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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): Good afternoon. Let's start the meeting.

We have Mr. Klaus Buchmüller, head of the international division of the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief, with us.

Sir, you have five minutes for your opening statement, and then members will ask questions.

I appreciate your co-operation. I'm not quite sure what six hours is at this point, but I guess it's around nine o'clock your time. We thank you for making yourself available.

Sir, you can begin your opening five minutes.

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller (Head, International Division, Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW)): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon. My name is Klaus Buchmüller. I have been the head of the international division of THW since 2006 and a member of THW since 1986. Thank you very much for the invitation to discuss Germany's Federal Agency for Technical Relief, THW.

I know that, in a previous session, Eva Cohen, a former THW member and our liaison to Canada, already explained that the German government has a disaster relief mechanism that allows the German armed forces to be the asset of last resort, and THW's unique structure as a government agency based on unpaid citizen volunteers.

There are 85,000 trained volunteers, including about 15,000 youth volunteers, in about 700 detachments across the country, with only 2% being paid staff, one of those being me. Most of them are located on the regional level. In the fire service, there are 1.1 million volunteer firefighters, and only 20,000 paid firefighters. There are approximately 400,000 volunteer paramedics and about 40,000 paid paramedics.

In my position, I have witnessed a steady increase in disaster impact over the last 15 years, as well as an increase of the requirements for effective disaster relief and the technical capabilities that go with it, both within Germany as well as globally. The collaboration of civil protection actors across borders is increasing for heightened efficiency, with the EU mechanism being a very good example. Currently, the ASEAN countries are examining a systematic approach to capacity building and co-operation that is similar to the EU mechanism. Aside from that, we are now supporting a growing list of countries that have decided to strengthen their disas-

ter response systems and that have recognized the benefits of a citizen-based or citizen-supported approach like ours.

Climate change and the resulting increase of extreme weather events have led to an unprecedented level of THW deployments within Germany in recent years. Most notable is the Ahrtal flooding in July 2021. I'm sitting about 10 kilometres away from the Ahrtal.

We were heavily involved in supporting all levels of government with pandemic response, with tasks such as the installation of test and vaccination centres; the transport of personal protection equipment, medications, etc.; as well as international civil protection, capacity-building missions in Jordan, in Tunisia, in northern Iraq, in Algeria, in Morocco, in Ukraine for the procurement and transport of equipment for different stakeholders, in Lebanon for urban search and rescue after the explosion at a chemical warehouse, and in Mozambique for water purification and drinking water supply after the cyclone.

Catastrophic flooding occurred at the Ahr river due to severe rainfall of more than 300 litres per hour for 25 hours ongoing. It was, more or less, 48 hours. This resulted in the biggest deployment of THW in its 70-year history. Alongside all other actors—the NGO sector, spontaneous private supporters and the German military as the asset of last resort—THW volunteers from all 700 detachments across the country were rotated as surge capacity, and all of our 25 technical all-hazards capabilities from urban search and rescue, water purification, blasting, bridge building, and emergency infrastructure repair were required. The operation lasted about 16 weeks, with more than 15,000 volunteers from our organization plus a lot of the other organizations. THW operated for about 2.4 million hours in this scenario.

Although you can imagine that many new lessons were learned, it was also a strong confirmation that our system works very well and can easily adapt and scale up to any demand on a catastrophic level.

It's an honour to be here today, and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

With that, we'll turn to our first round of questioning.

Ms. Gallant, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'd like to thank our witness for the help and leadership he gave in our county back in 2018. We had some flooding. Your paramedics, led by a crew, conferred with our paramedics, led by Chief Mike Nolan, and it really helped out.

You have a citizen-supported system. How do you recruit your volunteers for this paramedic volunteer system?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: May I correct you a little bit? It's not paramedic. We are the technical organization. We do have paramedics, but not in our organization.

How do we recruit? Of course, the volunteer system in Germany is a quite traditional system. With THW, you can start at age six years. It's like the Boy Scouts. They start with playing, using the tools, building up comradeship and so on.

Of course, we have advertisements, but mostly people join our organization because of friends, neighbours and others telling them about it. When they come to a local detachment, it is like a family for them. You don't need to do too much advertising to bring people to THW. We don't have a problem getting young people into our organization right now. We had a problem a few years ago, but not anymore.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: You mentioned that you have a technical aspect. Would you have professionals who volunteer, engineers, people from civilian society who would have the expertise to put into force preventive measures or to use their talents to mitigate when disaster does strike?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: No. There's a big range of different occupations, so there are a lot of tasks they can fulfill. There are engineers. There are lawyers. There are truck drivers. There are installers, plumbers, joiners, whatever. There is everything you can find within these 85,000 people. They are all in the data bank. If we need them for bigger missions, we can see in the data bank what kind of knowledge they do have.

When they work in the local detachments, they are working within a unit. They come with their professional skills, and they get added training for civil defence and civil protection. They know and learn, in addition to their normal job, how to use the skills from their normal job, from their normal profession in disasters, so they are adding.

We also do technical training, such as bridge building. We have bridge-building engineers among the volunteers, but they also need support. They get trained in how to build these mobile bridges, temporary bridges and so on, for example, in our training centres and in the local detachments.

The people we send out to missions are 99% volunteers. The operational job is done by the volunteers.

• (1545)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Obviously, these people have jobs. How do you get the employers to allow the people the time off when they may be critically needed at work?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: It's a federal law. It's called the THW law. The employers have to release the people when we need them. Of course, they get a reimbursement for the time they spend with us—two days—and couldn't go to their normal work. The employer can charge us for this time.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How do you call up your volunteers when disaster strikes? What method of notification do you send out so that they can come?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: We have beepers. We have our own messenger service, which is a purely THW messenger service. They get a call. The fire brigade or the police station can push a button. Their beeper goes off, and then they know where to go.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We might have a hard time in Canada getting volunteers in the beginning because it's a brand new concept, besides badges when they're Boy Scouts or maybe credits in high school. Besides the reimbursement for time lost from work, was there any other type of incentive that was needed in the beginning when you first stood up this corps?

If there was a time of war, obviously there may be volunteer military people within your ranks. How would you ensure that you had enough people? Would the military and civilians coordinate in this type of situation?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: To answer the first question as to whether they get incentives, they wouldn't have incentives in the form of money or whatever. Of course they get a medal when they do something special. Of course they get recognized by the media, and they have a social status within their communities because it's quite a tradition, as I said before. It's common to be a volunteer with the fire brigade, with a sporting club, with THW or with the paramedics, and it raises your social level. The media is doing a good job of supporting it as well, but there are no other incentives. They've been discussing this for 10 or 15 years already, so I'm not sure if this will come through.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're going to have to leave the answer there. I apologize for that. Ms. Gallant is a bit past her time.

Ms. Lalonde, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to say thank you for joining us. As mentioned, it's very late where you are, and I certainly really appreciate the fact that you took the time to share some of your perspective on what's happening.

I think you know that we have not been immune ourselves to climate change and its impact, and certainly this summer here in Ottawa—I'm a proud resident of Orléans—we had wildfires all across our country and here. It was terrible. We had a lot of smog due to those wildfires. We had flooding and tornadoes. Ottawa is now designated a tornado area, and we have been relying on our military.

I appreciate Mrs. Gallant's perspective on volunteering. Volunteers have come forward, and we sometimes need the extra help.

I was wondering, beyond the military, how NGOs like the Red Cross assist regarding recovery and support efforts. Are they complementary to the military efforts that you are seeing?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: The military in general in Germany is really the last resort. If there's a big disaster like the Ahrtal, the military comes to support, or if there's a big flood like in 2013 in eastern Germany, but there is a very well-balanced coordination system between the federal government and German Länders about when and how the coordination starts and which organization has to fulfill which task, and they train together. They do exercises together, the Red Cross, St. John, THW, the fire brigade and even the local police and the border police. The federal border police do exercises together on a broader scale.

There is no problem putting these organizations together in a big disaster so that they can work together. You do have more problems with what we call spontaneous supporters, citizens who are not in an organization where they have training and so on, and they just pop up when there's an event or a disaster, and they want to help.

With the structure we have from the federal government and from the local government, we have now found out how to work with these spontaneous citizen supporters and fit them in, because they want to do something. They need a structure and, without the structure, you can't coordinate them.

• (1550)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

Yes, I would agree with you, and I think we have similar systems.

I'm interested in the financial component. What financial supports does your federal government have for local communities that have been affected by disaster, and is there a particular formula for cost-sharing between orders of government?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: It depends.

When we talk about how THW is financed, we get about €350 million a year from the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community as a budget for THW.

I have to admit I don't know how much money the local governments have for their organizations, like the fire brigade. If there's a disaster in the local community and it needs support from the federal government through THW, it depends. If it is small, like a truck accident, and the fire brigade is not able to support it completely and they need support from THW, there is a cost catalogue. We have to charge the local community or the local structures, but most of the time it's paid by the insurance company, which has to pay for the whole thing.

If it is a bigger disaster, like the Ahrtal flood, which I mentioned before, then most of the time the federal government says that the support from THW as a federal asset is free of cost to the requester for the communal services.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Here, it's very similar. Usually a provincial jurisdiction or a municipality would request federal support. Is this similar?

My last question is this: How much support have you received from international partners, either financially or in personnel, to combat the fires or assist with, for instance, the 2013 flood?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: Let's do the second question first.

When we have bigger disasters, of course, neighbouring countries like France or Luxembourg give us some offers of help. We had a lot of injured people, so Luxembourg sent paramedic cars, brought some of the injured people to Luxembourg and treated them.

Sometimes we get in-kind donations, but that is more of a political gesture.

Within the European civil protection mechanism, we are able to ask all the EU members and partner countries to support us. There's a big and very effective system within Europe, which is also available for the whole world, where we can request support. Offers can also be sent within this mechanism.

If a country in the European neighbourhood wants to offer something to Germany while Germany is facing a disaster, it goes through what we call the Brussels hub, which is the ERCC or Emergency Response Coordination Centre. Then we deal with them on how and what kind of—

The Chair: Unfortunately, again, I have to leave the answer there.

[Translation]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Buchmüller, thank you for being here. However, I would like to apologize right away for the fact that my initial comments won't be aimed at asking you questions for one simple reason. For weeks, if not months, the government has refused to listen to the Bloc Québécois, which is asking it to hold an open and transparent competition to replace its multi-mission aircraft. As a result, last Tuesday, the Premier of Quebec, François Legault, and the Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford, joined the Bloc Québécois in asking the government to hold a call for tenders, which would allow for a transparent and fair process for the various aerospace manufacturers.

In that context, I would like to reopen the debate on the motion that we, the Bloc Québécois, put forward last Tuesday and on which the debate was adjourned. It reads:

That, considering the joint statement of the respective Premiers of Quebec and Ontario dated November 7, 2023, concerning the public procurement of CP-140 Aurora by the federal government, the Committee is of the opinion that the government must proceed by way of a formal call for tenders before awarding any procurement contract to this effect.

That the Chairman of the Committee immediately report this resolution of the Committee to the House.

• (1555)

[English]

The Chair: The motion is in order.

I had rather hoped, colleagues, that we could deal with this at the end of this first hour, since we have a witness. The time for the witness is at 10 o'clock at night. It does seem to me to be not treating a witness properly.

Is there an appetite to move Ms. Normandin's proper motion to the end of the first hour? She's prepared to do that. Okay.

A voice: Could we at least do one round?

The Chair: Yes, we'll do one round of questions. Are you good with that? That takes us to shortly after four o'clock our time. We'll then release Mr. Buchmüller.

I apologize, sir, but you've probably appeared before a few parliamentary committees in the past, and you know exactly how this works.

With that, I'm going to turn to Ms. Normandin, for a further four minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Buchmüller, I'd like to apologize once more.

My first question is about the ongoing training given to your employees and volunteers. How many hours does the training take? I'd just like to have an idea of how many hours it takes to train the people who are responding.

[English]

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: There's basic training, which is mandatory for every THW member. It's 120 hours of theory and practical training. Once they fulfill this training with an examination, they can go into one of the units. It depends on the unit whether it's bridge building, water purification, infrastructure or whatever. It

depends, also, on how many hours of training they can do, but they have permanent training in the local sections.

They train in first aid, security in the field, how to behave on a disaster site, how to co-operate and how to use the radios. This is ongoing training they have about every month on a weekend, starting Friday evening and ending Saturday evening.

They have special training where they can use one of our three training centres, but they are called to these training centres depending on their role and the function of the unit where they are based.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I'd like you to tell us about how the training is funded. If I understand correctly, there's a kind of continuum in terms of training civilians who become volunteers. Part of the training is done at the school. In your opening remarks, you talked about something similar to the Scouting movement.

Do people give the training entirely on a volunteer basis? If not, where does the funding come from to pay these people?

• (1600)

[English]

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: There are two different things. In the training centres, there are trainers, paid staff from the federal budget, and there are members of THW. They are supported by volunteers, as well. If we do training, for example, for bridge building, there's an instructor, maybe two engineers and maybe about five to 10 volunteers supporting the training.

We do international training for UNHCR, the World Food Programme and others in our training centres. It's conducted by about 85% volunteers and about 15% permanent paid staff.

The ongoing training and the normal basic training in the local sections is 100% done by volunteers, who, of course, are trained to be trainers. They have trained in trainer courses before. They follow the curriculum that is made at headquarters, which is the same curriculum from north to south and from west to east. They get the curriculum, the paperwork, the PowerPoint and whatever they need. All this is funded through our normal budget from the federal government.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

Next, we have Ms. Mathysen, for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you so much for your late-night attendance. We appreciate that greatly.

You spoke a bit about jurisdiction, where the local government—versus the federal government, in your instance—makes the THW work so well. We face that a bit in Canada, in that there have been conversations here about the creation of a national agency to fight disasters. Under the Constitution, of course, those responsibilities fall under the provincial governments.

Can you provide further insights into how Germany navigates those different levels of government, in order to ensure the THW fits the emergency preparedness for each level, as well?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: It's more or less the same as in Canada.

The responsibility for civil protection—like the fire brigade and paramedics—falls under the German Länder, such as Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate and so on. There are 16 Länder. The federal government is responsible for civil defence, which means in war time.

The THW law mentions that we support the regional Länder on request. If they need something, they can ask us for it. We're going to support them. The responsibility for a big fire in Munich is the responsibility of Bavaria. If they need support from the federal government and the THW, they can call on us. This is all regulated in the THW law.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Are you finding that those regional groups, like Bavaria, are not fulfilling their requirements and are turning more often to the federal government for that support?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: No, they fulfill the requirements.

Since this is a long-standing process, it's quite clear that the THW has, for example, the bigger and heavier machines, and the long-lasting equipment. We can do longer missions. If the fire brigade has a special problem or technical issue.... This happens every day. The Länder in our country call on us about 30 to 50 times a day for any support—small, medium or bigger supports.

They fulfill their jobs, but it's quite clear that it's shared. We do some things. We have heavier equipment, let's say, than the fire brigade.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: The Canadian Armed Forces is dealing with a recruitment and retention crisis. We don't have the personnel required, sometimes, to do what is required of us. There have been a lot of discussions around the role of our military and changing that relationship.

In terms of the impact the THW has had culturally, can you comment on the conversation? What does it mean for that cultural context and sense of duty to the national perspective, within Germany?

• (1605)

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: I don't know whether I get the question. Can you please try to specify it?

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Sometimes our military is called “the service”. It is service. It's a national duty. There's a sense of honour. We're facing a recruitment and retention crisis here in Canada, and we aren't able to fulfill that. Yet, servicemen and servicewomen still want to fulfill that role and have that sense of duty and honour in service to their country.

I was wondering whether you could comment on how the THW has fulfilled or increased—in your opinion—that sense of duty to the nation.

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: If I have it right, the THW has increased the level of service.

If you join the THW, you are a part of the federal government, and society recognizes you as part of the government. I don't mean as a member of Parliament or whatever, but you have a special status for the government. This shows others that the only chance to manage these disasters and support people in need is when the government—either the local or federal government—and citizens work together.

This is the big difference with a lot of other countries. Our civil defence system and protection system are volunteer-based systems. It means the government works together with the citizens. The citizens aren't blaming the government if something goes wrong, because it's an “all-burden” problem. We work together on disasters. This increases resilience for the country.

I hope I got it right, but I'm not sure.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: That's perfect.

Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Just before I suspend so that we can go on to the motion that is on the table, I want to follow up on Ms. Mathysen's question.

We do have a recruitment problem here for our military. Does the THW feed military recruitment in any way, shape or form? In other words, when they volunteer for your organization, does that sometimes lead to people who want to volunteer for the military?

Mr. Klaus Buchmüller: We do have some volunteers who are working permanently as paid staff for the military. There are maybe about a thousand of them.

The volunteers from our side are supporting the military. We do jobs that the military has to do in other countries. We free up space for the military to fulfill their original tasks. We keep them more or less free from supporting disasters within Germany, aside from very big disasters. Then they come with some units.

I think the co-existence of the THW and the German military makes it that the German military can fulfill their tasks.

The Chair: Thank you for that, sir. I thank you for your willingness to make yourself available at what is your very late hour. You are free to leave. Your thoughtful evidence will be duly incorporated into our evidence and reflections.

We're back to Ms. Normandin on debate.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Actually, my intention is certainly not to draw out debate. I think the motion that was put forward is explicit enough without my having to add any explanation. So I submit it for debate.

• (1610)

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I support this motion. I think it is an important motion to put forward. I am concerned however, that during Veterans' Week, leading up to Remembrance Day, we have a veteran who is waiting to speak in the second hour on this study.

I want to honour that.

In fact, he will be the only member who had served directly on a domestic deployment to speak on this study. I want to be able to get to that very quickly. If we can call the vote now, then we'll be done with it.

The Chair: Mr. Bezan.

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

I'd like to move the following amendment to the motion.

In English where it says, "concerning the public procurement of the CP-140 Aurora replacement", that needs to be clearer.

Where it goes into the formal call for tenders, I believe there's a mistranslation. Following a conversation with Christine, I believe it should read, "requests for proposals" rather than "call for tenders".

Then after "contract" delete "to this effect" and add "and that the competition be done on an accelerated timeline for competition and delivery of the new Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft".

The Chair: Is there any debate on the amendment?

Mr. James Bezan: I'll speak to the amendment.

At Tuesday's meeting, we heard from the government, and then we heard from Mr. Martel with Bombardier, who at one point even said that the government lied and that there was definitely a breach of the timeline and the request for information, and there wasn't communication back to industry.

We're concerned from our side that, one, the government has not been transparent on this; two, the government hasn't talked to all potential bidders for this potential contract; and three, and the reason I am bringing forward this amendment, there is a need to replace the Auroras more quickly, based upon the needs of the Royal Canadian Air Force, and for that reason there is a call for an accelerated timeline.

In my questions to Mr. Martel on Tuesday, I asked about the current expedited timeline to replace the Auroras, and he replied, "Actually, there's plenty of time in front of us. We're in 2023. There's apparently a process that could take place with a selection in 2027. Hopefully, we can expedite that and do even better." I don't see this as an impediment to Bombardier putting together a bid if a proper RFP is issued. I don't believe that undermines Boeing, which already, as we know, has contracts in place with Germany and other nations to continue to build the P-8 until Canada makes a selection. I don't think we're sliding that timeline at all to the left for them.

Ultimately, we want to get to a proper competition, to follow the rules the government has in place and to ensure that we get the right plane selected for our Canadian Armed Forces.

The Chair: Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mostly I'd like a point of clarification from James.

Who did you attribute those comments to, about the process needing to be sped up? On the one hand, you're saying you want to make sure the government sticks to the process, but on the other hand, you want to change the process. Who said you needed to speed up the timeline from the regular process? I just don't remember hearing that.

• (1615)

Mr. James Bezan: On Tuesday, we had questions being asked of Mr. Crosby and Mr. Page. In my questions, first, I asked Mr. Page what was in the RFI and about the timelines that were published on the PSPC website. He said, "As you mentioned, things can change. Sometimes speed is a factor. For this case here, it was not so much about speed, but the context that changed for DND. It conveyed to us a new window".

I went on and asked, "What was the impetus or the catalyst to change the window, Mr. Crosby?"

Mr. Crosby responded, "The timelines that we're working toward or that we're anchored around are based on the life of the CP-140 Aurora as it is right now. The reality is that there isn't a specific date on a calendar in the future when the CP-140 will suddenly no longer be able to fly or operate. What we see is a degradation in capability over time and an increase in the threat environment over time."

What they were alluding to, and now one of the arguments we hear as the reason for a potential sole-source contract with Boeing and for buying the P-8, was the concern about the current life expectancy of the CP-140 Aurora fleet.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I just wonder whether we, at this table, are qualified to be able to say that the process could be sped up. I'm not certain that I got enough out of what you said there, James, to be certain that a change in the time frame wouldn't hinder the process.

I'm fine for now, but that's just my concern at the moment.

Mr. James Bezan: We don't have the expertise. However, we did hear from witnesses. I think we should take the politics out of this, and that's what we're seeing right now with the potential sole-source contract; there is political interference coming from the Liberal government.

My suggestion is that we let industry, in collaboration with the Royal Canadian Air Force, PSPC and DND, figure out what that timeline is, what the life expectancy of the Auroras is, and base that bid.... I'm just saying to speed it up because, by the sound of it, the Auroras are running out of time.

This is doing what's right for the taxpayer, what's right for the Royal Canadian Air Force and what's right for the defence industry.

The Chair: I have Ms. Lalonde and then Ms. Lambropoulos.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm new to this committee, and I've been through some part of the witnesses on procurement. I think there have been over nine sessions where we heard from actual procurements. What's most interesting for me is that when we say we are not playing politics, actually this is what we're proposing to do.

We're actually interrupting a study, and we felt very strongly about having veteran witnesses here today, to debate a motion that, with all due respect, is extremely important, but we're doing political interference in the procurement process.

When you talk about transparency, I agree. We're here to study the procurement, to make recommendations to the government, and from that perspective, I hope that I would have support to bring a subamendment to the motion, if I may, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There's no reason why you can't bring a subamendment.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

I would like to bring a subamendment to the motion. The last paragraph would read, "that the Chairman of the committee immediately report this resolution of the committee to the House and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to this report."

The reason I'm proposing this is it would be—

Mr. James Bezan: I have a point of order.

I would just say that the subamendment isn't an amendment to the amendment, so I'd say it's out of order.

• (1620)

The Chair: I'm not sure it is out of order, but it is correct for you to observe that it is not an amendment to the amendment.

I'm going to allow it to stand, because when members are voting on the entire.... At this point, it's three votes. I will call the votes in the order of the subamendment, your amendment and the main motion, if it is amended.

Mr. James Bezan: I have a point of order.

Mr. Chair, if you go to chapter 20, page 1067, in the rule book, under "Amendments", it reads:

As with a main motion, a motion to amend can itself be amended. A subamendment is a proposed amendment to an amendment. In most cases, there is no limit on the number of amendments that may be moved; however, only one amendment and one subamendment may be considered by a committee at one time.

The motion that was before us that you said was in order is not an amendment to the amendment that's on the table, so I'd say it's out of order.

I'd invite you, Mr. Chair, to deal with the amendment that's before us, which I moved, and then we can come back and deal with the amendment to the motion.

The Chair: It says, "only one amendment and one subamendment may be considered...."

We have one amendment—

Mr. James Bezan: But the subamendment has to be an amendment to the amendment.

I'm a stickler for process.

The Chair: All right. The ruling has been made. Challenge the chair. I ruled that her subamendment was in order.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: But it's not a subamendment to the amendment—

The Chair: Not a subamendment, sorry—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I rise on a point of order.

We already have an amendment on the floor, and the sub that was proposed by the parliamentary secretary, the extension of the minister's office, is not an amendment to the amendment, so it's out of order.

The Chair: He has an amendment to the main motion. She is proposing a subamendment.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, as a good steward of this committee, because I do believe in close collaboration, I will remove my subamendment. We'll continue the debate on the amendment, and I will bring my amendment after.

Mr. Chair, I don't want to undermine you. Thank you very much for your service to this committee.

The Chair: Are you good with that?

Mr. James Bezan: Yes.

The Chair: I'm talking to the clerk.

Mr. James Bezan: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You, I don't care about; what I care about is the clerk.

Mr. James Bezan: On that, Mr. Chair, your role as chair is to protect the freedom of speech of each and every one of us as members.

I would ask that you apologize for saying that you don't care about me.

The Chair: I offer an insincere apology for that.

Okay. We can continue on the debate. Ms. Lalonde had the floor.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

My perspective has been that we are interfering with the experts. As we heard through Mr. Page, a large procurement needs a certain expertise from certain individuals who will carry it forward. The procurement process is unique in Canada.

I'll wait to bring my amendment, Mr. Chair. I'm still reflecting on the motion and also on the proposed amendment by my colleague, Mr. Bezan.

The Chair: Ms. Lambropoulos would be next, except that apparently your headset is not acceptable, so I'm sorry not to be able to hear what you have to say.

Mr. Fillmore was next.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Would it work if I said it in both languages and asked the interpreters not to interpret—

The Chair: No. Unfortunately we're pretty hamstrung on this. I'm sorry about that.

Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

It's a fascinating discussion. My analysis concludes that an accelerated timeline introduces bias into the process. We've heard from a number of witnesses throughout this study on the importance of depoliticizing processes, and I worry that this is actually that—politicizing a process.

I'm going to propose a subamendment to Mr. Bezan's amendment that eliminates the final line that he added, which is, “and that the competition be done on an accelerated timeline for competition and delivery of the new Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft;” so it eliminates the part about the accelerated timeline.

We can work on the wording of that.

• (1625)

Mr. James Bezan: I would just say this, Mr. Chair. If he wants to eliminate the addition of that amendment, just vote against it. You can't necessarily change the intent or the substance of a motion or an amendment to a motion.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: If I may, Mr. Chair, there's much value in the other parts of the proposed amendment, calling for an open and transparent process, a competitive process. I'm all for that. That is in fact a depoliticizing process. Of course, the addition of an accelerated timeline introduces bias.

I would like to support the first half but not the second half. Therefore, the subamendment is proposed.

The Chair: Only one amendment and one subamendment may be considered at one time.

It is in order.

We have Ms. Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

The first part of my intervention will probably resolve the issue.

In the case of the first two proposed amendments, I would consider them friendly amendments, since they deal more with the form than the substance. The first suggestion is that the replacement of the CP-140 Aurora be discussed. Yes, there was a typo there. It would also be a matter of changing the English version so that the term “*appel d'offres*” is instead translated as “request for proposals”. If these amendments can be considered friendly amendments and can resolve the issue for this part of the motion, so much the better.

As for the proposed amendment to the second part of the motion, I would like to ask Mr. Bezan a question for clarification.

As I understand it, he is proposing that this be done in accordance with the accelerated schedule for open competition and the delivery of the new Canadian multi-mission aircraft. We know that, in the original request for information, which was completed by Bombardier and 22 other companies, the deadline was for a first delivery in 2040. What is currently on the government website is a first delivery in 2023. If what is currently on the government website is considered to be an accelerated timeline, then I have no problem with this amendment, since it refers to what is already public and is already a prerequisite in the procurement process for the replacement of the CP-140 Aurora.

So, if I'm told that this is indeed the intent behind the amendment, I have no problem with it, but I would like that clarification first.

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan: Let me clarify, if I may, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Before you do, just so we all know what we're talking about here, Ms. Normandin is accepting the minor amendments that Mr. Bezan put forward, but is asking for clarification on “and that the competition be done on an accelerated timeline for competition and delivery of the new Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft”.

Mr. James Bezan: Ms. Normandin is asking for clarification on the accelerated timeline. My concern on this is that things have changed within the RCAF based upon statements made by Mr. Crosby and Mr. Page on Tuesday.

Then, on top of that, when I reiterated the concern to Mr. Martel, I asked, “Would Bombardier be able to meet that expedited timeline to replace the Auroras?”

To quote him completely, he said, “I have to admit that the timeline remains a bit unclear.” That's because there's a lack of transparency. He said:

We heard things two weeks ago at a different committee, and again today. Based on the timeline that is still posted on the PSPC website, we can meet those timelines. That requires the first airplane to be delivered in 2032 and the remaining by 2035. We could do that.

Actually, there's plenty of time in front of us. We're in 2023. There's apparently a process that could take place with a selection in 2027. Hopefully, we can expedite that and do even better.

Bombardier is saying they can meet it. We know that one of the arguments behind doing the sole source of Boeing's P-8 is that they can deliver on an expedited timeline as well.

If both manufacturers, who are the only ones, most likely, who are going to bid through an open competition, say they can do it on an expedited timeline, then accelerating the competition, selection and delivery should not be an issue.

I'm not putting any dates on that, but based upon the fact that the dates that are currently on the PSPC website are stipulated and aren't being followed anyway, based upon testimony from Mr. Page and Mr. Crosby and, along with the testimony we heard, then we might as well just say, okay, let's have some transparency here. Let them figure out what the timeline is, as long as it's faster than what's currently posted.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you for the clarification.

So my understanding is that the amendment doesn't refer to the schedule, which is now public. In that case, I will vote against this amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. It's all one or the other.

First of all, is there any further debate on either Mr. Fillmore's subamendment or Mr. Bezan's amendment or on the main motion? Is there any further debate?

Go ahead, Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wonder if Ms. Normandin would help us understand. If my subamendment were to pass, would she then support the amendment?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: As I understand it, I considered your subamendment a friendly amendment, it was accepted from the outset, and all that remained was to debate the last part of Mr. Bezan's amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any other debate? We're already getting into the time of the witnesses.

I'm trying to get clarity. The order of precedence would be Mr. Fillmore first, up or down, then it would be Mr. Bezan's amendment, up or down, and then....

Can you, just for the sake of clarity, repeat your amendment so that we all know what we're voting on?

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thank you, Chair.

With the subamendment in place, the amendment would read as follows:

That, considering the joint statement of the respective Premiers of Quebec and Ontario dated November 7, 2023 concerning the public procurement of the CP-140 Aurora replacement by the federal government, the Committee is of the opinion that the government must proceed by way of an open competition—

Mr. James Bezan: What I read into the record was “request for proposals”.

The Chair: That's fine. I missed that.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: I would accept what Mr. Bezan is saying on that point.

Before “before awarding any procurement”—

Mr. James Bezan: Add “request for proposals”.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: I beg your pardon. I don't have it in front of me, so I'm trying to remember what it is. It's “before awarding any procurement contract” for this “new Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft”.

Mr. James Bezan: You're just taking out “competition and delivery”.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Are we all on the same page?

Go ahead, Madame Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, for clarity, could you or the clerk read it please?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Hilary Smyth): First, I'm going to clarify.

We're looking to remove “and that the competition be done on an accelerated timeline”. It's that whole highlighted section.

• (1635)

Mr. Andy Fillmore: We want to keep the “Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft” part.

It would read “before awarding any procurement contract for the delivery of the new Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft”.

The Clerk: Okay. I will read this into the record. “That considering the joint statement of the respective Premiers of Quebec and Ontario dated November 7, 2023 concerning the public procurement of the CP-140 Aurora replacement by the federal government, the Committee is of the opinion that the government must proceed by way of a formal request for proposals before awarding any procurement contract—

Mr. James Bezan: It's “contract of the new”—

The Clerk: It's “contract of the new Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft”.

Mr. James Bezan: He is striking from “and” to “competition and delivery”.

(Subamendment agreed to)

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Bezan's amendment, which would amend the motion as it's just been amended, except I'm not sure how I could read that.

The Clerk: If you would like to suspend for a moment, I can send it.

The Chair: Distribution would probably be helpful.

An hon. member: You have to ask for a suspension.

The Chair: I'll just do one anyway.

An hon. member: That's a violation of privilege.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, I would like to suspend.

The Chair: All those in favour?

The Clerk: I can send it. We don't need to suspend.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): You have to have the consent of the committee to suspend. I merely ask for the courtesy of being asked before there is a suspension.

The Chair: You were asked, and you turned it down.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'm okay with suspending. If it takes a minute to—

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Mr. Chair, I'm hoping we can actually hear from the witnesses in the second hour. At what time do we have a hard stop?

The Chair: The hard stop is at six.

While we're waiting, I need someone to move a budget to cover the costs of the—

A voice: We can't do that. We're in debate.

Mr. Pat Kelly: On a point of order, you can't introduce another motion in the middle of a motion.

Mr. James Bezan: If you want, I could read the motion as amended by Mr. Fillmore. I have it in front of me.

We sent the new version to the clerk.

The motion as amended would read, “That, considering the joint statement of the respective Premiers of Quebec and Ontario dated November 7, 2023 concerning the public procurement of the CP-140 Aurora replacement by the federal government, the Committee is of the opinion that the government must proceed by way of a formal request for proposals before awarding any procurement contract of the new Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft”.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I just want to make sure that we keep the sentence that constitutes the second part of the motion: “That the Chairman of the Committee immediately report this resolution of the Committee to the House”.

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan: Yes, and that the chair of the committee immediately report this is there.

The Chair: Ms. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to make sure once we pass this part, I get to bring forward an amendment to the motion before we do the final vote.

The Chair: Do we have enough consensus on the way James has read it into the record?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Ms. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to bring forward an amendment to the new and improved motion. It's an addition to the last part of our motion, “That the Chairman of the Committee immediately report this resolution of the Committee to the House.” That's where I would add, “and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee request the government table a comprehensive response to this report.”

The Chair: Christine.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I understand it, adopting Ms. Lalonde's amendment would mean that no one could move a concurrence motion for 120 days. But we never know what might happen between now and then. A contract could be awarded to Boeing, for example. That would put an end to the debate on the motion, and it would no longer be possible to debate it in the House.

In that context, I have to vote against the amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any other conversation on the amendment moved by Ms. Lalonde?

(Amendment agreed to)

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

The Chair: With that, we do need to suspend.

• (1640)

(Pause)

• (1645)

The Chair: Let's come to order.

Thank you again for your patience.

Colleagues, I'm intending to go to 5:37 p.m. or 5:40 p.m. and then call it at that point. I'm hoping to get in two rounds. I would ask everyone to be economical with both the opening statements and questions.

Mr. Banks, sir, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Christopher Banks (Sergeant (Retired), As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is Christopher Banks. I retired as a sergeant and quartermaster after 20 years in the army reserve.

During my career, I deployed to Bosnia in 2003 as a peacekeeper. I deployed to Afghanistan in 2008 as a machine gunner in the battle group. I deployed in Operation Cadence in 2010, the Canadian Forces contribution to the RCMP-led security task force for the G8 conference in Toronto. I deployed again in 2010 on Operation Nanook, an Arctic sovereignty patrol based out of Resolute Bay in Nunavut. My last deployment was in 2017 on Operation Lentus. We were based out of Rigaud, Quebec, in response to the flooding. I suffered an OSI from combat and retired “3B” in 2019. I then began working as an advocate for veterans and for serving military.

One thing that gives me pride about my service, when I reflect back, is how uniquely capable we are as an institution. I have quite literally seen engineers move mountains. I have seen the impact we've had on Canadians when we've engaged positively with them. The three domestic operations I served on were progressively more fulfilling. In Resolute Bay, I met with a shopkeeper who told us how excited he and the whole town were to have us. They were especially thankful for our contributions to their economy. In Hudson, Quebec, the town was so thankful for our assistance that they threw us a barbeque in their fire hall.

Within the military community, the discussion of whether to enhance the military's domestic operations capabilities is split. As a diverse institution, there is debate on nearly every issue. However, the debate here focuses on primarily two criticisms—that the CAF “should not” and that the CAF “cannot”.

The first criticism is primarily ideological. What should or should not a military engage in? We can all agree that there are some absolutes. The military must be a combat-ready force capable of defending the nation. The military should not be the police. However, within this range is a large scope of capabilities—humanitarian assistance, aid to civil power, disaster relief, search and rescue, avalanche mitigation, firefighting and winter rescue. These are all tasks that the CAF has completed. We are capable of more—always have, always will—and that is the strength of Canada's military.

The second criticism is that the CAF “cannot”. In this regard, the criticism is correct. The decades of continual budget erosion have left the CAF on weakened ground. The error by the government has always been that the CAF continues to accomplish its tasks, and therefore it can operate at a reduced budget, when in fact the soldiers have been taking the brunt of the cuts. Because soldiers are so uniquely capable, they persevere. That leads to burnout, the root cause of CAF's retention problem.

Do you understand how demoralizing it is to join the military and to be continually told throughout your career that exercises are being cancelled because of the budget, courses are being cancelled because of a lack of ammunition, and the barracks are condemned, so you'll be spending the winter in tents? Our equipment is old, obsolete, broken or lacking. Armouries are leaking, flaking red paint and asbestos, and are without parking, classrooms or insulation. There are wait-lists for base housing longer than some members' postings. Bases lack the appropriate number of barracks.

Our aging infrastructure is being held together by the sheer will of our collective angst. Our equipment and personnel are beyond stretched. There's no time for maintenance or home life. Everyone wears more than one hat. Benefits were once again on the government's chopping block this year, and that was before the most recent budget cuts. The treatment of members is so often an afterthought that it is driving away recruits.

No, the CAF cannot manage an increase in domestic operations commitments, not yet. The CAF cannot manage much more than its expeditionary commitments when its personnel and infrastructure are near breaking points. It could and it should, but the trend of budget erosion would need to be reversed. Asking the CAF to in-

crease its capabilities without an appropriate and permanent increase is asking for more to be cut from the bottom.

Right now the CAF needs investments in housing, equipment, ammunition, personnel and more—investments that are beneficial to our economy and that are investments into those who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces and their families.

Thank you.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Banks.

Mr. Ellis, you have five minutes, please.

Hon. Mike Ellis (Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, Government of Alberta): Thank you, Chair.

My name is Mike Ellis. I'm the Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services for the Province of Alberta. In another life, I was a sergeant in the Calgary Police Service.

First, I want to acknowledge that I'm speaking to you from Alberta, the traditional territory of the signatories of Treaties 6, 7, and 8. I also want to acknowledge the Métis people of Alberta who have, of course, a deep connection to this land.

I want to start by expressing my personal thanks and appreciation on behalf of the premier and the Government of Alberta to the over 650 Canadian Armed Forces personnel and Government of Canada staff who provided invaluable assistance to Alberta during this year's hazard season. The assistance they provided made a tremendous contribution to the safety of Albertans, and the success of our disaster season.

The 2023 hazard season in Alberta was a complex series of disaster events that saw 50 communities impacted by wildfires, resulting in approximately 38,000 Albertans being evacuated, and over 2.1 million hectares burned. It was the first time in Alberta's history that a state of emergency was called.

Overall, our response to the unprecedented 2023 wildfire season was successful, but Alberta's government recognizes the continuous improvements that are important in emergency management. Due to the scope, scale and overall complexity of the 2023 season, we are also undertaking a wider review of Alberta's emergency management system that will include local authorities, and will look at opportunities for longer-term improvement. We are committed to working with all our stakeholders to make sure that their input is captured during the review process.

In June, in addition to the wildfires, there was also a flood in west-central Alberta that impacted five communities. On July 1, there was an EF4 level tornado that touched down in Alberta, and impacted the towns of Didsbury and Carstairs in Mountain View County. Finally, in August, Alberta hosted approximately 21,000 evacuees from Northwest Territories who were displaced due to wildfires in their communities. Nearly half of Northwest Territories was evacuated, and residents found refuge in Alberta.

The Canadian Armed Forces members assisted in evacuating hundreds of first nations, Métis and other residents from the Fort Chipewyan area of northeast Alberta who were at risk from encroaching wildfires, and this is, of course, a region of Alberta that is extremely isolated.

From May 10 to June 13, several hundred Canadian Armed Forces troops assisted on the ground in fighting the wildfires in various locations in Alberta, including Grande Prairie, Drayton Valley, Fox Creek, Whitecourt, McLennan, Slave Lake and Edson. Members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police worked in close partnership with the Alberta sheriffs to secure and protect communities that were at risk from the wildfires or that had been evacuated.

As the minister responsible for emergency management in Alberta, it is gratifying to see the practical and effective support that is provided by the Government of Canada when disaster strikes. Alberta is not a regular consumer of these services, as the last time that Canadian Armed Forces members were needed for assistance was back in 2016. Of course, we thank the federal government for its support, and I look forward to our continued practical and meaningful co-operation in managing disasters in Alberta.

On behalf of the people of Alberta, thank you.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ellis.

For the final five minutes, we'll go to Dr. Flannigan.

Dr. Mike Flannigan (BC Innovation Research Chair, Predictive Services, Emergency Management and Fire Science, Thompson Rivers University, As an Individual): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me.

My name is Mike Flannigan, and I am the British Columbia innovation research chair in predictive services, emergency management and fire science at Thompson Rivers University.

I am honoured to be joining you today.

As long as I can remember, I have been fascinated with weather and wildfires. I have had the good fortune to observe and study wildfires in my career since the late 1970s.

Most of my comments today address wildfires, but many of the concepts also apply to other hazards.

Every year, there are things about wildfire that surprise me. The 2023 exceptional fire season surprised me. It was not just the record-smashing area-burned numbers of around 18 million hectares—three times the size of Nova Scotia—which was more than double the previous modern-day record of seven million hectares in 1989. More importantly, it was about the impact of these wildfires, with lives lost directly and indirectly through wild-

fire smoke, homes lost and the stress and emotional toll on Canadians.

Wildfires raged from coast to coast to coast in Canada in 2023. Almost 300 communities were evacuated, with about 240,000 evacuees, and some evacuees were out of their homes and communities for weeks or more.

Even if wildfires are not on your doorstep, the smoke can travel long distances and have a major impact on quality of life, as we saw in Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto and the eastern seaboard of the United States, impacting over 100 million people. Insurable losses due to wildfires in 2023 are estimated at around \$1 billion, which is in the top 10 in terms of Canadian disasters. Fort McMurray was number one. Expenditures on fire management activities are likely to exceed \$2 billion in 2023.

The Canadian Armed Forces were called on many times to assist with wildfire disasters. The Canadian Armed Forces helped with evacuations as well as with firefighting efforts. Additionally, Canadian fire management agencies used resources from 11 other countries to assist with battling the flames.

In 2023, we did not have enough resources when there were widespread extreme fire conditions. These are the times when disasters strike.

We need to explore new approaches. In the future, the potential for more disasters will increase due to climate change bringing even more extreme fire weather and because of increased development in and near the flammable forest. We need to protect Canadians, our communities and our critical infrastructure.

How can we prevent or mitigate catastrophic wildfires? There are several options:

First, provide more funding to provinces and territories to address fire management activities. This could take the form of buying aircraft to help renew and augment an aging fleet and funding the development of resilient communities, programs like FireSmart and infrastructure, etc. The federal government has provided funding for training for wildland firefighting.

Second, create a federal emergency management agency, such as FEMA in the United States, or enhance and expand existing capacity to address emergencies before, during and after wildfire emergencies.

One approach would be to develop a quick-deploy wildfire fighting force that would work hand in glove with the existing fire management agencies. This could include a national firefighting air fleet as well as ground firefighting crews.

Instead of just copying what other countries are already doing in emergency management, we could be leaders by acting before the disaster strikes. Specifically, take preventative action. This could be done with an enhanced early warning system. This enhanced early warning system could predict when and where extreme fire weather will occur as well as where other wildfires are likely to start in the next three to seven days.

• (1700)

This would allow the movement of resources to those locations prior to any disaster and the ability to extinguish unwanted fires while they are still small. Small wildfires are easy to extinguish even if the wildfire conditions are extreme, but you have to attack them while they are small. This might only be for a short period of time.

The Chair: Dr. Flannigan, you're a bit over your time.

I wonder whether you can work in the balance of your comments in response to questions. We're in a time crunch here.

Dr. Mike Flannigan: Sure.

The Chair: Mr. Kelly, we're going to do the first round in five minutes instead of six.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you.

Minister Ellis, I'll begin with you. Thank you for joining us today.

It was, of course, an extraordinary summer for your responsibility for public safety.

Would you like to make any other comments about the different jurisdictions and responsibilities of local governments or the provincial government?

Do you think the federal government ought to explore a separate civilian emergency response system rather than simply relying on the CAF, given the testimony we heard from Sergeant Banks about the limited resources of the CAF?

Hon. Mike Ellis: I guess maybe I will start off by answering your first part. I don't believe that CAF should be the first call. Let me just say that.

Let me explain the uniqueness of what occurred in Alberta.

This wasn't just one crisis point. Many of you are aware that, in the past, we had the Slave Lake fires and the Fort McMurray fires. I think we had nearly a hundred different crisis points occurring all throughout Alberta, which made this unique. That is why we had to declare that state of emergency.

We relied upon the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, which is a great organization. Obviously, from an emergency management perspective, we have the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. It is not necessarily the primary agency. What I mean by

that is the local jurisdiction—the local municipality—is essentially the one fighting the fire, along with Alberta forestry. They work in collaboration with them. They have incident commanders. As the Alberta Emergency Management Agency works with them, if the incident commanders require extra resources, as an example, they will be tasked with finding them.

Sometimes very quickly within the fire season we had used most of our resources, I would say, throughout Alberta. We then relied on many other provinces.

This is the great country we live in. Through the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre we were able to ask for and get firefighters and incident commanders from other jurisdictions within Canada. As the fires continued to grow and more issues started to arise, this is where we started to bring in international firefighters with specific expertise.

I think it's very important to know that as much as we love our armed forces, they have very basic training when it comes to firefighting. Certainly, it's by no means at the same level as a structural firefighter, as an example.

What we're talking about here is holding the—

• (1705)

Mr. Pat Kelly: That's excellent testimony, Minister. I thank you for it.

Sergeant Banks, I will ask you to comment on the morale in the CAF. That was some powerful testimony about the condition and the effect on morale in the forces. There's a recruitment and a retention crisis.

Is it fair to say that when most members join, they want to train for the work they do and they want to deploy?

Talk again about the limitations, the budget constraints and neglect for things like basic maintenance.

Mr. Christopher Banks: Speaking in the context of domestic ops, for a lot of people, especially when we're speaking about reservists and Canadian Rangers, a domestic deployment might be the only deployment in their career, which may last decades.

There is an appetite for more people to be engaged in domestic ops because it is a way for us to serve and it is an opportunity for us to serve our own communities. This is particularly important for reservists because we still live in our own communities. We don't move far away to a base. That's not to say that appetite doesn't exist on the regular forces side as well.

We want to do more. A lot of us want to be able to do more and accomplish more, but we are also working within the limitations of our equipment and, as you say, our morale is being depleted year after year after more and more budget cuts.

I would love to see a domestic response come out of the military that is superior to what it is now, but we have to do more to invest in what's broken before we start building up capacities as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fillmore, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thanks very much for the time and the wisdom that the witnesses are sharing with us today.

Sergeant Banks, I just want to say thank you for your service and thank you for your frank comments in your opening statement. I think you will find them well heard by the committee, and I appreciate very much your making those observations.

To set some context here, in the last little while in Nova Scotia we had hurricane Dorian in 2019, a category 5 hurricane. Then, in September 2022, there was Fiona, the strongest recorded storm in Canadian history. In February 2023 there was a polar vortex. In June, there were wildfires, and in July, we had three months' worth of rain in 24 hours with flooding and loss of life. Just in the last year, we've had a hurricane, a deep freeze, flooding and wildfires, and in three of those four cases—the hurricane, the flooding and the fires—the CAF has been deployed.

We're in a new state here. We're in a new world order when it comes to responding to climate emergencies, and there are two things I would like to try to cover in this question.

Given the varying types of extreme weather events and disasters happening around the country, the four kinds that I just mentioned.... There are others. There will be air quality disasters. How can government respond? It's like whack-a-mole; they're popping up. There are different kinds. They're geographically separate, and we're trying to respond in an effective way that saves lives. Do any of the panellists have any advice?

Then, I'd like to come back to Sergeant Banks, if I could, at the end of this.

• (1710)

The Chair: Let's start with Deputy Premier Ellis.

Hon. Mike Ellis: We have the local authorities, which ultimately become the incident commanders. I believe that, at least in my conversations with Minister Blair and Minister Sajjan.... We've created here in Alberta the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, which has been recognized as a role model and a bit of an example. They are able to augment support at that local crisis point to make sure that they get the resources that are required to deal with the emergency.

None of these things are easy; they are extremely complex, but the Alberta Emergency Management Agency has the ability to go and get what is needed in order to protect any community.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Dr. Flannigan, just briefly, on the question of what we need to be doing to better respond to the variety and ge-

ographic dispersal of these emergencies, is there anything from your work that would be helpful there?

Dr. Mike Flannigan: At times, municipalities, provinces and territories are overwhelmed, and they need assistance. As for the vehicle to do it, that's something for you folks to sort out, but you need an emergency management agency like a FEMA. Whether the Canadian Armed Forces fill that role or someone else, we need to build it, because there are going to be more and more of these, as we have seen, and they are only the tip of the iceberg, so to say.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thank you.

For the remainder of the time, Sergeant Banks, I recognize that you served on Operation Lentus in 2017. I'm not sure where in the country you were, but I wonder if you might share your first-person experiences in Lentus responding to these kinds of disasters. That would be very instructive for the committee.

Mr. Christopher Banks: I would be happy to. I'm not quite sure exactly what you're asking, but I can give you an overhead to start.

I was a part of the response to the Ottawa River floods in 2017. My contingent, my company, was deployed to Rigaud in Quebec.

From there, I was part of the second wave. The first wave went in to install all the sandbags. I was part of the second wave. We came in to remove all the sandbags. There was still a lot of flooding and a lot of devastation that we were working through, too. We also had to engage in removing some fallen trees and some debris, and the navy was there as well offering water transportation.

Beyond that, I'm not too sure what you're looking for.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: NGOs and volunteer-led organizations can accomplish a certain amount. They can bring comfort, blankets and water, but there are going to be some skill sets missing. You mentioned tree clearing and running chainsaws and other heavy equipment. I guess there are skills that you and your brigade brought that otherwise wouldn't have been present.

Mr. Christopher Banks: Yes, absolutely. In this regard, I'm just going to give it up for the combat engineers. As a trade, they are amazing in their capabilities, and they are incredibly useful when it comes to Lentus-style operations.

There are things that the military can do that no other institution can, and I think first and foremost is force generation. We can create a sizable element of personnel faster than any other institution in this country, public or private, that I am aware of.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we are going to have to leave it there, Mr. Fillmore. I'm sorry.

Thank you.

Ms. Normandin, go ahead for five minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses.

I would first like to ask Mr. Flannigan a question.

The realities of the provinces aren't necessarily always the same. Needs, as well as emergencies, may differ from one place to another.

In light of that, should the best tool that can be put in place to respond to climate emergencies, for example, come under federal responsibility? Shouldn't it instead be the responsibility of each of the provinces, to ensure more tailored responses to the needs that are happening across the country?

• (1715)

[English]

Dr. Mike Flannigan: That aspect of governance belongs to the landowners and the provinces, but, at times, they need help. That's why we talk about working hand in glove. For example, with a fire—which is the area I know about—if SOPFEU needs help, they call the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre and resources are sent.

However, at times, there are not enough resources. That's when you need additional resources. It has to be the call of the province to request that help. You cannot just come in unannounced. You have to work together.

A unified command to deal with the emergency is critical. I would argue that, in Canada, we don't have unified command as we should.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

My next question is for you, Sergeant Banks.

First of all, thank you for your service.

You talked about the role that military members can play, but I'd like to hear what you have to say about the role that veterans can play in supporting everything related to Operation Lentus.

Should we consider more members who have been released from the Canadian Armed Forces, for whatever reason, as players who could have a role to play in the response to climate crises, for example?

[English]

Mr. Christopher Banks: Actually, a lot of veterans are already engaged. There's an organization called Rubicon. These are primarily veterans who have gone into emergency management fields. They volunteer through Rubicon to deploy within Canada, primarily. I think they also deploy, occasionally, internationally.

A number of veterans leave the military with their eyes set on emergency management as a professional career. We already are. I don't think veterans as a group can play a part. We're always around to support those who are serving.

From first-hand experience, I will tell you there are hardships, injuries and a lot of terrible things that still happen on domestic operations. The one thing that's different is this: We're not seeing someone in another country suffering. We're seeing Canadians—potentially people from our own community—suffering. There are hardships, but we'll be there to support them.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

According to the testimony we heard earlier, not all military members necessarily want to participate in Operation Lentus. Some prefer to be deployed on missions abroad, for example.

Should the role of military members be divided within the Canadian Armed Forces? There would be the military members who want to participate in Operation Lentus from the get-go, and the military members who would never work for Operation Lentus, because they would have announced from the outset that they wanted to take part in international missions, not those on Canadian soil.

[English]

Mr. Christopher Banks: It is a very diverse community.

I would say the Canadian Forces is a snapshot of the Canadian demographic. We are very well represented. I think the only area where we're not well represented is women. We have a lot of people who want to go on operations, whether it's domestic, operational or expeditionary. Most people will take what they can get.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Normandin.

Ms. Mathyssen, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Sergeant Banks, I, too, want to thank you for your service. I really appreciate your coming today, and I appreciate hearing from someone who has seen the action on the ground. Your expertise and those insights are really quite valuable to this study, I think.

In your statement, you mentioned the differences in perspectives around the “should not” and “cannot” arguments around responding to natural disasters, and I want to give you a bit more space to talk about it because we've heard in this committee a bit of a different scenario from the senior military leadership.

Since you've been on the ground directly, I would like to hear you maybe elaborate on why that's different.

• (1720)

Mr. Christopher Banks: Can I just get a little context on what the senior leadership's opinion was first?

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: We heard what Ms. Normandin was talking about in terms of that division on attitudes toward deployment. Why is your attitude so different?

Mr. Christopher Banks: I think a simplistic answer is that it might be generational.

I think there is a lot of rigidity with regard to change in the military. I don't want to be speaking ill of any senior leaders in the military, to be clear, but I do believe that there is a sentiment that things have maybe changed too much, that maybe we cannot handle everything that's being asked of us, or maybe, as I said in my opening statement, it is purely ideological that the military has one task, i.e., the defence of the nation. I would wager that is what it is.

I am a believer that public institutions should continually evolve to serve the modern demands of the people they serve. The Canadian population is asking for the military to do more, and I think this is one way that we can do more.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: That climate change crisis that we're facing, the culture change crisis, and the recruitment and retention crisis of the military seem to be very interconnected. Is that what you're trying to get at? It seems to me that that's what you're saying.

Mr. Christopher Banks: It is part of it. It's a bigger issue when we're talking about the recruitment and retention problem. This is part of it.

If you join the military and there is nothing to do, did you really join the military, or are you just putting on a uniform? This is especially true when people join the military and are told that they have to wait for their recruit course because it just doesn't have enough positions. They may wait years.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Those domestic deployments will happen more and more, and you say we should absolutely be sending people.

Mr. Christopher Banks: Yes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: We've heard at this committee, too, that there should be more recognition for that. People who deploy domestically don't receive medals. They don't receive those commendations. They don't receive a lot of the salary increases. Can you talk about that? Is that important?

Mr. Christopher Banks: It is, especially when we're talking about the administration side of what happens during a deployment. On an expeditionary deployment, there are phases to deployment, and there are a lot of checks that happen along the way. That is especially true on the back end when we're talking about health care and mental health checks.

As far as recognition is concerned, as I said earlier, for a lot of members, this may be their only deployment. I'll just highlight what happens in Alberta. They have Operation Lentus going all summer nearly every summer. For a lot of members out west, they may do months; over a career, they maybe accumulate three, four or five months of domestic deployments, which is, by and large, the length of an expeditionary tour.

For most deployment medals, it's 30 days to get a deployment. I, personally, have more than 30 days of domestic operations spread across the three.... There are people with far more experience than I have, and they will never ever see a medal for it and never ever see recognition. Maybe their unit gives them a commendation, but that's maybe; it's not structured.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: That's very different from what we heard from the German representative in the previous session. They

actively provide that to people who are volunteering as part of that service, so that would be a significant difference.

Mr. Christopher Banks: There is a lot to be said about the honours and awards system for Canada, and I think the veteran community is particularly loud about that. It is very notable in the military that medals are few and far between. You get a medal for deployment and if you're an officer you might get OMM or an MSC, but if you are just running and gunning as an infantry soldier or a combat engineer or a sailor, you may not get anything for everything that you do.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have 25 minutes worth of questions in roughly 15 minutes. I'm going to cut it back to three minutes each, one minute for the Bloc and the NDP.

With that, we go to Mr. Bezan for three minutes.

• (1725)

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Sergeant Banks, thanks so much for joining us. I thank you for your service. I'm sorry to hear that you had to leave because of an OSI. I see before me a military hero who is still passionate about the military. It's unfortunate that we lose that type of skills set and somebody who has the ability to keep training and train the new recruits coming up.

You talked about morale and the crisis that we have right now with recruitment and retention within the Canadian Armed Forces. General Eyre said here that as of August 31 the regular force was short 7,862 troops, and the reserve force was short 7,605 troops, for a total of almost 15,500 troops.

On top of that, you talk about sitting around on furlough and not being able to train, exercises getting cancelled, and not having ammunition to go out there and practise. Right now we have 10,489 troops who are under-trained and undeployable, so your testimony here today builds upon these hard statistics.

We know that the reserves and the Rangers have gone out and done a lot of the respite. Right now the immediate response units within CAF to go out and help with disaster assistance are mainly on the four big army bases: Edmonton, Shilo, Petawawa and Gagetown. As a reservist, how much did you incorporate with the IRUs as they were organizing Operation Lentus in the various regions? What type of extra training should we be offering under Operation Lentus? Is it wildfire training? I know you're swinging sandbags. I'm from Manitoba; I've swung a lot of sandbags over my life and whenever I go there as a civilian, I always go and stand with the Canadian Armed Forces because they know how to work and know how to get things moving.

When I was younger, I could keep up. I'm not sure I could now, but I'll just say that I thank you for your service again on all your deployments including on Op Lentus.

Mr. Christopher Banks: To speak to the training question, for Operation Lentus-type operations we're not going to be able to get into a pre-deployment phase prior to deployments. Op Lentus deployments are always let's go, we have a fire, a flood, something, we have to go. That is where the IRUs are best to be first in because they are regular force so they have the ability to say, it's fire season, it's snow season, it's flood season, and they can do that kind of training.

Our reserves won't have that benefit. As far as training is concerned, that training needs to be built into the training cycle preemptively. We need to be training for our Operation Lentus-type deployments as part of our training schedule and that's happening in some places, but it's not happening across the board.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. Collins, three minutes, please.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for their attendance today.

I'm going to go right to Deputy Premier Ellis.

I know as a long-time municipal councillor that we were always seeking support from the provincial government as it relates to ensuring that we had all the resources available to use in the event of an emergency, everything ready for the implementation of our emergency preparedness plan.

What should municipalities and non-profit organizations expect from their provincial partners and the federal government in terms of having the appropriate level of resources to respond in the event of an emergency?

Hon. Mike Ellis: Preparation is key. That's why the Alberta Emergency Management Agency works very closely with all municipalities to make sure they are prepared in the event of an emergency, but again, what made this one unprecedented was the number of crisis points throughout the province.

I will just say this. We've embarked on a study to do lessons learned and make sure we are prepared if unfortunately we have something in the future.

Mr. Chad Collins: This study of course is about the role of the federal government. What role should the federal government play in that process?

Hon. Mike Ellis: Let me just expand a little bit here. In a couple of our communities in northern Alberta, like other areas in northern Canada, we're very much isolated. I'll use Fort Chipewyan as an example. It is only accessible by a barge. It took the military to come in with the Hercules plane to really save people and bring them to safety in other areas of Alberta.

Making sure people are prepared is one thing. We called in the military as a last resort. They were wonderful, and they did what they needed to do. However, all communities need to be prepared

with emergency management in their various provinces to make sure that they are prepared for whatever that emergency is.

I look at the Canadian military as augmenting and supporting the great work that's being done by us.

• (1730)

Mr. Chad Collins: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, if I have time, I'll just ask Mr. Flannigan a very quick question.

Our previous witness from Germany talked about the program that they have. Of course, here in Canada we not only have recruitment issues; we also have issues with volunteers across the country, especially since the pandemic.

How do we incentivize Canadians to participate more so that we're not calling on the Canadian Armed Forces as often as we are today with the increasing number of events that we have across the country?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Dr. Mike Flannigan: Retention and recruitment are critical issues in the Canadian Armed Forces and in fire management. Having a career path, proper training, incentives....

Our situation is different from Germany's. We're 30 times larger with half the population, so what works in Germany won't work here, sorry.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Normandin, you have one minute.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have a question for Minister Ellis.

Mr. Ellis, you mentioned that using the army was really your last resort. Given the expected increase in the number of crises, could better financial support from the federal government help you continue to use the army as little as possible in future crises?

[*English*]

Hon. Mike Ellis: The simple answer is yes. One of the things that we could certainly use assistance with from the federal government has to do with mitigation when comes to building more firewalls and flood mitigation.

The simple answer is yes. I think there's about \$1.2 billion for mitigation that is distributed right throughout Canada. It sounds like a lot of money, but when you think about how big Canada is, it's actually not a lot of money.

Certainly, helping us with those sorts of things would, of course, decrease any reliance on the federal military.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen, you have one minute.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Sergeant Banks, I believe you brought forward some recommendations to this committee in a written form. It just hasn't been circulated yet. Is that correct?

Mr. Christopher Banks: I'm not sure if it's been circulated, but I did submit a brief, yes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Okay, perfect. We'll look forward to that.

Dr. Flannigan, I want to ask a quick question in terms of the manufacturing and usage of water bomber aircraft.

Canada has the Canadair water bomber. It's been ordered by many countries. It could certainly help, I think, with what we are dealing with here, and yet that hasn't happened.

Could you talk about the creation of a national fleet of aerial firefighters and the inclusion of that aerial water bomber?

Dr. Mike Flannigan: Yes. Having a national fleet to move to the places where we expect extreme fire conditions to put the fires out when they're small would be a great help. It would have to be at the call of, or working in tandem with, the province or landowner, but it would be very effective.

Europe has already ordered planes from Canadair, and they're booked up until 2029. If we want planes, they're going to have to increase production or we're going to have to wait until the 2030s.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Gallant, you have three minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

Minister Ellis, we've been hearing testimony lending itself to a national task force, perhaps something like the corps of engineers that the U.S. has, but instead of taking from the military, which is already depleted, it would be a civilian force.

Do you see a national entity like that being able to work with the provinces, or should any civilian force to help mitigate disasters be purely civilian and provincially run?

Hon. Mike Ellis: A simple answer to your question is that I think it is certainly worth exploring and seeing if it is at all going to be effective.

Again, Alberta, like the rest of Canada, is quite large. We really rely a lot on our local municipalities to make sure they are prepared. Then again, Alberta Emergency Management augments and supports that.

I can see a role for the federal government to augment and support our provincial emergency management.

• (1735)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Do you find it's easier to deal province to province when you have a crisis like the wildfires?

Unfortunately, all provinces were consumed with firefighting this year.

Is it easier to deal with the other provinces and coordinate that way, or is it just as easy to work with organizers or a command at the national level?

Hon. Mike Ellis: Specifically, regarding firefighters and any procurement of firefighters, those are always dealt with through the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre. It's not as simple as calling up British Columbia and saying, hey, do you have any firefighters?

This is a very good organization. It's very well coordinated. Every time we needed more firefighters, they were able to get some from other provinces or again, as resources started to dwindle throughout Canada, that was when we started looking internationally.

That is a very well-run agency. At least it's been working quite well.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: For other threats that need attending to, would having it modelled after that firefighting organization be something to look at as well?

Hon. Mike Ellis: Yes. Now we're talking about operational deployments as well. Canada is large, as you and everyone in the room knows. We couldn't base everything in Ottawa. We would have to start looking strategically at where to place resources, figure out what the emergency management organizations were within each province, and figure out where something like that would fit in.

I'll just leave a final point about crisis situations. At least in my experience over the last year, I have seen municipalities, the province, the federal government and Canadians in general, especially with the Northwest Territories and the way they faced the crisis and the way everybody was able to help them, and I think what we as Canadians do is just help people.

I appreciate that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

Ms. Lambropoulos, go ahead for three minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Can you please confirm whether the headset I'm wearing is appropriate? This is not the one I usually use. I just want to make sure.

I will thank the witnesses for being here with us to answer some of our questions. I also want to thank you for your services—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Emmanuella, but apparently you are not being approved.

I'm going to turn the three minutes over to one of the other colleagues on the Liberal side.

Ms. Lalonde, go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First, thank you all for coming.

Perhaps I'll leave the floor open. If you were to recommend something to this committee, what would it be? I would like to hear from the three of you, please.

We'll start with Sergeant Banks.

Mr. Christopher Banks: There's one thing I keep coming back to, because I'm also a Canadian; I'm also a citizen; I'm also invested in the future of the military. I do pay attention to policy in the news. One thing that keeps coming up in the conversation is what the best bet for the creation of a national fire service is. I think that's where the committee should probably take the recommendation from the brief I submitted.

Sit down and actually do a cost comparison of what it would cost to fund the military to build it versus to create a new agency. I think there would be a lot of cost savings considering that the military has airfields across the country and storage facilities across the country. We have a pretty awesome firefighting college in Base Borden. The skill sets are already in the military. Those skills sets and a property would have to be built for a new capacity and a new agency.

I think the study should be done, an actual cost comparison.

• (1740)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Deputy Premier.

Hon. Mike Ellis: Thank you.

Quite simply, I think that continued supports for fire and flood mitigation are vitally important. We try to prevent things before they happen. One thing we're preparing for, unfortunately, is that we expect more fires and floods. As a result of that, we have to make sure we're protecting our communities.

I certainly wish to continue to work collaboratively with the federal government to do this.

I just want to make sure, whether it be the federal government or the military, that we're doing exercises together for these events.

We always do simulations here in Alberta. We certainly would appreciate working with the federal government.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you.

Go ahead, Dr. Flannigan.

Dr. Mike Flannigan: There are only going to be more emergencies in the future. We need to explore our options. We have the expertise and knowledge in Canada for a Canadian-made solution.

Emergencies are a multi-faceted problem we're dealing with. We'll need multipronged solutions. There's no quick fix or silver bullet.

We should explore options. Whether that's a task force or a white paper, I leave it to you to figure out the best path forward. We need to explore our options to deal with the new reality.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank all three of you for your contributions and your patience. We appreciate it.

Sergeant Banks, thank you for your service, sir. We appreciate all that you do for our country.

Before I bring down the gavel, can I have a motion to have the costs of the headsets for the Hamas-Israel briefing covered in the amount of \$3,750?

Ms. Christine Normandin: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll see you not next week, but the following week.

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