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Chair: Terry Sheehan



Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

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• (1535)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number seven 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 resuming its study of indigenous policing and public safety.

The first witness on our first panel is Chief Leroy Denny.

Welcome, Chief. You have five minutes for your presentation. Then there will be some questions back and forth, where you can get more information out.

Just before we begin, I have a reminder about interpretation devices.

When you're not using your earpiece, make sure it's on your little disc here. There's a sheet here on ways to prevent audio feedback for our great interpreters. Make sure your mic is off to avoid feedback when you are not speaking.

Chi-meegwetch.

Chief, go ahead, please.

Chief Leroy Denny (Eskasoni First Nation): [*Witness spoke in Mi'kmaq*]

[*English*]

My name is Chief Leroy Denny.

[*Witness spoke in Mi'kmaq*]

[*English*]

I'm from Eskasoni First Nation.

[*Witness spoke in Mi'kmaq*]

[*English*]

I've been the chief for 16 years and in politics for 20 years.

First and foremost, I apologize. I was having issues with the traffic and with printing at the hotel. *Mesge'g.*

Today I want to speak on indigenous policing matters in my community of Eskasoni. Eskasoni is the largest Mi'kmaq community in the Atlantic, with almost 5,000 people. Currently, we are under the RCMP. There is a big history of police in Eskasoni, from having auxiliary officers, the RCMP, to having our own police department. They moved into the Unama'ki Tribal Police during the tribal policing era. Then, soon after, that folded and went to the RCMP again, and we had the trilateral agreement with the RCMP and the province from then on.

We've had a majority of Mi'kmaq-speaking officers in my community. We are in a Mi'kmaq-speaking community. My council and I are all Mi'kmaq speakers, and we speak only Mi'kmaq in our meetings. Our council's not happy with the current situation right now in policing. We never signed...with the RCMP; it has been quite a few years now. We feel it's not adequate. We feel that the service we need, as a community, is not working, so we're exploring and doing our own review of what works in policing for our community. Whatever works in our community will work for other communities as well. We're a role model, in any services we provide in our community, for other communities in Nova Scotia.

We have so many issues and concerns. Going back, even in starting...in our RCMP...there was a majority of Mi'kmaq officers, and now we have only two Mi'kmaq-speaking officers, who are about to retire, and two more who are non-speakers. Once they're gone, we're done with Mi'kmaq officers.

I feel that we need Mi'kmaq or indigenous officers in our communities in order to operate. There are too many issues that our people are facing. When we have different officers and they're there only a short time, it's affecting.... They're not doing community policing. They're not culturally sensitive enough to do the policing in our communities because we don't have Mi'kmaq-speaking officers anymore. We're having difficulty with that.

Just recently, our fire chief was arrested. He's a respected individual. He quit drinking 30 years ago. He was arrested because they thought he was drinking and driving and he refused to take a Breathalyzer test. There was an uproar. Our community is very upset about this. We do need changes in our communities, and not just in my community but everywhere.

I have some recommendations that I feel need to be said. Whether it's RCMP, provincial or tribal policing, we feel that the police should have a more sensitive and proactive approach—like a hybrid approach—for our communities.

Our community members are having a hard time entering depot in Regina, for instance, for policing. It's the colonial structure. For many of our officers who go through Regina...they don't teach you enough about indigenous people who are in our communities. They're trained to be police, in general. That's an issue right there, because our officers go there. We talk to a lot of our indigenous officers—the retired officers—and they feel they're not being well-represented and well-educated on indigenous issues, so it's a big issue.

We feel we should be a part of selecting our individuals who go to Regina or any police academy. At this point, we feel that we need more Mi'kmaq-speaking officers—indigenous officers—everywhere. We did it before with the tribal police. The tribal police were a hybrid with the RCMP and the provincial police at the time. They were able to go to Regina and become officers. However, even when they were officers, as Mi'kmaq and indigenous officers they weren't given the opportunity to be high-ranking officers, so there are a lot of issues.

• (1540)

Today we feel we can have tribal police or some sort of hybrid police officers who can work with the RCMP or non-indigenous officers. That's what we need, because there's too much discrimination happening in our own communities when dealing with policing matters. Our council and our community have had enough. We want to be part of the solution.

I'm very thankful to be given the opportunity to speak on this, because we want change. There are dollars being held up right now. There are monies to improve indigenous policing. Let's get to work. Let's get it done. Let's have action.

The first thing is having 15 to 20 officers come to my community and sending them off. We have a lot of people in our community who are well educated—young men and women who are very good people and who graduated from many of our communities. Did you know that our Nova Scotia communities have the highest graduation rate among indigenous people in the country? They have a hard time getting into the RCMP, but they're getting into universities. They're becoming doctors and nurses. We have it all in Eskasoni. We have our own doctors. We have Mi'kmaq-speaking doctors and Mi'kmaq-speaking teachers. It's a majority of them, except for policing. Why is that? What's the problem? Why are indigenous people not getting into policing?

That's the issue we are facing right now. I hope we can get to the bottom of this and make it work—

The Chair: Thank you.

Chief Leroy Denny: —whether it's an RCMP issue or a provincial police issue. It's a problem right across the country. The people in New Brunswick...mental health checks, for instance. If you go to the news, you see that our people are getting shot for seeking a mental health check. They end up being shot. It happened in our communities...happened to our fire chief, as well.

We've had enough of this. We're reviewing this as a community. I want to point out here that we have a need for policing within our own communities. A focus on the recruitment and retention of indigenous police officers needs to become a priority for the RCMP, and—

The Chair: Chief, we're going to the questions and answers. You'll be able to finish up what you're saying through the questions and answers.

Thank you very much, Chief. That was excellent.

Chief Leroy Denny: *Wela'liq.*

The Chair: The first round is for six minutes.

We're going to the Conservatives with Jamie.

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

Thank you, Chief, for coming out today, and for your passion for this important topic we are discussing. I know you have a lot more to add to this conversation here.

Just a few years ago, the prime minister at the time, Justin Trudeau, announced that first nations policing would become an essential service. A framework was started to get that process rolling.

Were you involved in that process at all, or do you have an update on where those talks are, based on your nation's experience?

Chief Leroy Denny: I wasn't involved in the development, but a task force raised issues at the AFN. We were able to address these issues because many chiefs across the country addressed them. I don't believe I was involved. There was a task force in Nova Scotia, along with former RCMP officers within the Mi'kmaq community.

Jamie Schmale: As far as you're aware, talks are continuing within the framework to, at some point, make indigenous policing an essential service.

Chief Leroy Denny: Indigenous policing in the community should be a priority right across the country. We're still having these issues. The main issue, to me, is this: We have to amalgamate or involve indigenous leadership in policing. If you're going to police our community, you need to have an understanding. You would have to be trained for that. You need to understand the history of our people and the intergenerational trauma people are facing. That's why chiefs across the country are pushing for that. I'm hoping that we can get to the bottom of it soon. What is the hold-up? Is it all the parties? Is it the whole government?

It's time for us to improve policing in indigenous communities. I speak to many of them. They feel there should be a sector for indigenous people in the higher areas. A big example is Kahnawake. They have really good policing over there. The first nations police chiefs of Canada are involved in that. They have courses for all the police officers working within their respective communities who are not indigenous, who are not Mi'kmaq. They get trained. Former RCMP officers were telling me that they don't have training in depot. It's all just Canadian-style colonial structure, and nothing that will allow it to work in our respective indigenous communities.

• (1545)

Jamie Schmale: Maybe I could get you to expand on that quickly. I'm running short on time. Your nation did, at one point, have its own police service. Is that correct?

Chief Leroy Denny: Yes.

Jamie Schmale: I'm assuming there were challenges. We've heard from previous witnesses that indigenous policing is a program, meaning it needs to be renewed every year, whatever the contribution agreement. This leaves very little certainty for the people involved, including the officers, leadership and even the councils on the ground.

Chief Leroy Denny: Yes.

Jamie Schmale: So you would need to see some sort of structural, long-term funding in order to take the first steps in making this work.

Chief Leroy Denny: Yes, definitely.

My brother is a former RCMP officer. He sent me a timeline. I don't know if I can read all of this, but it goes all the way back to the early 1900s. One of our elders, who was a World War II veteran, Roddie Stevens, after the war became an auxiliary officer. From there, we had our own auxiliary, and then we had our police department, and then finally, we had our own Unama'ki Tribal Police for five bands in Cape Breton.

They were sent off to Regina. Twelve of our community members were sent off to Regina. Our leadership at the time picked these people who they felt would be awesome police officers within the community. They spoke Mi'kmaq. They understood the culture. They understood the families. They knew the background of every community member. That's why the Unama'ki Tribal Police worked.

It was very poorly funded. It was set up to fail at the time, but it created many of our Mi'kmaq officers, who retired 20 years later. You went back to the CTA. CTA is a trilateral agreement for policing among the provinces and the feds. That's why the H division was created.

It didn't work. Even the RCMP is still not working. My community is supposed to have 17 members and we only have two Mi'kmaq speakers. One is off right now due to mental health. For a lot of our police officers it's not working because they're just overworked. Many of them are off, so you only have 12 or 13 who are working.

Jamie Schmale: Are they overworked?

Chief Leroy Denny: They're probably overworked.

Jamie Schmale: When you say it's not working and there are challenges with staffing, that type of thing, in terms of what's happening on the ground, the crimes that are being committed, that type of thing that isn't working, is there a tie-in with the justice system at all, the fact that bail seems to be easy to get, there's a small number of people causing crime, being arrested and being let back out on the street over and over again. Is that part of the problem as well?

Chief Leroy Denny: It all stems from the community policing. We feel community policing is not there.

You have situations. We're dealing with poverty issues in our communities. We're dealing with people with intergenerational trauma and mental health issues, especially, which are rising. Many people are vulnerable and harmless, yet they end up getting arrested. We have our own court appearances within the community. Large numbers show up over there. They get charged, fined and remanded.

We try to help these people. We try to get them jobs, get them trained, and get them out of that impoverished life. We do our best as the leadership within in the community, and we work with police officers and first responders as well, within the community. They deserve top-notch policing to feel safe in our communities.

We have drug situations. We have 17 officers, but for two positions we use our own-source revenue; these are the drug unit and prevention. We pay our own money to pay for these two positions because the funding is lacking. We're not getting enough from this deal over here, so we need more.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Chief Leroy Denny: We need more of these dollars for policing within Eskasoni, in our community, but also for other communities—everywhere, really.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We're going to move to Jaime, Chief, for six minutes to continue the conversation.

Jaime Battiste (Cape Breton—Canso—Antigonish, Lib.):
[Member spoke in Mi'kmaq]

[English]

Your shirt looks good.

Chief Leroy Denny: I ran over here.

Jaime Battiste: Thank you for joining us today, Chief.

I know you've had many conversations with me over the frustrations you've had with the RCMP. I know that you have a background of experience not only as a chief, but also, you started off working with the Unama'ki Tribal Police as well as the Mi'kmaw Legal Support Network.

I'm wondering if you can compare the community's feeling towards the RCMP versus when there was an Unama'ki Tribal Police. What were the benefits of having a tribal police who spoke the language, who were mostly Mi'kmaq community members, as opposed to what you're dealing with now with the RCMP?

Chief Leroy Denny: Yes, certainly, Jaime. *Wela'lin*.

We call the police *Mountie aqq*. That means "Mounties".

I was part of the Unama'ki Tribal Police. I was a jail guard. I assisted in my younger days when I was going to university. That was my part-time job. The majority of them were Mi'kmaq.

The higher officers weren't Mi'kmaq. This group was sent off to Regina and had tutoring, but it was really difficult for indigenous officers to enter depot. The Mi'kmaq were mostly constables. For any RCMP officer it is a very difficult process, but for indigenous people, it's very difficult.

We know that many people in our communities have really good backgrounds and are really good people. I even wanted to try it out myself to see if I could get into Regina. It's very difficult for indigenous officers, with our backgrounds and everything, and it just didn't work.

However, at the time of the tribal police, we were able to take a crew to depot. They helped each other because that's the spirit of our people. We work together as communities. There are huge differences, Jaime.

For instance, when talking to the elders, it wasn't just the police officers. Even on the phone lines, we had dispatchers who spoke Mi'kmaq. With 911, our elders would get frustrated and upset. They would hang up and try to call the police station. Those are the issues that our people are facing because 911 is not helpful. It's all English. Our people deserve to have somebody to talk to in their language, talking and explaining to them.

Sometimes they speak English, and it may be a broken English, but right away, a Mi'kmaq officer understands the situation, even before entering. They know the background of this person or know that maybe they get easily upset. They know which buttons could be pushed, and they can de-escalate issues just by talking or with humour and those types of things.

I even remember that my godfather was a police chief at the time. If somebody was pissed off, he would come in and say something to make them laugh. That was the style that our people used for indigenous policing. They understood the families and even other communities as well.

In Unama'ki, in Cape Breton, my brother worked in all these communities. They know each family because we're tied in, in some way or the other. That's the difference. It's a huge difference. If you put a stranger officer in there, they are going to have a lot of problems. They get freaked out by the person screaming or yelling or whatever, and they might shoot them.

That's what happened in Big Cove, in Elsipogtog, when somebody was asking for help, for a mental health check, and they ended up being shot. It happened in Red Bank. When I spoke to Chief Bill Ward, it was the same thing. It freaked out the people over there,

and they shot him. Those people should still be alive today. They were innocent, harmless people who were seeking mental health support, and they got shot. My fire chief could have been shot as well.

This is what we're dealing with here. We're dealing with lives. It's really important. It's in your hands to give us the opportunity, to listen to us and to bring in tribal police, special constables or peace officers. I think a hybrid approach would work in our communities, or bring back tribal police with more sufficient funding. The tribal police was poorly funded. It was set up to fail.

• (1555)

Jaime Battiste: Thank you, Chief.

You talked about Nova Scotia having some of the highest graduation rates because the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia took over their own education system. Do you think that success could be replicated if the Mi'kmaq took over their own policing, if there was a five-year or a 10-year grant, as MK is given?

Chief Leroy Denny: Absolutely.

Again, in any sector that our Mi'kmaq leadership tackles.... Whether it's education, social or health, they are all intertwined. All of the organizations that we have help in our communities to end the intergenerational trauma within our communities. Those are essential services—even the answer from the gentleman here. It's very essential. They all work together. If it's addictions, if it's mental health—which is rising—those are the areas where we should work together and should be part of it. If it's our self-government.... Our policing should be one of the things, as well.

I commend Kahnawà:ke. They took control of their police over there. Also, in Listuguj in Quebec.... In Quebec, it seems like they're doing a really good job in that area. We need to focus on improving, whether it's the RCMP or the provincial police.

Right now, we're under review. We're looking at going back to the RCMP, and we will sign.... We never signed a CTA. What's a CTA? Does anybody know? It's a community tripartite agreement. We never signed it because we don't feel that it's working for our community. We're trying to have a deal done that will improve our policing.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Meegwetch.

Chief Denny, thank you for being here, for your leadership, for your testimony, and for your passion for your people and the policing model.

[English]

Chief Leroy Denny: I'm trying to get interpretation. I'm sorry.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: If I speak in French, can you hear the interpretation?

[English]

Chief Leroy Denny: Yes, I hear the interpreter.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Perfect.

Eskasoni first nation has adopted a self-administered policing model, which means they have their own police service, separate from provincial or federal models, established through an agreement with the federal government, the Province of Nova Scotia and your community. To what extent do you think this agreement has enabled the community to better control its financial resources and its own policing governance model? Does this more community-based approach have a positive and tangible impact on safety, but also on the feeling of trust among the people of Eskasoni?

[English]

Chief Leroy Denny: Back in the nineties, when we had tribal police, it was funded provincially. The tribal police folded at the time. I wasn't there; I was young. I was an employee at the time.

There was a police commission at the time, and it was working with the provincial police and the RCMP. I think funding went on for almost 10 years, and finally they didn't renew it. The RCMP took over, the H division, which is all across Nova Scotia. All of the tribal police members became RCMP officers at that time. Along the way, only a few went, so they continued working as RCMP officers to the point where they couldn't work on a beat anymore—meaning working the streets. They were dealing with mental health, PTSD and health issues. The majority of them are retired now.

Now we're on the brink of losing one more officer. She's on almost her 25th year. She's going to retire soon. Then we have two young ones. They don't speak the language, but they grew up in the community. They know the reservation life. They know the background, and they know the people. They're very important to young individuals. We need more of our indigenous officers to work in their communities. Right now, it's not happening. They're having a hard time getting in, even though they have education. They're smart. They can read. They're capable. They're healthy.

In our communities, we really push healthy living. We invest our own dollars, our own resources, in young people to be healthy, to eat healthy and to exercise—including me. I exercise and train because I want to be a role model for our young people. I do not drink. I've never taken drugs. I want to be a role model. I want our people to have a good life, not the life like when I was younger.

Many people in my generation—I'm 50 years old—in our younger days.... I don't want our young people to go through what we went through: the discrimination, the racism, amongst police officers and everybody in that age. We need to change that now, and

it's in our hands here, together—indigenous leadership and all the leaders here in Ottawa.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Obviously, changing this culture requires funding. We understand from your opening remarks that this funding must be predictable and long-term.

The Auditor General's report found that under community tripartite agreements, the RCMP didn't have a national staffing strategy to meet its obligations, leaving each division to manage its own shortcomings. We also heard that Public Safety Canada ensures insufficient accountability for compliance with these agreements.

Is that an issue you're seeing in Eskasoni? What impact does the lack of federal coordination or responsibility have on the trust and continuity of policing services in your community?

[English]

Chief Leroy Denny: I think there are more options available beyond just whether it's self-administered or the trilateral agreement. There are hybrid policing models, as I mentioned earlier, adding peacekeepers or adding special constables. Back home we have our regional police, as they call them, provincial police. It shouldn't be the one-size-fits-all CTA. It should be customized for the community.

You mentioned the RCMP. The postings should not be mandatory in indigenous communities. It prevents the non-indigenous from gaining sufficient cultural competence. It also prevents indigenous officers from remaining in first nations. Those are the issues we're facing in the agreements. We noticed that, and something needs to be done. More of our community members want to go over to the RCMP right now, and I believe they should, like they did back in the day.

That needs to change. From talking to some officers, retired officers, I know that they felt even when they were in Regina, it wasn't customized for our own people. They went there without really knowing or without any knowledge. We need to improve on that.

With regard to the agreements, that should be properly funded, not just for constables but also for higher levels and in police academies as well. As I mentioned, the first nations police chiefs of Canada are providing those services to all the officers. That's really needed back home and everywhere, I believe, because this is brought up everywhere. It's a national issue. It's an issue in my community, because we're the largest community.

My community is an amazing community. It's a beautiful, amazing and smart community, but we're still having to fight drugs. There is a drug epidemic, and it's happening within our communities. We're having a hard time. The officers are going after the wrong people. They're going after the people who bribe for a couple of bucks, but there are the big ones out there who need to be attacked and to be arrested. They're not even in our communities. They're lurking on the outside and feeding off people with mental health issues, people in vulnerable situations and people who are impoverished: I'll give you \$1000 if you sell these off. Don't keep them at home. Be careful.

That's why we put our own dollars into this. It's an issue. When we ask the RCMP if they can provide an officer, there's no funding. But we'll pay for it. We're desperate. People are dying. Young people are dying at a fast rate right now.

Just over this past summer, I think we had four deaths there, Jaime, due to overdoses of fentanyl and many other drugs in our community.

We're hurting over here. Our young people are dying. We need to fix that.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that, Chief.

Next we have Billy for five minutes, please.

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

Thanks for coming today, Chief. I'm glad to get to know you and your community more, and your story.

Certainly, I do agree with you that Eskasoni is a leader in that people learn from you, but you also learn from other first nations. We all have something principally in common across this country—namely, that for policing in our communities, long-term solutions come from inside our communities, whether it's community policing or family policing, or something from the community, anyway, given—

Chief Leroy Denny: I'm sorry. I'm having a hard time hearing.

Billy Morin: Okay. I'll speak up.

I certainly agree with you that the solutions lie inside our communities when it comes to long-term solutions in our communities, but I would also say that Canada is a big country. As much as we do have some things in common, regions have different challenges. On the west coast, not to take away from anybody else, they've been in the news for drug-related things with the government. There's a little bit more access to drugs there, in Vancouver in particular. In the prairies we have a similar situation.

Of course, in your community and across this country, there are those things, but one unique aspect of the east coast is that treaty rights and fishery rights have been in the news, of course, over the last decades. When it comes to moderate living and livelihood, fishing with elver fishers, treaty rights and traditional rights, and balancing those with the Canadian economy and non-indigenous Canadians who work on the east coast, I'm wondering how the RCMP has handled that situation. Have things gotten better under the RCMP? Do they work in a peaceful way? Are things getting

better with the RCMP when it comes to moderate fishery livelihoods?

Chief Leroy Denny: Yes, I believe they're trying. That aspect, again, would have been different if we had more indigenous officers and somebody who speaks the language to be a liaison of some sort.

In the past, if there was a blockade or a protest when it came down to our rights, sometimes the RCMP would listen to what the government said, or even to industry. We'd hear from industry that we have to move and get out of there. Well, we have treaty rights and we have a right to fish and hunt. The RCMP are always in a tough spot—like, who do they help out there? That needs to be straightened up.

In my strong opinion, I believe they try to work things out and be mediators. They always mention that they make sure nobody gets hurt and make sure it's peaceful and safe for all.

A few years back, what happened in Elsipogtog—when there was a raid and one of the elders was shot in a protest—broke a lot of hearts and not just in Elsipogtog, but right across the country in indigenous communities. It's really hard to watch when you have an elder.... It just recently happened to our fire chief and the community was very upset.

We are working on our community and with the RCMP to work together. We're telling them that it all comes down to community policing. Be out there and talk to the elders. Tribal police members used to visit the elders. They would hang out with the elders and drink tea. They'd go to the hockey game or they'd go to the ball game. They were parked over there talking to the kids playing basketball and joking around with the kids and the young people. That's what it is. I think that's community policing.

We know that there are some people out there who are difficult. It's not their fault. We can work things out with them. We can try to help them and try to change our people and their past. We don't judge them from their past. We try to say, "Hey, we can help you here. We can educate you, get you trained, get you work and get your children back." It's those types of things.

We have a lot of kids who go into child welfare as well. We try to get them to bounce back and try to get them to new homes. We give away many homes to these families. Some of them we had to take back because drugs were involved in some sort. It's very difficult. The RCMP are along the way—any police really. When the tribal police and our indigenous officers were around, it was way simpler.

• (1610)

Billy Morin: Thank you for that, Chief. I wholeheartedly agree that community policing is a priority going forward.

Chair, I'd just like an opportunity to do some housekeeping and introduce the motion that was put on the table last week.

The Chair: Go ahead, you have the floor.

Billy Morin: I'll read out the motion for the record and then I would appreciate if we can have a vote on it.

I move the following:

Given that the damning report recently released by the Auditor General of Canada entitled, 2025 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Follow Up on Programs for First Nations, that found that in spite of an 84% increase in spending at Indigenous Services Canada, the department failed to address over half of the recommendations they agreed to, and given that Indigenous Services Canada has failed to address unsatisfactory drinking water conditions, has failed to address emergency preparedness on First Nations reserves, and did not assess whether remote First Nations communities have access to essential health services, among other failures, the Auditor General and Minister of Indigenous Services be invited by the committee to address the concerns raised in the report, provided that both witnesses testify at the same meeting, with the Auditor General scheduled for the first hour, followed by the Indigenous Services Ministers for the second hour, and that the meeting take place no later than on Monday, November 3, 2025; that the meeting be televised; and that the committee report its findings to the House.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on this?

Ginette, please go ahead.

Ginette Lavack (St. Boniface—St. Vital, Lib.): I'd like to thank my colleague for the motion he has brought forward.

I do have some amendments to the motion that I'd like to propose. Really, the amendments I am proposing are not to change the intention or the spirit of the motion, but are more toward the language so that it might be more constructive and collaborative. They really pull in the language used in the Auditor General's reports and the findings.

We didn't get here overnight. We know that indigenous peoples have been suffering from decades of chronic underfunding and colonial and discriminatory policies. It's not 10 years of programs and development that are going to solve all these problems, but we want to move forward, we want to continue to find the right solutions and collaborate on that. We want to work on this motion to bring forward the minister and the Auditor General.

I have written copies that I could circulate that show the changes we're proposing.

The Chair: Yes, please.

Ginette Lavack: Okay.

There's French and English, one on either side....

The Chair: Give it to the interpreters, please.

If we do this quickly, Chief, we can probably have a little bit of time for a couple of quick questions, if you don't mind. Thank you.

Chief Leroy Denny: The ball game doesn't start until nine o'clock, anyway.

The Chair: Duly noted.

Why don't you read it while people are reading?

Ginette Lavack: The motion now reads: "Given that the concerning report recently released by the Auditor General of Canada entitled, 2025 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Follow

Up on Programs for First Nations, that found that during a period in which spending at Indigenous Services Canada increased by 84%, the department unsatisfactorily addressed over half of the recommendations they agreed to, and given that Indigenous Services Canada had not made satisfactory progress in implementing the Auditor General's recommendations on drinking water conditions, had not made satisfactory progress in addressing emergency preparedness on First Nations reserves, and did not assess whether remote First Nations, and Inuit communities have access to essential health services, among other concerns, the Auditor General and Minister of Indigenous Services be invited by the committee to address the concerns raised in the report, provided that both witnesses testify at the same meeting, with the Auditor General scheduled for the first hour, followed by the Minister of Indigenous Services for the second hour, and that the meeting take place as soon as possible; that the meeting be televised; and that the committee report its findings to the House and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response."

• (1615)

The Chair: Is there discussion on the amendment?

Monsieur Lemire, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you for that work, Ms. Lavack. I think it is entirely relevant to raise these points. We're in politics, so it's normal for there to be turns of phrases that are perhaps a little more subjective. However, you're offering us a bit more objectivity.

I agree with the content of the text. However, I think November 3 is an important date. We can see the urgency, and we're hearing a lot of testimony. I'm also on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. There are a lot of things that affect first nations, and I obviously think we shouldn't let opportunities go by. First nations people expect us to look at the Auditor General's reports. If the Conservatives are willing, I would agree to incorporate the elements of the text of the motion, but I wouldn't change the date of November 3 to "as soon as possible", which may be a way of saying "never".

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, Billy, this is your motion. Do you take these as friendly amendments? What would you like to do with the suggestions?

Jamie Schmale: Did he specify which wording he's changing?

The Chair: He wants to put November 3 back in the motion.

Jamie Schmale: Yes, but he said he's okay with the other changes. Is that correct?

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: I accept the changes in the text, yes, but I would keep November 3 as the deadline for hearing from the minister and the Auditor General.

[English]

Billy Morin: I'm fine with that, Chair.

The Chair: Let's move to a vote on that.

Jaime Battiste: I think we can do that by consensus.

Jamie Schmale: If November 3 stays, then we're okay with the wordsmithing on the process.

The Chair: All in favour?

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

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

The Chair: Thank you.

Let's get back to the chief.

It's Ginette for five minutes.

Ginette Lavack: Thank you so much, Chief Denny, for being here with us today.

You mentioned that you're undertaking a bit of a current review of the policing situation as it stands. Could you elaborate a little bit on that review? What does that entail, and what specifically are you looking at?

Chief Leroy Denny: One thing we're looking at is that we have two Mi'kmaq lawyers looking into the review. The council told our lawyers to give them some recommendations as to how to improve policing, what's best for our community of Eskasoni and how to have a more customized police approach. Should we go back to the RCMP? Should we go to the provincial police, which is our Cape Breton Regional Police? Should we go back to tribal police again or some kind of hybrid form? By hybrid, I mean involving our own peace officers, auxiliary officers, to work with the RCMP or whoever is going to be the officer.

We have not signed the CTA as of yet because of that. It's just kind of like automatic renewal.

We have 17 officers with probably 13 who are working, and we provide funding for two, our own-source drug unit and prevention. Prevention is very important. It's very important to have officers coming to the school to help our young people. Again, we're trying to end intergenerational trauma situation here.

We deal with many issues today. Mental health issues are on the rise. There's drug use, cannabis and those types of things. It's very difficult trying to protect children—the kids and the teenagers.

That's the agreement we're working on. We're reviewing it, and we're feel that, as I stated earlier, we need to administer policing. Policing is an essential service, and other police forces in Canada do not have to worry about whether their contracts are going to be renewed or not. It should be long term. It would be properly funded, not poorly funded. That's why we are not signing anything;

we've been asking for more officers to be sent within our community.

At one point, we will admit that the higher officers along with the chiefs of Nova Scotia said, "Why don't you send 30 Mi'kmaq officers to Nova Scotia, and they'll be trained as their own unit?" They loved the idea and said, "Let's do it". Then we never heard anything. That was two years ago. We recently asked them again, "Can we send 10 of our officers within the community who are Mi'kmaq, men and women who are coming from university and speaking their language?" We need these people in our policing today, and, again, this isn't happening.

I told them that I'd sign that agreement if they included that first in the short term.

I also mentioned focusing on recruitment and retention for indigenous people. When they go out to Regina, to the RCMP, for instance, there's a barrier for indigenous officers because of the requirement to serve anywhere in Canada. Indigenous officers should be able to choose to serve in any indigenous community in the country, and there should be more options available beyond the self-administered or CTA, a hybrid model such as adding peacekeepers, as I mentioned. The RCMP post and duration should not be mandatory in indigenous communities. You should prevent non-indigenous from gaining sufficient cultural competence.

I think those are the issues, but as a community, we need to improve our policing. We need our officers first and foremost, indigenous, Mi'kmaq-speaking people first.

• (1620)

Ginette Lavack: By recruiting local individuals who could potentially train, whether it be with the RCMP or with a provincial policing body, if that were where they would get their training from, clearly they're coming to the table because they come from their community with that community knowledge and that culturally sensitive approach, so that's not part of the training they would require.

Do you see an opportunity or a place where it might be fitting that other police forces like the RCMP integrate some form of culturally sensitive training and that those should be developed over the course of time?

Chief Leroy Denny: Yes, that training, I believe, should happen in Regina or any police academy out there.

Right now the RCMP, when they go to Regina, are not learning about how to police a first nations community. If they had that in their lesson plans....

I don't know if you have ever been to Regina. I've been there a couple of times. They have movie sets; they do some scenarios of some sort.

I don't think they have the ability or training if there's a blockade, if there is a mental health situation or if there is a community shooting or crisis within our community. We rely on our officers so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief.

Now we'll go to Sébastien for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Denny, the Auditor General's report states that, although RCMP officers should know the culture of the communities they serve, no specific cultural training requirements are imposed beyond general training. Recently, there was an incident in your community, in Eskasoni, where an elder was tasered after speaking to an officer in the Mi'kmaq language. That illustrates the consequences of this shortcoming. What impact do you think it has on the community when officers, especially those who are not indigenous, do not share either the language or the cultural understanding of the people they serve?

I also want to talk to you about examples that were given to us last week. The Yukon House of Wolf and Associates Inc. cited some very powerful examples for us, including the importance of cultural sensitivity. There's also the Val-d'Or police and the exchange they made with the Pikogan police service. One thing that seems important to me is the fact that, if the financial resources were given to you and you were accountable, you would have the leadership and could decide where to invest that money. Would that change your priorities at all?

• (1625)

[*English*]

Chief Leroy Denny: I'll have to correct you on a couple of things.

I don't know if I mentioned our fire chief. He wasn't shot. He was tasered and arrested. Other people shot in other communities were shot dead, mostly in New Brunswick. There were probably four, two of them were women, shot during mental health checks. Two were from other first nations communities in New Brunswick.

In Nova Scotia, we are trying to push RCMP officers to work with our communities. We have some situations happening with drugs. We're trying to deal with the drug matter. Those are the issues we're facing as communities. I believe that having Mi'kmaq-speaking.... They don't even have to speak it. It could even be a Facebook post. One of the officers from my community works in a different community. He understands Mi'kmaq. He doesn't speak it, but he knows the people and the background. Just his presence eases the people. That's very important. If an officer approaches us like a movie-type officer, saying, "Give me your licence" and is a disrespectful, power-tripping officer, it will trigger our people and they will lose it.

In my experience as a jail guard, I saw people get arrested who, the next morning, were apologetic. They just wanted to...because they know we live in a tight-knit community. Actually, indigenous communities are very tight-knit and community policing is very important.

I hope this answers that.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief.

We'll go to Eric for five minutes.

Eric Melillo (Kenora—Kiiwetinoong, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the chief for being here and for sharing his important stories with us.

I have a couple of questions.

You've been here before with this committee. You mentioned, in the past, the difficulty with reserve bylaws not being enforced and respected by policing authorities. You said, "It makes becoming self-determined within our communities difficult."

I'm wondering if you can go into more detail on that and tell us how that's been impacting your community.

Chief Leroy Denny: We have chiefs who govern our communities and try to keep them safe. These are fast-growing communities. Vandalism.... Certain bylaws are not respected by the police.

I remember, a few years ago, back during the pandemic, we had a situation where we were trying to use our powers as chief and council to protect the community from the coronavirus. We wanted to issue fines. We told the RCMP, "Since we have an agreement here, you should do the fines. We shouldn't be doing it. The police from other areas are doing it outside. If the province issues a \$50,000 fine for...fire bans of some sort, you should be able to do that." The RCMP said no. We wanted to close off the road to people entering our community, and they said, "No, you can't do that." The government gave the RCMP six months to do that to help us, because it would become dangerous for our own security officers. They didn't have any weapons or protection of any sort, not even a stick. We weren't even allowed to touch anyone.

Those are issues, too, that should be part of an agreement on our being able to self-govern nations. Nations under band governance should be able to work with the RCMP or any officers on parking tickets, bylaws or any laws within the community, even under our treaties. Those are laws as well. Our treaties trump other provincial laws of some sort, even for our roads, side roads, ATVs and those types of things. We should be able to have certain rules and laws within our own governance be respected by the police, and that's not the case.

Eric Melillo: I appreciate that. You've also spoken before about the overlap between federal and provincial jurisdiction. Obviously the federal government position is to hold policing on reserve as a joint responsibility. You've said in the past that this creates jurisdictional confusion.

Can you expand more on that and how that plays out on the ground in your community?

• (1630)

Chief Leroy Denny: Yes, definitely it needs to be done. A good example would be Kahnawà:ke. They have their own police force. They enforce the Criminal Code of Canada, the Quebec provincial highway laws and the band governance bylaws. I saw it on their website. That's what they're doing over there. There setting good examples. In Listuguj, they don't even allow provincial police officers to enter their community.

Those are the things that I think need to happen. Communities or nations should have the opportunity to be respected, to be discussed here, to self-administer and to self-govern their own police affairs and, of course, to co-manage for community purposes and make sure that the law is followed.

Eric Melillo: I appreciate that very much. I'm hoping I have time for another question.

You've spoken a lot about the drug epidemic in your nation. I think we see that manifesting in different ways across Canada, really, in indigenous and non-indigenous communities. You also spoke about prevention. That's a very important aspect of it, obviously. We want to make sure nobody gets to that position where they find themselves addicted or in a dangerous cycle.

Can you speak to what you see as the keys to prevention for the people of your community?

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds.

Chief Leroy Denny: Again, it's education in schools and youth centres. It's key right there to have prevention officers and not just one. There should be several officers involved in prevention. There should be financial supports, whether for sports or for anything; if there's a death in the community, if there's a crisis or if there's a suicide, they should be there. It should be part of prevention to work with all the organizations, from mental health to youth workers; they should all be a part of it. It should be properly funded. They don't even have funding; they just show up right now. There should be money for prevention services as well. It doesn't happen, and we feel....

Here is a quick story. Recently, for instance, we honoured the first responders—police, paramedics and all the firefighters—because we had a tough year. I'm a first responder as well, and we had a really tough year. We had to deal with suicides and bad accidents. Even I was involved in trying to help the families. We arrived at the crime scene or wherever somebody died, and it was really tough on our mental health. That's why I felt it was important as a community that we come together and honour the police officers. We had ceremonies. The elders came. They smudged the police station. They smudged the officers and the firefighters. You'll find that on our Facebook page, so look it up.

We had to do it because we had to heal our first responders. With all due respect, I respect the police officers and the work they do, because it really affects them emotionally and it affects their mental health. Police officers and paramedics are going through a lot of tough times. They should have those services, as well, when they become officers in our communities and deal with suicides, because they're affected. It's the same with teachers and other people trying to raise our community members.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief.

We're getting towards the end. We have about a minute left for the Liberals.

Go ahead, Jaime.

Jaime Battiste: Thank you, Chief. I know that you do a lot for the youth in your community. I know that you do workshops on Mi'kmaq dancing and things like that. The youth are very comfortable with you, but I think the committee would love to hear the answer to this question.

Hallowe'en is a big time for the Eskasoni community. How many trick-or-treaters did you get last year at your house, and how many do you expect this year?

Chief Leroy Denny: We had over 1,100 last year, so I'm expecting 1,100 Hallowe'eners. My brother-in-law and my brother went to go buy me pop and a popcorn machine. It's awesome. Hallowe'en is very positive and happy, and my family and I invest to give back to our community.

When I was a kid, I went to go see the chief for Hallowe'en. Today, we have 5,000 people. Everybody and all the kids are coming to my house for Hallowe'en.

The Chair: On that, this is a good way to end it—sweetly.

Chief Leroy Denny: Yes, exactly.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief.

Chief Leroy Denny: Go, Blue Jays, let's go. We need a win.

The Chair: I agree.

Thank you very much.

We'll suspend for about five minutes while our next panel gets ready.

Thank you. *Chi-meegwetch.*

• (1635)

Chief Leroy Denny: Thank you, guys.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: All right, we're back.

We have, from Eel River Bar First Nation, Chief Christopher George.

We also have, from Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service, Chief Keith Blake.

You each have five minutes. After that, there will be rounds of questions where you'll be able to share more information.

Thank you very much, everyone.

We'll start with Chief George.

Chief Christopher George (Eel River Bar First Nation): Wonderful, thank you so much.

To begin, I send thanks to our member of Parliament, Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault, whose support makes my appearance here today possible.

My name is Chris George, I'm chief of Eel River Bar First Nation. I'm here today to voice the concerns of the nearly 900 community members who I represent.

Policing and public safety are of grave and immediate concern for my community and have been so for multiple generations. The issues we face today are symptoms of deeply rooted issues that conspire to suppress our capacity to defend ourselves effectively. I will use my opening remarks to address some of those issues.

My home community is situated on the north shore of New Brunswick, along Mawipoqtapei—more commonly known as Chaleur Bay—which has been recently identified as the 31st member of the Most Beautiful Bays of the World club. Eel River Bar lies within Gespe'gewa'gi, the seventh district of Mi'kmaq homelands.

Drug trafficking is a primary concern for my community. We lack our own police agency to enforce the bylaws and band council resolutions that my administration uses to address public safety concerns. Most of the perpetrators involved in this drug trafficking are not even community members, they come from outside communities and they use Eel River Bar as a haven for their trade because they know my administration lacks the institutional capacity to take real police actions to disrupt their illegal trade. I argue this lack of institutional capacity is due to the legacy of colonialism.

We have sought help from provincial agencies, but their jurisdiction does not extend to reserve lands. We continue to seek support from the RCMP, but they are not always capable or able to provide the sort of police actions we really need, which has led to a situation wherein the bad guys run the roost, which greatly raises the fears and concerns of our community members.

The violence we contend with daily in my community is symptomatic of deeper issues of structural poverty and institutionalized colonialism that continue to inhibit holistic growth and development for most Mi'kmaq families today. As such, my administration lacks the capacity to do the job of policing and public safety ourselves; we are forced to be dependent on provincial and federal agencies.

Policing and public safety are conceptualized much differently through a Mi'kmaq world view than mainstream Canadian perspectives. Policing for us is more than using force, it includes personal moral values and an inherited responsibility to live in harmony with all of creation.

Effectively confronting the violence and trauma of drug trafficking ultimately requires intergenerational community-led strategic actions aimed at healing the damage caused by forced assimilation

and colonization. This also requires financial resources that current funding models cannot accommodate.

The harsh reality is that funding models cannot effectively confront the deeply embedded structural poverty that institutionalized colonialism presents for Mi'kmaq communities today. We need fair and equitable resource revenue-sharing so we have enough resources to make our communities truly safe.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge that 300 years ago, my ancestors, along with other Wabanaki nations, entered a treaty relationship with the English Crown through the 1725 Peace and Friendship Treaties. Those ancestors had a much different vision for their future descendants from the one we exist within today.

I often reflect on the sort of political economy my ancestors would have developed if they had not been so violently invaded, dispossessed and assimilated, and how it would have evolved to operate today, and I wonder if the need for policing and public safety would be so urgent.

We cannot change the past, but we can learn from the mistakes and move forward better informed. Please consider the sort of comprehensive and intergenerational resurgence that can happen if one reconceptualizes current notions of nation-to-nation and treaty relationships.

I ask the committee to take time to read, reflect and discuss among yourselves the arguments laid out in the two red papers published by the Yellowhead Institute entitled "Land Back" and "Cash Back". Both address the structural poverty and institutionalized colonialism that I alluded to in my remarks today.

Thank you all so much for your attention.

Msit No'kmaq all my relations.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Chief.

Chief of Police Blake, please go ahead. You have five minutes.

Chief Keith Blake (Chief of Police, Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service): [*Witness spoke in Tsuut'ina and provided the following text:*]

Datanastada Sizi Keith Blake at'a, Guyamoha Tosguna.

[*Witness provided the following translation:*]

Greetings, my name is Keith Blake, Chief of Police of the Tsuut'ina Nation Police.

[*English*]

Good afternoon, everyone. I am Keith Blake, Chief of Police of the Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service. I have been so for almost 13 years. I am also vice-president of the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association. We represent the independent 36 indigenous police services across this country.

I first of all want to thank the committee for this opportunity to provide critical testimony on first nation policing and to discuss the vital need for program change and government support in the transformation of the first nations and Inuit policing program. This is the second time I've appeared before this committee. I must express disappointment that since my original testimony of over four years ago, we've seen very little of the change that was required and that everyone agreed was needed.

Before I speak to some of the inequities, I just want to give you a sense of our community and our service. Our community has about 2,500 band members. We have a land mass of over 300 square kilometres. We have 36 police officers. We are funded from both the tripartite provincial and federal funding partners, but we have a substantial commitment from our nation that pays for well over 16 officers within our complement.

I really want to speak to the fact that our service, like the other 35, is a community-centred and culturally aligned service that's fully accountable to our community. Our service and the other 35 independent indigenous police services are doing an incredible job of community safety, culturally appropriate service delivery and outreach within our communities. This is despite being chronically underfunded and having year-to-year funding envelopes that do not allow us to look at strategizing on how we need to provide that community safety.

It doesn't mean that we don't have a staggering amount of attrition. In our service alone, two years ago we had one-third of our frontline operations leave to join the Calgary Police Service. During their exit interviews, each of the officers wanted to stay in first nations policing, but because of the inequities in pay, benefits and pension, they felt it was an unstable funding model. They needed to provide security for their families.

We have to thank those first nations police officers who continue to perform with outstanding results despite having lower salaries, pensions and wages than their colleagues in mainstream policing. They are to be commended and sincerely thanked for their sacrifices.

I want to speak to a couple of really important examples of where first nations policing does provide a superior service. Despite all of our indigenous communities having the highest crime severity index in the country, we see far fewer use of force incidents and far fewer, if any, lethal force. I'm not suggesting that when you're looking at those situations that occur they're not justified, but that is a disproportionate number of deaths. We can all recall that, tragically, in 2024, within 15 days, six indigenous people died when coming in contact with mainstream policing across Canada. A total of 15 that year died in police interactions or while in custody.

When we're looking at that, it's highlighting a stark overrepresentation of indigenous peoples in fatal law enforcement encounters. It underscores systemic failures. Again, I'm not contending that those lethal force encounters weren't justified, but it is an alarmingly disproportionate statistic that demands further review and understanding.

I know that government is data-driven. I believe one of the more significant data drawn from Public Safety Canada recently was the

evaluation of the FNIPP. It was reported through Public Safety Canada that communities that are policed by independent first nations police services were substantially more likely, almost four times more likely, to say that policing is a strength in their community compared with those communities that are policed by mainstream policing.

Now, we also say that not moving forward with the promised essential service legislation and reform has created increased instability within our services. This is compounded by the multiple messaging coming from political leaders, agencies and officials all speaking about how the program and system are broken and need immediate attention. Without attention, it implies that the government is neglectful, apathetic or indifferent to the officers and the communities we serve.

Getting back to the use of force, I truly believe it's as a result of the relationship our officers have with our community. It's not merely a police officer and offender relationship. It's the de-escalation ability of our officers who have a relationship with our community members.

• (1645)

I had a number of quotes that I wanted to provide, from prime ministers to public safety ministers to auditors general to the CACP to the Quebec court of appeal, all saying that this system, this method of funding and supporting our services, needs to change. We—

The Chair: Thank you, Keith.

We'll go to questions now. You'll both be able to provide some more input then.

First up is Eric for six minutes.

Eric Melillo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses for being here.

Mr. Blake, I felt like you were still delivering your final remarks. Is there anything else you wanted to continue with?

Chief Keith Blake: I appreciate that very much, sir.

No, I think I can probably reiterate through the discussions we're having some of the things I didn't have an opportunity to speak of. But thank you for that.

Eric Melillo: Okay. I appreciate that.

Chief George, you mentioned some of the challenges you're facing and the gaps that exist. You mentioned drug trafficking. You spoke quite a bit about that. Unfortunately, that's something we're seeing right across the country. I know that in my region of north-western Ontario we see an increased presence of gang-related activities, including drug trafficking—not exclusively, but particularly in some of the remote first nations that I represent.

I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on this. You mentioned the capacity issue. I'm wondering if you have more on that or if you want to expand on why the drug traffickers are making their way into first nations and why there has been an increase, specifically.

Chief Christopher George: I think they've always been around. I am new on the job. I am four months into my administration. I was a councillor two years prior to this. I am an educator by trade. Coming into this, I'm about education and trying to learn as much as I can about this. I became aware of the FNIPP program.

When it comes to policing, we are a border town, basically. We're right on the north shore of New Brunswick into Quebec. It's a hotbed for trafficking interprovincially. We've been trying to build relationships with the RCMP. We've had some good conversations with them. When we contact the RCMP, their focus is much more on international, interprovincial and larger-scale drug trafficking. For us in the community, the small-potato fellows, they're big fish in our area. We use the tools we have at hand. We have BCRs and the homes that people live in. Ultimately, at the end of the day, our assets are the community. We have community bylaws to protect our community from outside unwanted persons and to protect our homes from damage and from illegal behaviours and illegal actions.

We have our BCRs. We publish BCRs. We do our best to include and involve the community, but the question is, who serves these eviction notices? The province can't. The province is unable to, jurisdictionally. The RCMP has been hesitant to push our bylaws. I don't think it's malicious. I think a lot of other issues are at play there. But we're left holding the bag. We publish BCRs. We have eviction notices. When the RCMP at first could not enforce those eviction notices, it sent a loud message to those bad actors and those criminal elements: Look, this is like a no man's land. This is a very grey area, the reservation.

We have community members who are deeply involved with this. It leaves us in a position of wondering how we enforce this. We try to avoid conversations about vigilante justice and that kind of measure, but that's the level our communities are left at when their neighbours and their communities are overrun by these behaviours. A lot of them happen after midnight, in the darkness of night, when most people are sleeping. People wake up to different things.

I reached out to the FNIPP program when I became aware of that. I saw that as an opportunity, and I know some communities here did, when it comes down to what is, for us, a lack of funding to bring on a whole police force and then training and all of that. As I alluded to in my messaging, I'm really focused on resource revenue-sharing in our province here to combat the tariffs. We hear a lot of conversation about the softwood lumber, for example, that's taken out of New Brunswick woods. That's billions of dollars of resources. If we could have access to some of that, we could handle these businesses ourselves.

When we talk about policing, I heard Chief Leroy Denny speak from a Mi'kmaq perspective. Policing is different. We wouldn't really be expecting police in full gear. We have to take a very trauma-informed approach to that. Our policing is more about safety.

• (1650)

Eric Melillo: I appreciate that. Thank you very much. I hope to come back to that question.

Mr. Blake, I share your frustration, sir. I've been in and out of this committee, but more or less on this committee, for the entirety of my six-year career in politics. We've been here before. We've been told that legislation to designate first nations policing and indigenous policing services is essential, and it will be just around the corner. That was many years ago. I think you said you were disappointed that we're still here and not much has changed. I want to say that I share that disappointment.

You did speak about it in your opening remarks, but I would like to hear further about how that uncertainty has created or even increased the instability you're facing.

Chief Keith Blake: It really does create an environment of instability within our [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. It makes it difficult. It makes it difficult to retain those people—

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: There's a problem, Mr. Chair. The sound isn't getting to the interpreters' booth.

[*English*]

The Chair: Chief Blake, your sound cut out at the beginning.

We can hear you now. Please continue.

Chief Keith Blake: It really does create an air of instability within our servicing communities. It's hard to compete when you have pension disparities at such levels that it means the difference of having financial stability for a family. The salaries are lower. It's all because we're not funded in the same way. It's not in an equitable way.

I guess one of the frustrating things is that we're looking at an infusion of 1,000 officers into the RCMP. The CBSA is getting an infusion of monies. I'm not saying all of that isn't needed, but for well over 35 years we have needed that. We always seem to not be a priority. Again, it is frustrating. I think if you were to look at every member in government, or any AG, they would all agree, and court rulings have said the same thing: What do we have to do to make this important change?

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Brendan Hanley for six minutes.

Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you to both of you, but I'll start with Chief Blake.

One of the things that interested me in your testimony was when you talked about losing officers to Calgary Police Service due to competing benefits, salaries and so on. Of those who stay, what is it that keeps them there?

Chief Keith Blake: That's a great question. It's something we've looked at. It is really about commitment to community and first nations policing. That won't occur if there's such a huge disparity, but they are invested in the model of policing that we employ here. I do think we have changed what we're trying to accomplish.

I just want to highlight that when we lose those officers, we've put them through training and invested money in them. Calgary Police Service gets them free of charge. Those officers are very good. They hit the ground running within three weeks. What we have to do is fill that position with the support of the Calgary Police Service in their training academy. The province of Alberta does not have a police training academy, so we're paying Calgary Police Service to train our officers, and yet they're getting an officer from our service free of charge.

Again, to me, that is what we call sucking and blowing. You can't do both.

Brendan Hanley: I don't know if you heard the previous testimony from Chief Leroy about the importance of relationships, cultural competency and so on. He felt that was lacking, certainly at the central level, at the Regina RCMP academy.

Obviously, coming from the community must make a huge difference in itself, but what are the particular skills in, say, cultural competency and de-escalation that are offered as part of the training within the community? Can you be as specific as possible?

Chief Keith Blake: Within our service, every officer is assigned to a nation elder when they join. That elder is someone who supports them with the knowledge and understanding of the community. It also allows the elder to have a contact within our service. That is a must every time someone starts. We have ongoing cultural training.

In fact, tomorrow we're hosting a conference, Reframing Our Relationships with Indigenous Communities, where we'll have 200 officials from across the country. We'll have Jody Wilson-Raybould, Dr. Pam Palmater and Susan Aglukark. We'll have experts within the field of reconciliation and what we in the justice system need to do to support the change in the relationships with indigenous communities.

We really focus on the fact that it's not just a one-off. It's not a training event. It's an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed each and every day. We do have mentors within the community and community members who support those who aren't from the community understand the relationships within Tsuut'ina.

Brendan Hanley: That speaks to my follow-up question. Do you have first nations officers from other nations or from other communities who are then trained within your community—or what proportion are they, I guess, as compared with those who are from Tsuut'ina Nation?

Chief Keith Blake: Well, our complement is [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. Seventy per cent of our officers are indigenous.

Am I still having microphone issues here?

Brendan Hanley: It's okay. You're back now.

Chief Keith Blake: Okay. We have four [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. What we find to be success is when people are invested in the community. They don't have to be from our community. In fact, when you come from the community you police, it's a very difficult job. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] but again, it's being invested.

The Chair: You just cut out again. Say the last part again. We missed that.

Chief Keith Blake: Sure. I'm sorry about this.

It's about the officers being invested in the community, whether they're from our community or not. It's about having that relationship with community. They may not be from Tsuut'ina nation, but they are invested in the community.

● (1700)

Brendan Hanley: Thank you very much.

Chief George, I'll turn to you. Thanks for your testimony.

I note that you're deeply committed, as your bio describes, to social and community initiatives. You're also pursuing a Ph.D., which sounds very interesting.

I want to bring some of it to specifics again. For example, you mentioned how important it is to participate in resource sharing. That's obviously particularly relevant for our government that is focused on infrastructure, major projects and indigenous partnership and participation.

For your own nation, can you describe more about what you would see as the model for resource sharing? I think you mentioned softwood, but what are the resources that you want to concentrate on?

Chief Christopher George: That's a loaded question. Thank you so much.

It's a large question. There are a lot of resources here. Primarily, we're looking in our rural area. We have lumber, minerals, mining and fisheries. As I become aware of my role here, I realize that, traditionally, we look at impact and benefit agreements or at royalties, small portions of a much larger plate. I'm speaking of more of an equitable sharing of the revenues from those resources. I'm not quite certain that there is a role model for that across Canada. I would have to spend more time looking into that.

I'm talking about sharing the resources within our Crown lands. Crown lands to us are treaty lands, and the resources are taken from that. We should be able to benefit from the financial resources of that as much as we do from hunting and fishing. A lot of our inherent rights and treaty rights are centred on access to hunting and fishing, maybe even logging, but the broader question for me is how we build our economy with a funding model that is unstable and unpredictable.

There is a large sentiment amongst my community and a lot of the Mi'kmaq people in our area that we want to do this ourselves. We have the capacity. We have the vigour. We have the heart and the will to take on these challenges ourselves. Like a lot of other communities, we lack those resources, financial resources and training.

It's something we also share with the francophone and the anglophone communities near us; it's not something only we face. Policing in rural New Brunswick areas is also scarce for francophone and anglophone communities. There aren't enough RCMP officers for the large area of Campbellton that we're included in so, when it comes to our specific issues with our economic development partners and components that we're—

The Chair: Chief, we're going to go to the next questioner, and that would be Sébastien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for six minutes.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chief Blake, as vice president of the First Nations Chiefs of Police Association and a member of the Assembly of First Nations police task force, you are intimately involved in the first nations and Inuit policing program.

Do you think the program has really made progress over the past decade to meet the needs of first nations communities? What are the main persistent shortcomings, particularly in terms of resources, staffing and funding allocations?

[*English*]

Chief Keith Blake: To be blunt, I don't think we've come even close to progressing in the manner that we should. If you look at policing across this country, there seem to be gains, and there seems to be investment, and it hasn't been the same investment within first nations communities.

I think that the successes you're seeing are despite the funding and equity and the discriminatory practices. I think it really has to do with the incredible people who are invested in policing the communities who we serve. Without them, we wouldn't be here today.

The numbers have decreased. At one point 25 years ago, we had almost 60 self-administered first nations police services. We're now down to 36. It's not because of anything that was done poorly in those services. There just wasn't the money they needed to do the work that was required.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: I'd like to hear your comments on the notion of pay equity. I see that it doesn't exist and that police officers who decide to serve mainly among first nations must, out of conviction or because of their values, sacrifice part of their salary or pension. Is that the case?

• (1705)

[*English*]

Chief Keith Blake: It absolutely is. Again, it's a testament to the people who dedicate themselves to this service.

Three years ago, we did an analysis of our pension compared to that of the Calgary Police Service, which is right next door to us, so it's a good comparison. The difference in value at the end of that 25-year career, at a constable, was well over a million dollars of difference in pension. Now, again, we don't hide that fact from our officers because we don't want to appear like we're not fighting. That's why we have a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal complaint regarding pensions.

It really differs from province to province, though. I think Ontario has done a good job in parities for pension—or soon-to-be pension parity—and salary. However, we also have other services across this country that need the same reform. We are not asking for more, but we're not satisfied with anything less.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Yes, I had the opportunity to meet with several chiefs of Ontario. They told me about the challenge of pay inequity. The committee is conducting a study and will be making recommendations. Do you think the committee should recommend a pay equity policy for police officers working with first nations?

[*English*]

Chief Keith Blake: I believe it is one of those considerations that need to be reviewed. I do think that policing is a very competitive profession, and what we're seeing is a migration of police officers from service to service that we never saw before. A lot has to do with the quality of life, and it also has to do with the compensation packages.

I think that if we're going to be really addressing retention and recruitment, we do have to consider salary parity, pension parity and also benefit parity. I was in the RCMP for a number of years. What I would get for my medical benefits was absolutely and completely different from what I receive now as a first nations police officer in the Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service. We don't have the economies of scale. We don't have that same support. Therefore, yes, I would very much appreciate that being reviewed.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: You contribute to the development of part of a piece of legislation.

Should the legislation recognize that community indigenous police services, such as Tsuut'ina's or other first nations communities in Alberta or elsewhere in Quebec and Canada, constitute an essential service? Do you think it improved government accountability to a fundamental institution like yours? Would that ensure stable long-term funding or staffing?

[English]

Chief Keith Blake: My response is 100% yes. I do believe that indigenous policing should be considered an essential public service with corresponding obligations for funding standards and continuity of operations.

I think one of the things we need is parity of service across the board. An indigenous community should not expect anything less than a non-indigenous community, yet that is the case. We need long-term, stable, predictable and adequate funding, and we need that capital support that clearly doesn't exist today.

The other area that I think would really be important is that we need clear and enforceable federal-provincial cost-sharing frameworks. Right now, we have a provincial funding partner and a federal funding partner, and we're never quite sure who isn't contributing to the degree they should because there's a lot of finger pointing.

Again, this needs to be put into essential service legislation. It needs to, again, offload the confusion that currently exists and ensure that there's a mechanism for arbitration if disputes arise. Currently, within the program, it's a year-to-year funding model in most cases, and we can't see ourselves in the future because we're not given the opportunity to strategize and prepare.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Chief Blake. I'd also like to thank you for your commitment to people.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Bob, you have five minutes, please.

Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Chief Blake and Chief George, for appearing at committee today.

My question will refer to the lack of resources for policing for first nations and Inuit communities. It's around firearms and firearms confiscation.

Chief Blake, I'll start with you. I think you said that you lost a third of your members to other police forces. Is that correct?

• (1710)

Chief Keith Blake: Yes, it was to one police service—the Calgary Police Service.

Bob Zimmer: Wow. We know that it's challenging. We've heard it from many witnesses at committee before. It's challenging to have the resources for police officers to police the current challenges, whether it's drug crime or just general crime in community.

I'll quote from the submission to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. It's probably a quote you're very familiar with. It starts off saying that Bill C-21 “does not address: criminal activity, illegal firearms proliferation, gang crime, illegal guns crossing the border or the criminal use of firearms.”

The National Police Federation would caution that “it diverts extremely important personnel, resources, and funding away from addressing the more immediate and growing threat of criminal use of illegal firearms.”

Chief Blake, do you agree that the government's firearm confiscation program diverts extremely important personnel, resources and funding away from addressing the more immediate and growing threat of the criminal use of illegal firearms?

Chief Keith Blake: I think where my hesitation occurs is that I'm not sure what resource draw that would be. No one's come and said that they will need these numbers of officers, whether it be from our own service, provincial police services or federally. I'm not sure what that will look like.

I can tell you the sentiments in my community when we're looking at sustenance hunting and people who legally have these firearms. I, as police chief, do not want to be going into people's homes and confiscating those firearms.

I'm not suggesting reform is not needed in some way, shape or form, but I think that when we're looking at what that will take and how that will impact our community, it's yet to be seen because no one's really come up with a plan that I have seen.

Bob Zimmer: I agree with you. I think the way I've made the argument before is that we're using resources that are supposed to be attacking crime and criminals and using those same resources and personnel to take away law-abiding firearms owners' firearms. To me, it seems like a misuse of resources.

I'll ask you the same question, Chief George.

Do you think community police resources meant for crime and criminals should go after law-abiding firearms owners' firearms? Do you think that's a good use of resources?

Chief Christopher George: I'm not as informed on the issue as I probably should be and as you are. From a layman's perspective, yes, I think police services should be focused on community safety and public safety.

With the issue of guns, that is something that is very traumatic. Without the police support.... Just recently we had to condemn and board up a house and remove some tenants. All of our council were threatened. We were threatened through social media. Our council members and I are community members. Our councillors are loading their guns and holding them by their doors. They feel like they're being held hostage in their houses while these criminals are going out.

They don't care about our BCRs and they don't care about the Criminal Code, so they have no.... I would much prefer to have those resources put toward taking care of those violent offenders and those bad elements who have no care for our BCRs, the Criminal Code or the health and welfare of any citizen, regardless of ethnicity or background.

Bob Zimmer: Thank you, again, Chief, for your comments. I am a former educator as well.

Being in community and seeing some of these challenges.... I've been to the north quite a bit and to the territories. Most first nations and Inuit communities are concerned about the potential confiscation of the SKS.

Are you hearing concerns about hunting rifles and...using police resources to collect a hunting rifle, which is essentially being prohibited? Are you hearing any comments as chief in your community?

The Chair: Give just a short answer, please.

Chief Christopher George: There's nothing as far as the seizing of them, but it's about the vital need of them. Long guns are very important for the way of life—for hunting, for food sovereignty and gun training as well. They're necessary.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, for the Liberals, we have Philip for five minutes.

• (1715)

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

I have two questions. The first one is for Chief Christopher George.

MP Deschênes-Thériault wanted to be here today, but he couldn't be, so I'm asking these questions for him.

I think in your earlier testimony you touched on this a bit. I'd like you to expand on it, if you would, please.

I acknowledge that you have been chief for about six months. The RCMP provides policing services in your community. Talk to us about some of the changes you've seen just in the last six months related to crime in your community and how that interacts with policing or lack thereof, if that's the case.

Chief Christopher George: Certainly, some of the issues that we deal with on a regular basis in a small community, which I think any community deals with, are lateral violence and internal fighting. That keeps us away from progress.

When it comes to outside elements coming in and posing a threat to our people, those are opportunities that I see to bond our people, to bring us to a higher level, to overcome some of the everyday lateral violence that keeps us separated and to focus on community safety and the safety, health and welfare of our children.

Philip Earle: Thank you for that.

My next question is for Police Chief Blake. In your testimony you talked a bit about far less use of force as it relates to the interaction. Were you speaking specifically about the policing that you oversee? I also acknowledge that you said you are the vice-president of the indigenous police association—I think I got that right.

Are you speaking more broadly, across Canada, or you speaking specifically about your own community? Could you expand on that a bit and tell us why it might be the case that there are there fewer use-of-force incidents?

Chief Christopher George: Again, I want to clarify that I'm certainly speaking on behalf of the Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service. I do have a broader understanding of the collective 36 first nations across the country. I can speak specifically to Tsuut'ina.

Having been in the RCMP for 24 years, I understand that the use of force is, unfortunately, something that police officers must resort to. However, I can tell you that, because we have had body-worn cameras here on Tsuut'ina for eight years now, we review every single interaction that our officers have with the community. Through those reviews of body-worn cameras, it's clear that our officers are very good at de-escalating a situation. They are going into a home, most often, knowing the person and so they've already formed a relationship. Again, we know what triggers might increase the threat level with that individual, but I also think that, when the relationships have been formed, the offender is less likely to be violent. As I said, it's amazing to me, when I watch our officers when I review these incidents, how good they are at de-escalating with their words, and not with the tools that they have been provided.

Again, when you look at 2024, we had, within a short period of time, six indigenous individuals who died in police contact. All of those were in mainstream policing. I would suggest that we need to take a deeper look at this. We have to understand why we're seeing less use of force and, certainly, fewer lethal use-of-force situations within our communities. When you look at our officers, they are more likely to be working alone in a remote area and, because of the CSI difference—the higher rates—that we have, going to higher-risk calls. Statistically, you would expect we would have more use-of-force situations and, unfortunately, perhaps more lethal uses of force, but we're seeing the exact opposite. Research needs to be done. I think all in policing can learn how it is that we're seeing, with all of those things that I mentioned are potentials for increased use, to actually be the opposite.

Philip Earle: As a final question from me, in your very opening comment you said you've been here before, you've seen little change. My question to you is this: Why?

Chief Keith Blake: Well, I think that's a very good question to ask, and I wish I knew the answer to it.

I was part of the AFN's subcommittee in the co-development of essential service legislation with Public Safety Canada. We are moving, I would say, at a slow pace, but at a reasonable pace. Once we started speaking about jurisdiction, that seemed to slow the process down, so I think that is going to be an issue that needs to be addressed.

Quite honestly, from the perspective that I have, as a chief of police, I think that's something that can be set aside for the rights holders, who can have that discussion. That shouldn't impede us from looking at equity, comparable funding envelopes and support that's always been needed. That should be a separate conversation with our leadership.

• (1720)

Philip Earle: Thank you. You're speaking very clearly on that point, but I want—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Sébastien, go ahead for two and half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chief George, given that New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province, do you think this reality is reflected in the delivery of police services for indigenous communities? Is that a problem? Is there a gap between the principles of bilingualism and the reality on the ground, particularly for members of your community who wish to speak in their indigenous language or the official language of their choice?

[English]

Chief Christopher George: We're predominantly an anglophone-speaking community. We're trying to bring back the connection to our language, the Mi'kmaq language, but for the most part our fluent speakers are gone. We work with English. We're in a very francophone area. I would say it's predominantly 60% to 70% francophone around us. The officers we work with have no problem with anglophones. That's not really the issue. The problem that we always stumble across is where their jurisdiction begins and ends. Can they enforce our bylaws? Are they able to? That's usually where it ends up.

Also, it's more of a social situation. For years there's been a mistrust of the RCMP for various reasons, and here we are reaching out to the RCMP to come in to protect us. There's a lot of relationship-building as well, and that works in the language of the heart, in the language of honesty, and being open and honest with the history of where we came from and what are needs are from each other.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: There's a lot of talk about a tripartite table between the federal government, the province and the indigenous community or nation. What role do you think the province should play to ensure that police services are culturally and linguistically adapted to the realities of first nations?

[English]

Chief Christopher George: When it comes to the tripartite agreement in the province, I know right now, for example, Mi'gmawel Tplu'taqnn, MTI, is a rights-based advocacy group that we are part of. It represents eight of our Mi'kmaq communities. I know, from reaching out to them, that they're in negotiations with the province and the RCMP to create some sort of MOU or trauma tripartite agreement, where the RCMP will be able to enforce by-laws. I don't know if that's across Canada or if that's in New Brunswick. I haven't had an update on that, but I know those con-

versations are in the works. I'm a big proponent of it. I'm new to this. Even this conversation here, listening to Mr. Blake, I've become much more informed on a lot of stuff. I'm a very data-driven person. That's how I found this organization and things of that nature.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, *welalin*.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Next I have Jamie for five minutes.

Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, once again for this very important conversation.

Quickly, Chief Blake, you mentioned earlier on this isn't the first time you've been here. You've been here a couple of times talking about this same thing. There are probably some recycled notes, I'm guessing.

Chief Keith Blake: Unfortunately, yes, we seem to be speaking about the same issues that were issues four years ago and 20 years ago, so you're correct in that regard.

Jamie Schmale: The program hasn't been updated since 1996.

Chief Keith Blake: That's correct.

We are looking at terms and conditions that are going to be new that will likely be introduced in December, but, again, we're still in a program that has discretionary funding that might be there, that might not. Again, although there's some window dressing that might be a little different, I don't think we progress anywhere near to where we should be.

Jamie Schmale: How often is your agreement up for renewal?

Chief Keith Blake: In our case, in my 13 years of being here, every year we've renewed it. Only one year, which is two years ago, we had a two-year agreement. Again, two years in policing does not make a budgetary cycle. Usually they're four to five years. It gives you a chance to, again, strategize on how you're going to deliver the best and most effective policing to the communities you serve.

• (1725)

Jamie Schmale: It's probably pretty tough, as you mentioned earlier, and you did express some of the challenges when you're right next door to Calgary. You obviously have the Calgary Police Service, which will continue to be funded forever, and you're scrambling and wondering if you're going to be renewed, which, thankfully, you have been.

Chief Keith Blake: Yes, it's very challenging. The one thing we always want to do is inform our staff as to what we're trying to achieve, because we don't want to hide anything about first nations policing; we want it all open. It is hard to provide explanations on why things are so different comparatively when there's really no justification that I've ever been told about that would mean this is why we're underfunded and under-supported and have legislative restrictions that no other police services have. There's no reasonable explanation.

Jamie Schmale: One of the parliaments years ago, I can't remember how many years ago, we had the Parliamentary Budget Office in. They were speaking about programs that exist currently within ISC, or Crown-Indigenous Relations. One of the comments that really stuck with me was that the departments themselves are good at doing the same thing over and over again, and they get into a routine, but if you try to throw a curve ball at them, all heck breaks loose, and trying to figure it out is very challenging. Sometimes if the department doesn't like it, you will never actually get any change whatsoever. This is why government taking control of something usually means less choice, less opportunity for those dealing...on the ground. Given the fact that this program hasn't been updated since around 1996—you've had a few appearances here, your notes seem to be roughly the same—we're not really getting anywhere, are we?

Chief Keith Blake: No, unfortunately, we're not.

I'm always optimistic and hopeful, but after 13 years of being involved in it, it is harder and harder to be optimistic, especially when you start to see infusions in other areas that are more politically driven than based upon the realities of the situation.

Again, when we're looking at the fentanyl crisis and what the government and the federal policing have done in relation to that, I wholeheartedly support it, but that has been a crisis in our community for years and years, and we have not seen any additional funding to address that. It is a systemic problem, and we need to overcome those systemic issues and look at how we can support communities that deserve that support.

Jamie Schmale: A few years ago, when you got that two-year extension, that was during the pandemic, I'm assuming.

Chief Keith Blake: It was just afterwards.

Quite frankly, when we've looked at our negotiations, I can honestly say that, over the 13 years, there has really been no negotiation. We usually butt up against a year-end, and if we don't sign it, we don't receive the funding, so we usually just carry over that agreement. There might be accelerators within that, small monetary increases, but again, those accelerators don't even cover the cost of living increases that we have.

We're falling further and further behind. Of course, policing is so complex now, the technologies that are needed... We're funded at a per officer rate, and that doesn't encompass all that's needed within policing. The specialties and technology that are required today are exponentially growing each and every year. Again, the funding levels don't even come close to what's required.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we have time for two minutes from the Liberals.

Jamie, please, go ahead.

Jaime Battiste: Officer Blake, I have a question for you around training and recruitment.

Besides the RCMP depot in Regina, how many different institutions are training police officers in Canada that could be training first nations community members?

Chief Keith Blake: It's a good question.

I can't say that I have the scope of all of that which is occurring in the country, but I can speak to the Alberta model.

We have Calgary and Edmonton police services, which have their own accredited training academies. We have the RCMP in Saskatchewan. We have a southern Alberta, Lethbridge University, model that we can take part in. It's, again, ad hoc. When a service needs a lot of members, like Lethbridge Police or Medicine Hat, they will start with one of those. However, there is no dedicated police service training facility in the province of Alberta. We did send our officers to Regina, but those officers are a long distance from home, and they are separated from family and friends. We looked at a different model. It's not that that training isn't good training—it is very good—but the Calgary Police Service affords our training officers the ability to stay at home, go home at night, go home on the weekends and stay connected with our service in proximity. However, it comes at a cost.

As I said, when we're looking at that, it isn't the best model because it doesn't have the cultural training that we'd like to employ.

What we do is, when they get on the ground here, we really look at taking our own homegrown training, whether it be community, language, culture, history and what we do differently here, and we put them on our own training program.

Again, that is one of the huge frustrations when we have a person who's available to go and has completed all of the necessary recruitment requirements—we then have to ask Calgary, “Do you have a spot open?” Generally, they don't, so we either have to wait or that officer will go somewhere else. Again, it's a challenge to say the least.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings us to the end. Thank you ever so much for your valuable testimony and for being with us this evening.

Do I have permission to adjourn, everyone?

The meeting is adjourned.

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