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Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec Centre, Lib.)):
Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 14 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the House order of reference of October 23, 2025, the committee is meeting on its study of Bill C-12, An Act respecting certain measures relating to the security of Canada's borders and the integrity of the Canadian immigration system and respecting other related security measures.

I'd now like to welcome the witnesses who will be with us for the first hour of the meeting.

From the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, we have Philippe Dufresne, Privacy Commissioner of Canada, and Marc Chénier, deputy commissioner and senior general counsel.

[*English*]

We also have with us Mr. Robert Huebert, professor, centre for military, security and strategic studies at the University of Calgary, who is going to proceed by video conference.

[*Translation*]

We also have Whitney Lackenbauer, professor at Trent University and Canada research chair in the study of the Canadian North.

Welcome.

We'll start with you, Mr. Dufresne. You have five minutes for your presentation.

Philippe Dufresne (Privacy Commissioner of Canada, Offices of the Information and Privacy Commissioners of Canada):
Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today to assist in your study of Bill C-12.

Bill C-12 would amend a number of laws and regulations with a view to strengthening immigration and border security and combating transnational organized crime and the flow of illicit narcotics and financing. These are important public interest objectives.

[*English*]

These provisions were initially included as part of Bill C-2, but Bill C-12 omits the elements of Bill C-2, including the lawful access provisions, that raise the most significant privacy implications

and on which I will have more to say when Bill C-2 is reviewed by this committee.

Last month, when I appeared before you on Bill C-8, I made reference to Bill C-12 and noted that it contains important positive safeguards with respect to information-sharing agreements for disclosures outside Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Specifically, Bill C-12 requires written information-sharing agreements for when the Minister of Immigration discloses specified immigration-related personal information outside the department.

[*Translation*]

The bill indicates that such agreements must include the elements of personal information that may be disclosed, the purpose of the disclosure, any limits on secondary use and subsequent transfer of information, as well as any other relevant details.

[*English*]

The bill further provides for the issuance of regulations by the government with respect to the disclosure of information, and I would expect my office to be consulted in the drafting of these regulations. These are important requirements that I support, and I would recommend that they be included in Bill C-8 as well.

The bill also includes a provision that would grant customs officers free access to premises or places where goods destined for export are stored. To harmonize this with the existing provisions of the Customs Act, in particular with subsection 42(3), I would recommend that the bill clarify that an officer may not enter a dwelling house without the consent of the occupant, except under the authority of a warrant.

[*Translation*]

Thank you again for the invitation to appear. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

[English]

Robert Huebert (Professor, Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

I have two points to make to this committee in regard to Bill C-12, one specific and one more general.

The first one pertains to my area of expertise, which is Arctic and strategic studies and Arctic security. That is part 4, the changes to the Oceans Act and specifically to the Coast Guard.

This particular element of the change to the Oceans Act is part of the larger picture of the transformation of the Coast Guard into a much more security-focused agency. It has been moved into the Department of National Defence, and it has been increasingly given more vessels and more activities. One of the functions of Bill C-12 is that it is going to be giving the Coast Guard more elements in terms of security patrols and gathering of security matters.

One of the challenges coming forward is that the Coast Guard is not law enforcement. One of the questions that is going to have to be addressed in the longer term, as more of a security mandate is given to the Coast Guard, is what in fact that means in terms of the individual members of the Coast Guard and what they will have to be doing in that particular context.

The additions that are proposed in Bill C-12 are in fact good, but there is obviously a greater need within the overall holistic understanding of what the transfer of the Coast Guard to DND and this larger security mandate ultimately means.

The second point I would make is with regard to the overall focus of Bill C-12 to secure the borders. One of the elements that many observers have made is the question that then follows: This obviously is securing against specific individuals, and there is the fact that you have within Bill C-12 a focus on the improvements in dealing with particular issues related to the drug trade and other aspects, which raises the question of how then this overall act pertains to the identification and the proactive actions taken against individuals who are violating our borders.

At the highest level, this gets to the issue of the strategic concerns that are now arising in terms of the increasing aggressive actions that we see being taken by Russia, China and Iran, as reported in our defence update and the Canadian Arctic foreign policy.

The question that really arises is how, then, this particular act strengthens, in the overall effort to protect at the strategic and more regional levels—how will it deal with the questions surrounding issues of the increased activities of organized crime and states that are said to be participating in the development of many of these drugs, the precursors and other elements that we are trying to strengthen the borders against.

Ultimately, the question is this: The borders need to be strengthened, but who are they being strengthened against, and how then does this pertain to the administration of the other agencies that are tasked with this job?

Thank you very much.

• (1110)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Huebert.

Professor Lackenbauer, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[English]

P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Professor, Canada Research Chair in the Study of the Canadian North, Trent University, As an Individual): Mr. Chair and committee members, I'm very honoured to appear before you today to offer a few opening reflections on Bill C-12.

Most of my work these days, like that of Dr. Huebert, focuses on Arctic security, so my comments will relate to how we conceptualize our northern borders and how Bill C-12 will contribute to improving their security.

First, successive governments love to talk about Canadian sovereignty. To an international lawyer, this might be read as the internationally recognized right for us to control activities in our jurisdiction. To many Canadians, however, the word sovereignty conjures up broader issues about how we actually govern our lands and waters, which I think are best seen through the lens of law and regulatory enforcement.

I think we need to shift our narrative, or at least a lot of it, from treating every unwanted activity in our Arctic lands, northern waters or aerospace as a sovereignty challenge to instead seeing most of them for what they are, the breaking of Canadian laws and regulations, which is a security and safety issue and not a sovereignty one. This entails ensuring we have the right tools to secure our borders and our territory and enforce our laws throughout our lands, waters and airspace.

We do face an increasingly dangerous international threat environment, which brings new challenges to our northern borders. This includes a wide range of grey-zone or hybrid threats that fall below the threshold of armed conflict, but these are often bundled together with more conventional military threats.

Many of these hybrid threats do not fall within the Department of National Defence's mandate. We need to be more precise in how we categorize Arctic threats across various sectors of security and then think about which departments and agencies are resourced to take the lead on addressing these threats.

There has been a broad consensus over several governments that we need to strengthen Canada's domain awareness, surveillance and control capabilities in the Arctic and north, and that we're able to enforce our legislative and regulatory frameworks in the region through truly whole-of-government and whole-of-society efforts.

I say this because I see various elements of Bill C-12 as improving the Government of Canada's ability to exercise its sovereign control in the Arctic and north by focusing on tangible security threats that threaten healthy communities, strong economies and a sustainable environment. Examples include those that Dr. Huebert just referred to, of international organized crime networks that have penetrated northern communities and are involved in human trafficking and the illegal drug trade. The opioid crisis is certainly a nationwide emergency, but its impact is disproportionately severe in northern regions, particularly amongst indigenous people.

Given the sheer breadth of Canada's northern borders, monitoring border areas where criminal networks might smuggle people or illegal goods is likely to entail turning to new technologies, such as drones, to facilitate wider area surveillance. When coupled with modernized legal authorities for border and law enforcement agencies, this can enable more effective responses. In the maritime security domain, our coasts face evolving security risks that require whole-of-government efforts. We can look to the 2022 Auditor General report on the need for increased surveillance in our Arctic waters and how we need to make sure that departments and agencies have fuller awareness of maritime activities and growing surveillance needs.

While the Coast Guard has long played a role in ferrying around law enforcement agencies and supporting an integrated government approach to maritime security, Bill C-12 will amend the Oceans Act to add security-related activities specifically to Coast Guard services. This is a big shift, and this is a very welcome one that complements the Coast Guard's wide-ranging safety roles.

This change, by enabling the Coast Guard to conduct security patrols and to collect, analyze and disseminate information and intelligence for security purposes, will capitalize on the persistent presence of the Coast Guard fleet in our Arctic waters to contribute to maritime domain awareness. As Prime Minister Carney noted in June, this integrates it into our NATO defence capabilities. What exactly this looks like remains to be determined, but incorporating the Coast Guard with more fully integrated intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance will benefit Canada and, by extension, our allies.

To wrap up, Canada's 2019 Arctic and northern policy framework, or ANPF, states, "In the Arctic and in the North, as in the rest of Canada, safety, security and defence are essential prerequisites for healthy communities, strong economies, and a sustainable environment."

• (1115)

The Canadian Arctic and the north pose distinct challenges in producing a comprehensive picture about what's happening across such a vast region, and, as well, our "ability to respond to regional challenges, provide security and ensure compliance with our laws and regulations largely depends" on our ability to put this picture together, because, as the ANPF says, "gaps can have life-threatening consequences."

Increasing maritime and cross-border traffic creates new challenges for border enforcement, and it's imperative that we advance whole-of-government and whole-of-society collaboration to enhance monitoring and surveillance, to integrate information from

more diverse sources and to enable timely law enforcement action as required.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Lackenbauer.

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

[*English*]

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Thank you very much.

There's so much here to digest.

Commissioner Dufresne, I'm not sure if you're comfortable with this, but I'm going to ask if you're comfortable talking about this. Bill C-12 came from Bill C-2, and there were some pretty significant privacy aspects in Bill C-2. I don't believe that you have spoken about Bill C-2 at committee.

Would you feel comfortable if I were to ask you about your general concerns, just so that as we move forward as His Majesty's loyal Opposition, we can have a sense as to what your concerns are? Is it okay if I lead off there?

Philippe Dufresne: Thank you.

Yes, I'm happy to speak to that, of course not specifically to provisions that I would do on Bill C-2, but generally, similar to my comments on Bill C-8. I always look at these types of national security bills to see what the tools are that law enforcement needs, because they need those tools, and whether they are necessary and proportionate.

That's a big lens, so we look at what the thresholds are. Are you requiring a warrant? Are you requiring reasonable suspicion or reasonable belief? What are the processes for Canadians to be informed of these things? What are the processes to challenge these things? What are the timelines to challenge these things? Who is given those types of powers?

In Bill C-2, there also are issues about requiring organizations to make information available. Is that done in a way that is going to create systemic risks or vulnerabilities to systems, and are we mitigating that?

Those are the types of things I'll be speaking to when I come here on Bill C-2. I will be making recommendations in terms of some of those thresholds, particularly when they deal with sensitive personal information, and how they can be made stronger: for example, taking it from reasonable suspicion to reasonable belief. These are the types of points I'll be making.

Frank Caputo: Okay. Thank you.

I don't want to put words in your mouth, but is it fair to say that around parts 14 and 15 generally—those are the lawful access areas—you have considerable concerns about that? For instance, reasonable grounds to suspect or believe versus reasonable suspicion are very different legal thresholds. Am I summarizing that accurately?

Philippe Dufresne: Those are the parts of Bill C-2 where I will have the most to say, and particularly on these threshold matters, absolutely.

Frank Caputo: Okay. Perhaps you and I can speak outside of committee at some point, because I would love to hear your insights.

Professor Lackenbauer and Dr. Huebert, I really listened to what you had to say. One thing that is often understated is our Arctic sovereignty.

Before we get to that, Dr. Huebert, you talked about putting the Coast Guard into National Defence. Is that simply, in your view, a matter of meeting our national targets to placate, perhaps, or to address international commitments? As far as I know, the Coast Guard serves no proper defence function. If fired upon, they retreat. They are not military or defence—not in the traditional sense that I would think of, anyway.

Could you give any comments on that, please?

• (1120)

Robert Huebert: Absolutely. The Coast Guard itself is undergoing a major transformation. We're seeing an explosion of new vessels being produced. In fact, as we speak, we have four very large vessels that are all being built at the same time—one in Vancouver, one that's going to be between Finland and Quebec City, and the two AOPS that are being constructed in Halifax. Really, what we're seeing is part and parcel of what you suggest—1.5% of meeting our 5% security elements for DND. The move of the Coast Guard to DND will assist the government in that regard. As my colleague Dr. Lackenbauer made clear, however, the geography of the Arctic is so vast that the problems of the new threat environment we're facing at both the subnational and national levels require the whole of government.

The vision for the Coast Guard, which really depends on how the government actually follows through on the implementation, is that the Coast Guard, of course, will not be at the pointy end. It will not fight. It will not have the capability of engaging in kinetic reactions. Where it can play a critical role is in terms of surveillance, in terms of presence, in terms of the ability to deal with threats that are sub-kinetic. That means not actually fighting. It means being able to get people into locations and being able to provide.

One of the thoughts that are being considered by some is that as we are increasingly recognizing the new high-intensity threat environment that is posed, particularly by the Russians and, many suspect, the Chinese, the surveillance capability cannot be done only by DND. You're going to have to get platforms. Again, how that works out is something that is still very much an issue in progress. We've yet to see it in this context. The recognition is that DND cannot do everything by itself. This is where I think the role of the

Coast Guard becomes so critically important and is underlined by part 4 of this act.

Frank Caputo: How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Caputo. That's all the time for now.

That brings us to MP Ehsassi for six minutes, please.

Hon. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. Your testimony has been very helpful.

Perhaps I could start off with Professor Lackenbauer.

One of the issues you touched on was criminal activity in the north. I must say that this is something that does not receive a lot of attention. I'm wondering if you could speak to that issue and further educate us on the threats we face insofar as criminal activity is concerned.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Thank you. It's an excellent question.

When I think about Arctic security, I often distinguish between threats through the Arctic—ones that would pass through the region, such as long-range strategic delivery systems, which are very much a military mandate—and a lot of the threats to and in the Arctic, which have been documented and fall with other departments and agencies. In our national discussions, it behooves us to dedicate more energies and perhaps more attention to those departments and agencies that have been overlooked up to this point in time.

We look at the opioid crisis and what that means in the north. We look at patterns of human trafficking and ask what the unique Arctic pathways or unique Arctic vulnerabilities are that are not covered by our existing national systems. We look at certain provisions in terms of a very limited footprint for border services in the north and a limited footprint of RCMP federal policing as being key gaps that have been identified in the last five years and that we're still in the progress of addressing.

I think this is where Bill C-12 helps to create the enabling legislative conditions to see the investment of resources. When we look at announcements of increasing CBSA and RCMP personnel, we also need to look to the north and ask ourselves what kinds of vulnerabilities we need to be investing in with federal resources in the region. It's here that the language of sovereignty, to my mind, is not just about lines on a map. For all of us, it's actually everything that goes on within those lines.

I would say that the most acute security issues are actually perceived at the community level. Here's where it's important to look at things like human trafficking, to look at a lot of the other forms of violence that are playing out in these communities, and to also understand the pathways for transnational organized crime, what that increasing presence in the north and throughout the north means, and how we can counter it.

• (1125)

Hon. Ali Ehsassi: I'm sorry. When you say transnational organized crime, is that coming from the north, or is it coming through our southern border and then moving its way up?

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Again, I wouldn't be privy to any of the detailed classified information on those pathways. We might look to the fact that we have a western border as well. I'm not sure how much organized crime is passing, but certainly issues relating to gun smuggling, for example, and theoretically to drugs, would warrant looking to that western border.

I think, more generally, a lot of the pathways are through southern Canada, reaching up to the north. In essence, investing in broader, more robust safeguards for our southern borders is ultimately helping us to address some of these northern aspects of our threat environment.

Hon. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much.

I will turn to Professor Huebert.

Professor Huebert, I find that the previous question you were asked by the member opposite seemed to have a very dim view of the Coast Guard, but, as you noted, the Coast Guard is going through a transformation. Could you unpack that for us some more and perhaps share with us why you think that the Coast Guard is fully capable of doing so?

Robert Huebert: The Coast Guard is often the victim of its own success, because so many of its activities in the north are beyond the vision of what we see. We don't see them resupplying. We don't see them in the engagements.

What we know historically is that the Coast Guard has been vastly underfunded and has been asked, always increasingly, to do more and more difficult tasks. These tasks have become even more pronounced as climate change has, of course, added new environmental demands in terms of how they are responding to crises—not only flooding and forest fires but also decreasing ice cover. That means the Coast Guard has always been the agency that the Canadian government tells to go up and fix the issue.

As we enter into this new geopolitical threat environment, there is the realization that it's not good enough simply to have the Coast Guard dealing at the subnational, lower level of responding to threats: We have to figure out how in fact we can utilize these new resources for the greater security issue.

This is something that the Coast Guard is wrestling with right now. It's the issue of not only how we integrate it so that it can still meet all of the requirements that we've always called upon it to meet, but also how we add on these new responsibilities. This is very much a policy issue in motion, literally as we speak.

The Coast Guard will figure out whatever is required. They're going to be given four ships from four different shipyards. They will figure out all the first-of-class problems that come with that. They're going to figure out what type of training is necessary. The problem we always have is that they do it so terribly well that there often is a tendency to say that they have enough money and that they're figuring it out.

Ultimately, we come back to the issue that we see with Bill C-12. We see the new ships. We see the transfer to DND. Will the Coast Guard get the resources it needs to maintain itself and to fully fulfill itself as it is given more security responsibilities?

Hon. Ali Ehsassi: I think I have very little time left.

The Chair: I think the time is over, unfortunately. Thank you for that segment.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for six minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I apologize to the witnesses, but I would like to move a motion regarding Bill C-12. My assistant has the French and English versions and can submit them to the clerk. The motion is as follows:

That, in order to allow the members of the Committee to take into account the appearance of 24 witnesses before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration as part of the study of Bill C-12, the Committee postpone the deadline for submitting amendments in preparation for the clause-by-clause study of Bill C-12.

That, for this purpose, the deadline for submitting amendments be set for Friday, November 21, 2025, at 11:59 p.m.

I find I have no choice but to move this motion to ensure a high degree of professionalism. Likely on Friday morning, the committee members will receive a list of recommendations based on the testimony and briefs received, of which there are probably dozens, about the part of Bill C-12 that deals with immigration and refugees. I can't even imagine us, the members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, not having time to familiarize ourselves with this document and analyze it on our own to determine whether or not we're going to propose amendments, given that the deadline for submitting amendments was set for Friday at noon. I'd be quite embarrassed should the witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration have to learn that all their work had not been given proper consideration to enable us to assess whether or not we're going to propose amendments.

That's why I'm proposing this to the committee, and I imagine there won't be much opposition to the idea. Instead of having until noon to submit our amendments, I propose that we give ourselves until the end of the same day to do so. That would give us time to familiarize ourselves with the material and everything the witnesses have done.

Honestly, I can't understand why we didn't make room in our committee's schedule to listen to and discuss what occurred at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. We're talking about 24 witnesses. I don't know how this happened. I know that the scheduling of our work on Bill C-12 was adopted in large part because of an alliance between the Liberals and the Conservatives, because I, for one, was not in favour of it.

I can't help but talk to you about it today, because I've always been thorough in the past. I can't accept that the deadline set for submitting amendments doesn't give me the time I need to read the document produced by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, assess its relevance and read a few briefs, so that I can do my job properly in preparing for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill.

I don't expect there's going to be a lot of debate on my motion. I think what I'm saying makes sense. It makes no sense to have to submit amendments no later than two hours after receiving the document produced by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

If we stuck to the current plan, I wouldn't be shy to explain the situation to all the groups who shared their recommendations or took the trouble to draft a brief. It would be as if we were sending them a message that our committee did not want to take their work into account.

Mr. Chair, I would encourage you to call the vote on my motion. Once that's dealt with, we can continue the meeting. I'll let you do your job.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

The motion on Bill C-12 is in order. That said, as we've just been notified, I'm going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes to make sure that all committee members can read it. We will resume immediately thereafter.

• (1130)

(Pause)

• (1135)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We're debating the motion that was just moved by Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mr. Ramsay, the floor is yours.

Jacques Ramsay (La Prairie—Atateken, Lib.): After discussions with the chair and the clerk, who were able to confirm that the work would not be delayed, we think this is an excellent motion. We're therefore in favour of it.

The Chair: Okay.

Is there any further debate? It doesn't look like it.

The clerk has informed me that it is theoretically possible to proceed as planned with the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill on Tuesday, except that it will place an additional burden on the clerk, parliamentary analysts and the other people who have to speak to the amendments. It will also place an additional burden on members, who will have a little less time to study the amendments and prepare for Tuesday's meeting. However, if this additional burden doesn't bother the members, it is up to them to decide.

Is everyone in favour of Mrs. DeBellefeuille's motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We will now return to the question and answer period. You had the floor, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Just before that, though, I see that Ms. Dandurand would like to say something to me.

• (1140)

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): In fact, I would just like to ask you if it's possible to extend the presence of the witnesses. What they have to say is really interesting, but our time with them has just been shortened a bit. Could we spend a little more time with them, to give them a chance to say what they have to say?

The Chair: Yes, we're going to give a few more minutes to the witnesses who were supposed to spend the first hour of the meeting with us. We'll still have a little less time than we expected. We'll also extend the meeting so that we can hear the witnesses scheduled for the second hour.

Thank you for that suggestion, Ms. Dandurand.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for you, Mr. Dufresne. At the end of the day, you're not suggesting a lot of recommendations or changes to Bill C-12.

Can you provide more details about the amendments you would like to see in order to reflect the points you raised in your opening remarks? For example, you'd like to be consulted when certain regulations are being drafted. You also believe that we need to clarify that a warrant is required for customs officers to enter a dwelling. Five minutes for a presentation is not a lot, so you didn't have time to elaborate on those points, even though you spoke at lightning speed, I must say. Can you clarify those points in a short time?

Philippe Dufresne: The first point I mentioned concerns information-sharing agreements when documents containing personal information are disclosed outside the department. That's one example I cited as a positive aspect. According to the bill, the agreements will have to include details on the content of those exchanges. That said, the government also has the regulatory power to add other pieces of information or other criteria, among other things. The message I'm sending here is that I expect my office to be consulted on these kinds of regulations. Consultation doesn't need to be included in the bill through an amendment, but I expect it. When the government drafts regulations that will have an impact on privacy, I expect that we will be consulted. That's the first point.

The second point concerns the additional powers that would be given to border services officers so that they can enter premises or warehouses housing goods for export. I support that. However, I would suggest making an exception that they can't enter a dwelling, therefore someone's residence, unless they have consent or a warrant. This practice can already be found in a number of statutes, including the one that applies to me, the Privacy Act. I have the power to conduct investigations and enter workplaces, but I can't enter residences without a warrant. I propose to clarify that the same thing goes in this case.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Therefore, you're suggesting that it be specified in the act in question.

Philippe Dufresne: Yes. In addition, there's already an existing model: Sections 42 and 43 of the Customs Act already contain the exact wording. It just needs to be inserted there.

Claude DeBellefeuille: That's perfect. Thank you very much, Mr. Dufresne.

Mr. Huebert, my next question is for you.

When we heard from the commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, whose name escapes me, he explained to us that Coast Guard practices were going to change now that the act would allow them to share, exchange and collect information.

However, Bill C-12 and the recent budget offer no guarantees that the Canadian Coast Guard can improve its technological capabilities, and acquire better technological tools or more vessels, for example. Bill C-12 and the budget do not provide anything specifically for the Canadian Coast Guard, and that worries me.

Are you concerned about the lack of commitment to equipping the Coast Guard with better tools to do its job?

[English]

Robert Huebert: It gets to the funding issue again. I completely agree with you, because this follows a pattern of behaviour. The Coast Guard is given greater responsibility, but because it is a special operating agency, what often happens is that the funds that are then provided to allocate for the new tasks that it is given go by the wayside.

I'm not saying that this is happening in this particular context as we see it given a greater security focus, but I am suggesting that, if past performances are to be held, your concerns that in fact they will be given greater responsibilities, they will be told that they have to do this, and then the issue will be if you have the money to get the necessary pieces of kit that you need to engage upon that type of information. They are already integrated with some of the security sharing of information. This, of course, is going to take them one step further in terms of that whole-of-government approach.

The other part, too, of course, that we haven't talked about is the issue of law enforcement that follows from that. That is something that is also going to have to be addressed if we see this continuation of the direction that the government seems to be taking with the Coast Guard.

• (1145)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Huebert.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lloyd for five minutes.

[English]

Dane Lloyd (Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I will also be putting a motion on notice today.

This past summer, I had the opportunity to attend a town hall hosted by the Penticton Shooting Sports Association. This facility has been in operation for 42 years and is essential, not only for recreational sport shooters but also for the RCMP and the B.C. sheriffs and cadets who depend on it for training.

Sadly, the Department of Agriculture has announced that the range's lease will be terminated at the end of this year. This divestment plan has been widely condemned by the community and the local RCMP. The local RCMP has been quoted as saying, "The closing of the PSSA would negatively impact our training in a myriad of ways; not only would [it] add significant expense for the RCMP members to travel to an alternative, distant facility, but many other facilities do not offer the same seclusion that allows for enhanced RCMP tactical training."

I would like to table this notice of motion:

That, given that the Department of Agriculture has advised the Penticton Shooting Sports Association, or PSSA, that their lease is to be terminated at the end of 2025; the range has operated for 42 years and is essential not only for recreational shooters but also for the RCMP, the BC Sheriff Service and cadets who depend on it for training; the planned closure of the range would deprive the community of a safe area where residents can legally and responsibly use their firearms; and the proposed divestment of this land has been met with widespread condemnation from the community and the South Okanagan RCMP; the committee call on the government to rescind the divestment plan and this be reported to the House.

Getting into my questions, I'll start with Professor Huebert.

It has been widely reported that the government is reconsidering its position on the F-35 purchase. We're here today talking about our border and our sovereignty. I fear that abandoning the F-35 would undermine Canada's reputation with our allies.

Can you give us your thoughts on this?

Robert Huebert: Absolutely.

Look at it from the perspective of the decision-making process we've seen—the discussions about reopening and moving away from a decision that seemingly has been made. Remember that we did go through a competition and the decision was followed up that we were going for the F-35 and not for the Gripen. We seem to be reversing it. That seems to be based on the current situation we face with a very unsettling administration from the United States. There seem to be some economics brought in, but it does not deal with the strategic ramifications.

What we see from all of the reviews from the Royal Canadian Air Force is that the F-35 best meets the need for meeting the strategic threat. That is, of course—to be blunt—coming from the Russians and probably from the Chinese, and the F-35 represents a system of systems. That's what people mean about fifth generation. The days of old-fashioned dog fighting and tactical warfare are still there, and that is where the Gripen probably is a very good aircraft. However, in terms of meeting the type of threat that Canada faces to the North American continent, by the observations of everyone—this includes the former chief of the Royal Canadian Air Force and Billie Flynn, one of the leading experts on this subject matter—the F-35 is the answer to the strategic threat. To move away from an F-35 to go to a technology that is not going to secure our borders is very problematic and troubling, in my estimation.

• (1150)

Dane Lloyd: Professor Huebert, the government is moving the Coast Guard into National Defence. We know that these vessels are not armed with kinetic force. What would be the consequences of sending unarmed Coast Guard vessels north without air support if there were to be a delay in the purchase of F-35s or other fighters?

Robert Huebert: Well, the question becomes how well we outfit them to be able to facilitate our helicopters, because, remember, that gives the Coast Guard the ability to have a much greater reach in that context. Now, you put it in the context of whether it's a risk to send the Coast Guard vessels north when we don't have a proper fighter envelope protecting it. Remember that NORAD, despite the types of difficulties we face with the Americans, is still functioning at a very high level of performance.

If we were to enter into a kinetic situation, where in fact we are dealing with an actual attack over the North American continent, then the American protection would once again come into play in this context.

What does that mean for the Coast Guard? The Coast Guard would be there in its ability, with its increased security orientation and, of course, in terms of observations and data flows—everything that Bill C-12 is offering and everything that the DND transfer is offering. They will be part of that system, but your point is—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Huebert, but the time is over. We might be able to come back to that a bit later.

[Translation]

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

Jacques Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Huebert, Bill C-12 seems to concern you in the sense that the necessary means may not be there to ensure what's provided for in it. However, let's be honest: Bills don't contain any financial provisions. They are two completely different things.

Am I correct or not?

[English]

Robert Huebert: You are right that the ultimate decision is within the budget to fund these aspects. My concern is from holistic observation. Often we come up with very good legislation that provides us with the means or the frameworks to act, and then it is the follow-through in terms of how well we fund the agencies that are

then given the responsibility to deal with them. This is ongoing, and there's nothing specific that you can put in the act to really remedy it. It becomes an issue of whether we have the proper integration. Because you are tightening up the borders, do you then make sure that the RCMP have enough capabilities? We go back to Dr. Lackenbauer's point about the thinness of the RCMP and other elements up in the north. Will we have that ability to implement? That's always one of the confounding issues when we're looking for improvement in border security.

[Translation]

Jacques Ramsay: I'm a bit surprised by your comment, since the Canadian Coast Guard will now depend on the Department of National Defence, which has just been allocated a budget of \$9 billion for its procurement strategy. I think that bodes well enough. In that context, I find it hard to understand your concern. I think the government has it right, so there's nothing to worry about at this point.

[English]

Robert Huebert: The problem is, do we follow through? Again, we go back to 2017 with the Canadian defence policy that came forward, “Strong, Secure, Engaged”. Remember that one of the major elements that were brought forward with that particular policy, above what it did with security, was that it said it was fully costed and fully funded. We know that wasn't the case, partly because of the COVID crisis that developed immediately after it, but we do have this difficulty that we come up with good plans and do not fund them.

In other words, yes, we're promising the \$9 billion. We're promising in the next five years the \$83.1 billion in addition. The question is, do we have the follow-through? That's always been my concern, from long-term observation.

[Translation]

Jacques Ramsay: You were also concerned that the Canadian Coast Guard may not have the means to carry out its mission. I would remind you that the Canadian Coast Guard often works with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Parks Canada and Transport Canada. It can also rely on officials from Public Safety Canada, Natural Resources Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency. It's important to understand that the Canadian Coast Guard works in collaboration with other agencies and that, as a result, it will have the means to enforce the law.

Do you have any concerns in that respect?

• (1155)

[English]

Robert Huebert: Absolutely. Your point to a certain degree answers itself, because we have the facilities. In other words, in the past, that's exactly how the Coast Guard had to function. It has to ensure that the agencies that then have the responsibility for law enforcement for the elements that it has to do.... You have to get those people. You have to have enough boots on the ground that, when the Coast Guard is going, say, up into a northern region, the RCMP and the border support individuals are, in fact, brought on board. It always comes down to the issues of having the people there and the ability to fund that capability.

Your point is very important, and I'm concerned that in the past that hasn't always happened.

[*Translation*]

Jacques Ramsay: There's already a commitment to hire 1,000 new officers at the Canada Border Services Agency and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Professor Lackenbauer, you talked about—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Ramsay, I hate to break your stride, but we're going to have to move on to the next person.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dufresne, for the sake of clarity, could you send committee members the specific amendments you would like to see made to Bill C-12, a bit like you did for Bill C-8?

That would make our work and that of the House staff easier, because, as you saw, we don't have a lot of time to think about the amendments we would like to submit.

Do you have time to do that?

Philippe Dufresne: We will be pleased to send that to you.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Okay, thank you very much.

Mr. Huebert, let's continue our very interesting discussion on the Canadian Coast Guard.

There's a lot of talk about the Arctic, but, as you said, a lot of things transit through the south and then move north. I'm a member from southern Quebec and, yes, I see a lot of gun and tobacco smuggling, as well as human trafficking, in the corner of Akwesasne and Lake St. Francis, in the St. Lawrence Seaway and near New York State. We can see that it's a hub.

Do you think the Canadian Coast Guard should also deploy personnel there, in collaboration with the RCMP's marine units, to ensure the security of the maritime borders in this sensitive area of Quebec, which has been very busy for many years?

Do you also believe that we shouldn't put all our resources in the Arctic and keep some for southern Quebec?

[*English*]

Robert Huebert: Well, your question ties very nicely into the question from your colleague beforehand, and that is this question: How do we actually have the enforcement, now that we're giving the Coast Guard a greater security capability? The Coast Guard has, in fact, done exactly what you've called for, on the Great Lakes. We operate with the Americans. There is a good relationship on it. However, both you and your colleague hit the point, and that is this: Do we have enough capability to allow the Coast Guard to function on a day-to-day basis? You're absolutely right that the focus right now has been towards the north, but that doesn't take away from the fact that the Coast Guard is heavily involved on both the east and west coasts, but also on the Great Lakes, and, in fact, could deal with some of the issues that you are raising.

It comes down to these questions: Do they have the infrastructure and people, and are there enough RCMP to integrate with them? Presumably, this renewed focus, with Bill C-12, with the move to DND, will allow the Coast Guard to do it, but as part of that strategic overview, I'd say it is so important that we now consider what we're giving the Coast Guard the ability to do.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for that exchange.

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

• (1200)

[*English*]

Chak Au (Richmond Centre—Marpole, CPC): Thank you very much.

From what I read and the presentation you made, I have great concern about Arctic security. In particular, the question is whether or not we have the capacity to determine the risk. Because of the time, I just want to ask all of my questions all at once.

The first question is this: According to your assessment, what is the risk level? Is it high, moderate or small? Second, where and what is the weakest link in Arctic security? Third, in terms of Bill C-12, what is one thing that's been left unattended or unaddressed for Arctic security?

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: I'll go back to Bill C-12 and to where the conversation has perhaps deviated. What it specifies in proposed section 41.1 is that the Coast Guard “may collect, analyze and disclose information or intelligence.” We're talking about law enforcement. I don't see this as being within the span of Bill C-12.

In answering your second question first, the gap right now is information sharing. We have silos between departments and agencies and in levels of government, and we have an inability to ingest information provided by community subject matter experts. The Coast Guard is already present in our Arctic waters and in our Arctic skies. It is already seeing things that could be fed into a more robust intelligence picture.

What I see Bill C-12 doing with the amendments to the Oceans Act is actually allowing for harmonization and better consolidation of existing efforts. When I look at this, it's about understanding patterns of vessels of interest.

We often get caught up in sovereignty issues with big commercial vessels that may be passing through and exercising an impermissible right of transit passage, according to Canada's laws. I think there are a lot of smaller vessels that we have an ability to detect using different systems, but we don't have the ability to pull that all together, so it's about respecting the existing mandates of CBSA and the RCMP in terms of enforcement. Of course, CBSA is limited to ports of entry, and the RCMP has the prerogative to do investigations and apprehensions in our internal and territorial waters. It's being very precise here that the Coast Guard is just another component of this.

What Bill C-12 does very well is to provide that ability for them to share information in a more timely way, at the speed of relevance, to allow for that more robust common operating picture. To me, that's a critical enabler to everything that flows from it.

Chak Au: How about my third question? What's being left unattended?

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: I think there are the follow-up pieces. This provides those tools to move towards, in a way, that legislative top cover. Now it makes sure that the different departments and agencies have the systems to be able to share that information, and where there are chain of custody issues—for example, for law enforcement pieces—those are protected. At the same time, it makes sure that the systems can speak to each other.

Here's where I think we're talking about a budget for building new capabilities, equipment or kit. I think a lot of the immediate-term investments can actually come by just making sure systems talk to one another and by getting our different information systems speaking.

Chak Au: In that case, are you sure that Bill C-12 would make that work?

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: I think it creates the enabling conditions for that to occur. My expectation from this piece of legislation is that it's necessary. It's the first step. Building forward, then, that becomes articulated in policies and programs that will allow for the implementation piece

Some of the conversation here is helpful in saying that, by having the Coast Guard move under the responsibility of the Minister of National Defence while retaining its identity as a civilian operating agency, there are opportunities for the synchronization, harmonization and leveraging of resources, where all the work done by Defence Research and Development Canada and by the Department of National Defence for systems could also be shared with the Coast Guard in a more agile way.

Chak Au: Okay.

My other question is for Professor Huebert.

What is our capacity, right now, to prevent infiltration by foreign countries, through the Arctic, into Canada? What has been the impact on the diaspora communities in Canada? Do you have any comments?

• (1205)

Robert Huebert: That's one of the critical questions.

You asked Dr. Lackenbauer what he saw as one of the major threats. When I listened to the head of CSIS just recently make his comments in terms of the infiltration that we are in fact seeing in the north, he specifically named some of the concerns he had with both Russia and China. This is one of the problems we face in reality coming to terms with how bad or how understated this threat is. We, on the outside, don't have access to the actual information. In other words, the head of CSIS has a much better understanding in terms of what's actually happening.

When he made his comments—last week, I believe—he publicly talked about the involvement of foreign states. Then I think back to what the Hogue report said in terms of the efforts at political inter-

ference. Joining those two dots together suggests, to me at least, that we are seeing increasing activity on the part of our adversaries. To what degree are we seeing that? Unfortunately, I can't answer your question. I just don't have access to that level of knowledge.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for that exchange, Mr. Au.

Ms. Acan, you have the floor for five minutes.

Sima Acan (Oakville West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

It's really nice to see you again today, Professor Huebert.

Yesterday, we were discussing the comparison between the F-35 and the Gripen. The comparison on my side was the procurement and operational costs of those two fighter jets.

As the world is quickly moving to uncrewed aerial systems, a discussion was opened today in which the F-35 question came out. It just came to me that those drones have combat abilities along with the investigation and search abilities, so I believe you'll agree with me that those are going to be a good addition, along with the helicopters, to support our Coast Guard.

That was my comment on that.

My question will be for both you and Professor Lackenbauer, and it is going to be on strategic alignment with the allies.

In part 4 of Bill C-12, the Oceans Act would allow for the Canadian Coast Guard to participate in maritime security patrols. This includes border monitoring and surveillance operations, as well as intelligence collection and analysis.

Given that engaging the Coast Guard in security and intelligence roles is consistent with the activities of Five Eyes partners, including the United States, how would this formal legislative mechanism improve bilateral co-operation and intelligence sharing against transnational maritime threats?

Robert Huebert: It's nice to see you again, two days in a row.

Thank you very much for your observation.

What Bill C-12 is going to do, since it consolidates and enables, as Dr. Lackenbauer says, the Coast Guard to focus on this.... We already have very good co-operation, particularly with the Americans and their coast guard. Our Coast Guard and the Americans in Alaska are almost joined at the hip, one could almost say, and they have been able to avoid all the political uncertainty that Trump has introduced at this point.

This particular piece of legislation consolidates the ability of the Coast Guard, then, to engage. It in fact sets up the mandate, and I suspect what you'll be seeing is further development, particularly with the Americans, in terms of how the various sharing of information on a security level is able to be done.

If Bill C-12 is properly implemented—and now we get back to the issue of implementation—obviously one of the things we want to be doing with the Americans and the three other members of the Five Eyes is considering how, in fact, we can share even more sensitive security information that may have beforehand had nation-only qualifications. I think it opens up the door for very good co-operation.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: I thank you for the question as well.

I think there's a real opportunity space here. As Dr. Huebert mentioned, we have very long-standing relationships, including information sharing and cross training, with the U.S. Coast Guard Arctic District, formerly District 17, and, again, well-established ways of sharing information through the Five Eyes. By creating the conditions for the Coast Guard to feed into that Canadian picture, by extension, it can feed outward to our allies. There's a real opportunity space with the Royal Danish Navy to also be working on consolidating that common operating picture in the Davis Strait and the Labrador Sea.

Within NORAD, giving the Coast Guard a mechanism to share its information lawfully with the navy and the Canadian Armed Forces more generally supports the maritime watch mission for North America. By extension, within NATO, with its increasing attentiveness to the Arctic and Canada's now very clear support for NATO speaking to Arctic issues, this is a real opportunity space to leverage all of the instruments of our national power and awareness to be able to contribute to that, and our allies will be very grateful.

● (1210)

Sima Acan: Thank you very much to both of you.

Again, this question can be answered by both of you.

Are there any best practices or lessons learned from international partners where coast guards have been granted similar authorities, such as conducting security patrols or collecting, analyzing and sharing intelligence? If so, how did these measures improve maritime security in their jurisdictions?

Can we start with you, Professor Lackenbauer?

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: There are, again, different arrangements. Certainly, within the United States context, its coast guard plays a very direct role in law enforcement. Under 14 USC 522, the U.S. Coast Guard is empowered to enforce federal laws on the high seas and within U.S. waters to deal with things like drug trafficking, illegal immigration and environmental violations. I don't envisage Canada going that far with our Coast Guard, but I think we can learn from some of its best practices what elements of that work.

I certainly don't think we will extend to some of their practices on the high seas outside of our internal waters or territorial seas. That said, I think looking at the kinds of tools it has and the kinds of training and capabilities it has developed to enforce U.S. laws is something we can look to.

If we look more broadly to what our Nordic allies are doing to integrate their coast guards into their total defence and comprehensive security postures in their countries, that is also something that encourages us to tighten those ties with our Nordic allies, not only to learn from them but also to share some of our best practices.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's all the time we have to continue this great conversation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dufresne, Mr. Chénier, Mr. Huebert and Mr. Lackenbauer, thank you for your participation today. Have a good day.

We will suspend the meeting for a few minutes, after which we will begin the second hour.

● (1210)

(Pause)

● (1215)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We'll begin this second hour of the meeting by welcoming our two guests: Brian Sauvé, president of the National Police Federation, and Mark Weber, national president of the Customs and Immigration Union.

Mr. Sauvé, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[*English*]

Brian Sauvé (President, National Police Federation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon. Thank you for the invitation. My name is Brian Sauvé. I am president of the National Police Federation, the union representing about 20,000 members of the RCMP across Canada and internationally. Our members work tirelessly to combat some of Canada's most pressing public safety challenges, including transnational organized crime, cyber-threats, financial crime, illicit drug trafficking, human smuggling and all forms of cross-border criminal activity.

Bill C-12 arrives at a pivotal time, as communities face escalating harms that demand a strong response from law enforcement. The NPF supports the overarching purpose of the bill, which seeks to strengthen Canada's border security. We also endorse the legislation's objectives of combatting transnational organized crime, illegal fentanyl trafficking and illicit financial activities. However, while legislative change is important, it will not by itself produce the comprehensive results Canadians expect. In order to achieve success, the bill must be accompanied by three main things: adequate personnel and resources, efficient procurement and operational tools, and stronger organized Canada-U.S. and cross-jurisdictional information sharing.

Today I'd like to focus on three key points from Bill C-12. The first is information sharing and intelligence coordination. In today's complex threat environment, effective information sharing among law enforcement agencies is one of the most powerful tools for keeping communities safe. Bill C-12 provides RCMP members with clearer authority to share and receive operational intelligence with domestic and international partners. One provision that the NPF fully supports is the collection and sharing of sex offender travel information through the Sex Offender Information Registration Act, aligning Canada with U.S. practices. In 2022 alone, Canada received 149 notifications of sex offender travel from the U.S., which allowed our members to act proactively to protect communities and prevent harm before it occurs.

Bill C-12 also formally recognizes the Canadian Coast Guard's security and intelligence functions. This will allow the RCMP's marine security enforcement teams to gain easier and timely access to legally supported intelligence and provide better situational awareness.

The next point is on the trafficking of illicit substances and guns. Illicit drug and firearm trafficking continues to threaten public safety and fuel organized crime across Canada. The opioid crisis and the proliferation of fentanyl have devastated communities while traffickers exploit border gaps to move drugs and precursor chemicals into the country. Bill C-12's measures to fast-track the scheduling of fentanyl and its precursors are essential, giving law enforcement the tools to quickly intercept these substances earlier. However, stronger domestic tracking and restored Canada Post authorities are needed to close loopholes and protect communities.

The last area is money laundering. While the legislation takes important steps to combat financial crime by strengthening Canada's anti-money laundering framework and increasing penalties to up to \$20 million for serious violations, it does not consider that the expanded data flow will be effective only if RCMP financial crime units are adequately resourced with staffing, training and technology to analyze and act on this new intelligence.

Bill C-12 is a step in the right direction. While the government's recent commitment to hire 1,000 new personnel to address public safety concerns is positive, it is only a start. To fully meet Canada's public safety needs, all 1,000 new hires must be fully sworn members of the RCMP, supported by a comprehensive multi-year staffing plan. Modern tools and technologies are also essential. Investments in drones, helicopters and remotely piloted aircraft systems along the Canada-U.S. border are critical to enhance surveillance, detection and rapid response, directly supporting Bill C-12's initiatives.

While the NPF strongly encourages the swift passage of Bill C-12, we are disappointed that some provisions of the former Bill C-2, such as amendments to the Canada Post Corporation Act and lawful access provisions, were removed. Without the ability to proactively detain suspicious letter mail, RCMP members face significant barriers to intercepting illegal drugs. It is also long overdue for Canada to implement a lawful access regime on par with our comparable jurisdictions.

• (1220)

Legislative reform, modern tools and adequate resourcing must work hand in hand. Only through this comprehensive approach can we effectively meet the evolving public safety challenges that Canadians face today.

The Chair: That is much appreciated. Thank you, Mr. Sauvé.

Mr. Weber, you have five minutes, please.

Mark Weber (National President, Customs and Immigration Union): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to appear as a witness as part of your study on Bill C-12.

As national president of the Customs and Immigration Union, I am happy to be here today to represent Canada's border personnel.

Per its name, Bill C-12 proposes a number of measures intended to strengthen Canada's border and immigration system. On paper, some of these measures are certainly positive. A prime example of this is language in the Customs Act that would see commercial operators needing to provide border officers with access to facilities for both import and export inspections. The export aspect is currently lacking in the act, and this is a commendable addition.

In practice, the reality is that despite already having these powers for import inspections, the Canada Border Services Agency is rarely able to conduct these inspections when it comes to certain modes, such as rail operations, due to a now well-established lack of staffing and a lack of facilities as well.

While the federal government has made it clear that hiring 1,000 additional officers was a priority and one that we very much welcome as an initial step, Bill C-12 therefore highlights once again how crucial adequate staffing is to a secure and well-functioning border.

Adequate staffing also needs to be the cornerstone of well-oiled, secure and fair immigration processes, including refugee claims. While Bill C-12 seeks to speed up the refugee claim process to address lengthy processing times and backlogs, it is worth pointing out that without the sustained understaffing our border system has experienced for many years, these lengthy processing times and backlogs, and therefore the pressure to seek efficiencies, would likely be far less considerable.

This is especially important in light of how CBSA has been managing the border for most of its history. Efficiencies, as implemented by CBSA management, almost always result in a degradation of the security and integrity of our border processes. We've seen it with traveller operations, where people seeking entry to Canada do so now through automated machines with no real interaction with officers.

Outside of Bill C-12, we're already seeing it in some circumstances with refugee claim processing itself, where the agency's simplified intake process, which is known as the one-touch process, means that claimants now spend significantly less time meaningfully interacting with officers, with the result of reduced security for the sake of expediency.

Interactions between officers and anyone who seeks to enter the country, be they travellers or refugee claimants, is a key component of border security. These interactions result in better intelligence and allow officers to recognize patterns and flags that would otherwise be missed, ensuring that any potential problem is detected early on and will not put further stress on the system at a later date.

Crucially, experienced officers have the training necessary to navigate complex processes efficiently without compromising security, yet, too often, CBSA prefers to push out experienced officers, as it is currently in the process of doing with nearly 200 officers who cannot carry a firearm, eroding both its institutional memory and its ability to maintain a direct contact with the people transiting through our borders.

The conclusion here is clear. Ensuring the security and integrity of our border and associated processes starts with an adequate human presence. Without this—the human element—no bill can hope to truly solve border issues in the long term.

I thank you, and I do look forward to your questions.

• (1225)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weber.

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

[English]

Frank Caputo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

Mr. Sauv , the government promised 1,000 new border officers at our border. How many of them have been hired?

Brian Sauv : As far as I know, the money for those 1,000 was approved only last week, so none of those 1,000 have been hired, as far as I know. A multi-year staffing plan...I know Depot is ramping up. They're increasing their capacity for next year in expectation of a greater number of trainees.

Frank Caputo: Mr. Weber, I put to you the same promise and the same question: How many have been hired?

Mark Weber: I'll give the same answer—zero thus far, although it's early days.

Frank Caputo: Yes.

Right now, CBSA, if I'm correct, experiences an attrition rate of about 500 to 600 officers per year. Is that right?

Mark Weber: That's right.

Frank Caputo: We won't get into it now, but there are some significant concerns about culture and why that number is fairly high.

Now, as I understand it, that promise to hire the 1,000 officers contemplates current levels of training, recruitment and things like that. In other words, if we're going to be hiring to get those 1,000 new officers, the attrition rate, even if CBSA keeps up at its current levels, will essentially allow for no new officers, because the attrition rate offsets the people coming through your training process.

Is that accurate?

Mark Weber: That's correct. Very few additions would be made, yes.

Frank Caputo: Okay.

As it stands right now, the government can promise 1,000 officers, but they don't have the training infrastructure to actually get those officers through to get to their 1,000-person target.

Is that accurate?

Mark Weber: That's correct. Yes, we do need a new training facility or an expansion of our current training facility.

Frank Caputo: As far as you know, has any budget been allocated for that, or anything like that?

Mark Weber: As far as I know, no, it has not.

Frank Caputo: We hear that there are going to be 1,000 new officers. The attrition rate won't allow for it and the training won't allow for it, but somehow they're going to come. Okay.

One thing I have raised with you in the past, I believe, Mr. Weber, is the use of students at airports. Students have three weeks of training. How much training does an officer have?

Mark Weber: It's an 18-week program at Rigaud, with a one-year apprenticeship.

Frank Caputo: A student has three weeks of training, and one of those weeks is on the use of force. Is that correct?

Mark Weber: Yes, I believe that's right.

Frank Caputo: I'm not going to disparage students. They're doing their best, and it's great experience.

However, in certain airports—Montreal, Vancouver—I don't have the stats in front of me, but students are the primary contact in about 20% of cases.

Is that accurate?

Mark Weber: I would say that the number might be higher, but yes, there are lots of them.

Frank Caputo: There is no way to differentiate, generally—unless you have a keen eye and you really know what you're looking for—between a student and a fully trained officer.

Is that accurate?

Mark Weber: There is no way whatsoever, no.

Frank Caputo: You have somebody with three weeks' training at our border, deciding whether someone comes in or out, and whether they're a security threat.

Is that accurate?

Mark Weber: That is accurate, yes.

Frank Caputo: Does that give you cause for concern?

Mark Weber: Some of our best officers began as students when the program started under the FSWEF program. They worked along with an officer. They were mentored. It was part of a program to enable them to gain experience and see whether this was something they wanted to do as a career. That has morphed into cheap labour, where they work independently. They don't work with anyone anymore.

• (1230)

Frank Caputo: I started as a parole officer as a student. I was mentored, and eventually I was hired permanently.

I am flabbergasted that somebody who probably has literally two weeks of training is making decisions on what could be potential national security questions, as in, is this person a threat to security?

Is that a concern generally, that somebody with so little experience is making fairly consequential decisions?

Mark Weber: Yes, it is a very common concern I hear from our members.

Frank Caputo: Has the government ever responded to that concern?

Mark Weber: To my knowledge, no. We've brought it forward with our employer, to no avail.

Frank Caputo: You said “cheap labour”. Is that your belief as to the motivation behind the government's doing it?

Mark Weber: I cannot see any other reason you would want to have, in some cases, more students working at ports of entry than you have full-time border services officers.

Frank Caputo: I beg your pardon.

Mark Weber: Yes. It's very typical during the summer at larger airports—Pearson and Vancouver airports, for example—that you will have more students on than you have BSOs.

Frank Caputo: We're going to hire 1,000 new agents when we can't even staff our airports with agents now, without help from students. Again, I'm not disparaging students for what they do, but there's a very big difference between being a fully trained officer and a student. Students have a role, but that role isn't on the front line of security.

Mark Weber: I believe the role is one that should be supervised, that the program should return to its original intent, as it was under FSWEF, when the program started.

It's very difficult for me to denigrate students, because they work hard—

Frank Caputo: They do.

Mark Weber: —they try hard, and some of our best officers started as students. As it's currently run, though, they are put in very difficult positions, where they have to make decisions and do things that I'm not sure they necessarily have the skills and experience to do well.

Frank Caputo: You have to learn to crawl before you learn to walk, and I think that's the analogy here. There's no disrespect to students. They do work hard, and they gain valuable experience, but I am deeply troubled by the fact that at times there are more students on the front line than there are fully trained officers.

We juxtapose that with this promise to train 1,000 officers, when those officers will be eaten up by attrition and we don't have training facilities. All in all, this is a bleak situation for CBSA officers.

Would you agree?

The Chair: I'm sorry, but this is all the time we have. There will be other opportunities to come back to this topic or others.

Let me turn to MP Dandurand.

[*Translation*]

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank both witnesses for being with us today to give us their perspective on this extremely important topic.

Mr. Sauv , you talked about three pillars, if I can put it that way, to ensure the success of our initiatives. First, there is the legislative route. We're talking about it, and I'll have more questions for you about it afterwards. For now, I'd like to talk to you about the other two pillars you talked about, resources and tools. I understand your caution or reservation in this regard, but do you think that the government's joint initiatives, if everything is put in place to carry them out, will meet a large part of the needs?

[*English*]

Brian Sauv : I did preface a lot in my opening remarks that Bill C-12 is a good start. We appreciate a good start. We have to start somewhere. If we don't start somewhere, we will never get anywhere.

The addition of 1,000 human resources for the RCMP, again, is a good start. It is not where we need to be, but it's a good start. The good thing is that we have the capacity, actually, to build those 1,000 resources in fairly short order.

The other piece is, obviously, the equipment and the technologies to be able to do the job. One of the challenges that the RCMP faces is a slow and bureaucratic procurement process with regard to the ability to get operational, life-saving and effective tools to be able to complete its mission to keep Canadians safe. Sometimes those procurement processes can take years, and sometimes they're over multiple governments.

It's a good start. There needs to be a continued push to carry on, to work through the mandate.

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you.

I'm sorry. I was trying to put my headset on so that I could hear you better, but I still got it.

You were talking about the slow procurement process. Do you think that what the government is doing with all the procurement initiatives to reduce red tape and to make it faster is also a step in a good direction to help you out with those issues?

• (1235)

[Translation]

Brian Sauv : Yes, certainly. We've even made two recommendations to the minister responsible on this issue. There are clear examples of problems with the government procurement system affecting the RCMP's ability to ensure the health and safety of Canadians.

[English]

It's a step in the right direction—another one—let's hope.

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you for this.

My position—obviously, being part of the government—is that many of the things that you're talking about, the three pillars, are addressed in the commitments of the government. I believe that it's going to move forward. Hopefully, it's going to go well.

Do you have any recommendations? When you see how it's going, do you have any recommendations on how we can make it happen fast and well, from what you see from outside?

Brian Sauv : Yes, and we've been studying this.

Actually, one of the recommendations we made to Minister Lightbound, I believe, who's responsible for that particular portfolio, was that if we are looking at this as border security, national security—one of the RCMP's mandates from that perspective—then there are exemptions that the government can provide to bypass the procurement process for drones, helicopters and those types of things. I think that serious consideration given to those exemptions, in certain circumstances where warranted, would be appreciated.

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you.

[Translation]

You recommend more sustained engagement and awareness efforts to strengthen public understanding of privacy and digital evidence reforms.

What kind of message would you like to send to Canadians regarding the use of data, or regarding the powers that Bill C-2 ini-

tially planned to give to Canada Post, Canada Border Services Agency officers, and other government officials?

[English]

Brian Sauv : Lawful access and Canada Post are fascinating things, and I think, if you heard from any police witnesses, they were disappointed to see the removal of lawful access from Bill C-12. However, I understand it's still being considered from different perspectives, and it might come down again.

One challenge we see is that, obviously, as social media and artificial intelligence have exploded at a meteoric rate over the past three to five years, the capacity and abilities to modernize and be nimble, as a law enforcement agency dealing with deepfakes, cyber-fakes and just some of the crimes that happen in that world, have been hampered.

I was a BlackBerry person. There was a very public case in which BlackBerry was refusing lawful access to the FBI in the United States. Similarly, with cell phone providers, cell phones, Apple Wallet, Google Wallet, etc., I suspect it will be a challenge in the future to enforce cryptocurrency and those money-laundering things.

We had a file not that long ago, in “C” Division in Quebec, where our market enforcement team seized \$56 million of cryptocurrency. The challenge is trying to find out who the owner of that is.

Lawful access is something that's relatively important, and I think it will be a step in the right direction.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have for this segment.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for six minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank both witnesses for being here today.

My question is also about the RCMP.

A study published in 2010 estimated that it would take nearly 5,000 RCMP officers to meet its needs and enable it to properly carry out its current mandate.

You're not against Bill C-12. It wouldn't give you more work. In fact, it would allow for better collaboration between the Canada Border Services Agency and the RCMP, which is important.

Many witnesses told us that they couldn't be against virtue, because Bill C-12 did contain some good measures to provide security for Quebecers and Canadians. However, they expressed their concerns and a lack of confidence about how it would happen and how quickly the bill would be implemented. Those were the things they were concerned about.

As for you, your concerns are about the slowness of the process for you to be able to make new acquisitions, whether it be equipment or technological tools, for example.

Can you give us a very specific example of a tool you use every day that hasn't yet been replaced? I want you to give me a very concrete example. I think we were talking about guns.

• (1240)

[English]

Brian Sauv : For example, if we talk about the Swanton sector, which is where I live—it's within your riding, Madame DeBellefeuille—mobile command posts with the ability to have infrared and thermal radar, to deploy drones and have drone operators within that, if we want to expand the use of mobile command posts across the border, in particular in that sector, to be able to receive, deploy....

The drones that we use do not have an extensive flying time. They have to recharge their batteries, etc. Purchasing those goes through the procurement process, which can take a considerable amount of time. The Black Hawk helicopters, for example, that we're using on a lease, temporarily, from a company, have not been purchased by the RCMP. They are leased, because we will have to go through the procurement process should we choose to use that particular vendor or platform permanently.

The sidearm that the RCMP is using right now is a prime example. It has been in use since 1998. It's 27 years old—well past its life cycle. It has been going through a replacement procurement process for nine years, and we still don't have a selection on that particular replacement sidearm.

These are simple, little examples of things that hamper our operational effectiveness.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Perfect, thank you very much.

We hope you will be heard. To ensure better security, it's also important to have modern equipment and be able to acquire it more quickly through a more efficient process.

Mr. Weber, we're surprised to learn today that 200 officers in the adaptation process, who have completed all their training at the Canadian Border Services College in Rigaud and who are experienced, may lose their jobs because they can no longer carry weapons, for all kinds of reasons, be it related to a workplace accident, trauma or something else.

How do you explain the fact that the Canada Border Services Agency, which is already experiencing a labour shortage, can do without 200 experienced officers? They are unarmed officers, but they are still trained and experienced.

How can that figure be interpreted by our neighbours to the south?

How do you explain that decision?

[English]

Mark Weber: Inexplicably to us, we've brought up the points that you've touched on in your question with the CBSA and have not been provided an adequate answer. The majority of the work that we do does not require a sidearm. There are shortages in almost every mode. It's inexplicable that you would choose to just

lose that experience, especially, as you say, when you're looking at the shortage of staff that you are.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: I know that a mathematical and financial calculation has surely been done. Let's say a trained officer is a level 4 and is paid accordingly. If the officer performs tasks that fall slightly below those in that category, a pay cut is definitely possible for a non-armed officer. The fact remains that the officer who is currently in adaptation is doing a job. If we replace that officer with an armed officer, then we lose an officer to ensure the security of our border. Is that correct?

[English]

Mark Weber: You're absolutely correct.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: In our view, this is a no-brainer. We don't understand the agency's decision in the context of a labour shortage.

We're talking about hiring 1,000 new officers. Personally, I no longer feel that we need 1,000 new officers, but rather 800 armed officers who will be trained at Rigaud. I think it's possible for the agency to achieve that objective. The reason I say 800 officers instead of 1,000 is that I'm taking into consideration the 200 officers who will not be armed and won't take the full training at Rigaud. We heard that from the president of the CBSA.

Three years from now, after Bill C-12 is implemented and those 800 new officers are hired and trained, where will they be deployed? Are you able to give us an idea? I get the impression that adding 800 officers doesn't really amount to a big increase for each territory to be covered.

[English]

Mark Weber: The effectiveness of the hires will be in the detail of where they're put. You're right that 800 spread out over the entire country is not actually a huge number. Realistically, we want to see all 800 on the front line. We want to ensure that it's not more middle managers, of whom we already have far too many. That's one of the issues around staffing. They have to be frontline personnel who are actually interacting with travellers.

At the same time that you're hiring those people, the CBSA must get back into the business of speaking with travellers. I touched on it in my opening statement with the one-touch system. We see it with automation at airports, and we see plans around further automation at land borders. We're getting to a point where we're relying almost entirely on self-declaration.

Anyone can self-declare whatever they want. We are there to make sure that the person is declaring what should be declared. We're kind of getting away from that.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weber.

Ms. Kirkland, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Weber, I appreciated your comments in your opening testimony regarding the adequate human presence needed for strong borders. With that come adequate human rights for those who are working at our borders. You mentioned experienced officers sometimes being pushed out of their roles.

We've heard directly from the minister, and it seems he's aware that there are some systemic issues at CBSA.

From your perspective, how widespread is the discrimination or retaliation specifically faced by women who go through something like maternity leave or illness?

Mark Weber: The CBSA ranks last in the public service employee survey almost every year. That is not an accident. There is fear of reprisal. There's fear of reporting. There's fear of being subject to an investigation that is not impartial.

Women face far more of those challenges. We do have workplaces that are...I think the word toxic fits. Many of you have probably read about the Danielle Getzie case out of B.C., which is one of the more high-profile ones. That is not unique. It is a challenge.

Rhonda Kirkland: For clarity, are we talking about isolated cases, or do you see a broader toxic culture issue?

Mark Weber: Yeah, it's a cultural issue. It's at many workplaces across the CBSA.

Rhonda Kirkland: Can you speak to whether CBSA has a pattern, then, of removing women from acting roles or specialty positions when they become pregnant and go on maternity leave?

Mark Weber: We have seen that, yes.

Rhonda Kirkland: Have you seen multiple cases?

Mark Weber: We've seen multiple. I mentioned one with Danielle Getzie, but it does happen. It is often a difficult environment for women to thrive in.

Rhonda Kirkland: The National Integrity Centre of Expertise, NICE, is an internal unit of the CBSA, established to handle workplace harassment and violence prevention.

Have your members raised concerns about the fairness or independence of these internal investigators?

Mark Weber: They have very often, yes.

Rhonda Kirkland: We've seen situations in which labour relations appear to influence or direct harassment in investigations. From the union's perspective, is there an inherent conflict when CBSA investigates itself?

Mark Weber: It could be more impartial.

One of the big problems we have with the NICE process is that it leads to recommendations that go through a health and safety committee to put in preventative measures. It fails to address the actions that led to the complaint in any kind of disciplinary manner.

What we see quite often is that on the front line, for a member, the first response of the employer is discipline. When a member brings forward a complaint to NICE about managerial misconduct, it never leads to discipline. It does not lead down that route.

Rhonda Kirkland: Okay. Just to clarify then, in your experience, when a woman at CBSA becomes pregnant or is diagnosed with, perhaps, a serious illness, is her career safe, or is she more at risk?

Mark Weber: I would say that she is more at risk than a man would be. There are policies around that specifically.

We had one with the Danielle Getzie case, around the detector dog service: Essentially, if you're off for more than 90 days, you're automatically removed as a dog handler. This means that having a child is just out of the question. Women are told that when they enter that program.

Rhonda Kirkland: I have heard from several women who have said this, and I find it alarming that a federal organization is behaving in this manner. No woman in this country should ever have to choose between having a child and keeping her career, yet that is exactly what is happening inside a federal agency under this government.

I have one last quick question before I take my last minute to just read a verbal notice of motion.

Has the CBSA president—

The Chair: Madam Kirkland, that is fine. You can do that, but it's going to eat into your time.

Rhonda Kirkland: I understand that. You stopped my time just then, did you? Thanks.

Has the CBSA president ever engaged with your union to acknowledge, investigate or correct any systemic discrimination?

Mark Weber: We've met with high-level representatives and directly with the president. On the case I mentioned, we have not, no.

Rhonda Kirkland: All right.

I would like to give verbal notice of a motion:

That the committee undertake a study, pursuant to S.O. 108(2), on the systemic discrimination and toxic workplace culture within the Canada Border Services Agency;

That the study include a minimum of five meetings;

That the committee invite the Minister of Public Safety, the president of the Canada Border Services Agency, the president and additional representatives of the Customs and Immigration Union, former and current CBSA employees with lived experience, experts in workplace culture and harassment, and any other witnesses the committee deems appropriate to appear before it; and

That the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you, MP Kirkland.

Let me turn now to MP Ehsassi for five minutes.

Hon. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. This has been very helpful.

Last week, on Bill C-12, we heard from the OPP. They urged us to take the issue of right to access very seriously, but as you know, there are differences of opinion insofar as the opposition is concerned, which dismays me to no end.

I was wondering, Mr. Sauvé, as you did touch on this, if you could elaborate further on why it's critically important that right to access be enshrined.

Brian Sauvé: I don't think you really need to hear more from me. I know that the NSICOP committee, the committee of all parliamentarians, made some recommendations that Canada needs to catch up to its Five Eyes allies and to modernize its right to lawful access for law enforcement. That would be a more educated forum making a recommendation than just some guy who's a cop in charge of a union.

Hon. Ali Ehsassi: Sure, I appreciate that full well, but the purpose of these deliberations and having experts such as you appear before committee is just to make sure that we're hearing the right things from all the experts, so that we can push the envelope, if you will. If you could help us and assist us, it would be greatly appreciated.

Brian Sauvé: I think the balance can easily be struck—you just had the Privacy Commissioner of Canada here in the previous panel—if we're talking about balancing lawful access for law enforcement to conduct investigations into what are challenging investigations. As I mentioned earlier, cryptocurrency is an evolving trend for money laundering, and there's organized crime and international crime and the evolution of artificial intelligence.

For example, the FBI did a little presentation for law enforcement a while ago about the rise in deepfakes in cyber-technology and the ability to essentially have child porn out there that is fake. The challenge is, how do you know it's fake?

A police service like Red Deer's, for example, could get a report of child pornography. They look at the images, but a regular member of the RCMP or a police service would not be able to tell that they're fake. They would need to use the resources of our integrated child exploitation unit to actually analyze those and determine that they're not fake. That takes resources away from real crimes where there are real victims. The idea of lawful access is to delve deeper into those stories to be able to determine ahead of time the "whether or not" and to expedite the ability to conduct those investigations.

Hon. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Mr. Sauvé.

Mr. Weber, given your position with the CBSA, I want to go to you on one of the issues that have been of great interest to members of this committee, which is the use of trained dogs.

Given that we are concerned about our officials having access to the right tools, technologies and so on, could you share an update with us about CBSA officers and the use of K-9 dogs for fentanyl and things of that nature? Perhaps you could let us know how we compare to other Five Eyes countries with respect to the use of this very significant tool.

Mark Weber: I'm not aware of what the other Five Eyes countries have in place. I know our use of detector dogs has increased and there was money allocated to increased detector dog teams.

That has been positive, absolutely, along with the hiring of 1,000 additional officers. There's been some good work around that.

Hon. Ali Ehsassi: You're aware of the fact that the training has already started. As I understand it, we're at the forefront of using trained dogs. To the best of your knowledge, that is already well under way.

• (1255)

Mark Weber: That is correct.

Hon. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much.

I think that concludes my time.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Ehsassi.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Weber, you said that Bill C-12 would from now on authorize you to inspect not only cars from imports, but also cars destined for export. In your opening remarks, you told us that you already had the opportunity to inspect cars when they were imported, but that you did so very little, because of a lack of staff.

Do you know how the agency will manage to carry out, as prescribed by Bill C-12, the inspection of cars coming from imports and those destined for export with current resources? It will take some time for the agency to be able to hire those 250 officers a year. In the meantime, we'll still have to do this work, while the agency is already having trouble doing its job at the moment.

[*English*]

Mark Weber: You're absolutely right. I wish I had a crystal ball and knew where the resources were going to be allocated, but the devil is in the details. We need the people in place to be able to do that.

In some cases, it's a matter of building and having facilities. For example, with exports, one of the big issues is stolen cars out of the port of Montreal, which is one of the main hubs for that. Facility-wise, when you get to the granular level of how it works, the reality is that once we find six cars, we have to stop because there's nowhere else to park them. We don't have the facilities to go beyond that.

We need more space, and we need more people. I think each mode and each port of entry has to be looked at in detail to make sure that things are in place and we can actually do the work.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: What do you think about the fact that railway companies' marshalling yards should now be organized in such a way as to provide certain equipment for inspections? I've always said that it would take time before railway companies like Canadian National or Canadian Pacific built facilities in their marshalling yards where inspections could be carried out.

Do you believe that the provisions set out in Bill C-12 are realistic or rather wishful thinking?

[English]

Mark Weber: Bill C-12 gives the ability to force that for exports. We already have the ability to force them to build it for import inspections. I'm hoping that what we're hearing about "Canada Strong" and the push to make our borders what they can be is honest, and that the nuts and bolts are going to be put in place so that we can actually do it.

Bill C-12 puts a good framework in place. We need to put the resources in the right place to make it happen now.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, there are a lot of remarks—

The Chair: I apologize, Mrs. DeBellefeuille, but you have exactly eight seconds left.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Actually, I just want to say that a lot of what we just heard could be included in the study I proposed to the committee on border security. I may move a motion so that we can consider that testimony in that study as well.

The Chair: Thank you for being so proactive and creative.

I now give the floor to Mr. Au for five minutes.

[English]

Chak Au: Thank you for the presentation.

I have a question for Mr. Weber. It's alarming to me that, at times, we have more students than fully trained officers working at the major airports, which you mentioned.

How long has this been going on?

Mark Weber: The number of students has been going up steadily since about 2013-14. We're at about two and a half times the number now than we were then, so it's slowly crept up. The way the students work has changed as well. Rather than working with an officer to learn the job, now it's essentially three weeks of training and then, "Here's your stamp and that's your booth; off you go."

Chak Au: You're talking about it going on for 10 years, if not more.

Mark Weber: It's been a long time. It's slowly gotten more and more to their working independently, yes.

Chak Au: In your assessment, what has been the negative impact on our border security with this kind of situation?

Mark Weber: It's hard to know what you're not seeing when you don't see it. Again, you're lacking the experience. You're lacking the ability to pick up on indicators and have that interaction with travellers, which is really what you want those experienced officers to be there for.

I've seen officers who are much better than I ever was, who are able to identify someone who's here for ill intent with three questions and a look. You watch them work, and you think it's almost magic—they're that good. To get that good, it takes years and years of being able to pick up on indicators, ask the right questions and know what travel patterns are. That's the kind of person you want working at the border, not someone who's working their first job with three weeks of training.

Chak Au: However, do you agree that this kind of situation has put our border security at risk?

Mark Weber: I think it's lessened our ability to interdict. I think that's fair to say, yes.

Chak Au: Okay.

I suppose that your union must have been working to advocate for your members. What kinds of reactions or responses have you received from the government in the past 10 years?

● (1300)

Mark Weber: What kinds of reactions or responses have we received from the government? None. We've brought it up with our employer, who doesn't see why students really should have any different work assignment or authority than a full officer has. It's been very difficult to have them see that this is an obvious gap in our security.

Chak Au: It's sad to hear that.

In that case, do you agree that Bill C-12 is good on paper only, if there's no further action to really substantiate the whole thing?

Mark Weber: Is it good on paper only? No, but that's what a bill is. It gives the broad framework of how something is supposed to look in the long run, but it's in the detail of how it's implemented and where things are allocated.

I would like to be in a position where we, as a union, could provide advice and guidance on exactly what is needed. I think we have the expertise to be able to assist in that.

Chak Au: It must be followed up with actions.

Mark Weber: Absolutely, yes.

Chak Au: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Sauvé.

What is the current capacity of the RCMP? Are you at full strength?

Brian Sauvé: No, we're not at full strength.

Chak Au: What percentage do you have?

Brian Sauvé: I think authorized strength from the government puts us at about 21,500 police officers across the country, and we're somewhere around 20,500, give or take. We've been on the upswing over the last two years. The addition of the 1,000 new personnel will put us up to about 22,500, and with the projections for applications, streamlining of training and all that great stuff, we should be able to get there within about four years.

Chak Au: Okay.

In that case, will the announcement of the additional 1,000 officers be practically helpful?

Brian Sauv : It's very welcome, because, you know, we've seen attrition in the RCMP actually holding steady or even declining. We have a younger workforce, because the majority of our workforce is junior in service, so they will be around longer. That means that, you know, if you add more people to the fray, you will see a larger workforce for a longer period of time.

Chak Au: Okay, so you have two problems. One is that you have to fill up the current capacity, and the other is that you have to hire an additional 1,000 officers. How long will it take?

Brian Sauv : I'm sorry. Do you mean to build up current capacity? As I mentioned earlier, I think we're looking at probably a four-year time plan.

Chak Au: What about for the additional 1,000?

Brian Sauv : No, they're included in that.

Chak Au: Yes, okay.

Brian Sauv : Yes, the training capacity at Depot is at about 2,100 per year. Right now, they're operating at about 1,200. We've been advocating to increase that. Next year, they're going up to, I believe, 50 troops per year, which would be almost 1,600 per year.

Our attrition is holding steady at about 725, so we will actually be net positive by about 800 per year for the next four years, which gives you 3,200, which puts us at the added 1,000-plus at full strength for today.

That's where I'm cautiously optimistic, waiting to see it in practice. That's the other thing.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Au.

Mr. Ramsay, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[English]

Jacques Ramsay: Modernizing lawful access to catch up with other Five Eyes nations in our abilities to fight organized crime and transnational organizations is often cited as a critical tool for law enforcement to enhance public safety. It's been great to hear you speak about the importance of lawful access, and I certainly hope that the members opposite here heard what you said.

Bill C-2 provides law enforcement with the necessary tools to support their operations in complex cases. However, from your members' perspective, does Bill C-12 adequately address the operational needs of frontline officers, or would the provisions of Bill C-2 further complement or even be better suited to resolve those needs?

Brian Sauv : I think both pieces of legislation are a step in the right direction. They set out the framework for future improvements.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, the removal of lawful access is a challenge, obviously, and probably a disappointment, but from what I understand, it possibly will be dealt with in a future forum down the road. We look forward to seeing that.

Bill C-12, I think, is a great start in intelligence sharing, information sharing and bolstering the co-operation between U.S. law enforcement and Canadian law enforcement, including our colleagues in the CBSA and the Coast Guard, in assisting with intelligence-led policing. I was listening to the previous panel, and Arctic sovereignty and intelligence across the north are fantastic initiatives for our members up in the north, who are going to be there in the future as long as I can foresee. It's definitely a good start in the right direction. It just has to be backed up by action.

• (1305)

Jacques Ramsay: All right.

Mr. Weber, we heard your skepticism regarding the training of 1,000 CBSA officers. You said in your response, "as far as I know". Given that CBSA management was here last week or the week before and assured us that they would be able to implement this within three or four years, is it fair to say that you've not been made aware of that program, and consequently you may not have all the details or information to actually have an opinion on the training program?

Mark Weber: It is absolutely possible that I don't know everything. I know that there was a pilot project floated for our smaller campus in Chilliwack. That is pending approval. It has not been approved yet, as far as I know.

In terms of Rigaud, though, I do know the numbers they can graduate per year out of that one facility. It caps up at around just over 700. Based on that, unless the program is changing or there's expansion to Rigaud, I'm not really seeing how you do it with just the one college.

You're right, though; there might be plans that I am not aware of.

Jacques Ramsay: You also mentioned the importance of having human contact and human intervention. I would like you to comment also on the \$1.7 billion that's been spent on CBSA upgrading and securing our borders with drones, helicopters, K-9 units and all of this. It feels as though this should improve the productivity, if I may say, of the manpower, and allow you to do more with the actual force.

Mark Weber: Yes, I think the things you mentioned, helicopters and drones and such, help specifically between ports of entry. The responsibility has been given over to the RCMP to do those patrols. When I speak about human interaction, it's specifically about how we do things at ports of entry. At airports, we've basically stopped doing that. For refugee claimants, it's almost a self-serve system now. Those are the specific areas I'm talking about, where we have to get back to doing the interviews we're no longer doing.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange.

I'd like to thank both witnesses for their time and work today. We wish them a wonderful day.

I'm going to give committee members an overview of our upcoming work.

As indicated in the motion adopted a little earlier, you have until the end of tomorrow to table amendments to Bill C-12. However, the clerk and his assistants invite you to submit your amendments as soon as possible, so that they can work on them tomorrow at the end of the day and in the evening.

You also have until the end of the day tomorrow to submit the names of witnesses you would like to invite for the study on foreign nationals.

At the meeting on Tuesday, November 25, during the first hour, we will hear the final testimony on Bill C-12. In the second hour of the meeting, we will begin clause-by-clause consideration of this bill and spend the rest of the day on it.

Next Thursday, on November 27, we will resume the study on border management.

We are now past our scheduled end time, so I will adjourn the meeting.

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