviously, had a very large presence. We had London police. We had police from all sorts of different police services throughout the province.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Can you tell me how long those officers stayed in your city?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: After the folks were cleared out on February 14, there was a very large police presence that remained for several weeks thereafter. They started to dissipate over time. I don't have direct knowledge of how many left every day, but you could see the presence diminish over a period of weeks.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Did you ever receive a request from the Ottawa Police Service, the OPP or the RCMP to send those officers or some of your officers to Ottawa?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Not at that particular time, but we responded to a request to help support Ottawa, and Windsor police sent officers to Ottawa subsequent to the clearing of the blockade in Windsor.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Do you remember when that was?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I'm sorry. I do not.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Was it immediately after February 14 or weeks later?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: It wasn't immediately thereafter, but it was within a couple of weeks—probably a week—that officers were sent.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): I see. If I understand correctly, your officers were not involved in the effort to clear Wellington Street, in Ottawa.

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I don't know what tasks they performed when they were in Ottawa, but it was to help support the overall effort.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): You said they came a few weeks later, so my understanding is that it wasn't in the days or weeks that followed.

Once you had cleared the Ambassador Bridge on February 14, no one at Public Safety Canada, the RCMP or anywhere else told you that the 100 or 500 officers had to go to Ottawa, because they were needed there. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: No one said that to me, but the police chief made the decision to send officers to Ottawa. I just don't know what date that decision was made.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): It wasn't at your request, either. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: That's correct.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Dilkens.

I am back in the chair.

Go ahead, Mr. Green. You have three minutes.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): It's going to be Mr. Masse, if we could do that.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Of course.

Mr. Masse, you have three minutes. Go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Dilkens, there were other costs associated with the disruption along Huron Church Road, because there was inclement weather.

Can you describe what those costs were to the city to support the police officers and their safety there, as well as other people who were on the ground?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I think all of the costs were wrapped up in the \$5.7 million. That was for overtime costs, Jersey barriers, food and lodging. It really ran the gamut of expenses, including city expenses for overtime to deal with traffic control, signage and all of the things you would anticipate would be required from a municipal operation to help support a policing effort like the one that happened in Windsor.

Mr. Brian Masse: Many of those expenses would be beyond your control, because they would be performed under collective agreements and safety protocols.

Can you submit your letter to the government, as well as the inventory sheet? Would you do that for the committee, please?

● (1945)

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I'll do that happily. Yes.

Mr. Brian Masse: I want to take a quick summary here to make sure I have this right. It's \$5.7 million. We have the feds, who haven't paid anything. The Ontario government hasn't paid anything. The businesses have not paid anything. The illegal protesters have not paid anything.

It's an area with high child poverty and unemployment, and people lost their jobs for a period a time. It also has a high immigrant population. People couldn't get to services, including—as I mentioned—medical appointments. Now, at the end of the day, we're expecting the city of Windsor residents to pay for all of this alone. How does that make you feel, if there is going to be another situation?

How do we go back to our community and explain that for doing all the right things, especially for people outside the area, we'll continue to have to do this without a plan? Does that seem fair?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Following the events in Windsor, I sent a letter to both the provincial and federal government and asked for a sit-down planning session to talk about what we would do moving forward in the event that something happened again.

There's no doubt that although people looked from the outside and said our response was really good in Windsor.... It was over in about a week. It was a good response for many. We probably could have shaved a day or two if we'd had a plan that was a little tighter, but if we spelled out who pays for what, it would make life a lot easier. You wouldn't have the mayor from the little city of Windsor grovelling over the \$5.7 million that was spent to help deal with a national economic emergency. We'd like to have that conversation. Huron Church Road is not going away. The Ambassador Bridge is not going away.

As to the possibility of something like this happening in the future, I cannot predict whether it will happen. I have no practical way to stop it from happening right now. We need to have a coordinated response that deals with a very unique situation of a municipal road joining a provincial highway leading to a federally regulated bridge that happens to be under private ownership.

We have to figure how to deal with this in a sensible way that allows the proper response and the most effective and timely response and that figures out who pays for what. In situations like this, it's completely unfair for municipal taxpayers to fund the bill.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Dilkens.

Your three minutes are up, Mr. Masse. Thank you.

Senator Boniface, we now go to you for three minutes.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): Thank you very much.

I have a couple of questions.

Mayor Dilkens, was there any concern raised from your citizens about a counterprotest in the event that those weren't moved? That is always a great risk when a protest is prolonged.

Mr. Drew Dilkens: That is a wonderful question. The temperature on the ground with the protesters was high, but every day that went by, the temperature in the community got hot. We had just gone through this difficult pandemic period together, when we had significant closures of our largest employer, and the parts sector as well, that affected tens of thousands of families in the city.

This was seen as something that was unnecessary. It was seen as a bit of an assault on the community because of the importance of the Ambassador Bridge, so there absolutely was the threat. There were Facebook groups set up asking for people who were interested in vigilante-style justice to sign up and express their support for the opposing side, those opposing the protesters. That did ramp up. Windsor police had to reach out to some in the community who were known community leaders to have them ratchet down the temperature that they were trying to raise up on behalf of some of the members in their union.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): Thank you.

Mr. Willett, I know that you're in a smaller community. Did you have any experience in terms of that?

Mr. Jim Willett: No. There was never any indication that anybody locally was going to counterprotest, other than gripe; but that's typical.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): That's what you're there for. You're available for them to call you.

Mr. Jim Willett: That's right.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): Mayor Dilkens, the concern, really, outside of.... I don't want to call it "vigilante", because I think the real issue for people was that they were being denied work. They knew that the plants would shut down if this didn't open up. Is that part of the argument?

I guess their second point would be about those who were affected in terms of high school and medical appointments, etc. They couldn't get the kids to school and couldn't get to where they needed to go for health and other reasons.

Mr. Drew Dilkens: I can't overstate the impact. I mean, it was large. It affected a lot of people. It wasn't just a couple of hundred people who were impacted here. Tens of thousands of people were impacted in their daily lives. They were impacted in grocery shopping. They were impacted in taking transit to get to work and in every other facet of things that people in cities do each and every day. It went on for a week.

The problem was that I couldn't give them a line of sight on when it would be over. Police were developing their operational plans, so it wouldn't have been appropriate even if I'd known. Just in trying to respond to them to say that we were on this and to have comfort that the leaders were dealing with this, it was difficult to communicate with them in a way that provided clarity to them. It looked like this could go on as long as the situation had gone on in Ottawa.

● (1950)

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Dilkens and Senator Boniface.

Senator Harder, you have three minutes.

[English]

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you.

I'd like to follow up on the line of questioning from Mr. Masse.

Mayor Willett, are there municipal expenses that have yet to be compensated, in your view, that Coutts incurred?

Mr. Jim Willett: Actually, no. That's one of the advantages of being this small. All of the policing is handled by the province, and we didn't incur any expenses.

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you.

Mayor Dilkens, would you be willing to table with this committee the itemization of the \$5.7 million? I think this is an item that the committee, when we come to writing our report, might wish to comment on.

I am a resident of Ottawa, and I know that the city costs exceeded even Windsor's. The resolution of those costs is an important piece of public confidence that emergency management is broadly shared across this country.

Would you be prepared to do that?

Mr. Drew Dilkens: Absolutely.

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Are you finished, Senator Harder?

Hon. Peter Harder: Yes.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Are you sure? You still have two minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Harder: Senator Carignan—

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Mr. Carignan, Mr. Harder had two minutes left. You may go ahead.

Hon. Claude Carignan: Thank you.

I'd like to come back to Windsor's \$5.7-million bill. That bothers me because it was sent on March 16, 2022, and the government still hasn't reimbursed you for those costs, costs you incurred because you responded proactively. I worry this could discourage people from being proactive in future situations, to avoid having to foot a bill that they are never going to be reimbursed for, as happened to Windsor.

What response did you receive from the federal government? What would you recommend so that this doesn't happen again? Do you think a dedicated fund should be created? How can the system be improved so that cities don't wind up on the hook when they deal with a situation proactively, like you did?

[*English*]

Mr. Drew Dilkens: We've had no response from the federal government yet to our request for funding, but I think part of the solution here is to respond to the letter, which would bring all three levels of government together to find a pathway that says that if this happens again, here's how we collectively respond and here's who pays for what, based on those responsibilities, and really helps to expedite the response in a way that would minimize the disruption if this were to ever happen again.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Claude Carignan: All right. Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Senator Carignan.

Thank you, Mr. Dilkens and Mr. Willett.

I'm going to suspend the meeting so that we can bring in our second panel.

- (1950) _____ (Pause) _____
- (2000)

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): We are now resuming the meeting with our second panel.

Joining us from the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association, we have Brian Kingston, president and chief executive officer, and Jennifer Steeves, director of industry and consumer affairs.

Joining us by video conference, from the Canadian Trucking Alliance, are Stephen Laskowski, president, and Geoffrey Wood, senior vice-president of policy.

Welcome to all four of you. Each group will have five minutes for opening remarks.

You can go first, Mr. Laskowski.

- (2005)

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski (President, Canadian Trucking Alliance): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and committee members.

CTA is an alliance of seven provincial trucking associations in Canada. Its board is made up of trucking executives from over 70 carriers ranging from small to very large companies.

Regarding CTA's position on protest, well before and throughout the events of 2022, CTA made its position on protests targeting public road infrastructure known. CTA does not support and strongly disapproves of any protest on public highways, roadways and bridges. CTA believes that such actions, especially those that interfere with public safety, are not how disagreements with government policies should ever be expressed.

Coming out of this committee, CTA would recommend that a national plan involving all provinces, federal and all relevant enforcement agencies and international bridge crossings be formed to develop plans to protect our nation's critical trade infrastructure from potential future protests and/or ending them very quickly and peacefully.

Regarding the blockades' impact on the trade community, these blockades had a very detrimental impact on our members, their drivers, customers and businesses. Although most of our comments today are focused on the economic impact in the international trade community, let us never forget the impact of these events on the economic backbone of our nation's labour force, the commercial truck driver. The impact of these blockades on their physical and mental health was significant, as was the impact on their ability to make a living.

As we are all aware, trade with the United States is critical to Canada's economic health. Over half of the \$850 billion in total Canadian trade conducted with the United States on a customs basis in 2021 was moved by truck.

Let's also remember that multiple crossings were impacted across Canada. This impacted and sent shock waves through our entire trade community, which was noted by the deputy minister of Transport Canada, the Bank of Canada and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce throughout the crisis.

We also heard reaction from U.S. politicians, including a Michigan Democrat who said, "The one thing that couldn't be more clear is that we have to bring American manufacturing back home to states like Michigan." Even the White House press secretary mentioned President Biden's concerns with regard to what was happening in Canada.

Very quickly, in B.C. on the Pacific Highway, nearly 2,000 trucks per day cross there. In February, year over, trade trucks fell by 6%. The Surrey Board of Trade said, "These ongoing protests are really sabotaging our economy, sabotaging our infrastructure, and sabotaging the livelihoods of businesses, jobs and families."

In Alberta, the blockades lasted for almost two weeks. Eight hundred trucks a day cross at Coumts. Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland has stated that \$48 million in trade was lost each day of those blockades.

In Manitoba, 1,100 trucks a day cross at Emerson. The Deputy Prime Minister has estimated that the trade impact there was \$73 million a day.

The Ambassador Bridge, which I'll leave to the folks at the auto manufacturing association, was obviously impacted. Truck traffic fell by almost 27% year over year in February because of these blockades. Seven thousand trucks a day cross at that bridge.

At the Blue Water Bridge, there were pop-up protests those very same days. As the trucking industry switched to the Blue Water Bridge because of the Ambassador shutdown, so did the protesters, as they did with the Peace Bridge and pop-up protests there. About 2,600 trucks a day cross there.

In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, both those provinces had to issue mandates about public highway protesting.

CTA strongly believes that all bridge crossings and authorities, provinces and federal enforcement agencies did their best throughout the crisis to end these blockades as quickly as possible in a peaceful manner. The commission is currently looking into whether the government's invocation of the Emergencies Act was appropriate under the circumstances.

We have all heard testimony from several witnesses who are in favour and some who are against the government's decision. I and the CTA are not national security experts. That said, within days of the Emergencies Act being invoked, the process stopped. The pop-up blockades stopped. Bridges reopened, trade restarted, and our nation's commercial truck drivers' lives were returned to them.

• (2010)

For the record, when the Emergencies Act was invoked, CTA supported its use. From our perspective, the invocation of the Emergencies Act achieved the objective we were looking for, which was a quick and peaceful conclusion to the blockades and an end to the pop-up protests on highways and bridges.

There may be some disagreement as to whether the act is meant for situations and circumstances such as the one we found ourselves in this past winter. Again, I am not a national security expert. From where I sit, if people are uncomfortable with invoking the Emergencies Act for situations like this, then we need to work together to find a substitute that is just as quick, powerful and effective.

My last closing comment is to reiterate what I said in my opening point. To repeat a previous comment, CTA would recommend developing a national plan that would involve all provinces, the federal government and relevant enforcement agencies. The plan would reflect various international crossing structural and authority oversight, and would develop a plan to protect our nation's critical trade infrastructure from potential future protests and/or ending them very quickly and peacefully.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Laskowski.

You may go ahead now, Mr. Kingston. You have five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Kingston (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association): Thank you, Joint Chairs and honourable members.

Thanks for the invitation to appear here today as part of your study.

The Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association—CVMA—is the industry association that represents Canada's leading manufacturers of light- and heavy-duty motor vehicles. Our membership includes Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, also known as FCA Canada.

The auto industry is responsible for approximately \$13 billion in annual economic activity, 117,000 direct jobs and an additional 371,000 jobs in the aftermarket services and dealership networks. The industry is our second-largest export sector, with \$36.5 billion in exports in 2021.

The auto industry is highly integrated with the U.S. through both supply chain relationships and the shipment of final vehicles. Parts may cross the Canada-U.S. border seven to nine times in advance of installation in a vehicle. Over 90% of Canadian-built vehicles are exported, with the overwhelming majority going to the United States.

Auto production relies on efficient supply chain logistics for the shipment of parts, components and vehicles. Assembly facilities depend on regular and predictable deliveries of parts that operate at full capacity. Any delay or disruption to the supply chain—even very minor—can have an immediate effect on production and trade. Given the integration of the industry with the U.S., the efficient movement of goods across the border every single day is particularly important.

The Ambassador Bridge plays a key role in the industry as Canada's most important border crossing. It's responsible for approximately 25% of Canada's annual goods trade. With five OEMs assembling vehicles in Ontario, the bridge is a key conduit for motor vehicles and parts.

The February blockade at the Ambassador Bridge exposed weaknesses in Canada's border management practices and trade infrastructure that need to be addressed to make the supply chain more resilient.

There is additional complexity with this particular trade corridor, as the customs plaza is under federal jurisdiction, the 401 is under provincial jurisdiction and the road leading into the plaza is municipal. It took significant time to identify each respective government lead and to coordinate, share information and determine what capabilities were required to resolve the trade blockage.

In an effort to accelerate this process, the CVMA filed an affidavit in support of the auto parts manufacturer injunction against the protesters on February 10.

While our members greatly appreciated all of the efforts of every level of government that worked to find solutions to mitigate the impact, the blockade resulted in automotive companies on both sides of the border undertaking extraordinary measures at great cost to divert trade to other border crossings. These other crossings simply did not have the capacity to handle higher trade volumes without significant disruption to supply schedules, which, of course, we witnessed. This meant that auto plants were forced to cease production. This affected thousands of people employed in the industry, not just in Canada, but also in the United States.

The blockade on the bridge came at an already challenging time for the industry, due to fragile supply chains under pressure from pandemic-related shortages and backlogs. In fact, North American vehicle production has still not returned to prepandemic levels.

This incident, combined with other recent port and railway disruptions, has undermined Canada's reputation as a reliable jurisdiction for the production and movement of goods. We must learn from these events to ensure that Canada has plans in place to quickly respond to future disruptions. Failing to address these weaknesses could impact our competitiveness, not just for existing auto manufacturing but also for future auto investment.

We should establish processes for quick and efficient coordination and communication between industry, multiple levels of government and other appropriate stakeholders to mitigate future disruptions to the supply chain.

We recommend the following.

First, identify a clear federal lead to provide guidance and direction when there is any threat to the uninterrupted movement of commercial goods. This lead should have the ability to coordinate with other levels of government and counterparts in the United States to ensure that decisions are made quickly and that disruptions are dealt with swiftly, with updates communicated regularly to industry.

Second, enhance the legislative tools to address future blockades or disruptions, such as the Keeping Ontario Open for Business Act, which established prohibitions and enforcement mechanisms to prevent persons from impeding access to, egress from or the ordinary use of protected infrastructure. The federal government should consider broader powers to quickly deal with blockades, powers that would preclude the necessity of invoking the Emergencies Act.

With that, I thank you. I appreciate your time and look forward to any questions.

• (2015)

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Kingston. Please speak more slowly when you answer questions. That will make things easier for the interpreters.

We'll begin the first round now.

Starting things off will be Mr. Brock for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for their participation and attendance tonight.

Mr. Laskowski, I listened very carefully to your opening statement. What I didn't hear are the reasons and the rationale for members of your alliance to be protesting in the first place. You're well aware of that, because you were advocating for that as early as January 5, 2022. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Are you stating that the CTA was supporting the protests?

Mr. Larry Brock: I'm not saying that at all. I'm saying that you understand the rationale behind why these people were protesting. You had several unvaccinated truck drivers you were supporting as early as January 5, 2022.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I do not understand what you mean by supporting unvaccinated drivers.

Mr. Larry Brock: On January 5, 2022, you issued a statement that I'm looking at right now. That was really on the eve of the Canadian government and the U.S. government making announcements that as of January 15 and January 22 respectively, only fully vaccinated Canadians and Americans could travel back and forth.

You were aware of those dates.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: It says that the “CTA...requested both governments meet and consult with key members of the supply chain to determine a more suitable date for enforcement that would be...less disruptive to the...supply chain, which [was] already struggling to function at normal capacity.”

Do you agree with that?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: At that point, “neither government” gave you “any indication” that they would reconsider “enforcing the mandates [that] month” and had not “provided any...details” to you.

Is that correct?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: You indicated further that there was “a modest uptick of drivers getting vaccinated at some companies”, but there was a “higher-than-normal turnover and others declaring their intention to leave the industry or seek employment in the provincially regulated sector over the impending mandate at the border.”

Is that correct?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: You anticipated that the industry was going to lose “12,000-16,000...cross-border commercial drivers if the mandate [took] effect [that] month”.

Is that correct?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: You quoted “as many as 30,000 Canadian federally regulated drivers exiting the supply chain.”

Is that correct?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: The “CTA continues to caution the Government of Canada that implementing a domestic mandate on federally regulated carriers and their employees [would] further exacerbate the driver shortage, [the] disruption to the supply chain and [the] rising costs on consumers.”

Do you stand by that statement?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: We do.

Mr. Larry Brock: You said that the “CTA and [your] member companies have worked closely with the Government of Canada throughout the COVID pandemic to prevent the spread of the disease throughout the supply chain and this cooperative relationship has helped make the industry safer.”

Is that correct?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: You said that you “strongly [believe that] the health benefits of vaccines are unquestionable. But that [did] not change the fact that any substantial reduction of commercial drivers, when there’s already an acute shortage, would further disrupt a very fragile supply chain and the economy.”

Is that correct?

• (2020)

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: “Simply put, the supply chain desperately needs more drivers”, not less drivers, “to deliver goods and products that [we as] consumers [on both sides of the border] depend on”.

is that correct?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: Therefore, the CTA was “again calling on the Government of Canada to maintain the position it agreed upon in the summer of 2021 of exempting the trucking industry as an essential service due to the potential consequences to the economy.”

You maintained that position didn't you, sir?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Yes, I did—

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

“At a minimum, Ottawa must exempt commercial truck drivers, mechanics and those who work outdoors from the domestic mandate.”

Do you agree with that?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Yes.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

Those are my questions.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Brock.

We now go to Mr. Virani for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Arif Virani: I believe it's Mr. Naqvi who will go first.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): I had your name on my list, Mr. Virani, but that's no problem.

Over to you, Mr. Naqvi.

[*English*]

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you.

Mr. Laskowski, I'll start with you, and I'll follow up on the questions that Mr. Brock was posing to you.

Of course, the mandate of the Canadian Trucking Alliance is to ensure we have a vibrant trucking industry in Canada. Am I correct?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: It's to have a vibrant and safe trucking industry.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Part of the work the alliance does it to ensure the trucking sector complies with the laws, the rules and regulations, so that we can continue to have a safe supply chain and safe routes between the two countries. Am I correct?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Absolutely.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My understanding is that you work very closely with all relevant government departments federally and provincially, and perhaps even at the municipal level, to ensure rules are being discussed and are fully complied with by your members of the Trucking Alliance. Is that correct?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Absolutely, including the COVID vaccinations.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: That's including the COVID vaccinations.

How would you describe the level of engagement you had with different levels of government during the pandemic?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I would say that we had an excellent and co-operative relationship, with lots of dialogue to work through a lot of complex issues.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Would you also agree that your members—trucking companies and truckers themselves—are law-abiding and comply with the rules that are set for them so that they can do their good work?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Absolutely, and in the vaccination rates, our industry was no different from the general population in Canada, including our nation's truck drivers.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Sir, what vaccination rate are we talking about among truckers?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: When we were looking at those vaccination rates at the time, it depended on your region, but it was 85% to 90%. Hence, to the previous questions, when CTA estimated the loss, we were correct that it was over 10%. Over 10,000 left the cross-border industry. That was through choice.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: The rate of 85% to 90% is really in line with what Canadians across the country were doing. That's remarkable. Congratulations.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Absolutely.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Sir, can you share your concerns, then, when you saw blockades and occupations happening in cities like Ottawa and across the country, and people suggesting they're truckers and they're taking matters into their hands? What, as an alliance, were your thoughts and your engagement and activities during that process?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: We made several statements throughout the crisis against public protests on public highways, as I noted in my opening remarks. They're available up on our website. I could read them all into the record, but I'm sure you want to ask me more questions, as opposed to my reading you back my statements.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Let me post a statement that I believe CTA issued on January 29.

It said:

While a number of Canadians are in Ottawa to voice their displeasure over this mandate, it also appears that a great number of these protesters have no connection to the trucking industry and have a separate agenda beyond a disagreement over cross border vaccine requirements. As these protests unfold over the week-

end, we ask the Canadian public to be aware that many of the people you see and hear in media reports do not have a connection to the trucking industry.

Do you still stand by that statement of January 29?

• (2025)

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Absolutely.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: What was the concern you were facing as an alliance and what were you hearing from those truckers, the 90% of truckers who had vaccinated themselves and wanted to continue working?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: It was a complex issue, and it still is a complex issue in our industry and in society. The vast majority of truck drivers were vaccinated and the vast majority of truck drivers were out doing what they love to do, and that's moving our nation's economy.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: What was the impact of those blockades on truckers who were vaccinated and were able to legally cross the border to the U.S. and come back?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: If you're stuck behind a blockade, you're stuck behind a blockade. As we noted, some of those blockades lasted days and weeks. That's food; that's water; that's restrooms. It's all the necessities of life. Some were running without their medication, and obviously their livelihood was being impacted as the trucks sat there, so there was a high level of frustration and a high level of impact on the vast majority of truck drivers who were out there, as I mentioned before, moving our nation's economy.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Have you done—

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Naqvi. Your time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Laskowski.

Mr. Green, could you kindly take the chair?

Mr. Laskowski, I'd like to continue with you. Can you tell us whether the Canadian Trucking Alliance was consulted before the Emergencies Act was invoked and before all of those regulations and orders were put in place?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: We were in constant contact.

Just so you understand how the alliance works, provincial associations across Canada belong to it. My counterparts throughout Canada who were impacted by these blockades at the borders that I mentioned were in constant contact with their various levels of government, as was I.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Who, exactly, in the federal government were you in contact with?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: My private conversations are my private conversations, but we were in constant contact with a number of officials and the relevant officials at all levels of government.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Who were you in contact with, Mr. Laskowski?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: As I said, those are private conversations, sir.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): They aren't private, Mr. Laskowski.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): If I could intervene for one second as the chair, I just want to procedurally remind Mr. Laskowski where he is. He's at a committee reviewing the Emergencies Act in the House of Commons.

We do, sir, have the ability to send for documents through either informal or formal ways. I would just ask you to consider co-operating with the questions at hand. Certainly it's not going to put you in any kind of a legal issue to be forthcoming in your answers.

Thank you.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): I'll ask you again, Mr. Laskowski.

Who in the federal government were you in contact with?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: It was CBSA, Health Canada and Transport Canada. Those would be the most relevant agencies, I would say.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Who, specifically, in those organizations did you speak with?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: They were officials responsible for border crossings and dealing with public health.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Can you give us their names, please?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: What names would you like, sir?

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): The names of the people you spoke with.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I deal with multiple people at Transport Canada, at CBSA and at Health Canada. I'd have to look through my Rolodex to go through them all.

Would you like them all?

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Yes, please send them all to us.

Did you speak with anyone at Public Safety Canada?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Yes.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Who exactly did you speak with?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: It would be directly with those responsible at CBSA for cross-border—

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): I'd like their names, Mr. Laskowski.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Again, I'd have to go through my Rolodex and get you all these names.

• (2030)

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Was it with people at the minister's office or in the department?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: CTA deals with individuals at both the bureaucratic level and the political level.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Do you deal with them regularly? I ask because you aren't even able to name one of them.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Exactly, sir. I don't understand what you want with names. What are the specific issues?

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): I want the names of the people at the Minister of Public Safety's office you spoke to.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I can't remember all the names off the top of my head.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): It's not all of them.

[Translation]

Give me at least one name, please.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): Could we please bring the questions back through the chair, just for the purpose of making sure our guests have the ability to respond?

You could restate the question.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): I take it, Mr. Laskowski, that you can't give me the name of a single person at the Minister of Public Safety's office whom you spoke to. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Sir, I do not see why names are relevant.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): That isn't for you to say. Only I need to know why I'm asking the question. Your job is to answer it, Mr. Laskowski. That's why you're here today.

Am I wrong? Did you not know you were going to have to answer questions?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I've done these meetings for almost 30 years, sir. No one has ever asked me to name someone.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): You are appearing for the first time before the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency, a joint committee of the House of Commons and the Senate created to review the use of the Emergencies Act in February of this year, Mr. Laskowski. Don't tell me you've been doing this for 30 years, because this is the first time a meeting like this has taken place.

You were told that you would have to answer questions, were you not?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Correct, and this is the first time in 30 years someone has—

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Did you come prepared to answer questions?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I am answering your questions, sir.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): This is a waste of time.

Did you see the transportation-related regulations before they were issued, after the Emergencies Act was invoked?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: No, I did not.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Did you speak with someone in charge at the Minister of Public Safety's office about the regulations?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: No, I did not.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): What, then, did you talk about with the people at the Minister of Public Safety's office?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Do you mean with regard to the pandemic?

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Yes.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: What I was discussing at the time was the application of multiple changes—if you go through our website—that involved COVID-19 protocols. There were weekly conversations, sometimes daily conversations, about how truck drivers and loads cross the border, sir.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): At this time, before I hand the chair over, I do want to take a chair's prerogative. Mr. Laskowski. I know that this can feel perhaps a little bit adversarial. It doesn't have to be.

I do want to remind you, sir, that this is not like any other committee that you've attended here in the House of Commons. This is dealing with the Emergencies Act, which is significant in terms of its precedence, the impact, and the national importance to security.

I would ask, sir, that when you finish this meeting, you consider working with your administration to provide the answers to the questions that were put to you. The names are germane. They might not be to you, sir, but to this committee they are. I would ask for your co-operation in providing them in the fullness of detail, notwithstanding the fact that you probably don't recall them off-hand tonight. You can submit them through the clerks.

I do want to again emphasize the importance of this committee and its nature, for which your candour and honesty are required.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I've given you my candour and my honesty, Mr. Chair, and I'd be happy to co-operate. If you give me specific topics for whom I spoke to, I'd be happy to answer that.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): Okay.

At this point, I will hand the chair back over and I'll proceed with my round.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Green. You have five minutes.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, to Mr. Laskowski, I might go a little bit slower for the purpose of the meeting.

Out of your total membership, how many drivers on the road, coast to coast to coast, does the alliance represent? I want to get a sense of that.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: We represent over 5,000 trucking companies across Canada.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): If you were to do an estimate, how many drivers would that potentially encompass?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: It's 5,000 companies. I have my senior VP here.

Geoff, what would you say, on average, was an estimate in terms of the drivers in that membership?

• (2035)

Mr. Geoffrey Wood (Senior Vice-President, Policy, Canadian Trucking Alliance): Let's say it's between 100,000 and 120,000 drivers.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): There were 85,000 to 95,000 vaccinated drivers still working day in and day out during the crisis this country was in throughout COVID-19, delivering goods and services to Canadians across the country; and 5,000 to 10,000 drivers who, through personal choice, decided not to get vaccinated. By round numbers, is that about right, Mr. Wood?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Yes, that's correct.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): Okay. That's perfect.

Mr. Laskowski, I don't know if you had anecdotal feedback on this. I'm trying to get a sense from you, sir—you alluded to this in questioning from Mr. Naqvi—about how this movement that was supposed to be about truckers got co-opted by people way outside the industry, who clearly, overwhelmingly, were not in support of the actual sector—the 95,000 people who did the right thing and kept working.

Did you get any feedback around how many active members—actual truckers represented within the alliance—were actively involved in these blockades and convoys? Did they make themselves known to your association in any way, shape or form?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: No, they didn't. As I stated before and in a public way, very few people who were associated with these things were associated with our industry. You can see by the types of vehicles that were at the blockades

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): That's right.

We're going to probably spend quite some time unpacking what happened and hopefully responding to some of the recommendations that you all put forward in terms of ensuring that the proper consultation happens across all levels of governments so that this doesn't happen again. I think you were quite right in your assessment that even if it isn't an Emergencies Act response, there needs to be something with higher specificity around our borders and infrastructures that might protect them from these types of processes.

You mentioned you had spoken to different levels of government. I think there was some confusion between you and the previous speaker, my colleague Mr. Fortin. I'm going to ask you specifically this, sir: What role did your alliance have in communicating with your provincial counterparts in the Ministry of Transportation for Ontario?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: We deal with all levels of government, including Ontario. Our members out in British Columbia and Alberta—

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): When you were in those discussions, with specificity, was there ever any conversation

around the Ministry of Transportation perhaps targeting either the suspension of licences or insurance to perhaps motivate licensed and regulated truckers to cease and desist in these illegal activities? Did they consult with you around those conversations? Is it something that perhaps you brought up in any of your conversations?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: The issue of how to move people away from borders was focused primarily on the federal government, as the trucks, or the vehicles per se, were at the federal government level. Our conversations with regard to dealing with how to remove vehicles from the roads or protesters from the roads involved multiple agencies, including the MTO.

For example, at the Peace Bridge, we had public people on public highways running up and down the roads—

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): I'll ask you with a greater specificity: Is it your opinion that if, at any of those levels of government, the Ministry of Transportation had perhaps stated that if people do not move, either their insurance or their licence may be revoked...

The reason we're putting these questions to you, sir, is that it's our duty. It's our mandate as a committee—you may or may not know our mandate—to see if the threshold was met, to see if we exhausted all other possibilities. We're turning to subject matter experts like you to try to figure out if those consultations happened. Is it your opinion that if that possible avenue had been used, we might have averted it?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: The Canadian Trucking Alliance didn't bring those things forward to any level of government.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Matthew Green): In the briefest way possible, in your estimation, what was the cost to your alliance members, the 95% who continued to want to work and continued to move goods and services? What was the material economic cost of the impact and the disruption from the convoy?

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Please answer quickly, Mr. Laskowski. The member's time is up.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Do you want me to answer that question?

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Yes, I asked you to answer quickly.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I mentioned in the earlier comments that it was general economic loss. You're probably looking at \$100 an hour, if not more, for running a tractor-trailer. Just think about all those trucks sitting in those queues, missing loads and just sitting there. The economic loss on our industry was significant. There isn't an exact number.

• (2040)

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Laskowski.

We now go to Senator Boniface for five minutes.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): Thank you very much.

Thanks to all of you for being here.

For the Canadian Trucking Alliance, let me first say thank you to all those truckers out there who kept things going through the pandemic under tough circumstances. We're deeply grateful to them. They kept our food chain and everything else going.

The emergency measures regulation included “truck depots” in the definition of “critical infrastructure”, meaning that it was forbidden to interfere with the functioning of truck depots during the time when that regulation was in effect.

Can you tell me the extent to which truck depots were subjected to interference during the protests and the blockades? Do you have any information on that?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I'm sorry. What's your definition of a truck depot? Do you mean a rest area, Miss...?

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): I'm using the definition found within the regulations, so I was actually hoping you would help me understand “truck depot”.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Do you know what the definition of a truck depot is here, Geoff?

Mr. Geoffrey Wood: I do not, Stephen. I have my own definition, but I do not know the one we're speaking about.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): I would welcome the definition.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: If you could repeat the question, I might be able to answer it, but I just want to make sure that what I'm answering is actually the correct reference.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): In the regulation that came as a result of the act being put into place, truck depots were included in critical infrastructure. I was trying to get a sense of definition on what you would say, what you would think, was intended.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I'm purely guessing here. It's either a truck rest area or perhaps the truck terminals, but that is.... I am guessing here.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): That was the distinction I was trying to clarify, but that's okay.

I'll go to both organizations. I'll start with the CTA and then I'll come to our guests who are present.

Have you done a review in regard to how it took place, what you may or may not have been able to do differently, or anything you can assist us with in that regard?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Sure. That's where we need our recommendation, and I think you heard it from the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association.

Every crossing is different. The Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association brought up that there are municipalities, provinces and the federal government. There can be different enforcement agencies involved. One of the lessons—and I think it was referred to by the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association—was that you get everybody in the room together to ask, “What are the lessons we learned here? How could we be more proactive to end it quickly and peacefully? Do we want it to end peacefully and end quickly? What is the plan? How could we work better the next time in terms of having a plan? In essence, who does what, and when?”

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): Thank you.

I'll ask the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association the same question.

Mr. Brian Kingston: Yes, we did undertake a review. We provided written advice to the public safety minister after this occurred, with some recommendations to ensure that it doesn't happen again, and they are in line with what I've mentioned here today: identifying a clear lead at these key pieces of infrastructure and ensuring that we have legislative tools to avoid the need for this type of act in the future if there is a disruption at a critical border crossing.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): You would definitely realize from your former roles that the levels of government that would be required to be involved would have an onerous task.

If you look at it from Ontario's perspective, the Ontario government moved with some legislation of their own. Was that helpful to you, and did you have input into that?

Mr. Brian Kingston: The legislation was helpful. We didn't have direct input into it, in the sense that we weren't providing specific advice on the tools that were necessary. We were communicating with all three levels of government on the economic harm that was occurring and asking for a solution to remove the blockade.

• (2045)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Gwen Boniface): If you look at the report today that says that there may be a return to these events in February, I would think that you would want to move with some sort—

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Sorry, you're out of time, Senator.

It's Senator Carignan's turn, but since he isn't online, I'm going to ask Senator Harder to go ahead. You have five minutes, Senator.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

Mr. Kingston, I was thinking that you were the Maytag repairman for a while. Let me start with you, but I will ask the same question to Mr. Laskowski as well.

In his testimony, Mr. Laskowski referred to the concern that they had with whack-a-mole in the sense of moving from Coutts. You close Coutts, and it goes somewhere else, to Blue Water or the like.

I think it would be very helpful for us to understand better the risks involved beyond Coutts and the Ambassador Bridge for your industry and how the Emergencies Act invocation gave some assurance as to the stability of the routes that were used.

Mr. Brian Kingston: Thank you, Senator.

What we witnessed instantly, once the blockade occurred... Automakers are best in class when it comes to operating an efficient supply chain. They have multiple plans in place to divert the trade to get it to the plant. Immediately, trucks were diverted to bridges like the Blue Water Bridge, but the challenge we saw there is that they don't have the CBSA infrastructure to accommodate high volumes of trucks. As we heard earlier, Ambassador Bridge can see seven or eight thousand trucks per day.

What then occurred is that we had lineups, and then truck drivers were timing out, meaning that they could no longer be on the road. Although there were diversions occurring, it wasn't a perfect solution.

In some instances, automakers had extremely extraordinary measures to get parts to plants. There were ways to divert around, but nothing has the capacity you would have at the Ambassador Bridge, which is why it is such a critical piece of infrastructure.

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you.

Mr. Laskowski, how would you respond to the same question with respect to your industry and the concerns that you earlier described?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: It was very frustrating. The blockades themselves were obviously frustrating, but it was equally frustrating was not knowing... For example, at the the Ambassador Bridge, carriers started to divert over to the Blue Water Bridge. Well, the protesters adapted. Although huge numbers didn't go over there, it was enough on public highways to stop the trucks and stop trade.

The same thing happened at the Peace Bridge and throughout Canada, even at Pacific Highway in British Columbia, where you would have people just running onto the roads. The impact was significant.

Although they weren't as fortified as those at Coutts, Emerson and the Ambassador, it was disruptive. At the time—hindsight is always a benefit—you wondered what was next and when was it going to happen again. It was erratic and it couldn't be predicted.

Hon. Peter Harder: Could I ask a follow-up question?

Once the Emergencies Act was invoked, were you and your truck association relieved that there was now greater predictability in the supply chain routes? In other words, it wasn't just relieving one bridge; it was actually providing confidence across the network of cross-border commerce.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Sir, as I mentioned in my opening comments, we are not security experts, but we do know that after the Emergencies Act was invoked, the blockades were lifted very

shortly thereafter, and what I referred to as pop-up protests on public highways all stopped.

Our industry was relieved. The Canadian public was relieved and the supply chain was relieved.

Hon. Peter Harder: I'd share that view. My only concern was that it took longer than I would have wished for the invocation to proceed.

Brian Kingston, could you indicate whether your advice to the department to which you referred went beyond the measures that you've tabled today, or are they the same?

• (2050)

Mr. Brian Kingston: We provided a few more details, specifically with respect to CBSA staffing and infrastructure upgrades. We've also recommended and supported things like the completion of the Gordie Howe bridge as a secondary. We gave a little bit more detail.

Hon. Peter Harder: Could you table that letter with us?

Mr. Brian Kingston: We'd be happy to.

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you.

Mr. Laskowski, if I have more time—

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): You have 15 seconds left.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you. I won't ask my next question.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Senator Harder. You can whisper your question to your fellow senator.

Senator Patterson, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: I have no questions for now, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Did you want to give your five minutes to Mr. Harder? He seems to have more questions.

[*English*]

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Yes.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Go ahead, Mr. Harder.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Harder: This is club loyalty, I guess. I appreciate that.

I just want to follow up with Mr. Laskowski. Mr. Kingston has said he will table his recommendations. Has the truckers association formed, in a written statement or request, its views on what actions government or governments could consider to avoid or better prepare for the next event?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Just in general, we've said.... It's far from us to tell the enforcement people how to enforce, how to tell bridge operators how to operate their bridges and how to tell provincial and federal authorities how to talk to each other.

We do believe, and it's a simple suggestion, that if everyone gets around the table to develop a plan.... There may be parts where industry can't be involved because governments want to talk to just themselves or the enforcement people alone. We do believe the first step is that everybody who is responsible for those aspects at all those crossings needs to get to the table to develop individual plans. It can't be a cookie-cutter answer. Every crossing is different.

Hon. Peter Harder: Thank you. That's a very good point to make.

Can I go back, Mr. Laskowski, to your expressed concerns with regard to the industry itself and the challenge of recruiting to your industry?

Could you tell us whether or not the events at the border themselves have been an obstacle to attracting potential drivers because of the risks of border interference or the like?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Border uncertainty is a challenge for our industry, and it continues to be a challenge. Truck drivers want to drive. They are obviously aware that the roads aren't always going to be clear and that the border is not always going to be easy to go over.

The short answer to your question is yes, it had an impact, and yes, there were a number of people who handed their keys in.

Hon. Peter Harder: Mr. Laskowski, did you have contact with your counterparts in the United States with respect to some of the issues that were raised in that there's a parallel set of regulations around vaccination restrictions and cross-border movements by the United States? Even the relief that you sought, had it been granted, would not have allowed your truckers to enter the United States because of the United States' rules.

What kinds of relationships did you have with your counterparts on this matter?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: We worked together. Both the American Trucking Associations and the Canadian Trucking Alliance issued statements similar to those that were read into the record. We said let's work together. Let's push this date out further, to when we can get vaccination rates up, educate more people on the benefits of vaccination and bring stability to the supply chain.

The ATA had a slightly different position. They had more of a legal issue of whether the government in D.C. had the ability to impose this mandate. It was more of a legal issue than ours was, but we worked together.

Hon. Peter Harder: They are a more litigious country than we are. That probably reflects itself.

What are the vaccination rates in your American counterpart organization?

• (2055)

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: We haven't looked at it since probably the spring, so I don't know if it's changed. Based on previous figures, it was significantly lower than it is in Canada. It is reflective....

I guess it all depends on how you define "vaccination". Is it two or is it three? At the time, it was two vaccinations. At the time, in our nation, I believe we hit over 85%. In some parts, it was almost 90%. In the United States, I don't believe they got over 75%. Their rates were very reflective of their society, as were ours.

Hon. Peter Harder: That's correct. That would have had its implications with respect to public health in both locations.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: That's correct.

Hon. Peter Harder: If I could conclude, Brian Kingston, with a question with respect to the OEM sector—

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): You have 10 seconds left, Mr. Harder.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Harder: In terms of further or future investments in Canada, is the issue of cross-border fluidity on the minds of your member organizations when they consider expansion into Canada?

Mr. Brian Kingston: Yes, it is. It's a key part of Canada's overall competitiveness. This came on the heels of previous disruptions to the supply chain, including stoppages at the port of Montreal. It is on the minds of companies when they think about investing in Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Rhéal Fortin): Thank you, Mr. Harder. Your time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Kingston.

We have about three and a half minutes left, so we don't really have time for another round.

I will simply thank the witnesses for being with us this evening and remind those who are supposed to get back to the committee in writing to do so through the joint clerks in the next few days.

We will now suspend and go in camera for the last part of our meeting.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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