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# Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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Chair: Jean-Yves Duclos





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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec Centre, Lib.)):**  
Good morning, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 18, the committee is meeting to continue its study on the management of the Canada-United States border. As usual, this meeting is being held in a hybrid format, which is permitted under the Standing Orders. To ensure that the meeting runs smoothly, I invite the witnesses and members to follow the established guidelines.

I now want to welcome the witnesses who will join us for the first hour. We want to thank both these important witnesses in advance for their important contribution to the work of our committee.

Our first witness is Mr. Thomas Boyle, executive director of the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority. The second witness appearing by video conference, is Mr. Kenneth Bieger, executive director of the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission.

Welcome, gentlemen.

Mr. Bieger, you have five minutes for your presentation.

[*English*]

**Kenneth Bieger (Chief Executive Officer, Niagara Falls Bridge Commission):** Good morning. Thank you for this opportunity to testify as part of your study on the management of the U.S.-Canada border.

The organization I represent is the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, which is a binational, not-for-profit organization that is charged with the authority to construct, acquire and operate international bridges traversing the Niagara River at or near Niagara Falls, Canada. We operate three bridges: the Rainbow Bridge; the Whirlpool Bridge, which is our Nexus-only bridge for autos; and the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge, which accommodates both commercial and non-commercial vehicles.

In preparing for this testimony, I listened to a previous witness from the first session on border management, who said something that resonated with me. Laura Dawson from the Future Borders Coalition stated that “Border security and border efficiency are not

mutually exclusive.” This is a very powerful statement and should be the backbone of this study. Both are critical to the success of Canada and the United States and should be viewed concurrently. Border security has received a lot of political attention recently and is critically important for the safety of Canadian citizens. Border efficiency is equally important: It fuels economic growth and trade, streamlines supply chains, enhances the travel experience, reduces environmental impact and strengthens bilateral relations.

The Niagara Falls Bridge Commission's primary goal is to facilitate the movement of people and goods, and CBSA's primary goal centres on security. Though our objectives differ, they are deeply interconnected. It's essential that we partner on both border security and border efficiency. These two priorities are not in competition; they're complementary. By working together, we can strengthen security while streamlining the movement of people and goods.

There are clear opportunities to improve cross-border efficiency in ways that also enhance security. The hiring of the additional 1,000 CBSA officers is a massive step in the right direction to improve security and efficiency. Staffing has been an issue on both sides of the border for years. We have been fortunate for the last couple of years on the Canadian side to have additional officer trainees from the Gordie Howe bridge training program at our ports in southern Ontario to assist with the peak travel seasons.

The Nexus trusted traveller program presents opportunities for improvement that can benefit both border security and efficiency. Continuing to reduce the enrolment processing times, improving program awareness and modernizing technology could streamline low-risk travel while reinforcing security protocols. Strengthening these program supports are shared goals, facilitating trusted movement and safeguarding the border.

CBSA technology upgrades represent a critical area of improvement. The recent IT outage really underscored the vulnerability of the current systems, causing significant disruption to the trucking industry and hardships for local U.S. border communities.

Modernizing infrastructure, enhancing system resilience and improving cross-border data coordination are essential steps towards ensuring both security and efficiency.

Acceleration in both procurement and implementation processes are essential to unlock the full potential of the CBSA advancement strategy.

Any method of obtaining advanced information for CBSA before a vehicle reaches the primary inspection lane can significantly expedite processing and enhance border security. Early access to data allows for risk-based screening, reduces congestion and supports a more efficient allocation of resources.

These improvements benefit both trade flow and enforcement outcomes and should be explored. While we support modernization of the ports and enhanced security as laid out in both Bill C-2 and Bill C-12, we do not support the proposed changes to section 6 of the Canadian Customs Act, which would put the financial burden solely on the owner-operators for any and all infrastructure upgrades, particularly the security enhancement. Section 6 of the Customs Act follows the user-pay principle, which is a model emphasizing a more privatized, commercialized, user-funded infrastructure model. This is different than the U.S. and Europe, which rely heavily on centralized government funding.

It is important to note three points.

Number one is that every secure crossing point strengthens Canada's overall safety, economic resilience and international credibility. Border security stretches far beyond the individual user. It's a national responsibility.

Number two is that the current version of the Customs Act was introduced in 1986, well before the events of 9/11, which fundamentally reshaped border security requirements and infrastructure expectations. When the 1986 version of the Customs Act was released, no one could have possibly had a vision of what was to come.

• (1105)

While the owner-operators provide physical infrastructure to support border operations, enhanced border security is a federal mandate with nationwide implications. It protects all Canadians, not just those who use the crossing.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bieger, you have another 10 seconds.

**Kenneth Bieger:** Okay.

My third and final point is that long-term planning is essential to our organization. The bridge commission maintains a five-year capital project budget, which is reviewed and approved annually by our board. Given the scale of our capital improvements, we must plan years in advance to responsibly fund projects through operational revenues and toll rate adjustments. We are concerned that the proposed bills, specifically the current language in section 6, may create conflicts with our long-term planning framework.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bieger.

Mr. Boyle, you have five minutes.

**Thomas Boyle (Chief Executive Officer, Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority):** Good morning.

Thank you, honourable Chair Duclos, for the opportunity to appear before you and your committee today.

The Peace Bridge is a binational public authority, owning and operating the international crossing at Fort Erie, Ontario and Buffalo, New York. Half of the 10-member board is appointed by the Canadian federal government, the other half by the State of New York. We also own the customs plazas on both sides of the Niagara River. The Canada Border Services Agency and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection are our tenants.

At an international crossing, there is always an inherent conflict of balancing national security with the facilitation and expedited movement of goods and people. At the Peace Bridge, this entails efficiently moving \$50 billion in trade annually and supporting a vibrant binational tourism economy. It also means that we are required to respond to legislative security requirements imposed by both countries.

In 2021, the United States passed the Securing America's Ports Act, which requires the 100% X-ray scanning of vehicles and cargo entering the United States, with a target implementation date of mid-2026. At the Peace Bridge, a small and constrained U.S. plaza would make it impossible to meet that scanning mandate. Even if we could, it would result in vehicles having to wait at the primary inspection booths as the scans are adjudicated, leading to lengthy and costly border delays. A much better solution is to put the scanning equipment in our Canadian plaza, thereby allowing U.S. customs to adjudicate the scan while the truck is moving across the bridge. It simultaneously meets both the security and facilitation goals. Let me explain how.

Every truck, without stopping, moves through a multi-energy portal at a speed of eight to 14 kilometres per hour. The truck cab is safely scanned at low energy, and then the trailer is scanned at the full energy dose. At the same time, the truck licence plate is read and the eManifest is verified, allowing U.S. customs to adjudicate the complete data package during the two to three minutes it takes for the vehicle to cross the bridge and before the truck arrives at the customs inspection booth.

Locating the facility in our Canadian plaza takes advantage of the time and space afforded by the bridge, reducing or even eliminating commercial border delays, facilitating Canadian exports, reducing idling and greenhouse gas emissions, assisting truck drivers in meeting their hours of service compliance, freeing up the bridge for tourism and commuter traffic and also meeting the U.S. government's security requirements, including fentanyl and other illegal smuggling-related interdictions.

Both the Canadian and U.S. governments agreed with our innovative approach. Canada, through the national trade corridors fund, contributed \$5 million, matching the Peace Bridge's \$5-million investment for all the civil works that will house and support the non-intrusive scanning technology. The U.S. government is supplying all the scanning equipment at a cost of approximately \$30 million U.S.

In December 2024, we completed all the required civil works. We are currently awaiting the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission's permits, which we hope to receive by the end of the year so that the facility may be operational in early 2026. It is an excellent example of the two governments funding and collaborating on enhancing border security.

We believe this is a much better and far more efficient solution than the Canadian federal government requiring international crossings to provide outbound inspection facilities, as envisioned by Bill C-12, which would be layered on top of existing inbound obligations already unfairly placed on some border operators, including the Peace Bridge. In fact, many of the costs of Bill C-12's implementation will be legislated to be borne by operators like the Peace Bridge, through revisions to section 6 of the Customs Act, which historically has not been administered fairly or equally among all border operators.

We understand and appreciate that Bill C-12 is focused on strengthening border security and fighting transnational crime and fentanyl trafficking. In fact, we applaud it. However, without the accompanying fiscal support from the government, border operators and, ultimately, the travelling public will bear the responsibility of cost.

I hope my testimony was informative. I look forward to responding to any of your questions. Thank you.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** It has indeed been informative. Thank you, Mr. Boyle.

We will now turn to MP Davies for six minutes.

**Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Boyle and Mr. Bieger. It's nice to see you.

Mr. Boyle is in my riding. The Peace Bridge is part of the Niagara South constituency.

You were both rather polite in your presentation of some of the issues that are facing our two border crossings, but I want to dig a little deeper into section 6, Mr. Boyle.

The big problem is the double standard of administration. I wonder if you can dive a little bit deeper into the section 6 problems by comparing the Peace Bridge and Niagara Falls and perhaps even other bridges, and describe what this means to you on a financial basis and what it could mean for the consumer.

**Thomas Boyle:** As landlords with the unique perspective of operating on both sides of the border, we can comment on how we interact differently with each government.

On the U.S. side of the border, we provide facilities and services to the U.S. government, and the government, in turn, pays us rent

through a lease that we have with the General Services Administration. Also, as a public service corporation, we are tax-free in the United States, meaning we don't pay property taxes on those facilities that we provide.

Conversely, in Canada, we also provide facilities and services to the Canadian government. However, these are provided by us free of charge, due to section 6 of the Customs Act. Furthermore, we are required to pay property taxes on those facilities that we provide for free.

This disparity can create tensions in a binational organization like ours and like the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, as it appears that the U.S. subsidizes Canadian operations.

As this committee is likely aware, section 6 of the Customs Act is meant to be enforced at any international bridge or tunnel where a toll or other charge is payable. To that point, several border crossings operate in direct contravention of section 6. At the soon-to-be-opened Gordie Howe bridge in Windsor, Ontario, the Canadian government is paying a public-private partnership concession to build and maintain CBSA facilities.

At the Ogdensburg bridge, another toll facility over the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Canadian government supplies and maintains CBSA facilities.

At other bridges, such as the Seaway International Bridge, the Sault Ste. Marie International Bridge, the Blue Water Bridge and the Thousand Islands International Bridge, when revenue shortfalls occur, the Canadian government has subsidized the operations and capital expenses of these bridges to the tune of millions of dollars.

Organizations like the Peace Bridge, as well as the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, cannot avail themselves of such government funding and must instead raise tolls, which impacts commuters, tourists and the commerce that crosses our bridges.

**Fred Davies:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Boyle, but let me just clarify this.

In essence, section 6 provides an unfair administrative and financial structure, because in your case, when the asset is not publicly owned, the only source of revenue for you is through tolls and the consumer, as opposed to other federally owned bridges, which by their very nature would have to have capital contributions for any required expansion under section 6. It's possible for section 6 to impose an obligation on you to spend millions of dollars on the possible expansion of assets without a single dollar being contributed to that cost, which then would be passed on to the consumer. Is that correct?

**Thomas Boyle:** That is correct.

**Fred Davies:** Okay. In your view, what is the solution?

**Thomas Boyle:** Our solution—again, I think Mr. Bieger touched upon it in his opening statement—is that from our perspective, we see two separate models.

The U.S. has centralized funding, and so the U.S. government will fund their own security initiatives. The Canadian government, again based upon the 1986 changes to section 6, really relies on a user-pay funding principle. Prior to 2004, when I believe CBSA was called the Canada customs and revenue agency, that made sense, because your primary focus was on the collection of duties and tariffs. However, 9/11 in 2001 really changed the scene and the world's focus. The focus became more on border security as well as national security, and we feel that the Canadian government's focus at that time should have also then shifted towards funding for those types of initiatives.

• (1120)

**Fred Davies:** I'm sorry, Mr. Bieger, but I have to stick with Mr. Boyle on this. I have only a few seconds left.

The PARE project, which is the Peace Bridge pre-arrival readiness evaluation program, is the scanning equipment that both you and Mr. Bieger referred to. It is critical stuff, and it's the first time that this technology has been deployed on Canadian soil, I believe.

Can you give me some commentary or insight into how you think this technology could be applied in other ports in Canada and what it would mean on, for example, the export of stolen vehicles?

**Thomas Boyle:** I can, absolutely.

Again, referring back to previous testimony at one of your other meetings, Dr. Laura Dawson of the Future Borders Coalition pointed out that technology doesn't necessarily mean the loss of jobs. Security and facilitation are not mutually exclusive. Often the concern when new technology, new regulations or new procedures are introduced is the fear that they will compound or add to the burden or congestion at the bridge.

Current inspection procedures are actually only on a small percentage of conveyances. You would think that scanning 100% of commercial vehicles entering the United States would increase those types of burdens. The opposite, actually, is likely true. You could focus more on targeted inspections, secondary inspections, and also on the time that things are taken across the bridge. The time that it takes to cross the bridge actually allows for quicker adjudication at the primary inspection lanes—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Boyle. That's my fault. I should have warned you that the time was almost up prior to your answer.

[Translation]

Ms. Dandurand for six minutes.

[English]

**Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.):** Thank you.

It was very interesting to hear you talking about those scanners. I know there was a lot of work done by MP Davies' predecessor, MP Badawey.

Can you talk a bit about the process and what was invested in front of Canada and where we are with this scanner technology?

**Thomas Boyle:** I can, absolutely. That's a great question, and I think it's one to be applauded.

With the passage of the Securing America's Ports Act in 2021, there was a mandate that 100% of commercial conveyances heading into the United States needed to be scanned. There was no possibility whatsoever for us at the Peace Bridge, with a very small pause in the United States, to be able to implement that mandate on our U.S. pauses.

The Peace Bridge approached the U.S. government and requested the possibility of this equipment being installed on the Canadian side of the border. We had very good reasons for doing that. One was that we didn't have any room on the U.S. side, but we also saw the innovative approach of being able to begin some sort of adjudication process prior to crossing our bridge, which would allow for the time and the ability for customs agents, remotely, to view and scan with this equipment.

The U.S. CBP thought this was a great idea as well. Their model, typically, is that they pay for everything and fully fund all of their security initiatives. We approached U.S. customs with the idea that we ourselves would invest so that they could change their operating model by putting it on the Canadian side. We volunteered to pay for the civil works.

When that was done, we approached Transport Canada through their national trade corridors fund for increasing the fluidity of Canada's supply chain. We realized that the expedited travel would cut down on greenhouse gases and cut down on idling. It would also be able to facilitate truckers to be able to drive quickly and not waste time in queues. It would also get Canadian goods out into the U.S. market at a faster rate.

We met all those goals of the national trade corridors fund, and, for their part, Transport Canada matched our funds of \$5 million in order to facilitate the development of the civil works.

• (1125)

**Marianne Dandurand:** From my understanding, there's only one step missing, and it's going to be installed if everything is okay. It could be installed as early as January or early next year.

**Thomas Boyle:** Hopefully, it will be sometime early in 2026. Right now, the process is going through the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission. To their credit, the CNSC has done a great job in focusing on our application and the U.S. government's application.

It's interesting, because although we finished last year, in December 2024, one of the reasons the facility is still not operational is that the application process and the regulations in the Canadian government right now really don't cater to this type of application. In fact, the class II nuclear facility application applies to three different applications. One is medical, the second is industrial and the third is for research activities, none of which really cater to scanning a commercial vehicle crossing a bridge, so we are the proverbial square peg in a round hole.

Hopefully, we are the trailblazers in this. We know that CBSA is interested as well in utilizing this type of technology, and hopefully this type of model as well.

**Marianne Dandurand:** I'd like to congratulate you on your resiliency on that and the hard work you did. It could set an example as well for other borders and make a huge difference, as you were stating in your opening remarks. Thank you for doing that and for pushing that very interesting project.

I'm from a rural area. We don't have bridges. I'd like to hear from both of you about particular challenges we face in smaller border crossings with regard to security and safety, and how we can improve with the new bills and the new staff we're bringing in.

**The Chair:** That is an unfair question, because we have one more minute for the two of you, but there will be more time afterwards.

**Thomas Boyle:** To be honest, it's very difficult. We operate a bridge, so for me to opine on the other aspects between bridges is very difficult.

I will say, however, that the co-operation between the United States and Canada has been exemplary. We have thousands of kilometres of a border that is an invisible line. It's not thousands of kilometres of barbed wire, so co-operation between the United States and Canada is paramount in order to maintain security between both the countries.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bieger, would you like to take 15 seconds? We may come back to you in the next round.

**Kenneth Bieger:** I just want to mention that all of the borders are different. Every plaza across the U.S.-Canadian border is different, and they have different requirements.

I did want to mention that the project at the Peace Bridge is an excellent pilot program. Kudos go to the Peace Bridge for pushing this forward.

This committee is looking for ways to improve things. One thing I want to mention is that this has been going on since 2021. The co-operation between CBSA and CBP has improved greatly in the nine years since I've been in my position, but you can see the holdup as the government is interacting and coming up with ways to get this to move with CBP and CBSA. It's a great project, and it should be moved along faster than it currently is.

If the committee is looking at ways to improve, there's great communication back and forth, but somebody has to get in the middle to push these projects through.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Bieger.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille for six minutes.

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

I'm pleased to see we share the same opinion that the Canada Border Services Agency must obviously secure the borders, but also facilitate the movement of goods and people to the United States. The purpose of our meeting today is to consider how we can

further secure the border without hindering trade between the United States and Canada. We know that local communities often have good ideas. They use common sense, and often act more quickly than government or the machinery of government can, to implement new structures or innovate.

My question is for Mr. Boyle. What I'm asking you today relates to our study. We're seeking recommendations on how to secure the border while ensuring that trade isn't impeded and that the movement of people and goods between the two countries is facilitated.

Do you have any specific recommendations we could implement to improve a situation that, in my opinion, requires change and innovation?

[*English*]

**Thomas Boyle:** I think one of the recurring themes in my testimony today is that Canada needs to invest in technology.

Often times, the U.S. is a trailblazer. Customs and security in the United States are trailblazers in this type of technology. The use of drive-through, non-intrusive inspection systems like the one that I explained is really setting the standard for 100% scanning of all vehicles and the finding of all sorts of smuggling and other sorts of nefarious acts.

Currently, CBSA uses non-intrusive inspection. However, it is done in a static role. A truck will pull into a location, and a mobile unit—what they call a VACIS unit—will scan back and forth on the truck. It accomplishes its goal; however, it's very time-consuming, and it requires a lot of queuing and waiting by the truckers.

For Canada to improve, CBSA, at many of its borders, should adopt something along the lines of what the U.S. is now proposing, particularly on the southern border, and first here on the northern border at the Peace Bridge.

One other area that can be helpful is facial matching. Again, we see this in the airport environment, where time is saved when a passenger can just have their face scanned and the scan is matched to a passport or another form of identification. Doing that at a border can also help.

Again, this type of technology does not take away jobs; it enhances the ability of CBSA agents to actually do their job more efficiently and be able to focus their attention on those other things that are not just checking a box.

[*Translation*]

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** We're waiting for the budget, and we know that it provides for the hiring of 1,000 new officers. However, we don't know how many of them will be assigned to border control; that has yet to be determined. Will there be 1,000 or 800? What will their role be? Where will they be deployed?

On the other hand, as you mentioned, we know the technology isn't intended to prevent officers from doing their job, but rather to further investigations and inquiries conducted at the border, so that human resources can be freed up to do the rest of their work, including analyzing goods and trucks, as you so aptly put it.

What struck me about your testimony was that you were innovative. You proposed a new way of doing things, but the decisions and the process to ultimately install the high-performance x-ray portal, which will be funded by the United States, met with resistance because you were stepping outside the established framework. It was difficult to get permission for your tool, which aims to increase efficiency and security, because existing laws and regulations did not provide for this kind of exception.

What suggestions could you make to accelerate the reflection and decision-making process when a local organization proposes a good idea that we want to implement to improve and optimize security?

• (1135)

[English]

**Thomas Boyle:** That's a wonderful question. Again, that's a question for any organization that reaches out and sees innovation.

These things take time. We understand that. Certainly, I tip my hat to the people at CNSC, because they have been doing their due diligence within the framework and the application they're given. They've invested in coming to our facility, as well as going to the U.S. southern border, to look at this technology.

Again, at some point, someone needs to be the trailblazer, and the hope is that this is not a one-off, that this is not just a single occurrence, and that the regulatory agencies that will eventually, hopefully, approve this permit will then change their mindset and change the regulations to become more encompassing of this type of approach.

Therefore, again, it takes time. There is a learning curve, and certainly the person who is on the front line of this is always the one who needs to wait the most, but again, CNSC is doing what it needs to do. We hope CNSC does it as well as it possibly can so that the next applicant that goes through this, namely CBSA, will benefit from the work we've done.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Let me turn now to MP Au for five minutes.

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

First of all, thank you to Mr. Boyle and Mr. Bieger for your presentations.

Both of you mentioned that you are trying to upgrade the technology and infrastructure to make our borders more secure at the same time as being efficient. While we are doing that, the criminals are also doing that, correct? They're trying to upgrade their technology as well. Are we trying to catch up with what they are doing? Are we on top of these people? Are there any gaps that you think we have to fill?

This is a question for both gentlemen.

**Thomas Boyle:** If you don't mind, I'll answer first in a very quick answer to you. We're landlords. Security is not our business. It's not in our mission statement.

For me to opine on how to make more effectual the Canadian and U.S. governments in security...I unfortunately can't really offer

anything. As I said, we're landlords. We provide a bridge. We provide plazas and booths. I apologize, but it's not really in my area of expertise.

**Kenneth Bieger:** I want to add just a couple of things.

Thinking outside the box was discussed. I think that should be a definite direction for this committee. There may be things that have been done for a while that need to be looked at. For example, we see one, and again, it may not be at the top of the list of major issues, but we see a jurisdictional issue.

I listened to Mark Weber, a prior witness, who is the union head for CBSA, say that he feels his frontline officers aren't able to do certain things. We also see that as a port operator. There are situations that may be different, let's say, on the U.S. side versus Canada.

If an issue arises on our bridge, we're directed to call the local law enforcement. We're actually calling regional police or the RCMP, and there may be a time delay in getting to the border to handle an issue. That's something that may have been done for a while, but again, I did hear Mark Weber complain about it from his perspective.

We just don't understand it ourselves, but that's one small area, I guess, that I would take a look at and ask why it is that we have CBSA officers who have guns and are able to...but they must be getting told as part of their mandate not to confront anyone, that local law enforcement has to be called.

That's a small issue, but thinking outside of the box I think is something that we all can do. I think all the port operators are willing to get involved in any type of pilot program to assist with any type of infrastructure, move things forward faster and experiment.

I'll take Queenston Plaza, for example. We have eight truck bays. Before this testimony, I asked how often they are used. Typically, I think the most anybody has ever seen is four truck bays being used at one time, and that's extremely unusual.

We have infrastructure. We have facilities. We just need to find a way to use them. Obviously, an additional 1,000 officers will help, but more than the 1,000 officers, improving any of the IT work or anything along that side is going to be critical.

• (1140)

**Chak Au:** Again, in comparison to south of the border, how are we doing in our job? Are we up to the standard? Are we doing as well as what they are doing south of the border?

Mr. Boyle, you mentioned the 100% scanning of outgoing cargo to the States. Do we have any plans for something similar in Canada? If not, why not?

**Thomas Boyle:** It's interesting. I'll answer just quickly.

On the differences right now between the U.S. southern border and the U.S. northern border, they are far different in terms of lot of the issues that might arise with border security.

CBSA, as I mentioned, has taken part in the review and has been to our site and has visited the U.S. southern border to review those facilities I just spoke about. The intent, I believe, is that they're looking to adopt this in Canada as well, which would be a great stride forward.

**The Chair:** Wonderful. Thank you for that.

Let us turn to MP Ehsassi for five minutes.

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

Allow me to join my colleagues in thanking our two witnesses. Your testimony has been very helpful.

Mr. Bieger, in your opening remarks, you alluded to the fact that there were staffing issues for both U.S. border officials and Canadian border officials, I assume. Could you elaborate on that and perhaps provide us some insights as to what you think those ongoing challenges have been?

**Kenneth Bieger:** In the last couple of years, because of the additional officers we received from the Gordie Howe training project, the Canadian side has been actually better versus the U.S. side in terms of the number of officers.

To give you an idea, on the Canadian side, we may have 10 auto inspection lanes and five commercial truck lanes at Queenston. You may see three or four at a time being utilized. Many times on the U.S. side, there may be only two or three open, when we have 15 lanes. Again, we have the infrastructure. It's just not being manned on a primary lane.

This was discussed by one of the witnesses at the last session. Getting people at the primary lanes is critical on both sides to be moving through this. It may be one of those things that CBSA—again, thinking outside the box—will look at in their overall business plan.

I have a quick suggestion on something like that. I'll give you a personal example, which wasn't Canadian bound. This was U.S. bound. I was in line and waited 10 minutes for an officer to process somebody, only to let them go through.

I think it makes more sense to interview somebody at the line for a minute and, if you have a problem, send them to secondary. Maybe you have an expedited secondary that doesn't handle all the problems. Maybe they don't have to go inside secondary. Maybe it's like a drive-through and you have a couple of people who are experts who can ask questions and determine whether somebody needs to go into the building and be investigated more.

It's just little things like that. I think everybody should be thinking outside the box.

• (1145)

**Hon. Ali Ehsassi:** Thank you for that. It's good to hear that on our side it appears to you that we're doing a better job.

However, I'm not quite sure that I understand what the challenge is. Is it, insofar as you are privy to those conversations and can tell, a resource allocation issue? Is it a training issue? What do you think it is?

**Kenneth Bieger:** Definitely, in the nine years I've been doing this, where I've seen improvement is in quantifying the delays and where we're at. When I first started in this position, the metrics were extremely rare and weren't being shared. We're seeing more metric-based management, let's say, on both sides of the border, where they are watching it. They're looking at the busy times in crossing the borders, whether there is a Buffalo Bills game or not. There is no question that locally they are on top of that and watching it.

I can't really speak much about the set-up at CBSA. Again, I know that Mark Weber from the CBSA union had an issue between middle management and line people. All I can say from our side—I can't tell you about their structure and how it works and how efficient it is—is that we just need more people in the primary inspection lanes.

**Hon. Ali Ehsassi:** Understood. Thank you for that.

Mr. Boyle, did you want to add anything to that?

**Thomas Boyle:** I will add quickly to that, if you don't mind.

Typically, we get an answer from CBSA and U.S. Customs that there should be an expectation of delay at the border. This is a border crossing, after all. You are heading into a new country.

I will echo what Mr. Bieger had to say about the recent years with CBSA staffing. We've been beneficiaries of the years that it has taken for the Gordie Howe bridge to come online and the staffing that CBSA had allocated to the Gordie Howe bridge—obviously the bridge is not functioning right now—and CBSA port leadership has been able to benefit from those officers who have been in the training program and waiting to man those booths at the Gordie Howe International Bridge.

Our concern is that when that bridge does come online, those officers will then be sent to their rightful jobs and local port management will be left with fewer resources. We will see again those types of backups we've had in years past due to low staffing, both on the Canadian side and on the U.S. side. It fluctuates.

Again, in recent years, we have been very fortunate. Our concern is that next year, when Gordie Howe bridge does come online, staffing will be short at the Niagara bridges.

**Hon. Ali Ehsassi:** Understood, but—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, MP Ehsassi. The time is up.

[*Translation*]

We'll now give the floor to Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

You have two and a half minutes.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Bieger.

You talked about an innovative solution, which is being proposed by the Customs and Immigration Union representing Canada Border Services Agency officers, as well as my political party. This proposal states that officers with the Canada Border Services Agency have received all the necessary training, including firearms training, to be able to intervene inside and outside their border crossing to intercept an individual or manage an emergency while waiting for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to arrive, for example.

You said it was just a small suggestion, but it's a way for our country and for border service officers to optimize their presence and ensure increased surveillance along the border.

Would you be prepared to make a recommendation to the committee that the Canada Border Services Agency be allowed to grant our border services officers this flexibility in the work they do outside their crossing?

• (1150)

[English]

**Kenneth Bieger:** I would highly recommend emulating the U.S. model in terms of allowing the officers to do more than they're currently doing on the Canadian side. I think that having to call the RCMP for issues...

We also have our Whirlpool bridge. We have train tracks on the second level. We occasionally have people crossing or trying to cross illegally using the train tracks. We have CBSA in a building, maybe on the first floor, looking at securing the border but not securing the bridge deck above it. We have to call the RCMP and notify them.

Between our three bridges, we have about 450 cameras, and we have sensors. We have a high-tech security system. We work with CBSA all the time on this, and we work with the local law enforcement, but there seems to be a disconnect. I think that if they were able to do more than what they're currently doing, you wouldn't have to go to three different agencies to try to get something resolved.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Bieger.

I'd now invite Mr. Davies to speak for five minutes.

[English]

**Fred Davies:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have just a bit of commentary on this because it's really important that this is on the record.

This scanning technology, which is generally referred to as multi-energy portal technology, is absolutely critical for scanning containers and commercial vehicles. By deploying this at the Peace Bridge the first time on Canadian soil... Mr. Boyle, when you dive into this technology, what is your opinion on this? I consider that this technology needs to be deployed in every seaport, including the ports of Montreal, Vancouver and Halifax.

Every export port in Canada needs to have this technology because it instantaneously can determine, for example, whether there are stolen vehicles in containers that are going into European or

other export markets. We've heard, for example, that fewer than 10% of all the containers in the Port of Montreal are actually inspected. This takes the HR out of it. Although it doesn't necessarily affect jobs, it instantaneously provides 100% accurate data on what's in that container.

Mr. Boyle, do you think that would have an enormous impact in other areas, in other export ports in Canada?

**Thomas Boyle:** Absolutely. Certainly, it's a game-changer in the land border crossing, but it's applicable in ports. It's applicable in airports as well.

I want to say again that part of my statement was that this does not take away jobs; it gives tools to those people. A scan, in and of itself, is useless unless you have an officer who is reviewing that scan and is able to identify anomalies that may occur within a cargo. Aided by things such as artificial intelligence, this really assists in being able to identify things that look out of the ordinary, and then you can focus your resources on inspecting those areas. For example, in a cargo container, you don't have to tear the entire cargo container apart; you can focus on an area that has been identified in a scan, saving time and being much more efficient in what you do.

**Fred Davies:** For example, then, in the Port of Montreal, every single container that goes through for export can go through this scanner at 10 kilometres per hour, on average, with the driver never having to get out of the truck, with people at the other end knowing the history of the truck, the name of the driver, the maintenance schedule of the truck, where it's been, what its track record is and whether there have been any issues of, for example, any crime related to that company. This technology, then, could solve our car theft problem in a day.

**Thomas Boyle:** Car theft, drug smuggling, human trafficking...all sorts of issues can be addressed. Throw in facial matching for the driver, and you really have a complete data package to review.

• (1155)

**Fred Davies:** Thank you.

I'm just going to switch gears a bit for both of you. Maybe I'll start with Mr. Bieger.

Since we've gotten into some trade issues with the United States, have you noticed significant declines, and do you keep a metric analysis of the number of visitors that were coming across the bridge perhaps over the summer? Do you have any data that shows a decline in American visitors to Canada?

**Kenneth Bieger:** Right now, as far as auto traffic goes, we're down about 16% from last year on auto traffic. It was probably 18% or 20% earlier on in the year, but now we're at about 16% from last year, which was down about 10% from pre-pandemic levels.

Our commercial trucks are actually up a little this year. We attribute that to the fact that with the tariffs, a lot of companies tried to get loads across the bridge to avoid any further unknowns, let's say, with tariffs.

**Thomas Boyle:** I'll echo what Mr. Bieger had to say.

Similarly, at the Peace Bridge, our year-to-year decline in auto traffic has been about 14%, again, in large part due to rhetoric from Washington as well as the response of boycotts from Canadians.

From the U.S. side, we've not seen a huge jump in Americans going to Canada. However, in the commercial environment, I'm envious of Mr. Bieger and the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission. We're actually down about 4%, but most of the goods that cross the Peace Bridge are covered under CUSMA, the trade agreement, and therefore are unaffected by the tariffs.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Now it's your turn, Mr. Ramsay.

You have five minutes.

**Jacques Ramsay (La Prairie—Atateken, Lib.):** Mr. Bieger and Mr. Boyle, I'd like to know what's the first thing that needs to be done over the next year, or next two years, to improve operations at your port facilities.

[English]

**Thomas Boyle:** I'll defer to Mr. Bieger.

**Kenneth Bieger:** Again, I've seen improvement over the years as far as communication between CBP and CBSA goes. There's a lot of talk about the improved communication.

I would make sure, from the committee's view, that this is really being utilized to the fullest extent. The problem at the border is the same problem, and rather than it being tackled—the technology and some of the ideas—in two separate silos, make sure the groups are working together completely in terms of what they're saying, what advancements they're making and what technology they see coming down the road and those types of things.

I would make sure that's happening. That would probably be the first thing I would do, because that's more of global thing.

I know that Mr. Boyle has talked about this with his project, which, again, is an excellent project, but anything we can do—it's just common sense—to get these officers on the primary inspection lane the information before they hit the booths is going to be a win. That's the way of the future: any technology that would help in pushing some of this through, any of the regulations, and anything we could do to move things faster on some of these pilot programs.

[Translation]

**Jacques Ramsay:** I'd like you to finish your answer. Are you talking about sharing the same software or the same data, or are you talking about lines of communication?

[English]

**Kenneth Bieger:** I guess I would start with the lines of communication and making sure any shared.... I'm not sure if you get to the level of the software. I'm not privy to what information is passed back and forth right now, to be honest with you. From a port side, we've seen that there has been better communication, but it's about making sure that it's not just lip service, that they are discussing specifics and that there don't need to be any secrets as to what technology somebody is working on or who gets there first.

This is about a joint effort to come up with a solution. The way I look at it from our port is this: Why don't we use the same technology on both sides? Truly, between the two groups—and there are some smart people on both sides—they should come up with the best answer rather than two separate technologies or ways of doing things at both borders.

• (1200)

**Thomas Boyle:** In echoing a lot of what Mr. Bieger had to say, certainly data sharing exists currently between CBSA and U.S. Customs. The project I introduced to you in my testimony would be a great example of the U.S. being able to help facilitate export inspections by CBSA. Therefore, it's having some sort of memorandum of understanding or memorandum of agreement that when there is information through this export scanning facility, the Canadian government is also aware of what has passed through the scan.

One thing that I might want to also focus on—again, getting back to that recurring thought in my testimony—is that Canada needs to invest in its technology. Mr. Bieger mentioned earlier the IT outage that occurred about a month ago at airports and land border crossings. This type of failure is not unprecedented. It happened in 2018 for a single day. This one lasted for three days and created havoc at the border, as well as in the communities on the U.S. side of the border. Investing in the upgrading of software, servers and other IT equipment is tantamount to making sure the border is going to be managed effectively.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Boyle and Mr. Bieger.

[English]

Thank you so much for taking the time and making the effort to be present virtually or physically. Your input has been much appreciated and will be helpful in drawing the recommendations that we will then be submitting to the government.

Have a great day.

For the rest of us we'll suspend for five minutes so that we can greet the other guests.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** We're now ready to begin the second part of our meeting.

We're fortunate to welcome Christian Leuprecht, professor at the Royal Military College of Canada. He is already familiar with the guidelines. We're lucky to have him with us for nearly an hour, so we'll be able to have some good discussions.

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

• (1210)

**Christian Leuprecht (Professor, Royal Military College of Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I have written on managing safe and secure borders for almost two decades and have recently published two books on the subject the committee is studying. I'm also part of the world's largest research network on borders. As part of this, I collaborate extensively on Canada-U.S. border issues with key colleagues in the United States. I also direct related research programs on transnational financial and economic crime and maintain relations with key federal, provincial, local, private sector and civil society stakeholders and entities tasked with national security and border management.

Borders are among the most politically contentious issues of the 21st century. Citizens expect their governments to maintain control over their borders—notably, who and what enters the country. Canada is among the very few western countries that have no exit controls on either cargo or people. No wonder we have an outsized problem with car theft when we don't do outbound inspections on containers at the port of Montreal. When Canadian marijuana shows up in the hundreds of pounds in Germany and Canadian meth shows up in New Zealand, Canada is creating serious problems for our allies.

The European experience suggests that a significant portion of citizens who feel their government is losing control over the country's borders is prepared to endorse populist and illiberal measures that are difficult to reconcile with the Constitution and the rule of law. A new CBC poll out today reinforces a “crumbling” consensus on immigration in Canada. This perception is not new. The safe third country agreement was driven in large part by U.S. concerns about Canada being weak on immigration. The state's ability or inability to manage borders effectively is at the crux of safeguarding democratic institutions' political and economic sovereignty in the 21st century.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** I apologize for interrupting you, Mr. Leuprecht.

Is the interpretation working properly?

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** The interpreter is working at the speed of light.

**Christian Leuprecht:** Would you like me to slow down?

**The Chair:** If you could speak a little slower, it would be good, because your speech is quite dense.

**Christian Leuprecht:** Understood.

[English]

Canada is in the unique position of sharing a border with the largest economy in the world. Keeping the border with the United States open is economically existential for Canada but not for the United States.

Canada also shares a land border with the largest weapons and drug market in the world. These asymmetries generate criminogenic effects that necessarily precipitate negative spillover effects.

In 2024, 88% of the crime guns seized by the Toronto Police Service were traced to the United States.

First, our framework for managing borders is not well positioned for the challenges of the 21st century. The international refugee system, for instance, was designed for a time when travel was difficult and expensive. Travel information was hard to come by, and principal threats to citizens were presumed to emanate from state actors. Today, travel is cheap and easy. Information is ubiquitous, and threat vectors emanate primarily from multi-faceted, well-financed non-state actors in naturogenic phenomena such as climate change.

Put differently, the ontology of our approach to managing borders is based on territory, while the threat vectors we are trying to contain and disrupt are characterized by transnational mobility of people, money, drugs, illicit trade, terrorism and the like.

CUSMA illustrates Canada's “de-connected” territoriality. With sealed trucks from Mexico destined for Canada, Mexico is now effectively part of Canada's land border.

Second, the nature of borders is changing. Borders are being pushed outwards, for instance in the form of pre-clearance, such as enhanced travel authorizations, pre-screening of inbound cargo and people; and pushed inward—think of deportations.

Moreover, much of money laundering, fraud and radicalization happens in cyberspace, which has no borders. People think of the border as a line, but the threat vectors are near impossible to manage effectively at the line. They need to be managed well before they ever reach that border. That requires extensive co-operation, coordination—such as shiprider, which the U.S. is now on record as wanting to extend to the land and air domains—and collaboration.

Third, for over 85 years, Canada and the United States have had a shared border strategy to have one another's backs. After the attacks of 9/11, then prime minister Jean Chrétien's approach to keeping the border open consisted of reassuring the United States that Canada had America's back. Canada adjusted its national security laws and posture within weeks and months. Chrétien understood intuitively that to keep the border open, it had to be well managed.

Both the Biden and the Trump administrations, Congress and the U.S. northern border caucus have repeatedly made it clear that rightly or wrongly, Canada is no longer living up to its end of the bargain. They are specifically concerned that Canada has become a high-value, low-risk back door to the United States, whose proliferating legislative and structural weaknesses are being exploited by powerful and dedicated state and non-state actors to undermine the social fabric, economic prosperity—

• (1215)

**The Chair:** You have 30 more seconds, Mr. Leuprecht.

**Christian Leuprecht:** —and territorial integrity of the United States.

I'll leave it at that.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry that we had to interrupt you abruptly, but there will obviously be time to come back to some of the points you would have liked to raise.

We'll now turn to MP Kirkland for six minutes.

**Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Professor.

I appreciate your speedy first testimony. I understand that's a lot of information to get in, in a very short time.

You said so many interesting things, and I've also previously paid attention to some of your interviews, so I have a few questions regarding those interviews as well as your testimony here today. You said at one of them that Canada had four years to secure the border. There was failure to act, and it seemed to be that it was for political reasons. Why do you think we failed to act, and what were those political reasons?

Would you say that our failure to strengthen our borders against organized crime and illegal migration has damaged our credibility with the United States at this time?

**Christian Leuprecht:** My colleague Kim Nossal published a book in 2023 called *Canada Alone* in which he cautions that, with the trajectory Canada is on, it is quickly losing the trust and confidence of its closest allies and partners and that it's detrimental to Canadian economic and political sovereignty if Canada stays the path. His point was simple: the challenges from the second Trump administration could have been anticipated. In the book, he actually lays out everything that the Trump administration has been doing in its first few months. He lays out that, in Canada, we opted to take the interlude of four years to pretend that the first Trump administration was an aberration rather than the new normal, the structural new normal, in the relationship and that we failed to prepare effectively for that structural new normal.

Now, I empathize with politicians. Politicians respond to public demand. When there is no obvious public demand to respond, they are unlikely to act, and there wasn't much of a public demand other than a few geeks like me talking about it. However, we need to understand that not acting on the border has real harms for real people. We have a large, active human-smuggling industry. We have a large illicit trade industry that is bringing vast amounts of illicit tobacco, for instance, into this country that is ultimately being sold in ways that undermine public health and undermine Canada's tax revenue. I gave you some examples with regard to the proliferation of drugs.

We know that one of the two global financial institutions in this country has been subject to criminal conspiracy charges to which it pleaded guilty in the United States, and the United States has imposed market capitalization restrictions on that bank. As a result, it significantly impedes Canada's ability to compete in global financial markets, when one of its two global financial institutions has these caps imposed.

You can imagine, if you look at the frustration of the then Biden administration attorney general in announcing the indictment against that bank.... We have a Canadian bank that is actively being

accused of and that subsequently pleads guilty to effectively conspiring in fentanyl trafficking to undermine the U.S. social fabric, and you are wondering why we might have a trust, confidence and reputation problem with the United States and, as I pointed out, increasingly with our closest allies.

• (1220)

**Rhonda Kirkland:** Thank you for that.

I appreciate you bringing, sir, the human component into what you've said. I haven't talked about this yet in my role as a member of Parliament because I get emotional about it, so I'll carefully just, before I ask about breakdown points.... During the last federal election, I lost my brother's son, my nephew, to an accidental overdose, and fentanyl is the reason for that. I'm going to talk a lot more about that when I can do it not emotionally, but I appreciate so much that you brought that human aspect to it.

My background is in educational therapy. Sometimes, we get accused of looking at the negative. You're always looking at the negative—why students are having struggles—but to look at the negative, sometimes you have to look at those breakdown points to figure out how to solve the problem we have, so I have a couple of questions on that.

We've heard repeatedly that fentanyl and precursor chemicals are flowing through Canadian ports and across the border. Where, specifically, are the biggest breakdown points that you see in detection and enforcement? Just give your top two, maybe, breakdown points for the sake of time.

Also, where has federal coordination between Public Safety, CBSA and the RCMP broken down? Where do you see that this breakdown is between them? What structural reforms could you maybe suggest to address those gaps?

**The Chair:** Answer in about 30 seconds.

**Rhonda Kirkland:** Oh, I'm sorry. That's a lot for 30 seconds.

**Christian Leuprecht:** I can do this in 30 seconds.

What frustrates me is that we take apart superlabs by the dozens in this country, and in many cases, not a single person gets charged. Our inability to go after the kingpins of transnational organized crime in this country shows that we are not positioned and that we are not structured to actually engage with these transnational threat vectors. Simply adding a few people here and there or tinkering with a little bit of legislation will not fix the problem if we are not going to commit politically to restructuring the national security posture. Our allies in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom and several European allies have done it; we have not.

With regard to coordination, I would say that we actually have pretty good federal coordination now. Where we lack significantly in coordination is with our provincial, local, private sector and civil society stakeholders. That is a whole testimony on its own.

**The Chair:** I apologize for interrupting. We'll have an opportunity to come back to the witness.

**Rhonda Kirkland:** Because that was such an in-depth question, would you mind providing to the committee something in writing that is a little more in depth? Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Let me turn now to MP Acan for six minutes.

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

Thank you for being with us today, Mr. Leuprecht.

Our government has announced recent investments to hire 1,000 RCMP and 1,000 CBSA officers. As it was mentioned earlier in this committee, Canada's border plan aims to bolster security operations across the border with infrastructure, technology and intelligence sharing. These are the first steps in strengthening our border and bolstering our enforcement capabilities across the frontier.

From your expertise and your recent answer, what additional investments should the government pursue to strengthen our capabilities along the border?

[*Translation*]

**Christian Leuprecht:** Thank you for that important question.

[*English*]

My view on the RCMP is that money is not the overall problem. The way the organization functions and its inability to perform on some of the highest political priorities for the federal government suggest that we need serious structural reform when it comes to national and federal policing in this country.

In the dying days of his office, after having been in office for almost a decade, the previous prime minister went on the record in his white paper on this. This should give us serious pause for thought, and it is serious cause of frustration among our allies.

In light of what I told you, hiring more CBSA or RCMP officers is not going to fix our problem. In my view, none of those CBSA officers should go on the front line. They should all be doing intelligence and investigative work, because the border is a very complex issue of expertise. Where we are falling down is our ability to run complex.... We are under-resourced in what keeps the threats away from our border to begin with and our ability to collaborate with our allies.

On intelligence sharing, yes, we have a growing number of liaison officers working with key institutions both in the United States and in other countries. It is unfortunate, in my view, that it looks like Canada recently did that in response to U.S. demands. These are proposals that had been put out well before, but had, unfortunately, in some cases not been actioned. What value are those liaison officers providing? Where are the studies and the evidence?

As far as I can tell, there's considerable frustration among some U.S. agencies, at least, which are saying it is so cumbersome to work with Canadian colleagues. The requirements, the regulations and the policies are so overwhelming that they might as well not even bother. Paperwork that takes half an hour or an hour in the United States takes half a day or a day.

I understand the importance of following proper regulations and proper procedure, but there is a fine balance between the govern-

ment assuming certain degrees of political, financial and reputational risk and offloading all of the risk onto the agencies, with the policies, procedures and regulations. That means we can't have those people doing the investigative and intelligence work we want them to do, because they spend all their time managing risk for the government.

• (1225)

**Sima Acan:** I assume that your expertise is on the table, and you are putting forth all of these recommendations to the government agencies and government personnel.

**Christian Leuprecht:** I am happy to work with you to formulate whatever submissions or further recommendations the committee might be looking for.

My remarks, in particular with regard to the RCMP, have been on the record in what I think is the longest study on the RCMP that's currently out that was not commissioned by the government. It lists, I think, 70 different studies that have been done over the years on the RCMP. I don't know the number exactly. I'd need to go back and look.

My point is that we've been at this for decades and we keep kicking the can down the road. We think we're going to fix the problems by hiring a new commissioner.

**Sima Acan:** To follow up, are there other models of border security and enforcement among Canada's allies and partners, like the Five Eyes, from which lessons can be learned for the U.S.-Canada border?

How does the management of the Canada-United States border differ from the border management of any other countries?

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Christian Leuprecht:** My starting point is that whether it comes to policing in this country or whether it comes to borders, I think we actually need a systematic professional development program. One thing that the military has is a systematic program to develop officers, in particular rank-and-file members and NCOs, as they rise through the ranks. We lack that at the level of policing, although CBSA does it a little bit better in the way they go about this. It means we never harness the full capacity of the people we have, in particular at the officer and management levels.

This is a very small investment with very high returns. The most important things aren't memoranda of understanding, technology and so forth but the people we have and the investing in those people so that we get the maximum return from their area of expertise.

I've long been on record as saying that we also need one dedicated expert agency in Canada to deal with the border. Canada is very different in the way that it has two agencies—one expert agency that manages at ports of entry and a generalist agency that manages not just borders, but whose commissioner has the largest span of control of any democratic police force in the world. We wonder why we are struggling with this organization: We're asking too much of it on too broad a spectrum.

I can provide some submissions on other models, but I think it ultimately comes down to political will. It comes down to understanding that security is job one for a government. As long as we don't understand that this is the first mover—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Leuprecht. I'm sorry to interrupt again.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

I now turn to Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille for six minutes.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Leuprecht, thank you for joining us today. It's good to hear your analysis, which takes us a bit outside the box of our original study.

The Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, announced with great fanfare that it would assign an additional 1,000 border officers and 1,000 RCMP officers to the borders. However, we know that many more are needed.

The CBSA and RCMP resolve the issues that receive media or political attention by allocating the necessary resources, whether these issues involve car theft or other border-related problems.

Which sector is being neglected as a result of this approach? Intelligence and investigations are being neglected because they receive limited human resources, which don't necessarily meet current needs.

You're saying that, if we want to deploy resources in the right places, we should perhaps take a more pragmatic approach to analyzing how we use them. In other words, we should optimize the skills of RCMP and border officers. You're saying that we should carry out a more localized analysis of needs for each port of entry, rather than taking a more general approach to resource management.

I gather that you're proposing a more tailored resource analysis for each CBSA port of entry. Is that correct?

**Christian Leuprecht:** Great analysis, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

I would like to address three points.

First, with regard to resources, the RCMP is a prime example of an organization that, owing to considerable constraints, must constantly reallocate its resources according to political priorities. This explains why it can rarely develop the necessary expertise. From one day to the next, it expects priorities to change.

For example, if the decision is made to assign RCMP officers to a port of entry rather than implementing a more systematic strategy, there must be a specialized team that focuses exclusively on borders.

Second, Canada lacks the resources necessary to assess strategic intelligence. If it wants to achieve certain objectives for strategic purposes, it must adopt a comprehensive strategic perspective in order to properly allocate its resources to strategic priorities.

In my opinion, there are two types of priorities. There are national security priorities, and then there are priorities—

[*English*]

to respond to Ms. Kirkland, that are causing the most individual harm.

[*Translation*]

However, without a good comprehensive overview, we can't really allocate our resources strategically for strategic purposes.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** Sorry to interrupt you, but we know that the National Police Federation finds it difficult when the government changes its priorities too often. For example, it allocates its resources to the fight against organized crime. Then a new government or minister comes in, and the priority changes as well. As you said, it isn't possible to develop expertise and to continue the work started. Many projects have been started, and police and border officers are moving from priority to priority.

I should point out that the upper echelons of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP, and the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, don't seem to necessarily listen to their rank and file. Instead, they listen to politicians who want to score points and who care less about short-term and long-term strategic planning.

**Christian Leuprecht:** In this country, public safety policies are developed backwards. We make all kinds of policies. We then assume that this will help us achieve a larger goal. We lack a national safety strategy to properly align all the other policies under development. The latest strategy of this kind dates back to 2004.

Another point, which you rightly raised, is the localized aspect of the whole issue. Since September 2001, we've taken a centralized approach to managing border security policy. However, border issues are quite localized. For example, in Québec, everything is tied to protecting language and culture, including the approach to managing cross-border flows. We need a more nuanced policy that takes into account the past, the flows and the needs of local communities around the border, including economic flows.

• (1235)

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

**The Chair:** You have 40 seconds left.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Leuprecht, I would like your opinion on the recommendation that the RCMP and CBSA should have closer ties with the different levels of government in areas with ports of entry in order to share information, provide training and increase awareness. They should strive to work together on data collection and observation.

I sense some openness at the RCMP, but not necessarily at the CBSA. What are your thoughts?

**Christian Leuprecht:** In my opinion, in places such as rural Quebec, it's certainly difficult to manage the public safety issues of an agency whose policies and structure serve and reflect Ottawa's objectives. My point is that the RCMP's current structure doesn't seem particularly conducive to achieving its objectives. Without any restructuring, things will stay the same. Police officers, police associations, politicians and the general public will remain frustrated by the results of this agency, which isn't structured to meet these types of nuanced needs.

**The Chair:** Thank you for this discussion.

Mr. Gill, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Sukhman Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley, CPC):** Thank you, Professor, for being here today. We really appreciate it.

You touched somewhat on the U.S. government and the Trump administration coming forward, basically in saying how the immigration policies and the increased border control that they demanded.... Why do you believe that the Liberal government failed to take early obvious steps to strengthen our border security and to provide necessary resources before illegal crossings, smuggling and organized crime activity surged in Canada?

**Christian Leuprecht:** I will read you a paragraph that I skipped, but that I think responds strategically to your question.

It says that “my late Queen's colleague Nils Orvik cautioned that, as the smaller partner in the continental sovereignty dilemma, Canada's strategy in dealing with the United States” must be to “defend against help”—to pre-empt unsolicited offers of help—which means, for Canada, “to establish and maintain credibility in matters of defence and security” with its great neighbour as a way to safeguard Canada's capacity for sovereign decision-making.

Of course, once the United States comes in and helps us, we've now seriously constrained our ability to make the decisions that are in the best interest of Canadian citizens, as reflected by the legitimately elected government of this country. “A more aggressive, robust, bilateral, bipartisan approach to managing border security is essential to counter the bipartisan consensus in the United States that Canada is a liability to the United States by virtue of actual [and] perceived deficits on security and defence.”

**Sukhman Gill:** Thank you for that.

I want to make sure we can keep concise answers as we go forward, but in your view, how was this avoidable—to avoid situations like this?

**Christian Leuprecht:** For decades, I and a former lead on CBP under the Obama administration, Alan Bersin, have had a proposal for what we call NORAD 2.0, which is effectively for the two countries to agree to depoliticize how we manage the border and to give the border, including the intelligence, enforcement and investigative infrastructure that goes along with it, to professionals to manage. I think we have an opportunity. The silver lining of the challenge we currently have with our southern neighbour is precisely that we can propose new structures that might better serve both our interests. I think taking the politics out of it and leaving it to professionals has served us very well in terms of continental defence. I think we might do very well to do likewise at the border.

**Sukhman Gill:** Understood. Thank you for that.

What are the consequences of the failures today? How do they affect us, not just for our national security but also for the safety of our communities, agency morale and public trust?

• (1240)

**Christian Leuprecht:** The challenge is that we now have a very significant lag effect. I think the temptation by politicians has been....

This is a very complex space. It has many moving parts. It is very dynamic. My sense, and you tell me if I'm wrong, is that politicians look at it this way: This will be really hard and really high risk, so let's just try to put band-aids on it, keep the wheels on the wagon, hope it doesn't fall apart, leave it for someone else to fix and kick the can down the road. The problem is the delta between where we need to be and the challenges we have as a result of transnational state and non-state actor threats. Expectations by the United States and allies continue to grow exponentially. What is the strategy for narrowing that delta, both operationally and especially in terms of perception by our closest partners?

**Sukhman Gill:** I believe you're correct. I believe the current government is not taking these precautions seriously and is, as you said, implementing a technique of putting band-aids on it for now.

As we see these promises from the Liberal government that are unfulfilled, and there's no real urgency for any quick solutions on what's broken at our borders, is this government still failing to take these issues seriously today?

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds left.

**Christian Leuprecht:** The current Prime Minister's attention to working with what I call joint multi-functional teams that get us out of departmental silos and get the right experts around to solve targeted problems with very clear expectations and clear milestones that reflect scale, pace, mass and quality is a good way to reframe the problem. Now it is for the government to demonstrate that it can actually deliver.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Leuprecht.

[*Translation*]

It's now your turn, Ms. Dandurand. You have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you.

Thank you for your comments. It's very interesting to hear you.

I've heard my Conservative colleagues talking about, and making you talk about, public trust, reputation risk and things like that. Very recently the Conservative leader, Pierre Poilievre, was talking about RCMP leadership, saying such things as they're "despicable".

From the perspective of national security in a domestic matter, and the perspective of the role of such institutions as the RCMP, what are the consequences of a perceived loss of institutional legitimacy? Could this affect co-operation within Canada or with our partners when we have leaders talking in such a way about our leadership?

**Christian Leuprecht:** I think in many ways, the RCMP leadership finds itself in an impossible situation in terms of the expectations we've placed on it. As I mentioned, perhaps we could do much more in terms of preparing our national security leaders more effectively for the challenges and tasks we give them. I think we always need to trust that every civil servant in this country, including myself as a professor at the Royal Military College, spends every day doing their very best at trying to serve the interests of this country, of the government of the day, of their institutions and of their people.

But we might ask hard questions—why, perhaps, some of the criticisms, perhaps not as prudently expressed as we could, reflect not just frustrations by a leader of the opposition but also frustrations by some of the police associations, by some of the members who work, by some of the provinces, by local police forces and governments, as well as by some of our allies and partners; and what is incumbent upon us as the political authority to provide in terms of the direction, the resources, the structure and the capabilities to ensure that we set people up for success with the tasks we expect of them in these very complex and challenging times.

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you.

Recently in front of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, you were talking about Canada's Arctic strategy. You were talking about defence as an investment to innovation in research technology. You were talking about the European drone company Helsing and the power of the algorithm behind those drones. Can you elaborate on the heightened skills we have in Canada and how they can be utilized to support efforts along the U.S. border?

• (1245)

**Christian Leuprecht:** The investment point is so important. You might know that I have a separate life in police governance where I've tried very hard—and I think we are getting there—to change the discourse around the money we put into local policing. As an investment, what is the return on that investment? How is the political authority defining what we expect in terms of clear strategic plans and clear measurable metrics as opposed to just saying, "Here's more money. Go do something a little bit different or more of the same"? Politicians talk about investments, but where is the public accountability for those investments and the objectives that we want to achieve with those investments? Hold the leadership of institutions accountable for the public money that we invest in terms of delivering on the expectations of the government of the day.

In terms of high tech, this environment is changing very quickly. I think that the Prime Minister, during the election, talked about procurement; he's now talking about investments. I think this reflects in part a recognition that we can't procure much of what we're looking for either because it doesn't exist on shelves or because we are not set up to procure it.

The point that I make is that, if you want to sell drones in this country as an innovative company, you could not because of what do we do. We procure drones that achieve certain effects. The algorithms and the AIs have all been much faster than the drones and the effects we need to achieve with those drones. What we need to procure is the algorithm and the AI and then build the drone on top of that to achieve those effects.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**Christian Leuprecht:** What are we going to do to make sure that the government becomes a data-driven organization that reflects those priorities?

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor Leuprecht. I'm sorry to interrupt you again. I'm always very reluctant to do so, but it's my job.

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

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have questions about the accountability and responsibility of the Minister of Public Safety. The minister often sidesteps his responsibilities by saying that the Canada Border Services Agency is an independent agency and that he can't tell the agency what to do or how to do it. In my opinion, this is a way to avoid accountability and responsibility.

I want to know how to make a minister more responsible and accountable when the minister must ensure border security and national security, but somehow offloads the responsibility by handing it over to an independent agency.

**Christian Leuprecht:** First, I believe that any minister is responsible for setting three, four or maybe five priorities for their department to ensure that all public servants clearly understand the objective. We aren't talking about a dozen or roughly thirty priorities, but about three, four or five priorities. I would say that the minister clearly expects his officials to allocate human and financial resources in a manner that best serves his priorities.

Second, I believe that the minister is in a better position to provide clear guidelines regarding his expectations for his department. Third, I believe that the federal public service basically isn't structured in a way that helps achieve the objectives of the current government's public policy priorities.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** Would you agree with the appointment of a "Minister of Borders", who would take sole responsibility for border management and who would be accountable for border security?

**Christian Leuprecht:** I'm not convinced that more ministers are needed. Quite the contrary. Much larger countries with small cabinets, such as Germany, successfully manage their borders.

As you said, the situation shows the need for a certain level of political responsibility, including ministerial responsibility on the part of the department. Public studies clearly show that the minister's role in ministerial responsibility has been in steep decline in our Westminster parliamentary system. I believe that the Prime Minister has the opportunity to restore the purpose—

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor Leuprecht. Sorry to interrupt you again.

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

[*English*]

**Dane Lloyd (Parkland, CPC):** Thank you for being here, Dr. Leuprecht.

Seeing as you're a professor, I might ask you a philosophical question and challenge you on one of the things I think you said when you were talking about depoliticizing the border.

In my experience in this place as a member of Parliament, a lot of the time, the government doesn't take action unless you make an issue political. I think of the issue of auto theft in this country, which rose significantly for a couple of years before it became a political issue and then the government started to take action on it. I think of when we talk about the flaws in the bail system. When opposition parties hold the government accountable and make issues political, it leads to action.

Can you tell us briefly how you propose depoliticizing something like the border and ensuring that we get effective management at the same time?

**Christian Leuprecht:** Those are terrific points.

For politicians to take action, there are three basic preconditions. First, there needs to be recognition that there's genuine physical harm to citizens as a result of non-action. Second, there needs to be a sense of diminishing that harm for the greatest number of Canadians. Third, there needs to be a sense among politicians that there's a chance of success with what is being put forward. Tell me if you think I'm wrong on that.

Yes, we need political action, because only politicians have the authority to change the frameworks under which civil servants operate in terms of the priorities we set and the legislative constraints we ultimately set. Yes, it is on the political authority to establish them, but we established NORAD in a rapidly changing threat environment at the time that posed and continues to pose existential threats to this continent.

We need to understand that what is happening along our borders is a rapidly changing threat and security environment that poses an existential threat to the political and economic sovereignty of this country if we don't get it right. Here is the opportunity to rethink how we manage the Canada-U.S. border, because if we can't manage it effectively, I think it will ultimately be the end of this country.

**Dane Lloyd:** I'm going to move on to another line of questioning.

At a recent committee meeting, we had a journalist, Sam Cooper, come in and we heard about the non-resident importer program.

Can you tell us if you believe the non-resident importer program is being used to bring precursor chemicals into Canada?

**Christian Leuprecht:** There are a vast number of vulnerabilities, and I think the political priorities on immigration in recent years have rapidly outpaced the ability of our intelligence and security agencies to do the vetting and be able to build the investigative and intelligence capacities to ensure that these are not being systematically exploited at scale by bad actors.

**Dane Lloyd:** Do you think that public safety was the number one priority when the government made a number of these immigration-related policies, or were there other priorities that superseded public safety? For example, I think of when visas were lifted on Mexico in 2016, against the recommendations of many in the public safety sphere who said it would lead to an increase.... We see now that in 2024, the government reimposed those visas after seeing the detrimental impact of that.

Do you think the government has always had public safety as its number one priority when putting forward its policies?

**Christian Leuprecht:** We live in a democracy, and it's the prerogative of the government of today to pick its priorities. That might or might not involve aligning with the advice from the civil service of the day. There is a reason we have civil service experts in these areas. Certainly, as you heard from my previous answer, there's an opportunity to strike a better balance.

• (1255)

**Dane Lloyd:** In your experience as an academic following the policies of this government over the past 10 years, do you think public safety has been a priority in this sphere, or do you think other priorities, like increasing immigration or bilateral relations with other countries, have taken precedence over Canada's public safety?

**Christian Leuprecht:** I think there has not been an incentive to make public safety the ultimate priority because there wasn't a demand from the electorate to that effect. There was simply a demand from expert agencies and allies.

I think many of these were not sins of commission but sins of omission, and now we are atoning for the aggregate effect of these multiple sins of omission.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

[*Translation*]

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

**Jacques Ramsay:** Professor Leuprecht, thank you for your remarks, which you delivered with great aplomb. However, as we know in the House of Commons, saying something with aplomb doesn't necessarily make it true. I would like to touch on a few of your comments.

First, I can tell you that, of the 1,000 officers that the Canada Border Services Agency wants to hire, 200 will be assigned to the second-line services that you referred to. This means that they can gather intelligence and carry out investigations to help front-line staff operate more effectively.

Second, I want to respond to your comment that we're being mocked in Canada. I may be paraphrasing a bit, but you said that the other countries described their experience with our services as "expensive" and "cumbersome." Isn't that a bit condescending?

Remember that, in a previous life, I used the services of other countries where it was obviously expensive and cumbersome, and perhaps even more so in the United States than in other places. Isn't it normal that, when we're faced with different cultures, it can be a bit more difficult to work together? If someone in the United States says that it's a bit more complicated to work with us than with their neighbour in Dale County next door, does that necessarily mean that we're less effective? I seriously doubt it.

You also said that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was too large to fulfill its mandate. Since this committee began meeting, we've constantly been hearing about the need for communication and co-operation. If the RCMP, the federal police force, didn't exist in its current form and if its responsibilities were divided among different agencies, wouldn't we run the risk of losing or undermining this key collaborative relationship?

I personally believe that, on the contrary, to ensure security, we need a strong federal police force with a command backed by a vision.

I would like to know your thoughts on this.

**Christian Leuprecht:** Those are good observations.

Some of the measures taken by our partner south of the border certainly make the situation quite difficult for our intelligence agencies. We certainly don't want to end up sharing intelligence that could be used in ways that fall outside the rule of law as defined in the United States or Canada.

We're a sovereign country. We don't always need to meet the demands and expectations of our partners in the United States or other places. However, in my experience, the transaction costs for national security and intelligence are still quite high in Canada. Other countries have found more efficient and effective methods.

In terms of the RCMP, I've long advocated for a model where the RCMP would withdraw from provincial contracts. There are limits to this approach. It will always require federal government involvement in Atlantic Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador and the territories, since they can't fund their police services on their own. However, I believe that, in addition to an agency acting as a federal police force, we need a separate agency responsible for criminal intelligence. Australia, for example, has separated police investigation responsibilities from criminal intelligence responsibilities.

Until we have an agency that operates as a separate entity from the federal police force and that handles criminal intelligence rather than criminal investigations, the federal government will find it hard to achieve its top national security objectives.

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Mr. Ramsay, you have 30 seconds left.

**Jacques Ramsay:** Mr. Chair, I would like to take this opportunity to move a motion, if that's all the time that I have.

**The Chair:** Is this a motion or a notice of motion?

**Jacques Ramsay:** It's a notice of motion.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Jacques Ramsay:** I would like to move the following notice of motion:

That, given Pierre Poilievre's, leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, dangerous and out of touch remarks on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) during an interview with the Northern Perspective, including accusations of covering up scandals, the committee reaffirms our confidence in the independence of the RCMP and the work they do for Canadians and calls on Pierre Poilievre to apologize and retract his statement.

**The Chair:** Very well.

Since this is a notice of motion, there isn't any debate.

This also brings your comments to a close, Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Leuprecht, unfortunately, our time is up. Fortunately, I have a few seconds left to thank you for your participation, your time and all your work in preparing for this committee meeting.

Thank you.

Your comments and suggestions will certainly be helpful as we continue our work.

**Christian Leuprecht:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** This brings us to the end of the meeting.

We'll see each other at the next meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.





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