



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 010

Wednesday, November 5, 2025

Chair: Terry Sheehan



Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Wednesday, November 5, 2025

• (1730)

[*English*]

The Chair (Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie—Algoma, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 10 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. We recognize that we meet on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, September 24, the committee is continuing its study of indigenous policing and public safety.

I'd like to remind everyone to please be mindful of the interpreters. Make sure, if you don't have your earpiece on your ear, that you put it on the little placemat that has the earpiece symbol. Turn your microphone off. Make sure that the microphones around you aren't on.

Thank you very much to our interpreters. You're fantastic.

Without further ado, I'd like to welcome our first witnesses of our first panel. We have the Honourable Minister of Public Safety. We have, from the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Talal Dakalbab, senior assistant deputy minister, crime prevention. We have Bryan Larkin, senior deputy commissioner of the RCMP. We also have Adrian Walraven, director general, indigenous affairs, crime prevention.

I'd like to welcome you, Minister. You have five minutes for a presentation, and then we'll have some rounds of questions.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, colleagues. It's an honour to be back here. As you know, I've spent many times through many years at this committee. It's always a pleasure to be here with you.

I also want to acknowledge that we are gathered here on the unceded territories of Anishinabe Algonquin people.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting me to speak about our government's work to support improved public safety outcomes in first nations and Inuit communities.

[*English*]

Our government remains committed to working in collaboration with all partners and with the provinces, territories, first nations and

Inuit to support the unique policing needs of Inuit and first nations communities. We do that through cost-shared funding for the 36 first nations and Inuit police services operating across Canada.

[*Translation*]

Like all communities in Canada, first nations and Inuit communities should be places where people and families feel safe and secure.

[*English*]

In recent years, we've made significant investments in indigenous policing and community safety, including the first nations and Inuit policing program, FNIPP, and the first nations and Inuit policing facilities program, FNIPFP.

Budget 2024 committed \$250 million over five years plus \$92.5 million in ongoing funding to the FNIPP and \$200 million over five years to the FNIPFP.

These commitments build on budget 2021, which invested \$540.3 million over five years and \$126.8 million ongoing to the FNIPP and \$108.6 million over five years to the FNIPFP. These programs are implemented based on a 52% federal and 48% provincial/territorial cost-sharing ratio.

Our expanded federal support has enhanced policing agreements and provided community safety officers in several jurisdictions. It has also stabilized the funding for existing first nations and Inuit police services.

We work closely with provincial and territorial partners to implement these investments as part of our collective responsibilities for the administration of justice. We also work to sustain ongoing tripartite discussions with provinces, territories, first nations and Inuit partners to assess which kind of policing and safety approaches are meeting local needs.

• (1735)

[Translation]

First nations and Inuit leaders and citizens will always play an important role in finding ways for us to improve safety outcomes in their own communities.

[English]

First nations have long called for reform of how their police services are funded. They've also advocated for federal legislation that recognizes first nations policing as an essential service. These calls were amplified by the release of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which called for reforms of the delivery of policing services in indigenous communities.

We have undertaken important work with first nations, police services, and provincial and territorial partners on federal legislation that would recognize first nations police services as essential services. That work is now guiding our program reform efforts.

As the committee is aware, in March 2024, the Auditor General released her report on the FNIPP, which recommended reforms to improve program governance and to ensure positive outcomes. I'm happy to tell you that these reforms have been made.

We have recently updated the FNIPP terms and conditions to be more flexible and less burdensome for funding recipients. This represents an important initial step in efforts to modernize the program, most significantly with regard to how we fund first nations and Inuit police services.

[Translation]

We know there is no one-size-fits-all approach to policing.

Policing priorities and approaches change according to local circumstances.

[English]

Community-based approaches are a key feature of our reforms and support our shared goal of improving community safety and policing outcomes in first nations and Inuit communities. We will continue to work closely with first nations and Inuit communities, as well as provincial and territorial governments, to advance this important work.

Mr. Chair, let me conclude by thanking the committee for the study that it's undertaking. I look forward to the report that will inform further progress on our part.

Thank you.

The Chair: We will go to first round of questions.

MP Zimmer, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): It's good to see you back in committee, Minister.

When testifying last week in this committee, OPP Inspector Marcel Beaudin was asked about using already stretched thin police resources to go after lawful firearms owners. He said that focusing on “nefarious activity” and “organized crime” is a “better bang for our

buck.” Inspector Beaudin is a senior leader in indigenous policing for the entire province of Ontario.

Do you think it is better to use already stretched thin police resources to go after criminals or to go after law-abiding first nations and Inuit firearms owners?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: It's good to be back here at this committee.

I want to first of all acknowledge the work of the OPP and I want to acknowledge—

Bob Zimmer: Minister, time is very short. The question is very specific, so if you could answer the question, that would be appreciated.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Sure.

The program that you are referencing contemplates using off-duty police officers and those who are not doing...as part of their regular duties. It is clear there will be additional resources available for them that will help them with the work they are being tasked to do.

• (1740)

Bob Zimmer: Minister, what we heard clearly from many witnesses at committee was that in terms of police resources, it's very difficult to just get the basics covered in a community. When asked to use those already stretched thin resources to go after law-abiding firearms owners.... If there's this great pool of officers and recruits that you're holding in queue, I guess, to go after law-abiding firearms owners' firearms, I think it would be best to let them know because they have some pretty significant issues in community.

Minister, we have heard from many witnesses over the last several weeks in this committee that the RCMP management in Ottawa is having a difficult time doing the basic community policing assignments in first nations and Inuit communities. To me, and I think it was clear even over the last couple of weeks, the RCMP lacks sufficient resources and it's a problem.

When I was in Cambridge Bay a while ago, the first concern brought to me by the Inuit members of the Canadian Rangers was that they were worried their hunting firearms, namely the SKS, would be banned by your Liberal government.

Your fellow Liberal MP, Nathalie Provost, said on September 23 that we have to find a solution to ban the SKS.

Do you agree with your colleague that you want to ban the SKS, yes or no?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: With respect to the SKS, as I said before in another committee, we intend to have an expert panel that comprises the RCMP undertake the study on the SKS, so—

Bob Zimmer: The question is yes or no. At this time, is it yes or no? Are you going to ban the SKS? Your colleague seems to be very emphatic in wanting that to happen. What's your answer today, Minister? Is it yes or no?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Zimmer, nothing is conclusive. I can assure you that right now, as part of the assault-style firearms compensation program, 2,500 firearms are the subject of the buyback and subject to the prohibition. That does not include the SKS.

Bob Zimmer: Not as of yet. Okay.

Every first nations police service is tripartite, as you know, meaning that Ottawa pays most of the bill. We have heard from many first nations chiefs and first nations police chiefs that they simply aren't going to participate in your gun confiscation scheme, because it uses needed officers and resources to go after honest, lawful Inuit and first nations people instead of criminals.

If they refuse to participate in the gun confiscation scheme, will you cut their funding?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: The assault-style firearms compensation program is a voluntary program on two fronts. First, for those who have prohibited weapons, they have the option of either disabling the unit or turning that in for compensation. Second—

Bob Zimmer: How is that voluntary? You're making somebody either turn in or decommission the firearm.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: If I may, Mr. Zimmer, let me finish the second part of this.

Bob Zimmer: Go ahead, please.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: It's also voluntary on the part of the law enforcement, the police of jurisdiction. Again, if a police service does not or is not able to participate, there are other means by which this program will be implemented. It is not contingent on police services' participation.

Bob Zimmer: Let me ask this, because my time is just about out. You're saying today that if police services choose to not participate in the gun confiscation scheme, they're okay to opt out.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Well, it is an opt-in. It's not an opt-out. We will—

Bob Zimmer: But that's what you've said. Opt-in is the same opt-out, Minister, to be frank.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Well, no, we will have a bilateral agreement with the police of jurisdiction if they want to take part in the program. That's the manner in which the program will be delivered.

Bob Zimmer: I'll tell you this: We heard from pretty much every witness, even the AFN chief, that they don't want to use those resources to go after law-abiding firearms owners. Whether it was an Inuit or first nations community, the message was quite clear. On the question of whether they would participate, there was an emphatic “no”, in many cases, even with, as I said, Inspector Beaudin.

Minister, I think you have a challenge on your hands. It's one thing to confiscate the firearms of law-abiding firearms owners, but I don't think you have willing partners in the police forces across this country and first nations communities to help you do it.

Thank you.

• (1745)

The Chair: That's the time. Thank you.

Next we have Jaime for six minutes.

Jaime Battiste (Cape Breton—Canso—Antigonish, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing today.

You know, we've heard quite a bit of frustration from first nations leaders around the lack of first nations police in their communities. We heard testimony from such communities as Eskasoni that said that at one point, 30 years ago, close to 90% of their police were actually Mi'kmaq community members. They spoke about how important it was, in de-escalating situations, to have police who the community knows showing up. We heard other testimony from other areas and other jurisdictions about how, when someone comes to check on someone, whether it's for a mental health check or whether they're coming to the door for the first time, it really de-escalates the situation if it's someone who speaks the language or is known in the community.

We heard from the national chief that we need to ensure that we have more first nations RCMP. I'm thinking about, in my lifetime, all the people I've known from Mi'kmaq communities who have tried to get into the RCMP. They were smart enough. They passed all those tests. They were physically fit enough. They passed all those tests. But for some reason, when it came time to do the interviews, they were weeded out. For some reason, they didn't pass.

How do we ensure that more first nations are making it into the RCMP? How can we ensure that first nations language speakers are prioritized by the RCMP? How can you as minister help us push to ensure that these communities that are talking about these frustrations actually have an ability to see movement from our government?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Jaime, for that very important question.

I've spent my entire life talking about and working on the issue of representation, and the work with the RCMP is a continuation of the work that I've been doing.

Currently, 6.5% of the RCMP's personnel—their frontline officers—are indigenous or self-identify as indigenous. I was over at depot several months ago and there was a troop there from Makivik in northern Quebec, which the RCMP trains. More importantly, there were a number of individuals who were identified as first nations, and it is work that we're continuing.

I fully agree with you that there is a need for representation within the community, like the Eskasoni, for example, where I was able to visit you last year. We will need to strive better to have that representation.

As part of the 1,000 new RCMP officers we will be hiring, one of the deep conversations I've had with both the deputy commissioner and the commissioner is about ensuring that there's representation, especially in northern Canada and especially involving Inuit, because we know that, again, location is important. Rather than bringing people from the south to the north, it's important to have sustainable officers who are on the ground.

With your permission, I will ask the deputy commissioner to speak about the work they've been doing.

Jaime Battiste: Absolutely, but before you speak, Commissioner Larkin, I just wanted to also frame it: We're not just looking for indigenous policemen; we're looking for first nations language speakers, because if they can speak the language when they come to the door.... How can the RCMP help ensure that first nations language speakers are prioritized as part of the 1,000 new RCMP we've gotten?

Bryan Larkin (Senior Deputy Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Minister.

Here is some quick data to bring you into the current context.

For this fiscal year, we've had 405 applicants who self-identify as indigenous. Out of those 405, 37 have already graduated from depot. This year, more than 5% of our graduates from depot identify as first nations, Inuit and Métis.

I can tell you that it is a consistent priority with a specialized indigenous recruitment strategy. In particular, around the indigenous languages, I want to highlight that in December 2023, in our official languages branch, where I serve as the champion, we took a culturally innovative approach to launching an educational program to ensure that the regular members and those who are serving in the more than 550 indigenous communities also bring cultural competence, including language. We currently have 140 regular members who are in ongoing language training in seven different languages in the indigenous community. We hope to continue to expand that in 2026.

We also celebrated our 31st anniversary of indigenous pre-cadet, where we bring young indigenous individuals who are interested in policing to RCMP depot to have an experience, and we've seen tremendous success.

I want to reaffirm our commitment that, as part of the 1,000, we'll have a specific approach to onboarding and implementing more indigenous regular members into our organization.

• (1750)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemire has the floor for six minutes.

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister Anandasangaree, thank you for joining us.

Obviously, as former minister of Crown-indigenous relations and northern affairs, you are very familiar with these issues. As you know, the Auditor General has repeatedly raised concerns about the funding of indigenous police services and the lack of consistency with the government's commitments. This was in her recent report, in the 2024 report, and in others.

Yesterday, there was a budget, which did not contain a single line on indigenous policing. How do you defend that?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you for your question and for your work.

[*English*]

Over the last several years we've had a number of investments in policing. We have a new infrastructure fund of about \$200 million over five years. We've also put additional resources into indigenous policing to the tune of \$250 million, again over five years. The quantum in terms of available resources for indigenous policing is around \$350 million, and this is over a number of years.

We were not anticipating additional resources on this budget cycle. As you know, a number of investments were made, including the RCMP.

Your point with respect to the Auditor General's report is well received. When I read these reports, I am frustrated by the lack of progress. I've been working on this file for the last 10 years as a parliamentarian. The primary area of my work is on reconciliation, an area where I think we have not been as efficient and as ambitious as we should be. My responsibility going forward is to ensure that indigenous policing is prioritized to the point that we can get additional resources and we can have greater self-determination, as well as bilateral and trilateral agreements with first nations communities.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: I understand and share your frustration, as do many members of the various indigenous communities in Quebec and Canada.

Yesterday's budget allocates \$1.7 billion to strengthen federal police services, including the hiring of 1,000 new Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers. However, Quebec's indigenous nations will not benefit from this funding because, as you know, the RCMP is not present in the province of Quebec.

This shows that the problem is not a lack of available resources, but rather a lack of political will to support indigenous policing initiatives and self-determined community safety programs in Quebec.

How does your government justify the exclusion of Quebec's indigenous communities and all those who wish to establish their own indigenous police service from this investment project? I would remind you that you were Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. You have therefore had a long opportunity to influence the Minister of Finance or the Prime Minister.

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I think you pose a very good question with respect to the police and the 1,000 new RCMP officers. I will disagree with you when you say that it will not have a direct impact on Quebecers. In fact, it will. If you look at the budget—the 1,000 new personnel, the RCMP officers, as well as those experts—you see they will be deployed primarily for federal policing, which includes issues around the border, around cybercrime, human smuggling and a range of other issues that impact indigenous communities, particularly border communities. There is an RCMP detachment in Quebec, a very strong contingent, that supports federal policing. Maybe not directly, as you indicated, but indirectly these 1,000 officers will have a net benefit to Quebecers, as well as indigenous people within Quebec.

• (1755)

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: I understand, but it has little impact in indigenous communities and on the ground in terms of ensuring safety on the streets. I would like to give the example of the Winneway community, the Long Point first nation, whose chief, Steeve Mathias, we welcomed last week. He has been working tirelessly for over 20 years to ensure that Winneway has its own indigenous police service. Agreements have been signed and services are currently provided by the Sûreté du Québec, but this is obviously causing a lot of turmoil there.

You have provided \$150,000 in funding for a feasibility study for an Anishinabe regional police service. The deliverables have been prepared, the study has been conducted, but the police service has not been created, mainly due to a lack of will.

In his brief to the committee, Chief Mathias indicated that Canada has been absent from the negotiating table since 2006, i.e., for nearly 20 years. Can you assure us that Canada will resume leadership of the process, return to the negotiating table and demonstrate the will to implement the promised indigenous policing pilot project?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Yes.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Would it be possible to have a timeline, please?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I'm more than willing to meet them within the next 90 days. I will be part of the first meeting—I invite you to be part of that meeting as well—and then we will let officials continue. My commitment, as always, would be to monitor and ensure the work is done.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: I appreciate your response. *Meegwetch.*

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Mr. Schmale.

Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing here today. The last time we spoke at the committee level, you were here in your previous role as minister of Crown-indigenous relations. At that time, we were doing a study on indigenous procurement, specifically the use of fake indigenous identity to obtain access to government contracts.

My question here relates to a letter I submitted to you earlier today, which was signed by you on December 13, 2024. It's in response to a letter that was sent to you by somebody named Eagle Eyes, a.k.a. Geoffrey, who is claiming to be the grand council representative of the Alliance of Indigenous Nations. A quick Google search of that name shows some pretty questionable results. There is the question of the legitimacy of this and whether they are indigenous at all.

Unfortunately, there is a band that just popped up recently called "Kawartha Lakes First Nation" that is claiming indigenous status. It's claiming 15,000 square kilometres of bands within the Williams Treaties area, including Scugog, the Chippewas of Georgina, Rama, Alderville, Hiawatha and Curve Lake, just to name a few.

Minister, the so-called chief of this organization is claiming that this letter confirms that you signed off on their being legitimate. Is that true?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: It's not true.

The recognition of indigeneity is a complex process. There are modern treaties that will recognize certain groups as indigenous based on the modern treaties that have been signed. There are historical treaties that recognize specific groups. In the modern context, this is within the context of the Indian Act. This particular community does not belong to the Indian Act band.

The process of recognition is an onerous process through what's called section 35 recognition. That involves an enormous amount of work, not only on the part of the community but also on the part of Crown-Indigenous Relations and the Department of Justice, that, over time, establishes the historical basis for that recognition.

I can affirm, Mr. Schmale, that in this case, that did not happen. What you gave me this afternoon is a form letter response to a letter that was received while I was in my previous portfolio. It is a courtesy response, and frankly, it does not in any way recognize the rights of this particular group.

• (1800)

Jamie Schmale: Perfect. There is no legal authority. There's a process. They're not legitimate.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Just to be clear—

Jamie Schmale: I do have a few other questions, too.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I'll be very brief.

We all receive letters, and we all respond to correspondence. A courtesy response should not imply anything further than that.

Jamie Schmale: Okay.

Minister, going back to the policing issue, in 2019-20, your government announced a desire to make indigenous policing an essential service. We've gone way past that. We're in 2025 now.

To Sébastien's point earlier, there was nothing really in the budget regarding indigenous policing other than a piece of a nation's jurisdiction, which they think was a positive step, but at the same time, your budget is also showing that you're going to spend more on going after licensed firearms owners than you are on Operation Reassurance as a NATO operation, securing the border and hiring Canada Border Services agents.

How is this a justifiable use of dollars when we have a study here with indigenous policing and nations talking about one-year programs, short staff, burnout and crimes going up? How can you justify spending it on legal firearms owners when there are problems all around you?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: To be clear, the dollars that are mentioned relating to the firearms buyback program were previously budgeted. They are really not new or additional dollars.

Having said that, with respect to the work on policing as an essential service, I think that there is work that we need to do.

I would say that there is a need for additional funding, and we will work with colleagues here, but we will also work with first nations and Inuit leadership, as well as communities, to ensure that there are additional resources in the upcoming years.

Jamie Schmale: We've had testimony about response times lacking in a lot of these circumstances, because they are rural and remote. That is a problem for police services to respond to existing circumstances.

How much longer are we and these nations supposed to wait for this legislation, if it ever comes forward? We're going on five years plus now. Has there been any headway here? Are we getting any closer to something happening?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: My approach is slightly different, Mr. Schmale.

As you know, I came into this portfolio in the last five months. One of the realizations I have on this is that we need to get the funding before the legislation comes in. There is a fair bit of work to do.

I know that there has been co-development of legislation, but I think that, given the current economic context, what we want to do is first of all ensure that we have funding. Secondly, with the national chief, I have asked to—

Jamie Schmale: Well, I think a good place to get funding is the firearms program.

The Chair: That's time.

Jamie Schmale: You're going after the wrong people.

The Chair: We're over the time.

Brendan, please go ahead for five minutes.

Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you for being here, Minister.

Thank you to the officials as well.

Minister, I've worked with you in your various roles over the last few years. You were, of course, the parliamentary secretary to the justice minister, then Crown-indigenous minister and now are the Minister of Public Safety. I know you've had ample conversations about community safety.

One of the specific topics that relates to indigenous policing is community safety officer programs and how they work with existing more traditional police services. Of course, the Yukon offers many models of how this can be developed and work.

Just to remind anyone participating in this meeting, the community safety officers really focus on prevention, on de-escalation, and on social and community support. That really complements the more traditional enforcement role of police officers. Also, part of the process is developing a community plan that really is rooted in what the community priorities are when it comes to community safety. We've had House of Wolf and other witnesses speak to the value of this program.

That part of the issue that was about federal resourcing for CSO programming is a segue to the bigger picture of financing and resourcing indigenous policing. Part of the uncertainty is also over which federal department leads. Talking through the number of portfolios that you've had, there is overlap in many of these areas.

I wonder if you can comment on what you've learned about CSO programming and how that could fit into and complement indigenous policing and traditional policing.

● (1805)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Dr. Hanley.

When you ask this question, I can't help but acknowledge that the first treaty implementation on administration of justice was in the Yukon. I know that it set a mark for others. Obviously, the notion of self-determination over policing in the administration of justice is crucially important. Ultimately, that's where we need to get to. In the interim is where all these programs come in.

With respect to community safety officers, we have a budget of about \$13 million. There are about 10 agreements across Canada that have a number of community safety officers who are working in communities. The opportunity is that they're able to do some of the non-policing work, including issues around mental health and issues around public safety, without the enforcement capabilities, and it has proven to be a workable model.

I do think that there are some challenges, because when there are security issues, you probably do need an actual police officer there, but for many communities, in conjunction with the policing service, it can be optimized. I do fundamentally believe that we need to start and to continue to expand these programs.

Brendan Hanley: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I am going to follow up on some questions from my colleagues around the table.

We have repeatedly heard, as part of this study and in previous studies, about the struggles with the lack of financial support and, often, the lack of parity between indigenous policing services—through the various agreements—and more traditional policing services in other areas of the country. We have heard how that really affects the ability to retain officers. Of course there is a huge advantage to indigenous police officers from the community in that they are trained and comfortable in the language and are culturally sensitive.

I recognize what Commissioner Larkin said about the efforts to step up education; nevertheless, how can we help you support that need and look for that necessary financial support, even as a preamble to legislation?

The Chair: Could we have a brief answer please?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Currently we have 36 bilateral and 147 tripartite agreements with the provinces. That's a 52-48 split.... More provinces are coming on board, and even with the provinces that are already participating, they're expecting us to do more. That's actually a good thing because it requires all of us to be at the table. As recently as two weeks ago, when we met federal, provincial and territorial first ministers on public safety and justice, this was a critical part of the conversation.

The commitment I made—and I'll make it again today—was to make sure that we work towards sustainable long-term funding. Of course, the notion of essential service is important, but it also requires the provinces to undertake the same level of ambition when we get there, so it's not just the federal legislation. It does need to bring the provinces and territories on board as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Sébastien, you have two and a half minutes please.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Anandasangaree, thank you again for joining us.

In 2020, the federal government expressed its intention to legislate first nations police services as an essential service. We heard this many times during this study. However, a discussion paper re-

leased in 2024 by the former minister of public safety, Dominic LeBlanc, your predecessor, seems to move away from this commitment. In your opinion, what explains this reversal? What concrete measures should the federal government put in place to ensure that this future legislation is recognized and that indigenous police services are truly recognized as an essential service? Is it the Minister of Public Safety of Canada, i.e., you, who should introduce this legislation, or the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, a portfolio you held without introducing such legislation? Which minister should do so?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: If it's tabled, it would be through Public Safety.

Let me respond to the question. The notion of policing as an essential service, as a principle, is something I fully accept. I think that, as a government, we are trying to close the gap, as we have continued to do with a range of issues over the last decade. In policing especially, we will continue on that path with the additional resources we have put in over the last number of years.

Legislating it becomes a bit more complicated because essential services, particularly in the provincial context, require provincial-federal partnership. Not all provinces are there, and we are unable, through federal legislation, to bind the provinces to ensure that it is an essential service.

I think there is work to do there, Sébastien, and the work right now for us—and the commitment I made to the AFN—is to commence a conversation to see how we can ensure the principle of policing as an essential service is attained, and then from there, we can move towards potential legislative recognition of that. That will require much more work with the provinces and territories, though.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Can you provide us with a timeline for the introduction and passage of such a bill in the House of Commons?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I wish I could give you timelines on bills being passed, but you know I am unable to do that. My commitment, though, is to continue and to sustain the discussions, particularly with first nations and Inuit, and I am more than glad to—

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: So there is no timetable.

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: —report to you in a year on progress.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Billy for five minutes, please.

Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

Earlier, my colleague Mr. Schmale asked a similar question asking for timelines for the commitments to the legislation as being essential. You finished off by saying that economic challenges are also a factor in that.

Is that correct?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: You heard what I said. There are, obviously, some difficulties right now on the fiscal frame, but I think that what is important and what the Prime Minister has reiterated is that, with respect to the critical files around reconciliation, we are continuing the path, and our commitment is to ensure that reconciliation moves forward and that services are not reduced in any way.

Billy Morin: Sir, if you're saying that there are economic challenges, you're running an \$80-billion deficit. What economic challenges are stopping you from protecting first nations and indigenous communities?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: There are a number of areas, and I will be the first one to admit and have admitted here that there are gaps. There are certainly disparities in the levels of services caused by decades of neglect. In the last 10 years, I would say that we have made some significant progress in terms of closing the gap. There are still gaps out there, and there is still work that we need to do as a government and as a country. For any successive government, there will be work to do. This is another area where that work needs to continue.

Billy Morin: You mentioned earlier that, for the last 10 years as a parliamentarian, your primary focus has been on reconciliation. Are you the right minister? You've been the CIRNAC minister. You know this file intimately. You know the communities intimately. Now you're the Public Safety minister. You refuse to give a date to get the legislation done to make it essential.

Are you the right person to get this done?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I will leave that to your judgment, but I do have a record here that I can defend with respect to reconciliation. If you would like me to enumerate that, I would be glad to, but I don't think that's necessary.

• (1815)

Billy Morin: Yesterday, during the budget submission, the finance minister had the audacity to say, "We build...for those who follow us."

I'm reminded of the seven-generation principle rooted in indigenous teachings. We are reminded that every decision we take must consider its impact on future generations. While these communities are in crisis, and they have been in crisis for decades, you refuse to go to essential and keep these communities in crisis by going year by year with this programming. How can they get out of crisis? How can you say that they are for seven generations when you keep them in crisis with these one-year programs and do not declare legislation essential?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Morin, I would not be the person, certainly, to tell you, because I think your lived experience and your leadership speaks for itself. What I can say is that, over several generations, there have been a number of policies that have deeply and adversely impacted indigenous people, particularly first nations people, with respect to the Indian Act.

Billy Morin: How many more generations is it going to take?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I wish I could answer that question. I wish I could say that it's going to be in the next 10 years. What I can say is that we have taken meaningful steps. Over the last decade, we have changed the trajectory of where we were going, including child welfare, the recognition of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action, of which the 10th anniversary is coming up, and the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and two-spirit calls to justice. We've been advancing on these issues for a number of years.

There is work to do. I will be the first one to say that there is work to do, and this is work that we need to do together in a manner that advances reconciliation and doesn't politicize this issue. I would love to work across the aisle with you and many other colleagues who I have been able to work with in the past. I invite you to continue this conversation, because I recognize the frustration you have. It's the same level of frustration that I've heard in the 60 or 70 communities that I've been to in the last year or so. It is work that we—

Billy Morin: I have one more question, sir, while I still have the time.

You talked about the investment of 1,000 police officers for the RCMP. We've heard the scathing report of the Auditor General on the failures of your government and the RCMP. How come first nations and indigenous policing were left out of that? Also, how come there are no Métis references in the budget to keep those communities safe?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: There is a distinction in terms of the RCMP. They offer contract policing, so many provinces, including yours, Manitoba and Saskatchewan and a range of provinces, have what we call contract policing. That is, we have a contract until 2032. We certainly have a desire, and the RCMP has a desire, to continue that service to those constituents, those citizens.

The investments that are going in are going towards federal policing, which has to do with the border and enforcement of anti-terrorism legislation, on—

Billy Morin: What about first nations communities' borders?

The Chair: That's time, please. Thank you.

Ginette, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

Ginette Lavack (St. Boniface—St. Vital, Lib.): Minister Anandasangaree, thank you for joining us this evening.

I would also like to thank all the senior officials who are with us.

Over the past few weeks, as the member of Parliament for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, I have met with several indigenous and non-indigenous organizations that are doing remarkable work in the field, including the Street Links team in Saint Boniface and the N'Dinawemak Centre.

What I hear consistently is that many of the safety issues we face here in Winnipeg and across the country are deeply rooted in poverty, housing insecurity, trauma, substance abuse and mental health issues. These findings echo much of the testimony we heard during our study. Witnesses often emphasized that, in order to ensure public safety, it was essential to address the underlying social causes, rather than just the symptoms.

How does the Department of Public Safety support and collaborate with actors on the ground, such as community safety officers, to improve safety at the local level?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I appreciate the question and where it's coming from.

If I'm hearing you correctly, your question is on urban indigenous populations. There's a distinction between challenges faced by urban populations and challenges faced by those on reserve, in community, and they're two different legal frameworks. I hate to put it in those terms, but within communities, a lot of the services are through federal transfers. In terms of gaps, we need to continuously close those gaps. With respect to urban populations, it's very much centred in the municipalities. So, there's a role for municipalities and for the provinces, as well as for the federal government.

From a public safety perspective, the RCMP is not the police.... The federal police are....police of jurisdiction in many cases. We see that in Winnipeg. You were a part of some meetings in Winnipeg. I know that there's definitely a groundswell of support and, I think, great collaboration that's taking place between the three levels of government, as well as civil society, which has for many years been doing the brunt of the work. My role, and I think the role of the department, is to facilitate and use our convening power to make sure that everybody's at the table.

One of the things we did in Winnipeg was the transfer of the former Hudson's Bay facility to the Southern Chiefs' Organization. Through this budget and previous budgets, we have additional resources. There's Build Canada Homes, which will provide transitional housing. There's certainly a need for mental health supports. Those have been going through the federal government, but they're funnelled through the provinces.

The role we have is that of collaborator, and it's one of taking leadership to bring that collaboration together.

• (1820)

[Translation]

Ginette Lavack: Thank you very much.

You also mentioned the Auditor General's report and the fact that you have accepted some of the recommendations in that report. Could you talk a little about the concrete steps taken so far?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: First of all, we accept the Auditor General's report. I expressed my frustration earlier. There are a number of things we have done.

One is the modernization of the FNIPP terms and conditions so that there's greater flexibility and a reduced administrative burden for communities.

We have a new FPT governance structure, which improves the funding decisions we make.

We use multi-year funding proposals, which is something we've heard over and over again. Even today, we've heard the frustrations and the challenges around having limited, shorter-term funding. In fact, we are able to go as far as 10 years in certain cases, and ideally, that's where the benchmark should be.

We have national-level tracking reports, aligning program demand with available resources. We've also updated the 1996 first nations policing policy and developed a new performance measurement framework.

A number of measures have been taken. There's still work to do. It's not just about the Auditor General's report. There are other commitments that we have under the 94 calls to action. There's enormous work that we still need to do around missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and two-spirit individuals, as well as around the UNDA action plan.

We're working in tandem. We're working across government, and we're working as a whole of government to address many of these issues.

The Chair: Thank you. That brings us to five minutes.

We have a little bit of time for a brief discussion with the parties. We're going to do a rapid two-minute round. Respect the two minutes, please. I'm going to be firm with it.

The Conservatives are first.

Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, the Auditor General and indigenous police chiefs are very concerned about short-term funding under the first nations and Inuit policing program, which you mentioned we've been waiting five-plus years for. Yet, under this budget, your government is spending more on the war on licensed firearms owners than you are on Operation Reassurance, a NATO mission, securing the border by hiring Canada Border Services Agency officers. How can you run an \$80-billion deficit and have a program that costs more than a NATO mission and say that we're going to be safer in Canada?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Schmale, I can go into the reasons for the assault-style firearms program, but I can also say the funding that you referenced—

• (1825)

Jamie Schmale: Are we able to define “assault”? Have we landed on a definition of “assault rifles”?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: There are 2,500 assault-style firearms that are part of the prohibition. There are three different orders in council—

Jamie Schmale: Yes, I've been counselled on shotguns.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: There are 2,500 firearms. Maybe, Mr. Larkin, if you want to—

Jamie Schmale: No, Minister, before you go, if you have a restricted firearms licence, your name is run under the policing database every single day. It's basically being on parole every single day. These are law-abiding people. You are going to go and confiscate some of their firearms that they legally purchased after obtaining training and a licence. We have a NATO mission that is getting less money than this confiscation program that isn't going to make anyone any safer. How can you justify that?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Just for the record, the program you're referencing was previously budgeted and those—

Jamie Schmale: You're still spending the money, and we're \$80 billion in the hole. Should we not see a result?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Those dollars—

Jamie Schmale: A result would be making Canada safer or fixing the indigenous policing program that we've just talked about many times over again. That is basically getting no attention.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: We can do all three, Mr. Schmale.

Jamie Schmale: How about we stop going after firearms—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Schmale, but that's time.

We have the Liberals for two minutes, please.

Jaime Battiste: Minister and Deputy Commissioner, we heard testimony that when Mi'kmaq communities had tribal police, while that was a better model that they were happier with, the project was set up to fail because of inadequate funding. We also heard that you need RCMP support for major crimes, major investigations, which most tribal police don't have the capacity to undertake.

With that in mind, we've seen communities take on jurisdiction over things like education. We've seen provincial indigenous groups take over health. I'm wondering if there is a possibility for us to look at a hybrid model that not only builds on the community's ability to have their own tribal police, but one that gets collaboration from the RCMP in a flexible and collaborative approach.

Bryan Larkin: In short, policing of communities is a democracy. One of the strengths of our nation is the way police services are developed across our country. Certainly, the RCMP's commitment is that we would work in collaboration with public safety and a specific indigenous community to ensure their success.

On the national infrastructure and the work required to operate police services, we have full commitment to ensuring that infrastructure and that support at the national perspective will always be

there. Equally, if any indigenous police service, including the current self-administered indigenous police services in Canada, require RCMP support, whether it be through contract indigenous policing, specialized policing or federal policing, let me reaffirm that we will be there to support that community, that police service, to ensure the safety of the residents.

Again, we're very open to that dialogue and discussion to ensure the evolution of policing in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have Sébastien for two minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, the Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador, Francis Verreault-Paul, also appeared before the committee and spoke about the importance of establishing a tripartite table bringing together Quebec, Canada and first nations in order to have indigenous police services recognized as an essential service.

You have shown great openness today. Would you be equally interested in meeting with Chief Verreault-Paul and the Quebec Minister of Public Security, who is also the minister responsible for relations with indigenous peoples in Quebec, within 90 days?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I'm supposed to call Mr. Lafrenière this afternoon. I texted him saying I would call him tomorrow. I have an ongoing conversation with him on a range of issues, and I will be more than glad to bring this up.

In fact, when we meet in person, this is one of the agenda items that we have: to be able to do greater collaboration. There are a couple of communities that we are now working on with some tripartite agreements, but I take your point about having a broader Quebec-wide program for first nations communities.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: I am very pleased to hear that.

Several police chiefs, including those from the Association of First Nations and Inuit Police Chiefs of Quebec, Director Annick Wylde and Chief Dwayne Zacharie, have called for indigenous police officers to receive the same benefits as their municipal, provincial and federal colleagues. I am talking about equal pay and equal pension plans for work of equal value.

Do you have plans for a pay equity law for indigenous and non-indigenous police officers? Is it necessary to go that far to ensure parity and the sustainability of police services?

• (1830)

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: There's certainly a need for parity. I'm not quite sure, and I don't think I can answer, how we can achieve that right away. The policing space right now and the law enforcement space overall is quite competitive from an employer perspective, because there's also a lot of competition—RCMP, CBSA. You talk to my province, Peel Region, Toronto, Ottawa, everybody is hiring. Everybody's improving the numbers of law enforcement they have. It is a competitive field.

It is also one where there's a disparity in terms of those that are able to pay more, that have better benefits, that have greater retirement benefits and so on. Conversations need to be had. It's a longer conversation that requires many more partners at the table. It can be done only through negotiations, and it is not something we can necessarily mandate.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

[English]

The Chair: That brings us to 6:30. Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Thank you to the committee.

We'll suspend while we switch to the next panel.

• (1830)

(Pause)

• (1835)

The Chair: All right. We'll now go to the second panel. Welcome.

From the Department of Indigenous Services, we have Lisa Smylie, assistant deputy minister, strategic policy and partnerships. The Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness is here as well to answer any questions in the second round. Again, Bryan Larkin from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is here, as well as Chief Superintendent Lindsay Ellis, commanding officer of M division.

Welcome to all. We're going to proceed to the rounds of questions. We have Jamie first, for six minutes, please.

Jamie Schmale: Are there no opening statements?

The Chair: I believe there are no opening statements.

Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much to our witnesses for coming in.

As I mentioned in the first hour and as we have heard in testimony, the ongoing issue being highlighted by the Auditor General and indigenous police chiefs themselves is with regard to the very short-term funding models. They make it very difficult to recruit, to plan and to retain. Are you hearing that with the partners you're working with in the field?

Talal Dakalbab (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Crime Prevention Branch, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Yes, it is something that we hear and it is something that we have heard in the past, and as the minister indicated earlier, it is something that we are working on.

We have had some successes and we're still working with all the provinces and territories to ensure that whenever we have a lesson learned that is successful, we apply it elsewhere. As the minister has said, some agreements now have been signed for a much longer time, up to 10 years.

• (1840)

Jamie Schmale: In terms of the RCMP, there are cases in which your jurisdictions may overlap. Are there conversations regarding mutual efforts to work together in order to keep these communities safe?

I know response times are obviously a major issue that is being addressed in this committee, but I'm curious to get your thoughts.

Lindsay Ellis (Commanding Officer of M Division, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): In the Yukon, which is the area in which I am responsible for policing, there are several conversations at the community level and the first nations government level, and also with the territorial government, about community safety initiatives that we can collaborate on and about requirements that the communities may have.

Jamie Schmale: In those northern communities that don't have a full-time indigenous police service and rely on the RCMP—and I get the challenges you're dealing with—what is being done to ensure that there is some constant coverage or reliability of service?

That's not to say it's not happening, but maybe you can explain what is being done there to ensure that those communities are getting service.

Lindsay Ellis: The Yukon is fortunate in that the vacancy rate for RCMP members is quite low. It hovers anywhere around 9% to 10% for both soft and hard vacancies at any given time, and that is for the total number of police officers in the Yukon.

There are various things that we do to try to ensure that no community is left without a dedicated policing service in the community. That's within our national backup policy, which is overseen by me and my leadership team in the Yukon. Through the contract police service, we have dedicated relief teams that go out into communities when expected or unexpected vacancies occur, such as through life issues that come up with police officers, but our staffing and our presence have been fairly stable in every Yukon community.

Jamie Schmale: Well, it is a beautiful place to live, especially in the summertime. In winter, I don't know. I'm not a winter guy.

Lindsay Ellis: I will disagree with you. Winter is beautiful as well.

Jamie Schmale: Dr. Hanley disagrees, but I don't know. It's pretty darn cold up there.

We heard during previous testimony that recruitment of indigenous officers is always a challenge for the RCMP, for a whole bunch of reasons—geography or whatever.

What steps are you or the service in general taking to ensure that you're reaching out to indigenous communities to get those voices and those bodies into your ranks?

Bryan Larkin: When we look at the challenges that we face, we provide service to 550 indigenous communities, and 450 of those are first nations, 40 are Inuit communities and 58 are Métis communities.

That being said, from a recruitment perspective, we have a lot of young Canadians who are actually interested in joining the mission and serving their nation as an RCMP officer. One of our focuses, though, is to ensure a diverse, gender-based approach to recruiting.

As I alluded to, in this year alone, our applications from Canadian citizens are significant and we're actually facing not a recruiting issue; it's really around processing, training and expediting those pieces.

Specifically to indigenous recruitment, as I alluded to, we have this year alone 405 who self-identified. Last year, 59 first nations, indigenous and Métis applicants graduated from depot. This year already we've trained 37, and that represents about 5% of all graduates coming through depot in Regina. Many of those go across the country, and many of those return to their communities.

In particular, as the minister alluded to earlier, 6.5% of our regular members are indigenous. Although that exceeds the majority of government services in the country, we won't rest on our laurels. As a result of that, we have a specific indigenous recruitment strategy. We have community engagement teams. We're looking at opportunities as we bring young indigenous individuals who are interested in the RCMP to depot to take them through an experience and through a learning piece.

Equally, at the same time for our non-indigenous members who are deployed, we work really hard on cultural competency. We acknowledge the past and we're working on the present, but we want a better future generation, so when a regular member who is not indigenous is deployed to one of the 550 communities, they arrive with a community cultural competency package. They have a

whole concept and understanding of where they're heading to work, and that allows them to slowly build trust and integrate into the community.

Of course, naturally, our goal is to have representation in all the communities that reflects the community we provide service to. This is one of our key priorities. Is it perfect? No, but it is a continued work in progress through our contract indigenous policing program. Again, we continue to see the recruitment numbers of those who identify as indigenous increasing, and our goal is to move the numbers forward.

● (1845)

The Chair: Thank you.

You'll be able to pull that out in another answer, probably, but that's time.

Brendan, please go ahead.

Brendan Hanley: Thank you all very much for being here.

I am supposed to be in two places at once, so I might have to leave in the middle, but I do want a chance, Chief Superintendent Ellis, to ask you a few questions to give us a very brief portrait of policing in the territory.

You recently took on the commanding role. You've been dedicated to service in the Yukon for many years, and you've established relationships all around the territory. Give me a quick picture of what it's like to police in the Yukon.

Lindsay Ellis: The Yukon is a remote and northern landscape. The RCMP has a long history in the Yukon. I would describe it as a progressive policing environment in the Yukon, given the landscape of self-government agreements for 11 out of 14 first nations. The remaining three first nations are Indian Act nations but have many initiatives under way that are extremely progressive.

The policing landscape in the Yukon is continually evolving, modernizing and leading to be effective every day in a sustained way for the Yukon. As I mentioned, the vacancy rate is fortunately very low. There is a robust contract policing resourcing framework. There's also an equally robust first nations and Inuit policing program resourcing framework as well.

At this time, there are 11 first nations—11 out of 14—that have active community tripartite agreements with Canada and the Yukon. The RCMP provides service within letters of expectation to those communities, but all the Yukon communities receive services directly from us.

There have been a few opportunities for success that I'll mention here. Those have been through some funding and some resourcing through the first nations and Inuit policing program. One of those is to the community of Burwash Landing, which has a population of approximately 120. It is a first nations community of the Kluane First Nation on Kluane Lake, Yukon. It is on the most western border of the Yukon and Alaska. The closest police detachment has been the Haines Junction detachment, which was about an hour and 20 minutes by car. The next one is the Beaver Creek detachment, which is on the U.S.-Canada border.

That community had not seen dedicated policing since 1946 until last February, when two positions were provided to the Kluane First Nation. They signed on to a community tripartite agreement with Canada and the Yukon to have two positions that were dedicated to them. Those positions are staffed. The infrastructure discussions are taking place, and the letter of expectation is fully engaged with that first nation.

We saw the need in that community to be more present and to build more meaningful relationships, not just on the drive-by when we're heading to Beaver Creek or vice versa. The real policing needs were acute in that community. Some of the calls for service that we were getting out of our Haines Junction detachment were extremely serious. Some calls for public safety included guns and impaired driving. We were on the back foot of developing those relationships that are key and critical, not only to respond to those issues but also to participate in prevention exercises with the first nation to keep people safe.

I would say that the Yukon is evolving. It's progressive. The RCMP wishes to remain in the Yukon for many years.

• (1850)

Jaime Battiste: I know a lot of chiefs have come to this committee frustrated with the fact that the RCMP doesn't enforce band by-laws. A lot of them have been talking about trying to remove drug dealers and trying to remove people from houses they suspect are selling drugs and hurting their communities. Is it realistic for communities to expect the RCMP to enforce bylaws around removing drug dealers from their community's boundaries?

Bryan Larkin: In short, yes, it is realistic. RCMP officers can and will. They enforce federal, municipal and provincial legislation as well as bylaws under the Indian Act and others. Our approach is that we're working on a national policy to build consistency across the nation. We're working with the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association because it is a national challenge.

One of the strengths of policing in Canada is also officer independence and officer discretion. That forms a part of it. Where appropriate, RCMP officers will and can enforce band bylaws.

Jaime Battiste: How would the community go about doing so? We've heard communities say that they've wanted this. I know you're saying at a committee here with us that you can do that. Communities are asking why their RCMP haven't done this.

How can we ensure that this is done in a collaborative, flexible way that acknowledges the communities' rights to do so?

The Chair: That's the time.

You can send it in writing, if you'd like.

Bryan Larkin: I'm happy to do so.

The Chair: Thank you.

Sébastien, you have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their presence here this evening.

Mr. Walraven or Mr. Dakalbab, under the current first nations and Inuit policing program, the federal government contributes 52% of the funding, while the provinces cover the remaining 48%. In practice, it is the government that invests the least that determines the total amount available to communities. Please correct me if I am wrong.

Is your department concerned that it is the government that contributes the least that dictates the level of funding available for first nations security resources?

Talal Dakalbab: I would like to begin by clarifying a few points. We have a dedicated budget and we are working with the provinces and territories to ensure that they contribute their share. We are making sure that this is not a random figure, but rather a figure based on needs, reality and comparisons with other police forces in the provinces and territories. That is how we are approaching this.

As mentioned earlier in relation to the Auditor General's report, it is also about ensuring that there is a better approach and fairness in distribution. What you are referring to is that sometimes we provide a certain amount, but the province is unable to contribute its 48% share, or there are discrepancies.

Last year, we had less than 3% of our total budget left, which shows quite exceptional collaboration. It may be something similar this year. As the minister mentioned earlier, less than a month ago there was a meeting of all federal, provincial and territorial ministers of public safety and justice. Collaboration and commitment were quite an important topic of conversation, and everyone around the table committed to working together to ensure that the funds are fully allocated.

Sébastien Lemire: The minister mentioned that the provinces must also contribute. That means that some provinces are probably not contributing at the same level, and I would like to ask you if that is the case. Are some provinces less generous than others when it comes to policing, which could have an impact on the ground?

• (1855)

Talal Dakalbab: This is certainly the case when we propose an amount, but the province is unable to contribute its share. As I said, there have been situations in the past where this has been problematic. Currently, we are seeing better collaboration in the allocation process. I would even say that we are increasingly finding that it is possible to go even further. As the minister mentioned, we will ensure that we have the necessary budget to do so when the time comes.

We have the figures and are happy to share them with you. The federal government allocated \$349 million to this program, of which almost 97% has been used. We are therefore on the right track.

Sébastien Lemire: If I understand correctly, Minister Anandangaree mentioned that a lot of work is under way to develop a law on essential services and that he would come back to see us in a year.

Mr. Chair, I therefore ask you to invite the Minister of Public Safety back in a year to report on the steps that have been taken and to tell us whether we can expect a bill to be introduced in the near future, which I believe is eagerly awaited by the members of the committee and by indigenous communities. We will see if we make a formal recommendation following our study.

In the meantime, Mr. Dakalbab, there is a major problem. Several police chiefs have mentioned the need for sustainable, long-term and predictable funding. In the short term, this has repercussions on equipment reservations and police recruitment. What can you tell us to reassure those who work in communities and need predictability?

Talal Dakalbab: I think the minister has been clear about the priorities. The discussion that began on the legislation a few years ago is continuing, and it is having a significant impact on the decisions we are making.

The budget is certainly a key element. Earlier, there was a question about community safety officers. There are several funds, not just the first nations and Inuit policing program. As we discussed earlier, there are tripartite agreements, community safety officers and infrastructure investments.

I think what's important here is to make sure we follow up. Of course, on our side, we meet with chiefs, communities, and representatives from the provinces, territories, and certain municipalities to ensure we have the capacity to allocate funds.

With regard to the infrastructure program, for example, it is extremely important to ensure that we are aware of the timelines. We are aware of the challenges, so we want to ensure that the money is invested at the right time to avoid shortages elsewhere.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you for your clear answers. I appreciate that particularly.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

William, you have five minutes.

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you.

I'll continue with MP Lemire's questioning.

You mentioned previously that you had a lot of statistics. Could we get you to perhaps have some of that spending broken down by jurisdiction as to who is actually participating, for how much and what those levels are?

With that, could you also break it down as to whether there is a difference on a per capita basis with regard to those who are doing self-policing versus those who are covered by the RCMP? I don't know if that's for Mr. Walraven or not.

Adrian Walraven (Director General, Indigenous Affairs, Crime Prevention Branch, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): We don't have it broken down in terms of what my team manages as normal data on a per capita basis, but as a substantive response to your question, one of the points of comparison that I think some first nations make—and I know that first nations in Alberta make this point of comparison—is how much funding on a per capita or per officer basis we are seeing going to first nations police services versus how much on a per officer basis is being subsidized under other aspects of the program, like a community tripartite agreement.

We are making those links in funding agreement negotiations. It is an informal point of comparison that we do use.

• (1900)

William Stevenson: Thank you.

That leads to where I was going, in that I have seven different reserves in my riding. All of them are covered by the RCMP at this point, but they're looking at why they don't go to the other one. Funding is part of the reason that they're looking at that.

I might have to go to Mr. Larkin on this one. I liked a lot of the stats from Ms. Ellis, but I don't know, because she's Yukon specific, if she can give us Alberta numbers. I wonder whether you can give us Alberta numbers as to what you have for vacancy rates and whether or not you can tell us, when we have higher vacancy rates, if you have anything for numbers for response times in serving the indigenous communities, especially in our more remote areas. Mine is a rather large area.

I've talked to a few members of the RCMP who have said that 400, 500 or 600 square kilometres per officer is rather large, and response time has been much slower when they have those vacancies.

Bryan Larkin: I can give you specifics in writing in the coming weeks around the specifics of the breakdown within Alberta. Our general range of vacancy in Alberta fluctuates between 7% and 10%.

Deputy Commissioner Daroux does allocate resources through the province to ensure, as my colleague Chief Superintendent Ellis alluded to, that we comply with backup policy service, 24-hour response, etc. One of the strengths of our being the provincial police in Alberta is the ability to deploy resources, to move resources and to have the equipment to move resources.

I can certainly break it down, particularly if you're interested in the RCMP serving your indigenous communities in Alberta. I'm happy to do that.

William Stevenson: Yes.

We'll probably have to get in writing as well any stats regarding those who are repeat offenders and whether or not those who are out on bail are reoffending and that sort of thing. Are there any differences, or can you give me any stats, with regard to the remote areas and indigenous and northern communities as compared with, say, some of the other ones that are in the more urban areas?

Bryan Larkin: We're happy to provide data. Obviously, rural crime is a significant priority for us, not only in Alberta but across the country. The majority of communities in the land mass that we provide policing to are largely in the rural sector of Canada. Clearly, our strategies around crime reduction and dealing with violent crime are very much focused on rural, but we're happy to work with K Division in Alberta, which you represent, to provide you with more specific data. We'd be equally happy to connect you with Deputy Commissioner Trevor Daroux, our commanding officer in the province.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Jaime, you have five minutes.

Jaime Battiste: Thank you for that, Mr. Chair.

You know, I'm a little bit frustrated. We had asked the RCMP commissioner to be here to take some of these questions, but you were sent, so I have to put you on the hot seat a little bit here.

We're having a federal study on indigenous policing, which means there's a serious problem that we're dealing with in indigenous communities across Canada. Just last year, in December, the Assembly of First Nations called for a national inquiry into systemic racism in policing. Specifically, they called for "a National Inquiry into systemic racism in policing, to be led by First Nations Commissioners, with a mandate to investigate police-related deaths, serious incidents, and systemic racism in law enforcement, and to make culturally informed recommendations that address root causes and drive reform".

With this committee looking at this, with the commissioner, with the national chief and all of the chiefs asking for this, do you feel the RCMP is taking adequate steps to address their concerns?

Bryan Larkin: First, let's be clear that systemic racism and systemic barriers have absolutely no place within the RCMP, within our police service. I can assure you of the commitment of Commissioner Duheme and of the entire senior executive and senior executive team. We are working hard. As I alluded to, we have acknowledged the past and we're working very hard on the present.

We're continuing to do a number of things. I'm happy to highlight a number of pieces around our equity, diversity and inclusion work. We have a specific team that supports it across the country. Every commanding officer has an indigenous advisory community that provides cultural wisdom and advice and guidance on providing service to indigenous communities. Equally, the commissioner has a national indigenous advisory community that he meets with biannually to discuss challenges within policing and to hear directly

from indigenous leaders and chiefs from across the country who guide our police service and the service we do.

We launched a significant anti-racism strategy within our organization. We enhanced cultural competency training at depot and across all the divisions. That includes mandatory training. As alluded to, we launched an official languages extension under the Indigenous Languages Act. We have 140 regular members now signed up to learn six different indigenous languages.

We're also piloting—

• (1905)

Jaime Battiste: Commissioner, I'm sorry I have to cut you off a little bit, but I don't have a lot of time here.

We've been hearing significant concerns over the past few weeks. This was something they called for back in December. Has the RCMP commissioner met with the national chief to hear her concerns since December of last year?

Bryan Larkin: I'd have to get back to you in writing. I do have good knowledge of the commissioner's calendar. I do know that he has met with a number of chiefs. We are happy to provide you with that information specifically. I do believe he just recently met with his indigenous advisory committee.

I want to reaffirm our complete commitment to this.

Jaime Battiste: As a member of Parliament and as chair of the indigenous caucus, what I'd really like to hear is that the RCMP are willing to meet with the national chief to hear the concerns that were raised last year when they called for a national inquiry. I feel that adequate steps have to come out of here. I would really have liked to ask this question of Commissioner Duheme, but he's not here. What I really need to get is a commitment from the RCMP to meet with the AFN's national chief. I hope you can take that back, and I hope we can get a response in writing before the end of this study.

I'll let you continue. What steps have we done since December of last year?

Bryan Larkin: On behalf of Commissioner Duheme, we are absolutely willing and we will meet at your request. We're happy to do that, and the commissioner meets regularly. We can certainly, through his office—and I have the privilege to work in the commissioner's office—arrange that and support that meeting. We'll also confirm that in writing.

As I alluded to, there are a number of significant strategies that are ongoing across the country, including in depot, around cultural competency. In short, I want to confirm to you our complete commitment as an organization. We're working hard on this. We recognize that it's a journey. It's not a program. It will take some time to build trust.

Again, in the more than 550 communities where we provide service—and I know Chief Superintendent Ellis can provide some pieces—our members are privileged to be a part of those communities and to contribute to the safety of those communities. That remains at the forefront of the work we're doing.

I can speak more to the work we're doing around de-escalation and those pieces. Tragically, too many individuals in our country have lost their lives at the hands of police, and one is too many. It speaks to the larger work we need to do, not only in policing but in the communities we serve. That includes other wraparound services to ensure the safety of all citizens.

Again, I will commit, on behalf of Commissioner Duheme—because I have the ability to do so—that we look forward to arranging that meeting, having that meeting and hearing directly from chiefs from across the country.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Sébastien, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dakalbab, you mentioned that you are coming to the negotiating table with a good idea of what you are going to put on the table, which is perfectly normal. On the other hand, we have heard from several indigenous representatives that the government often comes with an attitude that what it puts on the table is take it or leave it.

Can you tell us how the negotiations are going? Are the specific characteristics of the communities being taken into account?

Talal Dakalbab: I can assure you that the attitude with which my team and I approach this is really to listen, first and foremost. Of course, we are working within a budget, so I cannot have more money than the amount we are allocated. However, as recently as last week and the week before, I met with community leaders from Saskatchewan, Alberta and even Quebec. We listened to their needs, and I personally committed to meeting with them in person to see how we can improve the services or amounts allocated to them.

As recently as this week, I sent messages to four provinces, asking them to come to the table with certain indigenous communities and us to discuss needs and see how we can support these communities. I can confirm and give you my personal and professional commitment that we are open to discussion and negotiation. As I said, we may ultimately be limited in the total amount we can grant, but that does not prevent us from being open to discussion.

• (1910)

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you. I appreciate your response.

Several police chiefs also spoke to us about the need for infrastructure, equipment purchases and training for indigenous communities. Does the first nations and Inuit policing program meet these needs and, if so, how?

In addition, there has been construction or renovation in Pikogan, Kebaowek and Timiskaming. Did the funding for these new police stations come from this program?

Talal Dakalbab: Indeed, there have been investments. However, I will be very honest with you: despite my confidence in the first nations and Inuit policing program, there is still a long way to go with this program. There are certain limitations. It is sometimes difficult to build in more remote areas or to ensure that contracts are signed on time. I am not just talking about the federal government, but also the provincial government and indigenous communities. In general, we know that it is not easy.

I must therefore admit that we still have a long way to go with this program. We have the money, so it's not a question of money. It's really a question of process and capacity to ensure that construction is completed on time and that agreements are negotiated on time.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Now we have Billy for five minutes.

Billy Morin: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, guests.

Considering it's pretty close to Remembrance Day, I want to thank you for your service—to our RCMP members as well.

I guess where I'll start is with a little bit of background, being myself former chief of Enoch Cree Nation. Adrian knows this as we've worked in the department as well.

I was lucky to have a great relationship with the local RCMP. Commander Lokken, who now runs depot, was in Parkland, and he also had a subdetachment at our nation. We're lucky enough to be close to Edmonton and have our own source of revenue. I truly believe too that the federal government should chip in, the province should chip in, but nations themselves should chip in as well for their own policing services as a way to be able to create their own economies. We were lucky to do that with the RCMP and public safety.

I want to give a quick shout-out to Nelson Salter and Ray Starzynski, in particular. Those are two commanders I worked with. They did a great job for our community, and as you mentioned. Commissioner Larkin, we hear so much about the implementation and the enforcement of nation bylaws. The RCMP actually enforced our toughest bylaw, which is the eviction law, and they did it pretty consistently.

I know lots of first nations and indigenous communities and Inuit communities don't see that, but I know it is possible, so thank you for referencing that.

I was talking to Commander Lokken not too long ago, catching up with him and other RCMP members, about the upcoming budget, and they were advocating for mental health services and training. I'm wondering if you can expand upon that and put it in the context of working with indigenous communities, because they're unique placements— trauma-informed, their own history, along with a tough history of the RCMP, in particular. Can you expand upon what you are seeing on how that mental health investment would help in particular within the context of indigenous communities for a new training aspect?

Bryan Larkin: Thank you for the kind comments in relation to the leadership team. We're very proud of Assistant Commissioner Lokken and the work that he's doing at depot. It's in good hands as we look to the future of developing the next generation of police officers.

As you know there are some specific challenges, and I know Chief Superintendent Ellis will bring some real-life, on-the-ground experience.

The first and foremost one is taking a different approach to mental health calls for service for addiction and housing. For those types of challenges, the best approach is a community approach.

Certainly from a policing perspective, the RCMP's position is that we will not arrest our way out of some of those challenges; that the judicial system, as strong and as robust as it can be, is not always the suitable answer; and that you need community-centric, community approaches to solving some of the significant complexities we're facing in communities.

One of the challenges that we face as an organization is the majority of communities that we provide policing services to are often in limited, remote or northern areas, which make challenges for larger services and wraparound services. Often the only answer and the only solution at the end of that phone call is the local RCMP officer managing many different hats and doing many different things with the best of intentions, with the best of their abilities and the best of their skill sets.

Very clearly, in partnership with public safety, community safety officers and other mental health approaches, we endeavour to continue to work with provinces and territories on the evolution of the way that we provide policing. Recognizing the timing and such, Lindsay may have a unique approach that is working in the Yukon that would actually bring credit to the discussion that we're having.

• (1915)

Lindsay Ellis: In the Yukon, there are two areas I'd like to highlight.

The first one is the community safety officer program at Kwanlin Dūn First Nation. That program operates every day in strong collaboration with the three police officers from the first nations and Inuit policing program who are assigned to Kwanlin Dūn First Nation.

That community safety officer program is an on-the-ground, community, culturally relevant and trauma-informed service to the McIntyre subdivision in Whitehorse, Yukon, which is the settlement lands of the Kwanlin Dūn First Nation.

The work they do ranges from letting an elder's dog out in the evening hours when that might be a little bit dark and cold and scary to supporting the RCMP in their work when someone requires some wellness supports or follow-up and wraparound services. That's one highlight I will provide.

The second one is car 867, which is the mobile crisis response team. It is a territorially funded initiative out of Whitehorse detachment that pairs a police officer and a nurse. There are currently two police officers and two nurses. There are indigenous employees attached to this initiative. They not only respond to individuals in crisis in that trauma-informed and culturally informed way, but they also provide some prevention, check-ins and follow-up that have dramatically reduced the Mental Health Act calls for service at Whitehorse detachment.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that important answer.

Philip, you have five minutes.

Philip Earle (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I am from B Division in Newfoundland and Labrador and the member of Parliament for Labrador. Like my colleagues, I want to thank all your members for the great work they do in Labrador. It's the north. It's the Yukon by another name, and it's as beautiful as the Yukon.

I want to talk about policing and indigenous policing in communities. We've spent a number of sittings hearing from indigenous police chiefs who talked to us about the importance of consistency in community and how that brings tremendous results.

I'd like to direct my question to the senior deputy commissioner. It relates to FIFO, or fly-in/fly-out. I want to ask you to comment, to the extent that you can, on the benefits and the burdens of FIFO on the community first but also, equally as important, on your members.

Bryan Larkin: Clearly, policing the north is a complex challenge, and, of course, finding members to spend a significant amount of time in those communities can be challenging and complex, but, equally, it can be very rewarding.

As you're aware, we have been experimenting through pilot projects with the fly-in/fly-out and drive-in/drive-out model, depending on the portion of the country you're in, where a member would land in a community for an extended period of time—15 to 16 days—and then leave the community, and the next member would come in. We also are finding consistency in the same members coming in and out of the community, which has been well received.

Our internal audit is doing an evaluation right now on the fly-in/fly-out and drive-in/drive-out model. I can tell you that we received more than 6,000 responses from community members, internal members and leaders on that program, which will guide us in a larger direction. It's been a very successful audit. We do not have the results yet; however, generally speaking—and certainly Commanding Officer Ellis can provide further context—the feedback we're getting from Assistant Commissioner Pat Cahill in Newfoundland and Labrador is that it is a successful model. It's not without financial implications and travel implications, particularly in some of the areas when the weather patterns change, etc., but we are seeing enhanced consistency in the members who are in those communities and when they come and go, etc.

Again, it's early on in our pilot intervention. We've looked at the Ontario Provincial Police fly-in/fly-out and drive-in/drive-out model extensively, and we've also looked at the Sûreté du Québec model to see the best way we can provide service to northern communities that is consistent. As you alluded to, the greatest success in policing is around relationships, and that can only be done through interactions and through listening and those types of pieces.

Lindsay, am I missing anything? I know you have a couple of models that may bring a real live example, as well.

● (1920)

Lindsay Ellis: Thank you for that.

I agree with my colleague and senior deputy that it can be a benefit to many of the remote and rural areas, but it also comes with some challenges.

In the Yukon, we've been fortunate in that all of our detachments are tenured detachments. We've not implemented fly-in, drive-in per se, other than for the relief team that I spoke about earlier. The reason is that we do not have a maximum tenure in our staffing policy in the Yukon, but we have a minimum tenure. There's a requirement of a minimum tenure in the community.

Of course, things happen. Sometimes life changes, and sometimes members are unable to complete their commitment to that community, but I would say that is rare. The staffing policy of not having a maximum time in community provides that time for relationships, and it also provides the interest for the member and their family to ensure that their wellness is taken care of. Should they need to, perhaps, come out of remote policing for a certain time, say, into the larger centre of Whitehorse, then we have the ability to help them with their flexibility, with their life choices and their career choices. It's been highly successful in the Yukon.

I will say, as policing pressures continue with resourcing—and it's not just the RCMP; I think the previous committee members spoke about the total landscape across Canada—it may be something that we have to look at in the Yukon, but at this current time, fly-in, drive-in, fortunately, is not where we're at.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings us to the end of this second round of questions.

I'd like to ask the committee if we'd like to adjourn. We have just a few minutes left before 7:30. Are we all okay?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I want to thank the witnesses for your testimony and helping us with this study.

The meeting's adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>