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Chair: Mr. Heath MacDonald



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• (0815)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting 100 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. I would like to make a few comments for the benefits of the witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. To prevent disruptive audio feedback incidents during our meeting, we kindly ask that all participants keep their earpieces away from their microphones. Audio feedback incidents can seriously injure interpreters and disrupt our proceedings. I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the committee on October 23, 2023, the committee commences its study of the mandate and priorities of the Minister of Public Safety.

Appearing with us today is the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs.

From the Canada Border Services Agency we have Ted Gallivan, executive vice-president. From the Canadian Security Intelligence Service we have David Vigneault, director. From the Correctional Service of Canada we have Anne Kelly, commissioner. From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness we have Tricia Geddes, associate deputy minister. From the Parole Board of Canada we have Jennifer Oades, chairperson. Finally, from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police we have Michael Duheme, commissioner.

Please note that the minister will be with us for the first hour. The remaining officials will answer questions from members for the second hour.

Welcome to all.

I now invite Minister LeBlanc to make an opening statement.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr. Chair, thank you.

Good morning, colleagues. Thank you for inviting me to appear before the committee.

As your chair noted, today I am joined by the deputy heads of the Department of Public Safety, Correctional Service of Canada, Parole Board of Canada, Canada Border Services Agency, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

Some of the women and men who are with me this morning are tasked with defending our borders, keeping our communities safe and protecting our country from threats posed by foreign adversaries. I was looking at the horsepower from the department here with me at the table. I hope something doesn't go wrong in the country for the next couple of hours, because the women and men who are tasked with keeping our country safe are sitting with you this morning.

Mr. Chair, today I will speak to a few priorities that highlight the substantial progress that I believe our government has made, together with parliamentarians, to keep Canada safe.

[Translation]

We increased maximum penalties for firearms trafficking and increased the capacity of law enforcement to investigate these crimes. We introduced into law a national freeze on the sale, purchase and transfer of handguns. We introduced new penalties targeting ghost guns and 3D gun printing, making Canada a leader in cracking down on this worrisome criminal trend. We put forward new measures to address the risks associated with firearms in intimate partner and gender-based violence situations.

[English]

We've reformed bail to make it more onerous for repeat violent offenders to be released. I think it's important to note that this was a moment when parliamentarians came together in collaboration with first ministers across the country and premiers. I had a number of conversations, for example, with Premier Ford of Ontario. I think this was a good example of our federation and our Parliament working well together.

We've expanded the security infrastructure program to provide additional funding to upgrade the safety of community gathering places. We've advanced legislation to provide expanded civilian review of the RCMP and, for the first time ever, ensure civilian review of the CBSA.

We've invested in the RCMP to increase their investigative capacity and to ensure better co-operation with communities that are most at risk of being targeted by harassment and intimidated by foreign actors. I'm hopeful we can continue to make investments in these important public safety institutions as well.

We've put forward, as you know, Mr. Chair, cybersecurity legislation, which this committee has been working on, to strengthen the resiliency and coordination of our Canada's critical infrastructure.

• (0820)

[Translation]

We have consulted Canadians on changes to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act to ensure that Canada's national security agencies are empowered to share threat information with more Canadian partners than just the federal government and that CSIS has up-to-date powers to adequately protect Canadians and Canadian institutions in a digital world. I hope to have the opportunity to work with parliamentarians on this soon, of course.

The federal government recently convened a meeting with industry, law enforcement, and the provinces and territories to strengthen our collaboration in fighting the alarming rise in auto theft.

To complement the efforts of our national security and law enforcement agencies, we also continue to make investments that help counter violent extremism and address harms such as hate and gender-based violence.

[English]

Mr. Chair and colleagues, there is much more to do to ensure the safety of Canadians and their communities. This is a constant effort, and the women and men who join me this morning, as I said in my opening comments, are at the front line of doing this important work, with thousands of other women and men who work with them every day.

I look forward to continuing to work, I hope, in a collaborative way with this committee, and I look forward to your continued advice and engagement as you work with all of these people to keep our borders, our communities and our institutions safe and secure.

With that, Mr. Chair, you can't imagine how excited I am to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We're going to move right into questioning.

Mr. Shipley, you're up first for six minutes, please.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Minister, and hopefully that excitement continues for the next hour.

Thank you, Chair, and to all the witnesses and the minister for being here this morning.

Minister, I'll start off with you, please. Canadians and victims of crime are outraged that you and your government, without consultation with victims' families, have allowed the likes of Paul Bernardo, Luka Magnotta, Michael Rafferty and Russell Williams, some of the worst offenders in Canadian history, to live out their days comfortably in medium-security prisons. Why are you and your

government putting the rights of violent, heinous offenders ahead of the rights of victims?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Obviously, the concerns of victims and the rights of victims are at the centre of every action our government would take in this most difficult space. There are approximately 13,500 people serving time in federal penitentiaries. My colleagues will know very well that the decision around the transfers of individual inmates is made by independent professional public servants on a series of criteria, the most important of which, of course, is community safety. The Correctional Service always works with identified victims in these circumstances, and I have faith that it will make the right decisions, including, obviously, to keep communities safe when these transfers happen.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Minister, with all due respect, your government sets the policies and directives that allow for violent offenders to be downgraded from maximum-security prisons. The Canadian corrections system is your responsibility, and you must take responsibility for this failure and answer to Canadians. Do you have anything to add to that?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: As I said, the transfer of inmates from, for example, maximum-security to medium-security institutions is something that has gone on for a long time. I think it's instructive to note that the highest number of these transfers occurred in 2012-13, when 291 inmates were transferred, and in 2013-14, when 319 of these offenders were transferred. This is not new that the Correctional Service, in its professional judgment, applying criteria, the most important of which of course is community safety, makes these decisions. I think it's a bit disingenuous to pretend that this is something new or to pretend that an elected minister should be the one deciding where individual inmates serve their sentences in the federal system.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you, Minister. I believe the past is the past, and we're here to make new legislation and move forward.

People are concerned nowadays. This is a very serious issue, Minister. A member on your side is laughing over this issue. Canadians are upset.

Minister, we know that the costly carbon tax is negatively impacting the budgets of police services, particularly due to the increased costs of heating and fuelling policing facilities, detachments and vehicle fleets. Millions of taxpayer dollars a year are being spent on the carbon tax instead of stopping crime. Will you send a clear message of support to our hard-working police officers across the country and spike the hike on April 1?

• (0825)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: It may come as a surprise to you, but I support our government's carbon pricing regime. I think it puts more money into the pockets of eight out of 10 Canadians, as we know well. My colleague uses the line “spike the hike”. We'll hear it probably later today in question period a number of times, I would expect, so it's good to start the day with that phrase very early in the morning. However, I think Canadians expect, including people who work for police services.... You somehow made the bridge from budgets of police officers to climate change to carbon pricing. I would assume that the men and women who serve in national security and police organizations across the country are also concerned about climate change. In many cases, these people are on the front lines of some of the most dangerous events caused by climate change, so I have every confidence they understand that the government is pursuing an appropriate course of action.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you, Minister.

I'll give my last bit of time to MP Motz.

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

The OPP commissioner, the deputy chief of Peel Regional Police, the deputy chief of the Toronto police and the chief in Laval have come to this committee and told us that the lack of meaningful penalties for auto thefts and the revolving door of quick releases on bail have made the auto theft crisis even worse. Specifically, Deputy Chief Johnson of Toronto noted that almost 50% of all offenders that they apprehend for auto thefts are repeat offenders.

Minister, will you acknowledge that your government's bail policies are directly contributing to the auto theft crisis in this country, and will your government implement stiffer penalties on repeat violent offenders?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That is an important question. We certainly share the concerns of all the people on this committee and Canadians around the alarming increase in auto theft and the increasingly violent circumstances surrounding this crime.

I have spoken to many of the senior police officials that my colleague mentioned. My colleague, the Minister of Justice, who would be responsible for changes to the Criminal Code or bail legislation, for example, is in a better position than I am to speak to specific legislative measures. I think the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice and I have all acknowledged that the public is understandably concerned about some of these repeat offenders who, in the context of an increasingly violent crime, would be released after multiple convictions in this space. Obviously, we are interested in looking at all appropriate measures and working with the women and men you identified who are on the front line of this important work. I'll continue to be very involved in this issue to look for further investments.

Mr. Chair, when I have to leave later this morning, I think my colleagues from the RCMP and the CBSA will have some good news to share with the committee in terms of our increased efforts, recognizing that we can and must continue to do more at all moments in this important issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

Mr. Schiefke, please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Welcome to you, Minister.

On behalf of all my constituents in Vaudreuil—Soulanges, I want to thank this incredible lineup of people who come to work every day in service of our country to help keep us safe.

Minister, something that I've been preoccupied with, and I think a lot of Canadians share this preoccupation, is the attacks on our democratic institutions, particularly by Russia and China. This week, you introduced legislation updating the Canada Elections Act. I understand that the bill falls under your portfolio and you've done some diligent work on this.

Can you tell us how the changes proposed in the Elections Act will help further safeguard our democracy against threats of foreign interference?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Is Rigaud in your constituency?

Mr. Peter Schiefke: It is indeed.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: You mentioned your constituency, and I know the Canada Border Services Agency has a very important facility there. Next Thursday, I'm hoping to be at a graduation ceremony with the women and men at the Canada Border Services Agency, so hopefully we'll have a chance to spend some time there if you haven't already gone to Florida the Thursday before Easter. I'll be at work in your riding, Mr. Schiefke, so it would be great if you could join me.

You mentioned the Canada Elections Act. Yes, we worked collaboratively with our colleagues, particularly in the New Democratic Party. The Prime Minister and Mr. Singh made a commitment in this regard to make voting more accessible to Canadians through things like campus voting, making mail-in ballots more accessible and adjusting the requirement around officially being a nominated candidate. That was a commitment that Mr. Singh and the Prime Minister made to Canadians. We have lived up to that commitment, we think, with the legislation introduced yesterday.

We also took advantage of the opportunity, while the Elections Act was before Parliament, to work with Elections Canada, for example, to benefit from the advice of colleagues like Mr. Vigneault, who will join us this morning for the second part of this meeting. Perhaps he could talk about some of the risks to democratic institutions posed by the foreign state and non-state actors that you mentioned. You mentioned two countries, but sadly they are not alone in acting in this space in a way that we think is not helpful to our democratic institutions.

The amendments that are before you deal with things like artificial intelligence. It was already illegal in the Canada Elections Act to impersonate a candidate in writing, in regular print media or in a television ad, or to try to disrupt the electoral process, but technology has allowed many, particularly Russian, interventions to potentially threaten, for example, the ability to conduct an election or influence the outcome. However, they're not alone.

All of this was governed by the advice of our security agencies and Elections Canada. The Chief Electoral Officer had made a number of thoughtful suggestions, so we tried to incorporate those into the legislation that was tabled yesterday, and of course we would welcome parliamentarians, at the appropriate moment, to suggest ways to further strengthen this legislation.

It certainly is a priority for us and we'll continue to do everything we can in this space, recognizing that the nature of the threat evolves and, therefore, so too should the legislative instruments in the hands of Elections Canada, as an independent agency, to enforce these rules.

● (0830)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you, Minister, and you're right; we proudly host the CBSA training facility in my community. All of the border security officers as well as the detector dogs are trained in my riding. We're very proud of that, and we look forward to potentially hosting you next week.

[Translation]

Minister, the national summit on combatting auto theft was held about a month and a half ago. What progress has been made since the summit?

As I've mentioned a few times here in committee, a number of my neighbours in Vaudreuil—Soulanges have had their cars stolen, unfortunately. That's why we want to know what progress has been made.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That's a very important question.

We touched on that in response to Mr. Motz's question. Commissioner Duheme can certainly give you some encouraging details about what the RCMP has done in recent weeks and is continuing to do.

I'll ask Mr. Duheme to give you those details.

Commr Michael Duheme (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chair, as you've seen in the news, auto theft is really concentrated in the Montreal and Toronto areas. CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre, records data on automobiles, stolen property and licence plate numbers. It's a system that police across the country use on average 300,000 times a day, I think.

The RCMP has managed to connect the CPIC database to that of Interpol. The Interpol organization is made up of 196 countries. So, now 196 countries have access to the databases, and over 150,000 vehicles are registered in the CPIC portal.

We have seen results. Since we connected the CPIC portal to Interpol in mid-February, over 840 serial number checks have been carried out by our partners abroad. This creates an alert at the Interpol office in Ottawa. From there, foreign investigators request additional information. I think we've received between 50 and 100 requests so far.

The RCMP wants to start analyzing the breakdown or distribution of vehicles internationally.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: This is good news for insurance companies, car dealers, and above all for Canadians.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schiefke.

Go ahead, Ms. Michaud, please.

[Translation]

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

Minister, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here. We're extremely grateful.

Minister, I want to come back to your record, your government's record on gun control. It's true that work has been done through Bill C-21, but there's still a lot left to do. Your government announced a program to buy back prohibited weapons. That was a few years ago. An amnesty was announced in 2021. It was then extended until 2023, and now it's been extended again until October 30, 2025.

If I'm not mistaken, October 30, 2025, will be after the next election. I'm not a pollster, but all the indications right now are that if there were an election, a Conservative government would take power. We all know where the Conservatives stand on gun control. So there would be no control. Doesn't it scare you to push back this buyback program even further, to 2025?

In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer had budgeted this in 2021 at some \$750 million. The supplementary estimates (C) refer to a first phase of \$12.5 million. We're quite far off the mark.

What are you going to do about this, Minister?

● (0835)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I thank Ms. Michaud for her question. It will come as no surprise if I say that I share her concern about the Conservative Party's policies on gun control.

I very much appreciated the work we did in collaboration with Ms. Michaud and her Bloc Québécois colleagues, as well as our NDP colleagues, to strengthen these measures in Bill C-21, and I hope we can continue to work together on regulations. I look forward to doing this work with Ms. Michaud and with other colleagues who share our concerns.

Ms. Michaud is absolutely right. I don't think we can wait for next year as far as the buyback program is concerned. I hope to have details very soon about a first phase in which, for example, we would buy back the prohibited weapons that are in Cabela's stores as well as in other stores that were legally selling these weapons. They need to be recovered and destroyed.

The RCMP has already taken steps to be ready to do that, and I'm quite sure we won't need to extend the amnesty. I understand that there would be a difficulty in doing this again, and I think I'm very close to finalizing the second phase, which will be to buy back from Canadians these weapons that are now illegal, while recognizing the need to do it in an orderly fashion.

I understand and share your concern. I am confident that we will be able to meet these deadlines, and I will be happy to keep the committee and our colleagues informed of the progress we make. I think we're just about ready to get started.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Minister.

You talked about regulations and you hope that we'll continue to work together, and I'm pleased to hear that. However, you don't need the opposition parties to put regulations in place. You've promised some for high-capacity long-gun magazines. I imagine that will happen soon.

Also, you want to reinstate the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee, or your predecessor wanted to do so. Bill C-21 is fine, of course, but it's not great. It refers to future weapons, i.e., weapons that don't yet exist. Yet many weapons on the market are not yet banned by Bill C-21. Your predecessor, Mr. Mendicino, said he was going to re-establish this committee to make recommendations, so that measures could be implemented. When we spoke about this, you had just taken office. Now you've been there for quite some time.

How is the re-establishment of this committee coming along?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I thank the member for her question.

Once again, I share the concerns that Ms. Michaud explained very well.

I've just asked the assistant deputy minister when I'll receive the details on this. I also had this informal discussion with our colleague regarding the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee. We've made commitments and we intend to keep them.

I had a good meeting with the representatives of the PolySeSouvient group at which we talked about issues relating to regulations and the advisory committee. It's a pity that these two questions come one after the other, because, unfortunately, the answer is somewhat the same, namely that it's coming soon; we're close to getting there and I hope to have good news very soon.

I share Ms. Michaud's sense of urgency. We won't wait for my potential successor to restore these important things.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: This is good news, Minister.

To conclude, I want to hear your comments on the Canada Border Services Agency. Your government's latest scandal involves the ArriveCAN application. Some people have proposed simply putting the agency under trusteeship. I'd like to know what you think. Is it the Canada Border Services Agency that is at fault, or is it your government's unfortunate habit of handing everything over to subcontractors?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: The circumstances surrounding the ArriveCAN application are worrying. Again, I share the concern of our colleagues and Canadians about the use of public funds.

As you know, investigations are ongoing. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police is seized of certain matters. I have great confidence in Ms. O'Gorman, the president of the Canada Border Services Agency, who couldn't be here today. She has already implemented corrective measures. She has changed the way this kind of program is managed. She has changed a lot of habits, and rightly so, particularly with regard to the unfortunate habit of turning to subcontractors all the time. I'm convinced that the measures she has put in place will help avoid imprudent situations where public funds are potentially mismanaged.

My colleagues at Public Services and Procurement Canada and Treasury Board will reinforce these measures. We need to look at the big picture on a government-wide, systemic basis. We can't pretend that it's only at the Border Services Agency that we need to improve transparency and the way we audit spending. Once again, we are fully committed to making these changes. That said, we remain ready to make further changes and to follow the recommendations that will be made as a result of the ongoing investigations, including the Auditor General's recommendations in this regard.

● (0840)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

Mr. Julian, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here.

Thank you, Minister, for being with us.

I'll get started quickly.

In response to Ms. Michaud's question, you said you hoped to have good news very soon regarding the gun buyback program and the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee.

What's the timeline? Is it within two weeks, two months, four months? What do you mean by "very soon"?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That's a very good question. I understand and share the sentiments expressed.

Mr. Chair, I have spoken informally with Mr. Julian in many respects about the issues surrounding the gun buyback program. I believe that the objectives of the NDP and Mr. Julian—

Mr. Peter Julian: Forgive me for interrupting you, Minister. I just want to get an idea of what timeline we're talking about.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That's a very good question. There's a long list of ministers and MPs who have made commitments to set a specific timeline. It varies by a week or two. I think these initiatives will be in place very soon. I understand—

Mr. Peter Julian: What do you mean by "very soon"?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That's a very good question—

Mr. Peter Julian: Is it four, five weeks? What's the time frame?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I won't venture to tell you that it's two or three weeks, because, if it's four weeks, you're going to say I missed it by a week.

I understand and share your concern, Mr. Julian, and I can assure you that I'll be happy to give you further details when I have—

Mr. Peter Julian: The next time you testify before the committee, will you be able to tell us about the gun buyback program?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Certainly.

Mr. Peter Julian: All right.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I can also organize my schedule to make sure—

Mr. Peter Julian: We will invite you to the committee in two months.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Absolutely. I'm committed to it, and I'll appear before your committee again with pleasure.

Mr. Peter Julian: Very well.

[English]

You talked about substantial progress in your initial comments, but the Auditor General's report this week has been incredibly critical, particularly about the first nations and Inuit policing program.

talking about the inquiry into James Smith Cree Nation, Cindy Woodhouse of the AFN said that all the evidence showed that "if a First Nations police service had been equitably funded in the James Smith Cree Nation, this tragedy could have been avoided."

The Auditor General's report talks about the fact that there is no clear governance around the funding. It's not clearly tracked, and there are dozens of first nations communities that don't have access to policing.

How many communities have been refused in terms of getting a basic police service in place? What is your ministry going to do to fix what is a tragedy?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I certainly share the concerns expressed by the Auditor General and Mr. Julian.

I had an opportunity to speak with her for probably an hour, in order to understand from her personally the work she has done and the nature of her recommendations. I appreciate that. We've committed, obviously, to correcting some of the challenges she properly identified. I look forward to working with indigenous partners on legislation around designating an essential service and long-term, reliable funding. That's also a challenge. Recognizing her concerns around the proper management of that funding is something we will also do.

One of the challenges—and I'm learning about this long-standing frustration indigenous communities and provincial governments have had—is that we are necessarily in a space where we have to work with provinces and territories. I was surprised...at my first meeting that provincial and territorial ministers, understandably, very jealously guard their jurisdiction in the administration of justice. It makes it complicated, but it shouldn't be a barrier to achieving the results and improvements we want. It does necessarily involve arriving at agreements with different provincial governments and indigenous communities.

I certainly take the concern Mr. Julian expressed. He mentioned the James Smith Cree Nation. Again, that was a tragic circumstance, and we think about the horrible violence inflicted on that community. My colleagues in the second hour from Correctional Service and the Parole Board met with the community a couple of weeks ago and can speak on those specific items. I just didn't want to miss the fact that you raised that tragedy.

● (0845)

Mr. Peter Julian: I have two follow-up questions.

First off, the Auditor General indicated that \$45 million will be left unallocated at the same time communities need those resources by the end of this fiscal year. What steps are you taking to make sure that \$45 million is put out?

Second, one of the things indicated by the Auditor General and indigenous organizations is that there is no culturally appropriate, culturally specific training for officers in those communities. We're talking about indigenous communities that often have a profound distrust of policing, given the police's role in dragging indigenous kids off to residential schools and those horrific conditions.

What are the steps you are going to take to ensure there is culturally appropriate, culturally specific training for those officers, and how do you ensure the \$45 million is spent?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, those are two very important questions from Mr. Julian. I have confidence that the RCMP have understood and share exactly that concern around appropriate cultural sensitivity training and understanding of that history that Mr. Julian referred to.

I've had conversations with the commissioner, and he can also elaborate perhaps at a different moment on the work they have done and the funding and investments we have made in partnership with the management of the RCMP to correct this very understandable concern that Mr. Julian raised. It is improving. There is still more work to do, and the leadership of the RCMP is committed to doing that work.

With respect to the lapsed money, I was very surprised in my conversation with the Auditor General when I was briefed on her report. There is such a need to invest in this space, including with provinces and territories, as I said, but it doesn't absolve the Government of Canada of its responsibility to do the right thing. The idea that this money would lapse or not be allocated is understandably something that was surprising and concerning to me. Our associate deputy minister has assured me that those circumstances won't repeat themselves in terms of arriving at agreements with provinces and territories.

Again, it sounds like I'm sort of avoiding the question by talking about provinces and territories, but the constitutional requirement to deliver these services under provincial legislation means that simply allocating money that's outside of an agreement with a province and territory doesn't work. Some provinces are better at this than others, some respond more quickly and some have capacity challenges. It doesn't absolve us of the responsibility to do more and not see that funding lapse. I totally share that view.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Julian.

We're moving into the second round now.

Mr. Caputo, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I will address all of my questions directly to the witnesses through you.

Thank you to all the witnesses, and thank you, Minister, for being here.

Commissioner Kelly, can you please confirm that disgraced former colonel Russell Williams is also at La Macaza, which houses Paul Bernardo and Luka Magnotta?

Ms. Anne Kelly (Commissioner, Correctional Service of Canada): No, I cannot confirm that information.

Mr. Frank Caputo: How about Guy Turcotte? Is he also there?

Ms. Anne Kelly: I can also not confirm that information.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Did you confirm that Luka Magnotta was there? Did the CSE eventually confirm that?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Well, that's in the public domain right now.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Okay. How about Paul Bernardo? Did the CSE eventually confirm that he was there?

• (0850)

Ms. Anne Kelly: That was also in the public domain.

Mr. Frank Caputo: I'm not asking whether it was in the public domain. I'm asking whether the CSE confirmed it for those two offenders, but you're not prepared to confirm it for the other two. Is that correct?

Ms. Anne Kelly: That's right.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Okay, so we have one set of rules and another set of rules. I'm clear there.

Minister, as you know, we have the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, and it talks about the regulations. We're clear, obviously, on that.

Now, when it comes to the regulations, the government, the minister—you—have control over those regulations. Is that correct?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: There's a process through Treasury Board and a regulatory process, but I recognize that it's in the hands of the cabinet, yes.

Mr. Frank Caputo: It is in their hands, so the final say over the regulations is with the government. We can be clear on that. Is that correct?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Again, I'm not an expert on parliamentary procedure. I think there's a committee, a joint scrutiny of regulations committee. Our colleagues in the Senate are very interested in these issues. I think I've—

Mr. Frank Caputo: Minister, let's not get into—

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: If you want to have an esoteric discussion on the regulatory process, I'd be happy to have an official—

Mr. Frank Caputo: No, I'm not having an esoteric discussion. I'm saying that, when it comes to the regulations, the buck stops with the government. Is that correct?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Again, there's a parliamentary review process that I'm not familiar with.

I get the trap in the question. I'll say yes, and then you'll find an example... I recognize that regulations are in the hands of the cabinet.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Minister, it's no trap; it's very clear. The reality is that the government creates the regulations. Then, the CSE, the Correctional Service of Canada, implements those regulations. Those regulations allowed for the transfer of Bernardo and Magnotta. You have the ability to change those regulations. Is that correct?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: The government has a general authority, as long as it's within the four corners of the statute, to change regulation.

Mr. Frank Caputo: I'm not talking about the authority. In this case, Minister, the government could change the regulations, and it hasn't. Is that correct?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: The government has confidence that the regulations are appropriate in giving the correctional service, in its independent and professional judgment, the responsibility of assigning convicted federal offenders, in this case, people convicted of murder, to the appropriate secure federal penitentiary.

Mr. Frank Caputo: In this case, then, you are okay with the likes of Magnotta, Bernardo and Williams being not only in medium security but being together at La Macaza. Is that correct?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Again, for operational security reasons, which the commissioner can elaborate on, we don't discuss or actually do videos telling Canadians where particular inmates are serving their sentences. It's for the security of the men and women who work in those institutions. That's an irresponsible course that I don't think we're going to start on.

I share the concern that Canadians have about—

Mr. Frank Caputo: Minister, we're not talking about my conduct. We're talking here about the government and whether you will create regulations. Those regulations allowed the transfer of Bernardo. They allowed the transfer of Williams. They allowed the transfer of Magnotta. You're here telling us that, no, CSE is going to do its job.

Minister, you have the opportunity to change those regulations right here, right now. Will you commit to doing this? You've said that you don't intervene on specific cases. I'm not asking for you to intervene on a specific case. I'm asking for you to intervene on a class of offenders. Will you intervene on a class of offenders, an injustice that has happened, and change those regulations right here, right now?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Again, if you want to be technical, I actually can't change those regulations right here and right now. I explained to you that there's a Treasury Board process—

Mr. Frank Caputo: Minister, will you commit right here and right now to changing them?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: —with the Governor in Council.

No, I can't change those regulations right here and right now.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Will you commit to changing those regulations to address this class of offender—yes or no?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I will commit to ensuring that those regulations that focus, as their most important objective, on public safety are appropriate to give the Correctional Service the authority to keep federally sentenced inmates in secure federal prisons to protect the public. That's a very important objective.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Appropriate—so it's appropriate that Paul Bernardo is in medium security. You are fine with that. I will take it that you don't care that Paul Bernardo is in medium security. I will take it that way, because you're not prepared to act. If you're not prepared to act, then what are we even talking about this for? It's someone else's problem. No, Minister, this lies directly at your feet.

When was the last time you went to La Macaza, Minister?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Caputo. Your time is up.

Mr. Bittle, you're up for five minutes, please.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm from the Niagara region. I just watched Mr. Caputo, and I don't doubt that his sincerity is there and his concern is there. My constituents went through this. The victims' families are still here. It's very painful for them, and it's painful for my community, but perhaps you could explain the law for those who are watching.

I know that Mr. Caputo is a former prosecutor. I don't expect that the provincial attorney general ever called him to tell him how to prosecute a case. Mr. Motz is a former police officer. I don't imagine the mayor called him to tell him who to arrest and how to conduct an investigation.

Can you please explain your role with respect to federal correctional inmates and what the law says on this subject?

● (0855)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: We obviously share the concern that you articulated for the communities you represent and, particularly, the victims of some of these most notorious crimes. Every Canadian remembers some of these horrific crimes and remembers, sadly, the names of the perpetrators.

I think you identified an important distinction in the role of an elected minister and an elected government, and the proper administration of justice, including the Correctional Service. When we think of the administration of justice, we think of courts or the police, for example. However, I think you properly drew a parallel between administering a Correctional Service of Canada that is responsible for, in some cases—and the commissioner, in the subsequent part of the morning, can provide more details—approximately 13,500 people who are currently residing in different federal correctional facilities across the country, and there are thousands of others who are under supervision in the community...

I think, Mr. Bittle, you correctly identified the challenge here. Some people—in my view, irresponsibly—seek to say that because a particular offender was transferred based on a series of long-standing criteria administered properly by independent, professional public servants, who are accountable to the commissioner of the Correctional Service for those decisions... These are not new rules. They have existed for a long time, and they are made often in the interest of institutional security.

That's something we perhaps don't reflect on: the safety of the brave women and men who work in the Correctional Service. I visited a number of these facilities and was very impressed by the women and men who work in these difficult environments in these correctional facilities. Their safety and security are often a factor when the Correctional Service makes these decisions on transfers.

It's not new that people would transfer from a maximum- to a medium-security institution. As I said, in 2013 to 2014 alone, in the last year of Mr. Harper's government, 319 inmates were transferred from maximum to medium security. That's certainly higher than in any recent year.

These are normal decisions. What is disingenuous is to pretend that because somebody is in a medium-security facility, there isn't a very high level of security to make it impossible to escape from these facilities, their behaviour isn't appropriately controlled within these institutions, or somehow they're on their way out to the community. That's the really disingenuous part. It's pretending that some of these notorious people who are serving life sentences in secure federal prisons are somehow on their way out to the community.

That's the part that we think is very disingenuous and not conducive to public confidence in a correctional service system in which I have a lot of confidence.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I'd also like to respond to Mr. Shipley's comments. I think it shows how unserious the Conservatives are on climate change if their only environmental policy is recycling slogans.

I was wondering if you could comment, Minister, on what climate change is doing for the security landscape that you and our public servants have to deal with to protect Canadians.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: As I said, anecdotally, as a member of Parliament in New Brunswick during some of these extreme weather events, I'm thinking of hurricanes. I'm thinking of flooding circumstances.

In our province, the RCMP, in many cases, is the police of jurisdiction. It's the contract police of the Province of New Brunswick. I have seen remarkable work done by women and men in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and in the Coast Guard, for which I used to but no longer have responsibility.

These public safety personnel are on the front lines of protecting Canadians during these alarming, worrisome and potentially very dangerous events. If I think of hurricanes that have hit Atlantic Canada and my province of New Brunswick.... Our chair's province of Prince Edward Island was obviously very badly impacted by some of these events. It was the women and men who serve in the RCMP who were providing that public safety presence in these very difficult moments.

Working constructively and effectively on climate change should be a priority for everyone.

• (0900)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Bittle.

We'll go to Ms. Michaud, please, for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, let's face it, the government's not doing too well these days. It's not going very well. Some MPs are putting their foot in it, and the latest blunder is that of your colleague the MP for Brossard-

Saint-Lambert, Alexandra Mendès, who is also Assistant Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons. She was quick to criticize an ongoing Royal Canadian Mounted Police investigation into alleged Chinese police stations in Montreal. I won't ask you to comment on the investigation, and I won't do it either. However, experts, including former Sûreté du Québec investigators, and even an RCMP member of the Integrated National Security Enforcement Team, as well as former diplomats, have said that it doesn't make sense, because there is a separation of powers. It's a basic principle.

How is it that members of your government interfere with RCMP investigations?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I think Ms. Michaud described these circumstances well.

I understand that investigations are underway. The Commissioner of the RCMP is in a better position than me to talk about these kinds of details. However, I think that Ms. Michaud is right. It is not appropriate for government members, or opposition members for that matter, to comment in the context of an ongoing investigation. So I won't.

However, I have every confidence that the RCMP will conduct an investigation to shed light on the circumstances surrounding this incident. Above all, I understand that the Canadian Chinese community, the Chinese diaspora in Canada, is often targeted by these practices. This is totally inappropriate interference by the government of China in these circumstances.

Mr. Vigneault and Mr. Duheme can talk about how they counter and limit these threats. I completely agree with you that it's not helpful to talk about any particular person or investigation. In fact, I don't think it helps the RCMP do the important work they do. I have every confidence that they will do their job.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Minister.

I'm counting on you to pass on the message to your Liberal colleague.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: You have done a proper job of it.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: You talk about foreign interference. Yesterday, you were talking about introducing a bill on electoral reform. Bravo!

Indeed, to prevent these practices of foreign interference in our democratic institutions, I wonder why you didn't take this opportunity to insert electoral reform into it. If I'm not mistaken, your government was elected on this promise, in 2015, among others.

Did you forget to insert this measure in the bill?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: We tried to adopt this measure.

You mentioned the 2015 elections, and there were elections in 2019 and, subsequently, 2021. It hasn't been a huge success in terms of government commitments.

Between 2015 and 2019, we found it difficult to reach a consensus. As part of the agreement between Mr. Singh and the Prime Minister, we made a commitment to strengthen the electoral system to make it even easier to vote. I understand the request you're making, and I'm pleased to see you smile when you ask the question.

I don't think it would have been very helpful, when we had a small window, to add a potentially controversial measure to a bill aimed at strengthening the electoral system—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister LeBlanc. Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

Mr. Julian, you have two and a half minutes please.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have two more questions.

The first is on the CBSA cuts. We have a dearth of funding around CBSA officers. We've heard testimony before this committee that we lack about 3,000 CBSA officers across the country. This government can rightly blame the Harper regime for having cut back on CBSA, and of course the Harper regime was horrible for public safety, but the reality is you've been in government now for nine years, and you have not addressed that shortage of CBSA officers. How do you intend to respond to those needs, given the rise in auto thefts?

• (0905)

[*Translation*]

My second question is about prejudice. You said you wanted to tackle harms such as hate.

[*English*]

We know that every single ideologically motivated mass murder in North America in 2022 and 2023 came from the extreme right. This is a growing and persistent threat to our democracy and to public safety. What are the actions your government intends to put into place to counter that threat from the extreme right and extreme right violence?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Those are two important questions. We recognize the good work done by the Border Services Agency and the frontline personnel. We also recognize that continued and sustained investments are important. We announced an amount of funding targeted specifically at some auto theft concerns, but we recognize that we can do more.

I know I'm going to run out of time, and I want to get to your second question. I would have happily yielded some time to the CBSA to answer the details of those particular recruitment challenges, but in order to get to the second part of the question, perhaps in the second part of this meeting the CBSA could answer that directly.

We do share, absolutely, the concern with respect to the rise in hate crimes, the increasingly violent rhetoric that sadly motivates and incites people to undertake some of the most heinous and violent actions that we've seen in recent years.

My conversations with David Vigneault and his colleagues at CSIS leave me with a very real concern about ideologically motivated violent extremists. Mr. Julian referred to that. There's also religiously motivated violent extremism.

We have invested with the RCMP and their partners in terms of helping police forces across the country, police of jurisdiction—including the RCMP in many cases—better understand ways to prosecute some of these hate crimes. It's a difficult space for prosecutors and police officers to investigate.

It doesn't mean that we don't need, as a national police organization in the case of the RCMP, to take responsibility for working with partners. I know that if there's time in the second part... The officials who will be here can provide very good answers, and I know that David Vigneault would be very anxious to answer Mr. Julian's question with some important work that CSIS is doing in this area.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leblanc, and thank you, Mr. Julian.

We'll move to Mr. Lloyd, please, for five minutes.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here.

We have the whole national security establishment of the country, so hopefully we can get some good answers to my questions.

Minister, earlier this month there was a pretty groundbreaking decision of the Supreme Court, the Bykovets decision. I wonder if you can tell us about what the impact of that decision has been in the last month.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I'm not familiar with the precise details of that decision. I'm happy to answer, but the associate deputy minister would be the best one to give you the precise answer to your question.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

Going into the Bykovets decision in regard to Internet protocol addresses, IP addresses, these IP addresses are essential evidence enabling our law enforcement to track down and prosecute child predators.

Under the Supreme Court decision, it has now been ruled that there's a judicial authorization required in order to get those IP addresses. It's the equivalent of saying you need a search warrant to look in the phone book.

This decision has had an immediate effect on basically freezing, and, in the words of some RCMP officers, terminating child predator investigations in Canada. Some believe that Canada has now become the safest place in the world to be a child predator.

I wonder if you can give your comments on that, Minister.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Obviously, that would not be a circumstance that's at all acceptable. I am informed that the RCMP and CSIS are looking at the court decision and determining, based on some legal advice, its operational impacts.

I wouldn't compare getting access to an IP address to looking in a phone book. I think that's a bit disingenuous.

These are areas that are governed by law, and a body of case law, but we recognize that the police, the RCMP and other police partners, and CSIS in the case of national security investigations, need appropriate access to that information. We'll take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the police have access to that information, while, obviously, respecting the Charter of Rights and cases that the courts—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you for that, Minister.

I'm not that reassured, because we have RCMP officers who are already speaking out on this. They spoke out earlier this month and said:

Canada must act quickly; this ruling opens a huge gap in our ability to protect kids and stop offenders from preying on them. There must always be a balance between citizen privacy and the state but—

This is in the words of an RCMP officer who is on Twitter, Sergeant Kerry Shima.

—this decision has put our kids in the crosshairs.

Those are the words of RCMP officers on the front lines.

It's now been three weeks. Your government has now unveiled massive new legislation, the online harms act, yet I can find nothing in your online harms act that deals with the fallout from this very concerning decision, which, in the words of an RCMP officer, “essentially terminates investigations into online sex offenders and identifying child victims”.

We cannot allow our country to be a safe haven for child predators. What are we going to do about this immediately, Minister?

● (0910)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Obviously, I share Mr. Lloyd's view that we can't allow Canada to become a safe haven for child predators. That's a circumstance that would be completely inappropriate.

I have confidence that the RCMP, respecting the law, respecting decisions of the Supreme Court and the charter, will come to the government, as will CSIS, with advice on the most appropriate way to ensure that they have the tools to do that exact work that Mr. Lloyd correctly identified. Perhaps the commissioner or others can discuss this in the second part.

However, I think the important principle is that in a case where an important Supreme Court decision reviews authorities like that—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'm sorry, Minister. I have only about a minute left.

I just want to ask you this: How far are you willing to go to protect children in this country? Would you be willing to consider using the notwithstanding clause, if that were the only option to allow the RCMP to do these investigations?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Obviously, we're not going to answer hypothetical questions like that.

Our views, in terms of the notwithstanding clause, are well known. I think Mr. Lloyd is well ahead of himself in concluding that the advice I'm going to get as minister, with my colleague, the Minister of—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'm not making any conclusions, Minister. I'm just asking how far you're willing to go to protect children in this country.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: We will do everything that we lawfully can to protect children and to support the women and men in the RCMP, CSIS and other agencies that do this important work. They are doing effective and good work in this area, and the government's job is to ensure they have the resources—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: They can no longer do that work, because of this decision.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: —and the authorities to do that work.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will move on to Mr. Gaheer, please, online, for five minutes.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Thank you to the minister and witnesses for appearing before the committee.

Minister, if you look at the 11 electoral wards of Mississauga, you'll see that ward 5, which contains Pearson airport, is largely within my riding of Mississauga—Malton. It saw the most auto thefts, by far, in 2023, out of all of Mississauga, and understandably, because it's home to Pearson airport, which is a transport hub.

It's been about a month and a half since we had a national summit on combatting auto theft. I want to ask about the progress that has been made since then.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: You correctly noted that in the community you represent and the neighbouring communities, this is understandably a very real source of concern to the citizens and to our partners in municipal governments and in the provincial government.

As colleagues will know, we made some initial investments with both police partners and the Border Services Agency. We'll continue to do more.

I have taken note of comments and conversations that we've had with elected municipal leaders in this space. I know that the mayor of Brampton has been an effective partner and has identified some concerns around the ability to quickly procure the appropriate scanning technologies for some of these intermodal hubs. We're very much seized with that work and will do everything we can, as quickly as we can, to support the important work done by police services. In some cases these are municipal or regional police forces.

The RCMP, as the commissioner noted a little while ago, has an important role in coordinating much of the transnational organized crime elements involved in this increase in auto theft, and their ability to work with international partners in terms of cutting off some of the money that organized crime would benefit from in some of this traffic in stolen vehicles. I always take advice from the commissioner of the RCMP and from the Border Services Agency in terms of what the government can give them in terms of additional resources or tools or authorities to work with their partners in this space.

In my role as intergovernmental affairs minister, I talk regularly with colleagues in provincial governments and with provincial premiers around what we can do in this area.

I am very encouraged by some of what my colleagues at Transport Canada are talking about in terms of vehicle standards. I had a conversation in this area with the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, when I was in Washington some weeks ago, around the integrated nature of the vehicle manufacturing sector in Canada and how we might work with American partners to ensure that some of the latest technologies that would discourage criminals from attempting to steal vehicles, or make it harder, could also be included.

We're always looking for good ideas and will continue to do more and more to make sure that Canadians feel secure in this increasingly worrisome context.

● (0915)

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Great. Thank you.

I'm glad you touched on that point, actually. Mayor Patrick Brown of Brampton has gone on record on CP24 as saying that there is a leaky bucket. He claims that the leaky bucket is the port of Montreal. He highlighted some issues with scanners and the timeline for preparing those scanners.

Could you perhaps comment on some of the resources we've provided to different law enforcement agencies, including the CBSA, to help target this problem?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I'd like to thank Mr. Gaheer and also his colleagues from communities near the one he represents who have spoken to me. I had a conversation with our colleague, Mr. Sidhu, about this again yesterday as well.

Mayor Brown has been an effective advocate for his community and for his regional police services in this area. I know that for the RCMP it has been a privilege to work with the Peel Regional Police and with the Toronto Police Service. In some successful interdiction operations, the Border Services Agency plays a key role here.

One of the challenges is that, understandably, people focus on the port of Montreal or other places where these stolen vehicles might be exported. I am told that 30% to 40% of the vehicles that are stolen are in fact resold in Canada. It's not a perfect solution to choke off the export points only. We need to work also with the police of jurisdiction and the local police to prevent these vehicles from being stolen, or to arrest the persons who are stealing these vehicles at the point of theft. The most inefficient and expensive

way to deal with the problem is at the very top of the criminal activity, when they are being exported.

Obviously, we will give the CBSA the authority and the instruments they need to do the work that we expect of them, but we also need to do it in a concerted and coordinated way with local police. That's the most effective way to bring these numbers down. That's what Canadians want. They're concerned about the increasingly violent nature of these offences. As I mentioned, it's something that we share and will want to attack in collaboration with partners as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gaheer.

That brings the first part of our committee meeting to an end.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing and for your testimony.

The meeting is suspended.

● (0915) _____ (Pause) _____

● (0925)

The Chair: I'll bring this meeting back to order. We're going into our third round of questions.

Mr. Lloyd, you're up first for five minutes, please.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll lead with my last line of questioning with the minister, in the last round. He said with regard to the Bykovets decision requiring judicial authorizations for IP addresses, that it was an unfair analogy for me to make to say it was like asking for a search warrant to look in the phone book. In fact, it's worse than that.

Imagine a phone book that has phone numbers listed, but no names. The only names that are listed are the ISPs and the telecom companies that service those phone numbers: the Teluses, the Rogers and the Bells.

Police are being told now that they can't even look in the phone book of those IP addresses. They can't even know who the service providers are unless they have a warrant. The effect of this in the past month since this decision came in, according to frontline RCMP officers who are working in the integrated child exploitation units across this country, is that telecommunications companies, in compliance with the Supreme Court of Canada's decision, are now denying this critical information that police are using to track down and prosecute child sex offenders and child predators.

Commissioner Duheme, can you provide us with some more context on the impact this decision has had on the RCMP integrated child exploitation units in the last month?

Commr Michael Duheme: We were a bit surprised with the decision that came out. At this point in time—the decision was rendered three weeks ago—I've asked that throughout the country, we monitor the impacts on our operations. I don't have the numbers just yet, because it's relatively fresh. We will have to come back to the committee.

I think it's important to note that although we were focused on children, and that's extremely important, I'm looking at it much more broadly. I'm looking at threats to elected officials, and to individuals and whatnot, so it's a little early. We've been through other cases, like Stinchcombe. When Stinchcombe came in, we had to readjust.

Our concern is that we want to make sure there are no additional delays, and we're monitoring that right now, but I don't have the total impacts right now on the operation.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

A very good point you've made is that, of course, the issue of protecting children is of paramount importance, but this decision does not just impact child predator investigations; this is about threats against elected officials.

The case of Bykovets was one of fraud involving stolen credit cards. It is a groundbreaking decision. I must say it was not a clear majority. It was a majority of the Supreme Court, but it was a 5-4 decision. The dissenting judges, in their own words, said this decision “would seriously thwart the police’s ability to investigate such serious offences against children.” They also said later down that it would “exacerbate the existing challenges faced by the criminal justice system.”

Commissioner Duheme, we know our police are overwhelmed with the task we have given them and the paperwork that is required of them. Can you tell us what the impact is of having to get search warrants every time they get an IP address, say, from the FBI? We know it's our international allies providing us with this information.

There was a case in my own area, in the greater Edmonton area, in which a mother was allegedly putting up videos of her own child. It was a conviction following an investigation in California that led to the procurement of those IP addresses, which were given to our integrated child exploitation units and enabled them to rescue that child from that situation. Under this decision, those IP addresses would arguably be inadmissible in a case. This is a devastating blow for child protection in our country.

Can you tell us what the new administrative requirements are going to do to investigations?

Thank you.

● (0930)

Commr Michael Duheme: Mr. Chair, the impact is felt not only in the RCMP but also by my colleague David Vigneault from CSIS. Again, the decision was rendered three weeks ago. I don't have the number of files that took place in the last three weeks that incurred delays, but from an organizational perspective we are monitoring the impact on current operations.

I think I know what the impacts are, but I want some metrics to make sure we can come forward with a proposal to the minister as we move forward.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

With that, Mr. Chair, I just want to quickly move the motion that I gave notice of at the last committee meeting, which all members of this committee have, regarding the police resources that are being directed to food banks across the country that are dealing with the impact of, in some cases.... I am moving this motion. The motion has been moved.

In Surrey, police were brought in to redirect traffic because of the huge number of Canadians who were seeking food. We have food banks in Montreal where police have been directed away from the very important work they're doing on our streets to protect Canadians by providing crowd control at these food banks.

The cost of food is going up in Canada, and we know that on April 1 there will be a 23% increase in the carbon tax in this country. That's not just in the provinces where the federal backstop is in place. Every province, even with their own carbon tax regime, has to increase this price to meet the federal requirements.

At a time like this, when inflation is roaring, when food prices are escalating, in some cases over 10% in some categories, Canadians can no longer afford food, and we can no longer afford to see our police officers, who are overstretched across jurisdictions, not just the RCMP, having to go to food banks to provide crowd control to protect Canadians and protect food banks because of these rising costs of food.

With that, I'll move my motion, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. O'Connell, please.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. I move to adjourn debate, and I'll ask for a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: We're going to continue with our witnesses.

It's Ms. O'Connell up for five minutes, please.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I want to start with Commissioner Duheme.

In terms of sexual harassment and sexual assault within the service and the RCMP, can you please update us on what you're doing in your leadership to ensure that the workforce within the RCMP are protected? I refer in particular to women and the fact that, when there are instances or cases in which there is sufficient evidence of an assault or violence, these cases are also being referred to local police for charges, that offenders are not simply losing their jobs and face consequences that a civilian would, for example.

Commr Michael Duheme: Let me give you a few numbers on the sexual harassment side of things over the last couple of years.

In 2021, there were 48 out of 373 harassment files. Out of those, 12 did not meet the definition of harassment and violence; 16 at least had one allegation that met the definition of harassment, and 18 were withdrawn by the principal parties.

I must stress that our harassment process is independent. It's independent from the RCMP. The investigators are independent, but the decision-maker is a member of the RCMP who is present in the investigation.

Out of the total number of files, there's one that's still undergoing investigation. I want to make it perfectly clear: One complaint is too many. With one complaint, the damage in that unit has already been done. We want to get to a point where we don't get any more complaints.

The stats for 2022 are very similar, but the point is that I expect every employee engaged in the organization to respect and adhere to the core values of our organization.

We have measures in place to address that with regular members. We have a code of conduct through which some really great work has been done over the last couple of years. We're revamping the whole code of conduct to bring it to what is expected from Canadians when we are dealing with a code of conduct. We're being more aggressive on everything to do with sexual harassment and sexual assaults in the organization.

● (0935)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Director Vigneault, I have a similar question for you with your organization and the members serving. There were recent media reports that there are challenges in terms of reporting, given the nature of some of the work that CSIS members might do in terms of protection of identity, which all makes sense.

How are you ensuring that, within the service, you're protecting employees and ensuring that the nature of their work doesn't create some sort of loophole in terms of reporting and the protection of members of the service, in particular women in this case, to be able to report, and obviously, then, doing the additional work to make sure it's a safe workplace for everyone?

Mr. David Vigneault (Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): I welcome this question from the member. This is a very serious issue. I have to say I don't want this to become a bumper sticker because everybody says it, but when we say that it is inappropriate and it will not be tolerated, I can tell you that is exactly the case at CSIS. I have made a personal commitment to create an ombudsperson, even though we have very robust internal

processes and it has been recognized recently by the Federal Court of Appeal that our processes to investigate are adequate to address these issues. It's more important to go over and above that, so we'll have a separate ombudsperson to look into this.

I have also committed to reporting publicly on an annual basis any cases of wrongdoing, which will, of course, include any cases of sexual violence. I want to take this opportunity to say personally that my heart goes out to anybody who has been affected by sexual violence. I made a commitment to all of my employees when I talked to them recently that if there are any issues that affect them, they are to bring them to me personally.

I also made it very clear, and I think it's important because of the case you referred to, Ms. O'Connell, that the media reporting unfortunately had very serious inaccuracies in it. I publicly corrected the record within 24 hours to say that there's absolutely nothing that prevents an employee who has been a victim of a crime from engaging with the police. I've made that very clear publicly and to all of my employees. Hopefully that will clear up the ambiguity, but I welcome the question.

CSIS, along with other organizations in our country, needs to continue to do the best for people who are victims of sexual violence.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you. I think it's important that we have that discussion here today. Thank you for both coming and sharing that.

I want to move quickly, because I have limited time.

Commissioner Kelly, you've spoken before at this committee with regard to the reclassification of inmates and prisoners. You've said that, under the previous Conservative language around "most appropriate"—I believe your officials have said this in the media as well—and the threshold used, the evaluation that your team collectively does to make these decisions would still have happened because "most appropriate" is also building into those other factors.

Maybe you could list some of the factors that actually go into making transfer reclassification decisions.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell. Your time is up. Perhaps one of your teammates can follow up with Ms. Kelly, and she can answer it then.

Ms. Michaud, please go ahead for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

I have a question for representatives of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

The mandate letter of the Minister of Public Safety states that he must "work ... to make our communities safe and increase forest resilience to wildfire, including training 1,000 new community-based firefighters, investing in equipment and other measures to reduce risks from wildfires".

I recently met with people from a union that represents forest firefighters across Canada. I was told that these firefighters weren't recognized in the same way as regular firefighters, that they didn't have the same benefits or the same type of equipment.

I don't know if you know why forest firefighters aren't recognized in the same way as other firefighters. I was told that it wasn't necessarily a legislative or regulatory change that was needed, and that if we simply amended the National Occupational Classification, that could solve the problem.

Could you tell us more about that?

Ms. Tricia Geddes (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): I thank the member for her question, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I will say a couple of things first. I want to comment on what an extremely difficult last season it was for forest fires in this country. We're anticipating another season ahead of us that's going to be quite stressful for the country. Ensuring that the forest firefighters who work with us in the area have the best possible supports is really important to our being as well prepared, or better prepared, this year than we were last year.

Natural Resources Canada has ownership of some of those aspects of how we support firefighters in this country. Madame Michaud, I'm very happy to commit to following up with you in terms of how we can address that very specific question.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: That's fine, thank you.

I'd now like to put a question to the Canada Border Services Agency representative.

The Minister announced an investment of \$28 million to fight the scourge of auto theft in the country, of which \$5.9 million will go to increase the agency's criminal intelligence capabilities; \$5.9 million will support officers who conduct container inspections; \$4 million will go to the development of new technologies; \$3.5 million will increase the capacity to examine containers, specifically in the Greater Toronto Area.

Has all this money been deposited in the agency's account? How does it work? Are you already in a position to implement new policies to help officers do their jobs?

Also, may I mention that we talk a lot about the Port of Montreal and containers, but we also talk about trains, about what's going out of the country versus what's coming in. Should we perhaps modify the agency's mandate to also take a look at what's going out of the country?

Mr. Ted Gallivan (Executive Vice-President, Canada Border Services Agency): As we speak, we have already increased our efforts on this front even before we officially receive the funds, especially with regard to the Port of Montreal, where the seized cars constitute evidence that helps police forces advance criminal investigations.

We work closely with the Sûreté du Québec and the Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal, which represent police forces across the country to some extent, to ensure that protocols are clear.

The agency has increased its capacity to open containers and seize vehicles. We do this in partnership with police forces, because one of the concerns that was conveyed was about the huge quantity of cars.

We're also working to prevent theft. The rail network and stations are one of the focal points, and we're trying to share the data we have regarding the identity of the importer and the transporter, to help police forces dismantle the networks that move the cars.

I can confirm that the agency remains determined to act on all information given to us by police forces across the country. If they have a clue that a container contains a stolen car, our commitment is to stop it, open it and send the evidence to the police.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gallivan and Madame Michaud.

We'll move on to Mr. Julian, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I'd like to go to you, Ms. Kelly and Ms. Oades. We've been talking at public safety about the horrific crimes of some of these offenders who have been transferred to medium security—Bernardo, Magnotta, Williams—and I have two questions.

First off, is there a higher risk of escape at a medium-security prison than at a maximum-security prison?

Secondly, Ms. Oades, is there a greater possibility that inmates who were in medium security would be granted parole at the end of their sentence? The crimes these individuals committed are horrific. It is very clear that Canadians want to be protected from these predators for the remainder of their lives.

These are two key questions that I'd love to have responses on.

● (0945)

Ms. Anne Kelly: On the first one, in terms of escapes, the perimeter security for maximum and medium security is the same. We have fences. We have walls. We have patrols. We also have armed correctional officers.

Mr. Peter Julian: My question is specifically this: If you look at the statistics, is there a greater likelihood of escape from a medium-security prison than a maximum-security prison?

Ms. Anne Kelly: I would say no. Most of our escapes are from minimum security. That's where they occur.

Mr. Peter Julian: Is it possible that you could share those figures with the committee to indicate the rate of escapes at maximum-security and medium-security prisons?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Yes. I could do that.

On your second question—

Ms. Jennifer Oades (Chairperson, Parole Board of Canada): That one was for me.

Ms. Anne Kelly: It was for you. I'm sorry.

Ms. Jennifer Oades: I think it's logical, just in terms of reasoning, that someone who is in a maximum-security institution is much less likely to be released by the parole board than one who is in a minimum-security institution. No matter where they are, though, there are two criteria—

Mr. Peter Julian: Again, is it possible for you to share those figures with us on the parole applications and approvals at maximum-security and medium-security institutions?

Ms. Jennifer Oades: Likely, yes, we do have that, so we'll get that to you.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

You were going to talk about two criteria. The chair hasn't cut me off yet.

Ms. Jennifer Oades: Yes, there are two criteria in law. The offender will not, by reoffending, present an undue risk to society before the expiration of their sentence, and—it's not an "or", it's an "and"—the release of the offender will contribute to the protection of society by facilitating his or her reintegration as a law-abiding citizen.

Those are the two criteria that the board is most interested in and, by law, must consider before making a decision.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Oades.

We're moving on to Mr. Kurek, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much, and thanks to our witnesses for being here. Specifically, a big thanks to all of those who serve under you in your organizations for the hard work they do to keep Canadians safe.

Commissioner Duheme, I'm just wondering if you could commit to tabling the number of cases that might be affected by the Bykovets decision. Is that something you'd be able to take back and table with this committee?

Commr Michael Duheme: I can commit that we'll look into it, but I'm just not quite sure if we have it.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Commissioner Kelly, are narcotics and hard drugs allowed in Canadian prisons?

Ms. Anne Kelly: No, they are not.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Do you not think it's a bit disingenuous that there are prison needle exchanges and safe injection sites that allow for the legal consumption of narcotics in Canadian prisons?

Ms. Anne Kelly: These are harm reduction programs that have been implemented. In terms of the prison needle exchange program—

Mr. Damien Kurek: Commissioner Kelly, you stated that narcotics are not allowed in our prisons, yet there are programs that facilitate their legal use in our prisons. I think Canadians are rightfully disappointed. Quite frankly, I hear from many who are disgusted that this would be the official policy of the Correctional Service of Canada.

Further to that, Commissioner, do the guards who are responsible for ensuring that inmates are safe and that the Canadian public is safe—the correctional officers of this country—support those programs and their use in our prisons?

Ms. Anne Kelly: In terms of the prison needle—

Mr. Damien Kurek: Do guards and officers support these programs? They're the ones who are on the front lines, facing the consequences of these programs. Do they support those programs in our prisons?

● (0950)

Ms. Anne Kelly: I would say that some do support it, yes. I would say that the prison needle exchange program is more challenging, and there's more support for the overdose prevention service.

Mr. Damien Kurek: It's interesting. I've tabled a petition in the House of Commons from correctional officers, and I've spoken to many of them. I'm proud to represent Battle River—Crowfoot, which is home to a federal institution. Many of my constituents are, in fact, correctional officers. So far I have yet to find an officer who supports the administration and allowance of illegal narcotics in Canadian prisons.

Madam Commissioner, when it comes to stopping the flow of narcotics, do you think an environmental assessment of netting over a prison, or some other tool that could actually deal with things like drones, which is getting held up in the bureaucracy, is an acceptable excuse to slow down the approval of things that would actually stop the flow of illegal drugs into our prisons?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Actually, we've done an awful lot. Drones are definitely an issue—

Mr. Damien Kurek: They're a huge issue, yes.

Ms. Anne Kelly: —and there's been an increase in their use in the last year of 37%. Since 2020 there has been an increase of 104%. We have different measures that we use, such as intelligence and searches, and also we have drone protection systems—

Mr. Damien Kurek: However, I do hear, again, from—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Chair, I have a point of order. I understand Mr. Kurek loves the sound of his own voice, but I would actually love to hear the answer from Commissioner Kelly on any of his questions.

The Chair: Let's continue, Mr. Kurek, please.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you. I'm sorry that Ms. O'Connell is so offended by some of the questions I'm asking on behalf of prison guards in our country.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: No, I'd like to hear the answers.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Commissioner Kelly, the challenge associated with some of these things is that there has been a staggering decline in morale within the Correctional Service. There has been a host of concerns. There's not trust within the ombudsman's office.

My question is simple, and I hope to get a quick one to the Parole Board here as well. Will you commit to speaking with your officers on the ground to actually hear the concerns that they have within the service?

Ms. Anne Kelly: What I can say is that in the last few days I visited three institutions, and every time I visit an institution I speak to the union representatives and gather their comments.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Here is some unsolicited advice: Speak to some of the guards on the ground, Commissioner Kelly. I can tell you that in the conversations I have, there is a troubling lack of confidence and a growing decline in morale within your service that is ultimately impacting not only the public safety of those officers but also the trust that Canadians need to have in their institutions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kurek.

We're moving on now to Mr. Gaheer, please, who is online.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Thank you, Chair. My questions are largely for the RCMP, but others should feel free to chime in as well.

Commissioner, we've seen a rise in extortion attempts that have been targeting the South Asian community across Canada. There has obviously been a large focus of that in B.C. and in Ontario. It always follows a very similar pattern, whereby business owners are reached out to, perhaps via a phone call made on WhatsApp, and a certain amount is demanded. If the demand is not met, then their businesses or their homes are targeted, oftentimes with gunfire. I've received videos from constituents of their homes actually being targeted by gunfire.

Do you want to comment on what the RCMP is doing to address this problem?

Commr Michael Duheme: First off, I feel sorry for people who have to go through this type of extortion. It's unacceptable in Canada. You will note that Peel started an extortion crime task force. There's also one in Edmonton and one in British Columbia. The RCMP has the overarching role of connecting all three organizations to make sure we have the right picture. There's some good intelligence being drawn from working together.

If we come across enough information where we have the appropriate information or evidence to lay charges, we will lay charges.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: The RCMP has gone on record to state that organized crime is obviously linked to this as well, but this was not happening prior to the fall of last year. Very frankly, is there an international component to this that was triggered by something that happened in the fall?

• (0955)

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm not quite sure if the numbers were the same—I apologize if I don't have the statistics—or if this was influenced by a certain event, or whether there was still extortion but maybe not at the level you're seeing today and with the violence you're seeing today.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Look, I think certain members of the community are levelling allegations, saying that when the Prime Minister came out and spoke on the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in B.C., perhaps that was a precipitating event. After that is when we saw a real spike in some of these extortion attempts, especially targeting the Punjabi Sikh community in Ontario, B.C., Alberta and elsewhere.

We've also heard from Peel police that perhaps this is inspiring copycats as well. Individuals have found a scheme whereby they can make money, and they're not perhaps being caught by local law enforcement.

Do you want to comment on that?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would first say that with regard to Peel's comments, I can't really comment on them. It's the first time I'm hearing about the copycats. The RCMP takes the question of extortion very seriously. That's why we put a national project team together, to make sure we can connect the dots and demonstrate that they're possibly related, from what we're seeing in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

I just want to share that the RCMP works really closely with the service to address any threats that come in and works with local police of jurisdiction to make sure we can keep the community safe.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Does the CBSA want to comment on members of the community saying that this is linked to the comments Prime Minister Trudeau made on Hardeep Singh Nijjar?

Mr. Ted Gallivan: With regard to the CBSA, we've in fact had one employee kind of targeted by social media campaigns and that kind of information. We work very hard to make sure that people can trust the integrity of CBSA officers and the people who are serving Canadians. We have noticed some threats and comments directed toward one member of our team. I think we've taken all appropriate action to make sure that travellers are safe and that the employee is safe.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Gaheer, thank you.

Mr. Motz, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

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

My questions today will be focused more to Ms. Geddes, specific to firearms.

Now, I know that back in 2019, the minister of the day... Internal documents have shown that the government has estimated that the confiscation of firearms will be \$400 million to \$600 million. We know that this is probably three times less than what it actually will be. Small-c conservative estimates from across the industry put it at over \$2 billion.

I have a couple of questions around the confiscation. The government calls it “buyback”. You can't buy something back that you never owned in the first place. In any event, on the confiscation of firearms, what is the department's plan to make that happen? That's the first question.

As well, how do you propose that it be rolled out? Who will be doing it? There's a lot of ambiguity in the industry and with firearm owners and, I think, with Public Safety, because we're not sure exactly what's happening on that front.

Can you give us an update on that, please, if you'd be so kind?

Ms. Tricia Geddes: First of all, at Public Safety we certainly are framing it as a firearm compensation program. As you pointed out, it's an extremely complex program to deliver. Some of the data has indeed been difficult to obtain. We're working as closely as we can with business and industry that have access to the best possible data. We're working with chief firearms officers across the country as well, to try to do our best to be able to get a good estimate of the number of firearms that we will be looking at compensation for.

In terms of the program development itself, as the minister said, we're looking at doing this in two phases, first to look at how we collect from business and industry and, in the process of doing so, to learn from that about the most cost-effective and efficient way in which to ensure the safety of Canadians in the way we deliver on this program. Our first phase is business and industry, and the second phase is to reach out to individuals who are currently protected under the amnesty order.

We're doing it in a very careful, conscientious way. As I said, those principles are about efficiency for dollars for Canadians, doing this in a very cost-effective way, but also, as I said, making sure we prioritize public safety throughout the execution of the program.

• (1000)

Mr. Glen Motz: I'm going to get to the amnesty issue in a minute. What I find troubling is that the evidence that law enforcement has shown across the country is that this.... You're the wrong person to ask, but I'm going to make the statement anyway, Ms. Geddes. Law enforcement has shown that the confiscation of these firearms will do nothing to improve public safety in this country, absolutely nothing. In fact, gun crimes continue to go up even during this amnesty program, and not by firearms owners.

I guess what I'm concerned about is that the law enforcement community have pushed back on government and voiced their concern and their opposition to being the ones responsible for confiscating these firearms. That includes the RCMP.

You can go to industry and ask them to voluntarily surrender the firearms that fall under this prohibition with compensation, which I hope will be appropriate, except the taxpayers are going to be on the hook for it. How are you going to deal with individuals? Who is

going to collect the firearms of individuals who resist this policy? It's not because they are criminals, but we've made administrative criminals out of people who haven't committed a criminal act. I'm just kind of concerned about that.

I want to get to another question that's in line with that. The government has introduced some proposed legislation and changes to the Elections Act. One of them is that the election might take place later in October, like October 27, 2025. Has there been any thought to the impact that changes to the Elections Act will have on the amnesty period, which goes until October 25, 2025, and the impact of the fact that we will have no government sitting at that point in time? Are there some provisions that are going to be in place to make that work? How is that going to look moving forward?

Ms. Tricia Geddes: I'll try to answer both of those together. I want to acknowledge your point. Gun crime in this country is extremely complex, as is finding ways to address it. There's not one simple method, one simple program, that is going to address gun crime completely. There's a comprehensive approach that we are putting in place—dealing with communities directly through investments and the building safer communities funds, and investment and supports to the RCMP and the CBSA—to be able to address some of those challenges. The firearms compensation program is simply one part of a broader and more comprehensive program to address gun crime in the country. I will ask Commissioner Duheme if he wants to add anything about the law enforcement aspects of gun crime.

On your second question, around the amnesty order, we are designing the program, and we are doing it, as I said, adhering to those principles, including how we prioritize public safety, which I think is partly your question. How do we make sure Canadians are safe throughout this program? That is one of the most compelling features of the program design, certainly. We are providing advice to government on how we intend to implement this, including how best to meet the dates of the amnesty orders that were set out. We will continue to provide that advice to government.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Geddes, and thank you, Mr. Motz.

We're moving over to the Liberals now.

Ms. O'Connell, please, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, Chair.

Commissioner Kelly, I'll give you a chance to answer my question from before in terms of the previous regulations for prisoner reclassification in comparison to now and what some of the factors are that your team would consider.

Ms. Anne Kelly: Right now, the way it reads is, “the least restrictive measures”, but people sometimes forget that there is a continuation of the sentence, which is, “consistent with the protection of society, staff members and offenders”. It respects a certain principle, just as the previous wording would have, which was “necessary and proportionate to attain the purposes of this Act”.

Obviously, as you know, when we assess an offender for security reclassification, we have to use an actuarial tool. Depending on whether it's an admission, it's the custody rating scale.... Later on, it's the security reclassification scale. Our parole officers use their judgment and have to assess three criteria: institutional adjustment, the risk of escape and the risk to the safety of the public. Those are actually outlined in the regulations. The law requires the CSC to assign a security classification to each offender.

• (1005)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, Commissioner Kelly.

It's too bad the Conservatives weren't listening to that, because it's crucial to what they've been talking about in the House, and having the facts might actually educate them on the criminal justice system—certainly on corrections.

I said earlier in my question that there was a quote in the media, I believe from a representative of the CSC, talking in particular about the Bernardo transfer. They said that the transfer itself, given the criteria that are looked at, would still have happened under the Conservatives. The performance of the Conservatives is talking tough, and under their regulations, transfers would never happen.

Do you agree with the quote in the media from the CSC official who said that under previous language, the Bernardo transfer would have gone through the same criteria review, and would, therefore, have happened under the previous language as well?

Ms. Anne Kelly: I would say so, because in terms of the legislation, it dates back to 1992 that we have to assign an offender. In terms of the regulations, maximum, medium and minimum have been there.

The other thing I would say is that I've looked at the distribution of inmates in maximum, medium and minimum. For well over 10 years, the inmate population in maximum has been approximately 22%. In medium, it's been 63%, and in minimum, it's been 15%. That has remained relatively constant for well over 10 years.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, Commissioner.

I think it's important that Canadians understand the incredible work you all do to keep the community safe, the difficult decisions needed to make these reviews, and the fact that politicians' performances can't possibly take into account the incredible work your team is doing. It's not one individual; it's a team making these assessments to keep the public safe.

What is often lost in these “talking at” lectures from Conservatives is that they don't think about the safety of officers working in these facilities and the incredible risks they take to keep Canadians safe. This is a crucial element of these assessments.

Thank you for clarifying this for committee.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Michaud, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Duheme, thank you for your service.

It is well known in the public sphere that the RCMP suspects community centres of monitoring and intimidating citizens on Quebec soil on behalf of Beijing. There are ongoing investigations.

The government has made a clear commitment to do more to prevent foreign interference in Canada. What specific mandate has been given to the RCMP in this regard?

Commr Michael Duheme: Mr. Chair, first of all, the RCMP has a mandate to investigate any foreign interference or any other matter that may affect national security.

We work closely with our partners abroad, as well as with Mr. Vigneault's team, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service team, across the country. We're working together to make sure we investigate the threat and protect communities.

In this case, we had received complaints from the public, and the RCMP took an aggressive approach by sending cars to the site, while sharing information in English, French and Mandarin with the diaspora. Our goal was to encourage people to come forward and tell us things we suspected.

Last week, I received a letter from an anonymous person thanking us for the work we were doing. It's just one person, but I'm sure she speaks for several others.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you very much.

I want to get back to the scourge of car theft.

I was pleased to hear you say earlier that, since mid-February, the exchange of information with Interpol has been going very well. The government has announced that it intends to ban certain hacking devices that help thieves steal vehicles. Some security engineering experts say that these devices have come out of nowhere, and that banning them won't make much difference in the field. Some devices are banned in Canada, but that doesn't stop thieves from using them.

From your policing expertise, what do you think? Will it make a difference?

• (1010)

Commr Michael Duheme: Mr. Chair, I'm not an expert on all electronic devices. However, the recent National Summit on Combatting Auto Theft brought auto industry representatives and auto insurance representatives to the same table, because the solution has to come from more than just the Canada Border Services Agency or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It's bigger than that. I always say, if we can send someone to the moon, we can certainly stop a car thieves are trying to get out.

That was what this symposium was all about: bringing people together and finding solutions.

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

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Michaud.

We're moving on to Mr. Julian, please, for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I'd like to come to you, Mr. Vigneault.

I asked a question of the minister about the rising and disturbing trend in far-right violence motivated by hate. In 2022-23, every single ideologically motivated mass killing in North America was committed by far-right extremists manifesting hate toward a variety of groups.

What measures is CSIS taking to counter that rising tide?

[Translation]

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you for your question, Mr. Julian.

[English]

What you're describing, Mr. Julian, is one of the most significant evolutions in terms of violence, not just in Canada but across the world.

At CSIS, with our partners, we have done a lot of work in terms of conceptually defining what ideologically motivated violence is, because it is morphing. It is not just people who are anti-immigration or who are anti-Semitic or Islamophobic. It's also anti-authority. We've seen a number of the threat vectors increasing.

From that point of view, CSIS is devoting about 50% of its counterterrorism resources to investigating the threat of ideologically motivated violent extremism.

I would say that it is also more than just a CSIS, law enforcement or federal issue. We describe it using the analogy of a funnel.

If you look at the narrow end of the funnel, this is where CSIS and the RCMP investigate. We engage in counterterrorism operations. When you go up into the funnel, you may have criminal activity that would be hate speech—something that the Criminal Code may address—but in the rest of the funnel, where you find the

vast majority of the people, it's speech protected by the charter. It's vile hate speech. It is people engaging in radicalization, who are identifying each other and then are essentially able to bring some of the most radical people into encrypted chat rooms where they are further radicalizing themselves. This is where we see some of the individuals who are engaging in plots.

Right now in Canada, we have people who are engaged in these activities and are under active investigation by both the RCMP on the criminal side and also a number of national security investigations.

You're right to point out the rise of this phenomenon in our country.

Mr. Peter Julian: What are the tools you need to really combat this rise, which seems to be fostered by foreign governments as well? There's a tie: Putin's FSB promotes far-right hatred and targets individuals.

The Chair: Please answer very quickly, Mr. Vigneault.

Mr. David Vigneault: Very quickly, I would say that we need to have a national discussion on this, because, as I said, it is at more than just the federal level.

From a CSIS point of view, it's the ability to get access to data. The previous line of questioning regarding the Supreme Court decision on Bykovets is one that we are actively looking at. The concern we have is that the proper judicial authorization is required to be able to take those IP addresses so that we can get to the actors and apply the tools that we have.

This is a very serious concern.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to do two minutes for the Conservatives and two minutes for the Liberals, and then we're calling it a day.

Mr. Caputo, you have two minutes, with a hard stop.

• (1015)

Mr. Frank Caputo: Thank you, Chair. Through you, the following question is for Commissioner Kelly.

Commissioner, the judge in the Bernardo case.... I'm not sure about the sentencing comments in Magnotta or Williams, but I'm sure they were the same. They said that these were people who could not be rehabilitated; they were sadistic. The service has its own metrics on that, yet they are routinely transferred to medium security.

Does the CSC and do you view that as a just resolution?

Ms. Anne Kelly: Again, we have a rigorous process in place to assess the security classification of offenders. I would say they are appropriately placed. I would also say that in maximum security, over 95% of the inmates who are there are there because they are a threat to the staff; they are a threat to the institution, and they are a threat to other inmates. That's who is in our maximum-security institutions.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Just so I'm clear from what you said, you view it as appropriate that the likes of Magnotta, Bernardo, Williams or whoever are appropriately held at maximum security and that is a just outcome given what their victims have gone through.

Ms. Anne Kelly: Obviously, my heart goes out to the victims whose lives have been changed forever by the heinous crimes that have been committed by these individuals, but, again, we have a rigorous security classification process. In the Bernardo case, as you know, we did a full review. We actually did two reviews. In the end, the reviews concluded that we had respected the laws and the policies.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Of course. Those laws we know. We know who instituted those laws and those policies. Yes, the laws were followed. They just led to an unjust result.

The Chair: Mr. Caputo, your time is up, please.

Ms. O'Connell is next, for two minutes.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, Chair.

I want to follow up with Commissioner Kelly on that very point.

You've made this point before, but for some reason I guess Conservatives don't want to be confused by the facts. In terms of sentencing, the facilities themselves are not connected to sentences themselves. It's in and around the organization of the prison itself. You identified that maximum-security prisoners pose a threat to the safety of the correctional workers and to other inmates. Where prisoners are held is not a condition of sentencing; it's a condition of corrections being able to control and contain and keep the public safe.

Is that correct?

Ms. Anne Kelly: That's right. When offenders come to us, we have a responsibility, like I said, to make an assessment on their security classification and ensure they are transferred to the appropriate institutions based on a series of factors. Once we've assessed them, we have to determine which institution is the best to meet the security requirements, the interventions that are required and programs that are required.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: If it was truly a continuation of sentencing, wouldn't a former prosecutor know that sentencing and those decisions of the courts and what the prosecution can even ask for don't include facilities, because it is not a continuation of punishment? The punishment is the sentence itself—

Ms. Anne Kelly: That's right.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: —and this individual being removed from the community. That is why it is left up to correctional experts on how to take that individual and properly secure them away from the public and properly keep Correctional Service officers safe.

Ms. Anne Kelly: That's right.

We administer the sentences imposed by the courts.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell.

Before we go any further, we have project budgets for committee approval. The clerk has distributed to members yesterday two project budgets regarding our meeting today and the 106(4) meeting on March 11.

Do I have agreement from the committee to adopt these budgets?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Good.

We've also had an invitation from a Ukrainian delegation. What I think I'm going to do on this is allow the clerk to circulate it to members and get a decision on what you feel is appropriate. We do have a date and a time here. I'll get him to do that.

Also, there's an update on the visit to the port of Montreal. We're going around and around on this one. I would really like to get it settled for the clerk's effort on this. The clerk has suggested that he work with the whips, if that's okay.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We'll do that.

Witnesses today, I think sometimes we take you guys for granted for everything you do and all the staff you have. We certainly appreciate your time here today and your professionalism. We hope to see you back.

Thank you so much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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