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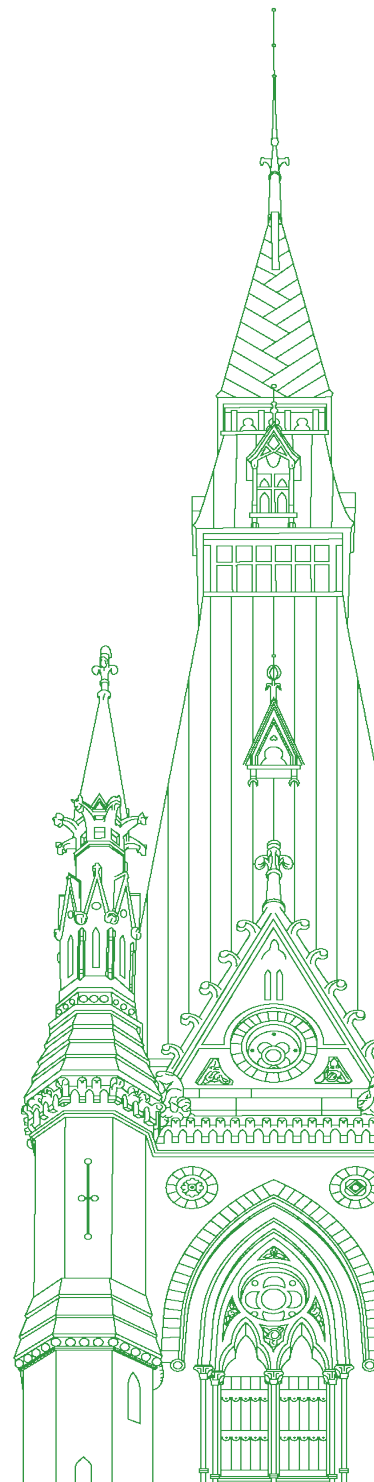
Standing Committee on Public Accounts

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 047

Thursday, September 24, 2026

Chair: John Williamson



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• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

I would like to welcome you to meeting number 47 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Since it has been three months since I last spoke French, I hope it goes fairly well.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), the committee is beginning its review of the 2026 spring reports of the Auditor General of Canada, entitled “Recruiting for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police”.

[English]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders, although I believe all members and witnesses are in the room.

There are some standard notes that I'll go through at the top of this meeting. Before we continue, I'd ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the audio cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, particularly our interpreters. You'll also notice a QR code on the card that links to a short awareness video for your interest.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating via video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair, although I recognize that during the question and answer session with the witnesses, this is less necessary. It's a formality, but I prefer the interaction between witnesses and members.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak—and this has more to do with a point of order—please raise your hand. If you feel I've missed you and you want to raise a point of order, say into the microphone, “Point of order.” For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Before we begin, I'd like to welcome all the new members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. We have a number of members who are joining us. It is always nice to refresh the roster.

Before I go any further, I have some business to attend to, so I'm going to turn things over to our clerk for the election of the second vice-chair. I also want to welcome our clerk. We've already been working together for a couple of weeks, and it's been a pleasure. I'm sure that will continue, and I'm also sure that all members will find that as well.

Over to you, Clerk.

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Aimée Belmore): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

I am now prepared to receive motions for the second vice-chair.

[English]

The Chair: We will proceed with our North Korean-style election.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Go ahead.

Jasraj Hallan (Calgary East, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

It's a pleasure to be on this committee. Welcome to the clerk.

I'd like to nominate our friend from the Bloc, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Mr. Hallan moves that Mr. Blanchette-Joncas be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

It does not appear so.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Blanchette-Joncas duly elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and I'd like to welcome everyone once again.

[English]

I have a couple of notes for the new members. As the chairman, I've developed a habit that I think has been met with agreement on both sides.

Everyone, when it's your turn, you're restricted to a certain time. I allow members to ask questions to the end of that time, at which point, I allow witnesses to provide an answer. I ask that members do not interrupt the answer once your time has expired. If you do, I then cease the answer and move on.

This is designed as the committee's approach in wanting to get answers from our expert witnesses. It has worked for the last couple of years, and it is my intention.... I wanted to let new members know.

Watch your time. You want to wrap up if you're hitting that two-and-a-half-minute, five-minute or six-minute mark. Just be aware that the witnesses will be given the opportunity to answer. This habit has reduced any kind of showboating whereby we don't give witnesses a chance to answer. More importantly, it's provided answers to questions when we have many of them. I hope this will continue to meet with everyone's agreement.

I'd now like to welcome and introduce our witnesses. Thank you all for being here.

From the Office of the Auditor General, we have Karen Hogan, the Auditor General of Canada. We have Sami Hannoush, principal. We also have Maria Pooley. It's nice to see you again.

From the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we have Michael Duheme, commissioner. Thank you for coming back. It's good to see you again, sir.

We also have Adam Palmer, assistant commissioner of national recruitment transformation, in from B.C. It's nice to see you as well, Mr. Palmer.

We're going to have opening statements from both Ms. Hogan and Mr. Duheme. You will have five minutes each.

Ms. Hogan, you have the floor, please.

Karen Hogan (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to appear before the committee today to discuss our report, "Recruiting for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police", which was tabled in March.

I'd like to begin by recognizing that we are gathered on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

With me today are Sami Hannoush, the principal who was responsible for the audit, and Maria Pooley, the director who led the audit team.

The audit found that although the RCMP identified recruitment as a top priority in 2018, it did not know how many police officers it needed to fully staff the force. The RCMP set recruitment targets that fell well short of its staffing needs and did not recruit as many officers as planned. Our analysis of RCMP data found that the

shortage had gotten worse since 2023, with at least 3,400 additional police officers needed as of September 2025.

The RCMP also missed its target processing time for 97% of employment applications, making it harder to fill training classes with enough cadets. Successful applications took an average of 330 days to process, and processing times got longer over the audit period. Over the 30 months we examined, the RCMP filled only 18% of its cadet training classes to the maximum capacity of 32 cadets each. In other words, the RCMP sent only 2,400 cadets to Depot for training when there were almost 3,000 spots. This meant that fewer cadets entered training than planned, limiting the RCMP's ability to reduce its staffing shortages.

Shortages of frontline RCMP officers were widespread across Canada. As of September 2025, nine of the 11 provinces and territories where the RCMP provides frontline services had vacancy rates above the force's critical threshold of 7%.

● (1110)

[Translation]

This shortage also limited the number of experienced front line officers that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP, could transfer to fill vacancies elsewhere in the organization.

In 2023, the RCMP introduced the flexible posting plan, which allowed new officers to choose the province or territory of their first assignment. The plan succeeded in attracting thousands more applicants than anticipated. However, the approach also increased chronic vacancies in some areas. In July 2025, the RCMP began phasing out the plan and returned to assigning new officers according to operational needs. Given the high number of vacancies, it will take many years to fully reverse the effects of the temporary approach.

These high vacancy rates pose a clear risk to the RCMP's ability to maintain operational capacity and deliver effective policing services in all parts of the organization.

Chronic shortages also increase the risk of police officer absences and burnout, which could make it more challenging for the RCMP to prevent and investigate crime, maintain peace and order and contribute to national security.

Given the significant concerns raised by this audit and because a year has passed since we completed our work, the RCMP is best positioned to answer the committee's questions on its current staffing needs, application processing times and any critical shortages in front line policing.

This concludes my opening remarks. We would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Hogan.

[English]

Commissioner, you have the floor for about five minutes. I won't cut you off if you run a little over. The floor is yours, please.

[Translation]

Commissioner Michael Duheme (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Chair, members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to appear before you to discuss the Auditor General's report on recruiting for the RCMP.

With me today is assistant commissioner, Adam Palmer, who is responsible for national recruitment transformation.

[English]

The RCMP accepts the recommendations in the Auditor General's report, and we appreciate the work of the Auditor General and her team.

The report identifies challenges with how the RCMP manages its workforce and staffing. Organizationally, our issues are historical, centred on how we recruit and train cadets, manage vacancies and measure results. I would like to assure the chair, committee members and Auditor General that I take these findings seriously and remain committed to change.

Our management action plan has been shared with the Office of the Auditor General and this committee. Today, the assistant commissioner, Adam Palmer, and I are here to provide an update on efforts and to answer your questions.

Recruitment, training capacity, workforce planning, vacancy reduction and posting decisions are closely connected and must be addressed together. The RCMP is pursuing a modern approach to better understand staffing needs, recruit and train effectively and manage future staffing risks.

[Translation]

This initiative is important as the RCMP works to strengthen its federal policing mandate. The government has invested in adding 1,000 new federal policing positions to help the RCMP address threats to national security, transnational organized crime, and border and financial crime.

[English]

Following an external review and an internal report on recruitment practices across Five Eyes countries, we are making the application process more personal, flexible and efficient, while maintaining core assessment requirements.

In March 2026, the RCMP released its organization-wide national recruiting strategy to improve screening, modernize online tools, strengthen outreach and increase workforce diversity. With government support, the RCMP has increased the cadet recruit allowance to help address financial barriers for recruits.

Project Red Serge is testing a direct, applicant-focused model in B.C. and Yukon. Recruiters have a greater involvement with appli-

cants, key screening steps occur earlier and assessment pathways are managed flexibly. The redesigned process enables recruiters to identify and defer non-qualified or non-competitive applicants earlier in the process, focusing resources and attention on high-potential candidates who are more likely to progress. The early results are encouraging, and we are assessing long-term and nationwide potential.

The RCMP is making it easier for qualified, experienced candidates to join through different pathways. We are establishing national standards for recruiting police officers from other jurisdictions and piloting a pathway for experienced peace officers.

[Translation]

Increasing the diversity of our workforce remains one of our recruitment goals. The RCMP works with indigenous organizations and under-represented communities, while pre-cadet programs provide an introduction to police work and prepare participants for the training offered at Depot Division.

[English]

The RCMP is developing a first nations, Inuit and Métis recruitment strategy for police officers and public service employees, informed by engagement with indigenous employees, regional representatives and national indigenous organizations.

We are developing a workforce planning model to provide enterprise-wide demand information and real-time data on needs by region and function, including current and projected frontline vacancies to be implemented this fiscal year.

The management action plan provides for evidence-based vacancy targets, timelines and regular reporting.

[Translation]

The RCMP is reviewing how it assesses recruitment, workforce capacity and long-term sustainability. We will track application processing times, the rates at which cadets are admitted to a detachment and promoted to constable, vacancy rates, workforce diversity indicators and progress made toward operational staffing needs.

[English]

We will modernize recruit training and increase capacity at our training academy, Depot. We are currently conducting an extensive review of Depot. This is a holistic review of the curriculum, the culture, the leadership and the overall environment in which our cadets are trained.

• (1120)

Mr. Chair, while the work ahead is substantial, I assure you that we are committed and are making good progress. My objective is to ensure that the RCMP has the right people, skills and capacity required to meet operational demands across its policing responsibilities and to deliver the services Canadians expect.

[Translation]

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Mr. Palmer and I would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

I'll now begin our first round, which will consist of three members for six minutes each.

Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): I'm sorry, Chair. [*Inaudible—Editor*]

[Translation]

The Chair: Is the interpretation working in English?

Okay.

[English]

If we can put this on hold, I need to resolve this to ensure that all members are able to participate.

[Translation]

Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, do you have your earpiece?

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Mitis—Matapédia—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Chair, the problem is that the terminals disconnect after a few seconds. It's the same for me.

The Chair: Okay. Fine.

[English]

The Chair: Is it the same with you, Kelly?

Kelly McCauley: Mine is intermittent.

The Chair: Give me one second. I'm going to consult with the clerk.

I'm going to suspend this meeting.

• (1120)

(Pause)

• (1135)

The Chair: I'll call this meeting back to order.

Just to recall, Mr. Steinley, had I called on you yet? Were you just about to start? No? Okay. I think I was about to call on you. I'm just going to make sure that no one is having any technical difficulties.

[Translation]

Is everything okay with the sound? I see it is.

[English]

Mr. Steinley, welcome to committee. You have six minutes, please, to lead us off. This will begin with three members for six minutes each.

It's over to you, sir.

Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be here at public accounts with my colleagues and jumping in for a second.

I have the honour to represent Depot in Regina—Lewvan, and F Division as well. I want to say before we get started that I am proud to represent all the men and women who serve us across the country. Every RCMP officer who goes to every one of your towns and cities goes through Depot, through Regina—Lewvan first, and I'm very proud to represent those men and women.

I have some questions that I want to start off with.

One is something that has been confusing to the public, Commissioner, and this is the fact of the continual repetition of the government—the Liberals—in saying that there are going to be 1,000 new RCMP officers hired. I have some information here. Can you confirm or deny that there will be 1,000 new frontline RCMP officers hired?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would like to highlight the fact that the RCMP has three key programs, which are contract policing—that is frontline policing, as most of you know—the federal policing mandate and special police services.

I would say that the focus over the last 30 years has always been on the contract side. Any time there were budget cuts with regard to the RCMP, the government would get 100% of the dollars by cutting into the federal side of things, not just investigations, but the infrastructure support side. I have committed to, with the new investment of \$1.8 million, 1,000 new resources, and 750 of those are regular members. I have committed to a three-year plan to make sure that we bring 750 police officers into the federal policing program.

• (1140)

Warren Steinley: Thank you for that.

How many positions were cut in the RCMP because of direction from the government last year?

Commr Michael Duheme: There were none on the federal policing side and none on the contract side.

Warren Steinley: Civilians...?

Commr Michael Duheme: There's a comprehensive expenditure review that we've gone through, but it did not affect the operations.

Warren Steinley: Would it be fair to say that 250 positions were cut at the RCMP last year?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'd have to get back—

Warren Steinley: Approximately....

Commr Michael Duheme: —with the exact number.

Warren Steinley: Was it around that?

Commr Michael Duheme: Probably around that, but none on the operational side....

Warren Steinley: Okay. I have an email from you that said there will be 250 civilian positions filled and 750 regular members.

That being said, are 350 of those positions coming from contract policing moving to federal initiatives, which would take 350 officers off the street?

Commr Michael Duheme: That's not exactly right. When we came with the proposal for 750, consultation with government was the 350. We average anywhere between 100 and 150 experienced police officers in a year, banking on that, and we know that with the closure of Surrey detachment, there is a reserve of close to 150 officers we can use for federal policing. This would bring us to about 75 to 100 people we would have to hire from either the academy...but again, on the federal policing side, we wish to have experienced police.

Warren Steinley: In the commissioner's broadcast, it says that the "goal is to hire 350 regular members" into federal policing, in your words. That's 350 regular members: Where would they come from?

Commr Michael Duheme: As I said, the first target for regular members for the first year is 350. Out of that 350, the plan is and continues to be increasing the experienced police officers from other police departments who are joining our organization and who become regular members. Our regular members are currently in Surrey. We're drawing down our numbers in Surrey. In Grand Prairie, we're also drawing down, and then it would be about 80 to 100 people that we would recruit from different divisions.

Warren Steinley: You keep saying "drawing down". How many contracted officers who were on the front lines in each province that has contract policing are you taking from the front lines to put into federal initiatives? I've heard that you're asking Saskatchewan to give 35 members from contract policing to put them into federal initiatives.

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, every commanding officer was given a target to release regular members—experienced members—to the federal policing mandate that we have. I also have a role in balancing the resources that come in and balancing the service that we provide to Canadians across the country.

Warren Steinley: In no world are you going to hire 1,000 new frontline RCMP officers to serve and protect this country as the Liberals have been saying. That is blatantly false.

Commr Michael Duheme: What I was ordered to do, or the mandate I was given, was to hire 750 police officers for federal policing—

Warren Steinley: This is not what the minister said. The minister said 1,000.

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm telling you what my mandate is, Mr. Chair.

It was clear from the minister: 750 police officers for federal policing.

Warren Steinley: Why do we keep hearing the number 1,000?

For example, Shafqat Ali said, "we're hiring 1,000 RCMP officers and 1,000 CBSA officers."

"We are hiring 1,000 new RCMP personnel", said Gary Anandasangaree.

Sean Fraser said we're going to "hire 1,000 new RCMP officers."

Each one of them is saying they're going to hire 1,000 new RCMP officers, which is blatantly false.

Commr Michael Duheme: My commitment to the government through the minister is 750 regular members—those are police officers—and 250 who would fall under public service employees with special skill sets to support the federal policing mandate.

Warren Steinley: In the time I have left, I want to ask this: How many frontline officers who work in patrol cars on the streets in our communities is each province going to have to give up to go into federal initiatives?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm more than happy to share a chart with the specific numbers for each division. In the first year, it will be about 80 police officers from across the country who will be re-assigned to federal policing.

Warren Steinley: Mr. Chair, I'd like to make sure he tables that.

The Chair: The commissioner offered to do that, and the committee will look for the information in the next couple of weeks. Thank you very much for that.

I appreciate that, Mr. Steinley.

We're now turning to Ms. Yip.

It's nice to see you. You have the floor for six minutes.

• (1145)

Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the Auditor General for this important report.

Thank you to the RCMP for keeping Canadians safe across the country.

My first question is this: Why did the RCMP not meet its target processing time for 97% of applications?

Commr Michael Duheme: If you'll allow me, I'll let Mr. Adam Palmer respond, because he's our chief transformation officer for recruiting. Adam and his team have been dissecting everything that we have right now in the recruiting program. Adam can share that with you in detail.

Assistant Commissioner Adam Palmer (Assistant Commissioner, National Recruitment Transformation, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Good morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the question.

The processing time was a big issue for us. It's something we've been very alive to and have been working on full steam since September 2025. In fact, on February 1, we implemented a new process in British Columbia and the Yukon as a pilot project, changing the game in the way we process applicants to the RCMP.

I would just like people to know that we're very fortunate in that last year we had 20,997 people apply to the RCMP, so we do not have a problem attracting people. An incredible number of people, three shy of 21,000, applied to be Mounties, and it was over 8,500 this year alone since the new fiscal year. There's no problem attracting people.

The issue was the processing, so we've gone from the system that was primarily public service employees and centred at one central location—at Depot in Regina. All these public service employees were managing the large group of people who were applying into the RCMP. Since the February 1 pilot project, we've moved to a hybrid model. We now have regular RCMP members and public service employees working in concert, streamlining the process significantly and getting it down to six months, which is where we want it to be. That's our target. We've been able to process even quicker than six months during the pilot project.

In terms of some of the things we've done, in a nutshell, I will tell you that we've applied the queueing theory. Think of a large funnel with 21,000 people at the top. When you get to the bottom of the funnel, that's how many people we send to Depot. Coming out at the very bottom of the funnel will be the number of people who graduate from Depot, the people who successfully get through. We've put time and effort into the early stages of the processing to remove people from the process who have a low likelihood of success. We do get people applying to the RCMP who may have criminality in their background, for example. They may have mental health histories. They may have things that preclude them from becoming a police officer. This would also include not meeting our base requirements. Those sorts of people we move out quickly.

We have sped up the processing time by bringing people from a linear process into now a very flexible and dynamic recruiting process. We can bring in large numbers of people and process them through several steps, sometimes in a weekend or over several days, doing early attribute evaluations and interviews, making sure they have all their documentation and meet all the requirements, and doing early law enforcement record checks to make sure they're viable candidates. Then we close the number down to make sure that the ones we're focusing on have the highest likelihood of success in our process. It's proved to be very helpful.

In terms of decentralization in recruiting and adding back in the regular members, I'll use an analogy with regard to one of the problems we had before. If you were ever thinking about being a pharmacist, before you became a pharmacist you would want to talk to a pharmacist. If you wanted to be a schoolteacher, you would want to talk to a schoolteacher. We had a process in which you would never talk to a police officer. You'd never talk to a Mountie before you showed up at Depot, believe it or not. Now we have a process in which you will actually work with a police recruiter investigator who will have first-hand responsibility for your file, working with our PSC counterparts and moving you through the process in a

much more efficient and timely manner, with flexibility and shorter time gaps between each step in the process.

Jean Yip: Would there be somebody there guiding the applicant and answering their questions?

A/Commr Adam Palmer: Yes. That would be part of it. For example, if you apply to the RCMP, we will do early checks to make sure that you're a viable candidate. We would invite you in. We can also do it remotely. For example, because we're doing the pilot in British Columbia and the Yukon, you don't have to come down to a main centre in the metro Vancouver area. You could be up in the north. You could be on Vancouver Island. You could be in the southeast portion of the province.

We can now run physical tests and give our police fitness assessment to make sure you meet the physical requirements. We will check your documents. We will do an attribute evaluation in which we check to make sure you can speak one of the two official languages. We will make sure you have good communication skills and good interpersonal skills. We'll get a sense of you. Throughout that process, the applicant now knows which Mountie will be their recruiting officer. They can have direct contact. It was more of an administrative process before. It didn't have the same ownership and accountability. We've brought this into the process and reduced the processing times.

• (1150)

Jean Yip: This would probably help applicants who have left early.

A/Commr Adam Palmer: That's an absolutely astute observation. The recruiting environment in Canada is very competitive. We have people applying many times to the RCMP and multiple police services simultaneously. Because our recruiting process was taking so long administratively, we had opportunity losses with people going to other agencies. We're reducing the opportunity cost by keeping them engaged in our process and processing them quicker.

Jean Yip: If we look at exhibit 8 of the Auditor General's report, we see there is a bit of a timeline. It shows "Intake", "Applicant selection", "Suitability review" and so forth. It says that "Intake" was "23 days slower"—and you've mentioned some improvements—that "Applicant selection" was "60 days slower" and that the "Suitability review" was "55 days slower".

Do some of those improvements made in November capture some of the more lagging time delays there?

Commr Michael Duheme: Mr. Chair, if I may....

The Auditor General—Karen and her team—looked at the old system that we had in place, which was very linear. I want to highlight the fact that some of the delays in the process are our own doing, but there are sometimes also delays caused by the applicant when they don't return the questionnaire or when they have to correct something and it takes two to three weeks.

Following the review by Adam and his team of different processes in the Five Eyes countries and in Canada, we've changed the whole linear process altogether. To compare the new process with what we have here would be difficult, but the ultimate goal with the new process is going from 330 days down to six months, which would be very acceptable and 50% shorter than what we have right now.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm afraid that is your time, Ms. Yip, but I'm sure we'll come back to you.

[Translation]

Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, you have the floor for six minutes.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses who are with us today.

Good morning also to the members of the committee. It's a pleasure to be back on this committee, which I was on from 2019 to 2021.

My first questions will be for you, Commissioner Duheme.

You are a Quebecker from Chambly. I'd like to hear your comments on a very important issue for Quebeckers. In October 2023, at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, you acknowledged the RCMP's difficulties in meeting its language obligations, particularly with respect to French. In February 2024, the Commissioner of Official Languages himself attributed these difficulties to a culture problem in your organization.

Do you share the same diagnosis?

Commr Michael Duheme: First of all, congratulations on your election as vice-chair.

Second, I'm not saying that there isn't a language culture in the organization. Bilingual people are posted and can apply pretty much anywhere in the country. So, I don't entirely agree that there's a culture, in the sense that was described. I'm not at all convinced that the language issue is a cultural one.

Bilingualism exists in the organization. I'm bilingual, and I expect others to be bilingual as well. To ensure that everyone in the organization is bilingual—much like in the public service once you reach a certain level—we would almost have to hire only bilingual people, which isn't really realistic. However, training in Regina is given in a bilingual format.

So I don't entirely agree that there is a culture that neglects francophones within the RCMP.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: If you don't think there's a culture problem, why aren't you able to meet your own obligations under

the Official Languages Act? I'm not making this up; it's the Commissioner of Official Languages who said that.

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm not sure which report you're referring to, so I'd need to refresh my memory on that document.

However, that may be. There are places in Canada where, when a news release is issued in an emergency, it isn't entirely in both official languages. It's risk management done by the manager responsible for issuing the news release, if it's an urgent operational news release.

• (1155)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay. Let me refresh your memory, then. You know that in Quebec, our motto is “*Je me souviens*”, or “I remember”.

So you yourself, in October 2023, were at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, and you committed to restoring training entirely in French. So, today, tell us what has happened over the past three years. What commitments have you made, and what actions have you taken?

Another thing: In 2023, according to the latest data we have, 41% of your officers who had to have a bilingual position were unable to meet the language criteria of their position. That means that two out of five RCMP officers were not bilingual when they should have been.

Today, you are telling me that there is no problem, and that everything is fine.

Commr Michael Duheme: I didn't say everything was fine.

When I said that everything was fine, I was referring to culture and francophones. When I look at my staff's proficiency in French, I see that most of the people around the table are bilingual. I admit that, sometimes, there are challenges when it comes to staffing. We're looking for people with specific qualifications, and they aren't necessarily bilingual.

It's important to understand one thing: I understand that there are criteria to be met, and I know many bilingual people, but they don't meet the criteria. However, when you talk to them, you realize they're perfectly bilingual.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Can you formally confirm to us today that in 2026, 100% of officers at the rank of inspector and above who hold a position that is normally bilingual truly meet these language requirements?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm unable to confirm at this time that they're all bilingual. If you would like statistics on bilingualism among the executives in the organization—at the inspector rank and above—I would be happy to send them to the committee.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

Mr. Duheme, do you think these issues regarding compliance with language obligations, particularly those concerning French, are hindering your efforts to recruit francophones? They might wonder why they would join an organization where French isn't important and where, once again, the obligations under the Official Languages Act can't even be met.

Commr Michael Duheme: I would say that no one in the organization is saying that French isn't important. As for most people in the province of Quebec, obviously, the language chosen is French. New Brunswick is a completely bilingual province. We have bilingual positions scattered across Canada.

I encourage people to join the RCMP. We have bilingual units at Depot Division, which provide a learning environment for people who want to learn a second language.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: So there are no issues with recruiting exclusively in English outside Quebec. Everything is bilingual. Is that correct?

Commr Michael Duheme: I don't know. No one reported any recruitment problems to me regarding people who speak only French. It's important to understand that, as far as I know, the RCMP doesn't have any unilingual French positions.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: However, there are many who are unilingual anglophones. That's true.

Commr Michael Duheme: If we look at the positions held by the organization's 19,000 police officers, we see that there are indeed many positions in western Canada and the Maritimes that are English only.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

Don't you have an obligation under the Official Languages Act to provide services in French?

Commr Michael Duheme: These are services in English and French, the two official languages. We try to meet that obligation as much as possible.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: If there are positions only in English, how do the people who occupy them speak French and offer the service?

Commr Michael Duheme: There are also bilingual positions. In western Canada, there are certain detachments where there is a certain proportion of bilingual positions and a certain proportion of unilingual positions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, the commissioner offered us documents. Would you like to have them?

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Yes. I would like to receive several written responses. We want data, not just lip service.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

We'll now begin our second round, consisting of five members for various lengths of time.

It's back to you, Mr. Steinley, for five minutes, please.

Warren Steinley: Thank you very much.

First of all, I want to say thank you for changing the flexible posting, because I heard from Depot that it is very hard to get people in the exact positions they want, and this added to some vacancy issues across the province. Thank you for listening to commanding officer Lokken and changing that, because it was very helpful.

Commissioner, the Auditor General's report wasn't a surprise to you, was it?

• (1200)

Commr Michael Duheme: No, it wasn't a surprise, because we knew most of the things that Karen and her team had brought forward, and some of the things we're already working on.

Warren Steinley: I think you knew that, because there was a report in July 2023 done by Dwayne McDonald, former commissioner Dennis Daley and Assistant Commissioner Rhonda Blackmore that basically outlined exactly what the commissioner said.

Is that fair to say?

Commr Michael Duheme: I remember the report, but I trust that it's similar to what Karen and the team found out.

Warren Steinley: I did some background work. I ran the Auditor General's report and this report in ChatGPT, and they came out almost identical. Everything that was said in this report would have been a preview of what the Auditor General did.

I have a couple of questions around Assistant Commissioner Blackmore, because she was the commanding officer in Saskatchewan and she was very well liked. Do you think some secrecy around her removal has caused some recruitment issues in Saskatchewan?

Commr Michael Duheme: I will say two things, and I do want to go back to your first question on flexible posting. I want to highlight the fact, because I made the decision regarding flexible posting based on—

Warren Steinley: Thank you for that.

Commr Michael Duheme: —my trips across Canada when retention was becoming an issue. There were some success stories with regard to flexible postings. We're returning people back to their respective provinces and territories.

The challenges we had were with Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Those were the challenges and we're addressing them right now with changes.

Warren Steinley: That's fair.

Commr Michael Duheme: With regard to Assistant Commissioner Blackmore, I'm not aware that it had an impact on the specific recruiting strategy we had in F Division or Saskatchewan.

Warren Steinley: Assistant Commissioner Blackmore did have a strong following in Saskatchewan around some reserves. She jumped in the car a couple of times and did some shifts so that people would have some time off.

When was the last time you were in a car? I'm just curious.

Commr Michael Duheme: Well, define a car.

Warren Steinley: Done a shift, my friend, done a shift....

Commr Michael Duheme: I haven't done shift work for quite some time, but I'm also conscious that if I get into a car and if I get involved in an incident, I can be compelled to go to court. When you go to court, there's not just the incident itself. It could be much broader than just the incident itself.

Warren Steinley: I appreciate that. There's a young man in northern Saskatchewan.... I think you're aware of this. I can't believe it actually happened. A junior officer worked 42 shifts in a row, and with no time off, no nothing. This is something that really needs to be looked at. How does this happen?

Commr Michael Duheme: Well, this is the first I've heard about it. I'd be more than happy to raise it—

Warren Steinley: Are you sure about that?

Commr Michael Duheme: If it was shared with me verbally years ago, I'm not quite sure, but in front of this, I do not recall being briefed about someone working 42 days in a row. I will be happy to raise this with Assistant Commissioner Robin McNeil, who is the new commanding officer there, and who, by the way, is doing an excellent job of getting out in the communities and knowing these people. I'd be more than happy to.

I would say doing 42 shifts in a row is unacceptable. I know for a fact that Robin has put measures in place to have pools of people to support different detachments such as Pelican Narrows. When the crime rate went up, he mobilized people within the division and asked throughout the country if we could mobilize members to come and help.

Warren Steinley: I appreciate that.

Have you ever seen a video that Rhonda Blackmore did about morale in the RCMP?

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, I did see that. The video itself was pertaining more to the shortage of resources in the division.

Warren Steinley: I appreciate that. I highlight it because I think the RCMP is trying to do a lot, and you guys did have some budget cuts this year once again. Trying to make the RCMP do more with less is something that.... We can find savings in other areas rather than do that with our RCMP.

The Liberal government is promoting this as 1,000 officers. That's not true. The Liberal government is trying to cut your budgets and make you do more with less in your budgets. What I'm trying to get at, Commissioner, is the fact that we need to be honest about what's going on with the RCMP. We need to be honest about how we're going to make sure that we protect our streets and keep them safe. It's not that the frontline officers aren't doing the best they can. It's that they're being asked to do more with less, and I really want to make that point clear today.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

There's no question. Do you have a response?

Commr Michael Duheme: Just very quickly, on the question itself, I'm not wanting to play politics, but in the last round of the comprehensive expenditure review, most government departments were tasked with a 15% reduction. The RCMP was tasked with only a 2% reduction. I will say that none of those reductions were

done in contract provinces. They were all absorbed here in national headquarters.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Mr. Osborne, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Tom Osborne (Cape Spear—Mount Pearl—Paradise, Lib.): I want to explore the flexible posting plan for a moment and look at both sides of this plan. There has been some success after eliminating this plan in terms of the first two quarters. Can you talk about whether you're continuing to see a positive trend as a result of removing the flexible posting plan?

Commr Michael Duheme: I want to go back to when the flexible posting plan was put in place. This was to address attrition, but it was also to address one of the recommendations of the MCC report, wherein the organization was criticized for members being in areas and not knowing the provincial history, the area and whatnot.

When you combine the attrition rate with how most people joining the RCMP at the time were, on average, 29 years old, coming out of school or having families, that's why our numbers shot from 15,000 or 17,000 to 20,000 interested applicants for two years in a row. We were bringing people back to their respective provinces and whatnot.

We became conscious and realized over time that it impacted specific divisions. A division is a province or territory. It impacted Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories and the territory of Nunavut. At one point, we reset the flexible posting. With anybody who was coming into the organization through the recruiting process and was interested in going to Saskatchewan or Manitoba, we'd fast-track them through the process. They wouldn't skip any steps, but they'd be fast-tracked through the process and posted directly to Saskatchewan or Manitoba.

I can share with you that since we changed this.... I was talking with the commanding officer of Manitoba, and he is now in a position whereby he can release regular members and put frontline patrol members on specialized units within his division, because he's seen an increase in people in his division.

There are some adjustments. I recognize some of the issues—I'm not going to say "damage"—that were encountered by some of the divisions, but we adjusted. Right now, when someone comes through, we explain our operational needs, but we're also flexible. If we can send someone back home to their province, we'll send them back home.

British Columbia is a good example in which the cost of living is higher than in most parts of Canada. The commanding officer and I.... I have always told him that if he can load 32 people in a troop, we'll send them all back to British Columbia.

Tom Osborne: I wanted to explore this side of the flexible posting plan as well. The Auditor General identified the success of the flexible posting plan, although it was a double-edged sword. It proved to be very successful in many areas of the country, but in some areas of the country, it created a critical shortage.

At some point, will the RCMP revisit that plan because of its success? If it does, how do you address the fact that there was a critical shortage in certain areas? How do we attract people to those areas, if you're looking at something like the flexible posting plan again?

Commr Michael Duheme: Adam mentioned it earlier: The world of policing right now is highly competitive. There's recruiting going on, and it's challenging, regardless of what police force you are. This is not only in Canada. I meet with the Five Eyes partners, and they're feeling the same thing when it comes to recruiting people.

To go back to your question, the importance of having a flexible.... We have good candidates. Because they can't move somewhere.... Is that enough for us to say we can't put them through training because they don't want to move somewhere in Canada?

The other thing I want to highlight is that if you look at the province of B.C., it was having challenges with staffing the northern part of B.C. It came out with a specific strategy for staffing the north of British Columbia.

It would be foolish for me to say that if you go to the Depot, you'll serve everywhere in Canada when that strategy.... How are we going to enforce that strategy? The whole strategy is having people from the northern part of B.C. going back to the northern part of B.C., so we can ensure that we meet our commitments when it comes to police officers.

• (1210)

The Chair: You have about 10 seconds. You can use them if you have a short question.

Tom Osborne: Let me use the 10 seconds. I'll ask questions when I come back.

I wanted to thank the Auditor General. Oftentimes, people look at your reports as finding what the government is doing wrong or what agencies are doing wrong, but really you look at how we can do things better and serve Canadians better.

I also wanted to thank the RCMP and your members. First responders in the country don't always get the praise and recognition they deserve, so I will recognize the work you're doing, and the work of your members as well.

I'll ask more questions when it comes back to my turn.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Osborne.

[Translation]

Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Hogan, I'm going to summarize a few key points from your audit. Roughly speaking, in 2023, the RCMP was short 3,000 offi-

cers. The RCMP had recruitment problems because it hadn't planned its needs properly. Is that correct?

Karen Hogan: We found that the RCMP did not consider its needs across the organization. It really focused on one element, namely, front line police officers in contract policing. These are the experienced police officers in that group who, later on, occupy other federal positions. It is therefore essential to look at the situation across the RCMP, not just one element.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: You've noted that the recruitment and resource problem, particularly in the field, poses risks to the RCMP's ability to maintain its operational capacity as a police force.

Karen Hogan: I would like to qualify that a bit. It isn't a recruitment problem, because there are a lot of applicants. The problem was that the applications weren't being processed in a timely manner, to the point where many people were leaving or abandoning the process. We're hopeful that accelerated recruitment will make it possible to increase the number of individuals invited to participate in training.

Also, when you set a target that is much lower than the needs, it guarantees that you will never be able to fill all the necessary positions.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: The exact number of positions required is 3,000. Is that correct?

Karen Hogan: We estimated that number to be 3,400, taking attrition into account as well. This doesn't just include positions that are actually vacant; we also need to plan for people to leave in the future.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

Mr. Duheme, in her 2023 report, the Auditor General mentioned 3,400 positions. In October 2026, three years later, the government is announcing only 1,000. I'm going to do a mathematical calculation, without taking attrition into account. If I subtract 1,000 from 3,400, that's 2,400.

Is there a risk today that you won't be able to maintain your operational capacity if you're recruiting only 1,000 officers?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would say two things about the statistics that have been presented. When I look at the staffing level in the country, I mainly look at unfilled vacancies. If they're unfilled, it means that there's money for a position but that no one is occupying it. The percentage is lower than the one Ms. Hogan presented, because there are various factors. There are various unfilled positions that Ms. Hogan's speech takes into account.

I have a duty to ensure public safety across the country. The Government of Canada has contracts with the provinces throughout Canada, with the exception of Ontario and Quebec. I have to respect those contracts, which require me to keep people safe.

As I said in my opening remarks, and as Ms. Hogan mentioned, the problem we're facing dates back to 2018. Measures are in place to improve the system, attract the right people and ensure that the staffing process—from when someone enters the RCMP office to when they leave depot—lasts a maximum of six months.

The Chair: There we are. Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. McCauley, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Kelly McCauley: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, walk me through this discrepancy between the figure of 1,000 new officers that has been repeatedly stated and what you were saying earlier. Minister after minister has said it would be 1,000 new officers. You were saying that it will be 750, but of those, 350 are going to be internal transfers from contract to specialized. Did I hear that right?

• (1215)

Commr Michael Duheme: We're using the term "officers." My mandate is for 750 police officers over three years and 250 additional personnel with the special expertise to support the federal policing. For the 350 in the first year, that calculation is based—

Kelly McCauley: I'm sorry. Let's back up.

Of the 750, are those contract workers and the specialized personnel, or are they purely...?

Commr Michael Duheme: They're purely police officers. Let's call them "investigators." They have different skill sets.

Out of those 750, the first-year commitment is 350 police officers. Out of that 350 number, in the last couple of years, we've been averaging about 100 to 150 experienced police officers. Those are police officers from other police departments who choose to join the RCMP. You can rely on these people with their expertise.

Kelly McCauley: Will those be net bodies added?

Commr Michael Duheme: Net bodies...?

Kelly McCauley: The government has promised 1,000 new officers. I don't care about the experience. Is it correct that there are going to be 1,000 net new bodies?

Commr Michael Duheme: There will be 750 net new police officers.

Kelly McCauley: Okay.

They constantly state publicly that they will add 1,000 officers. Have you ever contradicted that or spoken to the Minister of Public Safety and said, "Wait a moment. That's different from my mandate"?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'll be honest. I have not heard the phrase "1,000 new officers".

Kelly McCauley: How did you not hear it? It's probably been stated about 20 or 30 times by senior ministers, including your boss, in the House.

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm not always with every minister. I'm trying to correct—

Kelly McCauley: I'm sorry, Commissioner. Not one of your executives, Mr. Palmer or anyone else, has come up and said, "Hey...." They're very public with this.

I would think that if your mandate is 750 and the government has repeatedly stated 1,000—including your boss, the minister in charge, and the Attorney General—surely someone....

Mr. Palmer, have you never heard this 1,000 number?

How has no one gone to you and said, "Hey, boss...?"

A/Commr Adam Palmer: It's 1,000 personnel: 750 police officers and 250—

Kelly McCauley: They stated publicly 1,000 officers.

A/Commr Adam Palmer: I've heard both being used in the media. I don't know who to attribute that to, but I have heard both being used in the media.

Kelly McCauley: It's many ministers: the public safety minister, the Attorney General, the Treasury Board president, who is responsible for the money.... That's who you can attribute it to.

A/Commr Adam Palmer: It is 1,000 personnel. It's 1,000 people, but the devil is in the details, because it is 750 police officers and 250 public service employees.

Kelly McCauley: The devil is certainly in the details.

Were you consulted before the 750 were added to your mandate?

I ask because, since 2018, as has been identified in the Auditor General's report, we've known there's a recruitment issue. Were you consulted before they decided to add the 750?

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, Mr. Chair, I was consulted. The team and I.... The human resources team and the federal policing team got together, did a number crunch and felt comfortable with the mandates being given.

Kelly McCauley: How do you feel comfortable with that when the Auditor General's report states you're short 2,700? When I read "Key facts and findings" in the report, it says that the RCMP "did not know how many new police officers it needed to hire to fully staff the force".

How can you be comfortable with a mandate to add 750 when you don't even know how many you need to fulfill your mandate to serve Canadians?

Commr Michael Duheme: As I tried to explain earlier, for the first target for the first year—which is 350—the organization was relying on three things: experienced police officers coming into the organization, anywhere between 100 and 150; the closing down of the Surrey detachment, where we had a couple of hundred people; and Grande Prairie. There would be a minimal impact on the front line.

Kelly McCauley: [Inaudible—Editor] the key fact that the Auditor General has written in the report under "Key facts and findings" that the RCMP doesn't "know how many...officers it [needs]...to fully staff the force"?

Commr Michael Duheme: I said in my introduction that I accept the recommendations the Auditor General has made. I also said that we are working towards a new system that's digitalized; data-wise, it's easier to get the information that's required.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

The time is up, Mr. McCauley.

Ms. Tesser Derksen, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Kristina Tesser Derksen (Milton East—Halton Hills South, Lib.): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks so much for being here today, everyone. It's great to be back.

Welcome to new members.

I want to thank the RCMP for all the work they do. It's a challenging time to be in policing. That's one of the reasons our government invested in hiring new RCMP positions back in the 2025 budget, a budget that our opposition colleagues, unfortunately and most regrettably, refused to support last November. That was a month after the leader of the official opposition made some rather unfortunate comments about our national police force, but that's in the past. Let's move on.

I want to ask the Auditor General and her team my first question.

I want to note that it seems as though there may be a time misalignment between the release of your report, Auditor General, and the national recruitment strategy. I think they were maybe crossing timelines a bit. Is that a fair comment? It was, maybe, three days before or after.

Karen Hogan: I believe the national recruitment strategy was updated a few days before we released our report, yes.

Kristina Tesser Derksen: I mention it only because it's important for context that this information was coming out around the same time.

Auditor General, paragraph 28 of your report notes that you “found that the RCMP did not use the human resources data it had to set [the] targets” for new recruitment and that human resources instead based recruitment targets on the amount of funding it had.

I'd like you to expand on this. To me, it doesn't seem as though aligning capacity of the task to match cost and funding is a terrible business decision, but because this is a matter of public safety, it's a bit of a different discussion.

Can you talk to me about that misalignment of targets and recruits as a problem of funding?

Karen Hogan: As the commissioner mentioned, there are contract agreements with provinces. A good place to start is to know you've made an agreement between a province and a territory and know how many police officers you need.

The way the RCMP staffs other areas outside the contract and indigenous policing is they take experienced officers there and move them. You have to think not just about the hard vacancy rates you have in your contracting line of business but about all the other va-

cancy rates, because that's the feeder pool. We would have expected all of that to be considered and then also to have attrition layered in. Police officers will be ill. They will take leave. They will leave and retire. You have to plan for this. We found that they were basing the recruitment targets on their capacity at Depot and the amount of funding they had for training, and that was well below the actual needs.

When you're not meeting the target and you're already starting below the target, you're lining yourself up to never be able to meet your actual needs or to make it a very long pathway to get there.

Kristina Tesser Derksen: Thanks for that clarification.

I'll go over to the commissioner. I read the national recruitment strategy with a lot of interest. It notes that there's a need to define and target those whom the RCMP needs to hire and that the RCMP needs to hire “the right people” to “meet the needs of Contract and Federal Policing and develop a comprehensive approach to workforce planning”. This is on page 7 of the strategy.

You also note at page 14 that there are current challenges not necessarily in the number of applicants but in the quality of applicants relative to what the RCMP needs. You note attributes, skills, fitness and those sorts of things.

There's also a bit of talk about diversity of the force reflecting Canadians, particularly with respect to indigenous and bilingual applicants or recruits and other under-represented groups. It's really important that the force reflect Canada.

[Translation]

That's a very important thing.

[English]

I'd like to know a little more. Maybe we'll focus specifically on the indigenous folks. How do you see the indigenous recruitment strategy possibly helping you with recruitment targets in places where it is difficult to fill vacancies, like the north, for example?

Commr Michael Duheme: Thank you for the question.

I'll go with hiring the right people. That's what we want to do. Right now we're seeing an attrition rate at Depot, which is our training facility, that's not comparable with other law enforcement. This is a concern for us, because the initial point of entry is where we have to be really convinced that the people we're moving through the process are the right people, people we believe will successfully graduate from Depot.

I believe the indigenous strategy will be coming out in March 2027. We have a first nations, indigenous, Métis and Inuit strategy coming out. It was developed with key stakeholders. It was also developed in my national advisory committee.

There are a lot of things going on, especially when we look at the north. The north has such a small basin of people we can recruit from. For instance, if you look at the StatsCan data for Nunavut—I think the last time it was entered was in 2021—for the 20-to-30-year-old age group, there are only about 5,000 people in there, so this sometimes makes it challenging.

When I look at some of the programs, we have successful ones. There is one called DICE, which is the diverse and inclusive precadet experience. We bring in people from different walks of life, different experiences, different ethnicities and different backgrounds. They come in and we expose them to policing for three weeks. We currently have 1,800 applicants in the process. Out of those, we've had eight DICE troops and 229 graduates so far. This is done at Depot. There are 28 DICE graduates who are now serving police officers, and 11 are currently enrolled in the cadet program. This exposes them....

We do the same thing with regard to the indigenous applicants. They can go through DICE, but there's also the indigenous precadet training program, which is a period of three weeks at Depot that exposes the people to what policing is all about.

The challenge—

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you. I'm going to stop you there because we're well over, but you've opened up several lines of questions and inquiry. I'm sure there will be more questions to drill down into.

We will begin our third round now, with five individuals and various times.

Mr. Stevenson, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for attending. I always enjoy having Ms. Hogan and her team here, but I'm going to focus my questions on the RCMP.

To start, I'll go down a similar path of questioning to Ms. Tesser Derksen's and ask about some of the training.

The auditor's report said that the number of recruits you were going to train was determined by your capacity to train them at Depot. Was there a conscious decision as to how many you were going to train at the time, or was it just the reality of what you could do, Mr. Duheme?

Commr Michael Duheme: Thank you for the question.

To put things in context, there's a set funding for Depot, for training people. We are funded to train 1,280 cadets annually. This would be 40 troops of 32 people per troop. That's the capacity right now at Depot. We must remember that, if I increase—

William Stevenson: You had the funds, but you didn't have the trainers, apparently, to get them trained. Is that not correct?

Commr Michael Duheme: Quite honestly, we did not fill every single troop to 32. That was one of the challenges.

William Stevenson: This was in the report we've seen.

Commr Michael Duheme: This has stemmed from the whole review of the recruiting process that we're doing, but also the curriculum and the environment at Depot, of which we're doing an extensive review to make sure that we have everything lined up to be a modern-day police force.

William Stevenson: When an officer is trained, who decides where that officer is going to be stationed? How do you prioritize to say, "Twenty of them are going to Alberta; 16 are going to Saskatchewan"? How does that determination get made?

Commr Michael Duheme: In March 2027 we'll have a new process. It will be easier to track all the vacant positions and transfers. Right now the system we have doesn't really meet the requirements. What we have right now is an HR office out of Depot, and from there the commanding officers from each province and division will call in and ask for certain cadets. They will say how many vacancies they have, how many cadets they require.

William Stevenson: If they ask for 2,000, you have to make a choice, or somebody has to make a choice. I just want to know, how and where is that choice being made?

Commr Michael Duheme: Most of the choices are being made through conversations with the HR process, depending on the urgency. Right now, as I mentioned earlier, anybody coming in who wants to go to Saskatchewan or Manitoba is fast-tracked through the process: They're going there and they know it.

William Stevenson: I had a recent conversation with an RCMP officer on the ground. In one of my local areas, there are two indigenous reserves, and they were allocated, for their offices, two officers per reserve. Previously, in the spring, we had a report that said indigenous policing was chronically understaffed. Can you tell me where that number of...or how there are only two per...allocated? I believe they had nine others, so they had 13 in this one station, and two were allocated for each of the reserves. Can you tell me how they came up with that number and who made that decision?

• (1230)

Commr Michael Duheme: To put things in context, we have 700 detachments across the country, and we serve over 600 indigenous communities. I am not familiar with the example that you're providing, but we do have, through Public Safety, community tripartite agreements that are signed with the community. Those community tripartite agreements specify the number of police officers that are supposed to be assigned.

William Stevenson: Would you say this was a local request to allocate 13 for the one detachment, and it was four for the two reserves?

Commr Michael Duheme: My understanding is it's specifically for, as you referred to it, the community, the reserve, but I'll have to follow up because it could be.... If you give me specifics, I'd be more than happy to follow up. We have close to 150 community tripartite agreements across the country, and through those agreements we determine how many people are working in the indigenous communities or assigned to indigenous communities.

William Stevenson: I'll go to a slightly different question. Albertans are looking to increase their number of sheriffs. You're to renew—I think in 2030 or 2031—the RCMP part of it. What kind of sales pitch are you going to have to say, “You need to keep the RCMP in Alberta”? There are a lot of rural areas that are not necessarily going to say this is what they need.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stevenson.

I'll allow an answer, please.

Commr Michael Duheme: How long do I have for a sales pitch?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Commr Michael Duheme: Thank you for the question. I'll be really brief.

You have to look at what one entity can bring to Canada. We could cover 70% of Canada's land mass but only about 23% of the population. I can mobilize, at a moment's notice, resources from across the country to come help out. We saw it at the G7 that took place in Alberta. We mobilized resources from across the country to go there. There's strength in numbers. I will say that there are a lot of good police organizations throughout...but we have something to offer that many can't, and it's that power to mobilize people, at a moment's notice, across the country.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

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

Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here today. It's good to see you all again.

I want to give a particular welcome to Assistant Commissioner Palmer, who advised me that he hails from Coquitlam. As the member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, I certainly welcome him here.

I want to start by drilling into the 1,000 new personnel accommodated in our last budget.

Commissioner, you mentioned 750 frontline officers and 250 special personnel. Could you please clarify what those 250 people do? Are they a sort of investigator? Are they forensic professionals or whatever?

Commr Michael Duheme: Briefly, it's a breadth of expertise that we're looking for, from the IT component to intel in terms of intel analysts. I don't have a set description of all the different skill sets we're looking for. It's anyone who brings a special skill set that will help advance our federal policing investigations and mandates.

Ron McKinnon: Thank you, but to me, that all adds up to 1,000 people.

Commr Michael Duheme: This is a good way of saying that it's 1,000 people we're getting in the door.

Ron McKinnon: Excellent. Thank you.

Are any of these 250 special people doing any kind of policing, or are they in supporting roles?

Commr Michael Duheme: They'll be predominantly in supporting roles with regard to the mandate of federal policing.

Ron McKinnon: Basically, they make the work of the 750 officers and others much more effective.

Commr Michael Duheme: If you look at your cellphone, it's a mini computer now. I can't stress enough the special skill sets we need to support the frontline officers.

Ron McKinnon: I'll segue away from that and talk more about your new recruiting strategy. You mentioned that one thing you're doing is recruiting from “other jurisdictions”. Does that mean other police forces? What do you mean by other jurisdictions?

• (1235)

Commr Michael Duheme: This practice has been well under way in many police forces. In the RCMP it started probably five or six years ago. A good example is that my good colleague, Mr. Adam Palmer, was the chief of police in Vancouver for 10 years. He is well respected in Canadian law enforcement, as well as in international law enforcement. I'm happy to have him in charge of this whole new recruiting transformation.

As I said, we offer certain opportunities that other police forces, because of their size and because of the mandate, are not exposed to. This in itself is attractive to some of the people. Again, in the last couple of years we're averaging anywhere from between about 100 to 150 coming to join the RCMP. Adam can get into the details of what takes place once they come in. There is a training process. We've expanded this to peace officers. Peace officers would be sheriffs, marshals, conservation officers, fisheries officers and CB-SA officers. We want to bring a breadth of diversity and experience into the organization.

Ron McKinnon: When you recruit from other jurisdictions in this way, I should think that there's a certain cultural difference between those police forces and the RCMP. Does this add an additional complexity to the training?

Commr Michael Duheme: Perhaps I'll ask Adam to answer. He went through the training.

A/Commr Adam Palmer: Thank you for the question.

This is an important point, because it goes toward the multiple pathways we're looking at coming into the RCMP. As the commissioner mentioned, it's a very competitive policing environment. There are about 194 different police agencies in Canada. Everybody is taking from one another. This has been going on for many years. People will take people from the RCMP when it's appealing for individual members, and we will take people from other police services.

What we have to offer is over 150 different specialties in the RCMP. We have mobility and the ability to do local, national and international assignments. We offer things that no other police service in Canada does. Over the past three and a half years, we've hired over 600 experienced police officers from various jurisdictions across Canada.

As the commissioner mentioned, we're starting a new program that I will say no other police service in Canada is doing. We'll be the first in the country. We'll be fast-tracking peace officers into the RCMP in an expedited process. If you are a sheriff, conservation officer, wildlife officer or that type of thing, with firearms training and legal studies on use of force and those types of things, you have a skill set that we're looking for in the RCMP. We can train you now in a shorter curriculum. Because of the knowledge, skills and abilities you bring, we can train you in 14 weeks instead of 26 weeks.

We're also leveraging alternate sites so that we don't take up capacity at Depot. We'll be using our Pacific region training centre in Chilliwack, which is a world-class training facility. We're also looking at leveraging other sites we have, such as the Canadian Police College. We will bring people in as new cadets. We will bring in experienced police officers and experienced peace officers. We're the first in Canada to do that, and we're very proud of this prospect.

Ron McKinnon: Great. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Duheme, I have an important question: Does the RCMP currently have the necessary staff to carry out its various mandates in Quebec?

Commr Michael Duheme: If you ask any chief of police, they will tell you that we never have the necessary staff. Indeed, we always want to do more. However, we also have a duty to manage risk and ensure that resources are deployed in the right place at the right time.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Speaking of risk, I'd like to quote one of your colleagues from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police,

Daniel Dubois. As the acting non-commissioned officer responsible for border patrol in Champlain, Quebec, he's the one ensuring border security at Roxham Road with his team. I think you're very familiar with this issue. He says that the closure of Roxham Road has now made it more difficult to control irregular crossings, because people have to cross along the entire border instead of going through one crossing.

From a strictly operational standpoint, are you suggesting that the government change the entry point? Do you recommend re-opening Roxham Road to facilitate intervention?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would say that the statistics I get each week show that fewer people are being intercepted between ports of entry than before. The Government of Canada has invested \$660 million in the RCMP to improve technology, resource deployment and drones to protect the borders. I would say that the number of people crossing between ports of entry is lower and that people are no longer there at Roxham Road. I would say that it was problematic before because it was well known, and people could cross at that location.

● (1240)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: That wasn't the question.

Say that there's either one point to intercept people or 147 points, for example. Which is easier?

Commr Michael Duheme: If we agreed that everyone goes through that point, that's one thing. However, people were also crossing between ports of entry at various locations in the country, not just at Roxham Road.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: You don't agree with what your colleague is saying, then. According to him, it's more difficult to contain irregular crossings because people are entering everywhere, whereas they used to enter at one location.

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, that's for sure, if we claim that everyone was coming through at one location. However, based on the information I had at the time, I can tell you that people weren't crossing only at Roxham Road, if we're talking solely about Quebec.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: From 2017 to 2023, 113,000 asylum seekers passed through one location. How many are currently crossing via the rest of the border in Quebec?

Commr Michael Duheme: I can give you the number of people who have been apprehended in the past year, but I'm unable to give you the total number. I can get back to you later with the number of people we have apprehended between ports of entry.

[English]

The Chair: We'll look for those. Thank you very much.

Mr. Falk, welcome back to public accounts.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses.

Thank you, Auditor General, for this report and the work you've done.

Commissioner, I'd like to begin with you.

Folks in my riding—and I'm served well by D Division—are proud of the RCMP, and I think Canadians in general are proud of our police force. It's to your credit, all of you, that it is this way. I'm wondering, sir, how long you have been an RCMP member.

Commr Michael Duheme: Come February, it will be 40 years.

Ted Falk: Thank you for your service.

Do you enjoy police work or administration more?

Commr Michael Duheme: You forgot to include politics in that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Commr Michael Duheme: You realize as you move up in ranks that there's an administrative portion. I understand some of the administrative burden that it's putting on the front line, in which people are spending more time in the office than on the road.

We're hoping that with our data plan going forward, we can minimize that. It is a complaint I hear when I travel across the country. It's about how long it sometimes takes for our frontline people to fill out certain forms, and while they're filling out the forms, they're not on the roads patrolling them.

Ted Falk: Are you proud of this audit report?

Commr Michael Duheme: Am I proud? I'd be crazy to say “proud”, but not surprised.

Not surprised, but we knew there were issues from 2018. When you look at the numbers before COVID and after COVID, there's a significant difference. I've said this. I truly believe that the organization relied on people wanting to join the RCMP pre-COVID, and when COVID hit, with different career aspirations, we saw a dip. I don't think we came out of the gates fast enough.

Ted Falk: Okay. I can appreciate that answer.

I'm looking at the information. It was 2018 for the last audit, and then in 2023 you had that internal report, which is almost mirrored again in the Auditor General's report. There have been three years in which improvement could have been possible, but it didn't happen.

It looks to me as though there's an administrative failure. One of the really telling comments in the report is the Auditor General's noting that you really had no idea of how many new individuals, new officers, you needed to hire. This, to me, was a very disappointing read that you didn't know. To me, it speaks to administration and not enough emphasis put on the administration of the force.

You indicated that you agreed with the Auditor General's recommendations. Do you also agree with her observations?

Commr Michael Duheme: For the most part, as I said earlier, I agree with all the recommendations that were brought forward. The only difference is when it comes to vacancies and the total capacity of Depot, but I accept the general recommendations.

Ted Falk: We live in a very instant society and world, in which we have credit cards, we have pre-approved credit and we have microwaves. However, people have to wait 330 days to find out if their application has been accepted. Do you not find it a bit odd that the process takes this long?

Can you tell me, is it because of budget constraints?

Commr Michael Duheme: It has nothing to do with budget constraints. It has to do with leadership. It has to do with people being comfortable doing things a certain way.

That's why, since I've been in the chair, as of 2023, we've looked at the whole recruiting process from the entry point to Depot. We scaled it back down. Not seeing a significant improvement in it, this is why we.... This is a very centralized process, which the commanding officers across the country have little involvement in. This is why we started Project Red Serge out of British Columbia and the Yukon.

We're streamlining the process. We're going to get this down to six months, 180 days, which is acceptable for our standards, and then look at the model we have, because the centralized model right now is a single point of failure. It's a choke point right at the central point. If that had to break, the whole process would break, so we're looking at getting the commanding officers more involved in the whole recruiting process.

• (1245)

Ted Falk: One of the observations of the AG was that the diversity priorities set by the department or by the government created a problem in recruitment. Would you agree with this?

Commr Michael Duheme: When we go through the recruiting process, we don't look at the individual, the gender and whatnot. We want to get the right people in the door to do the work.

We have statistics when it comes to gender diversity and whatnot. The last numbers I saw.... When you look at women versus men, women, I think, are at 21% or 22%. It was close to there.

Ted Falk: You wouldn't agree with her conclusion, then, that it's created a problem and that you've moved away from this.

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm not aware of whether it created a problem.

Karen and her team did the work. They did fantastic work. However, I'm not aware that there were any holdbacks or delays because of the priorities. We understand the priorities. We want to ensure that we police communities and that the police in communities are reflective of the community they serve.

Ted Falk: The report also says the classrooms were not filled to capacity. In fact, 16% of attendees in those classes weren't able to complete the course because there weren't enough courses offered in a timely manner.

Is this because of leadership at Depot or is it because of other reasons?

Commr Michael Duheme: The main reason there are vacancies in some of the classrooms is our inability to fill the troops up to 32 cadets per troop.

The Chair: Thank you. That is the time.

[Translation]

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

Daniel Gobeil (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is my first meeting. I'm pleased to join the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. This is my first week on the Hill.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their various reports.

Mr. Duheme, I would like to hear from you again. My colleague who spoke before me touched on the diversity targets for women, indigenous people and so on. I'd like you to tell us again about the targets set out in your recruitment strategy.

You mentioned 350 new hires this year. Do these targets fall within the rates you were hoping to achieve to bring diversity to the communities?

Commr Michael Duheme: The target of 350 is for federal policing. The mandate is a bit different from that of the uniformed police in communities. However, I'm a firm believer in diversity within the organization. The organization is stronger when there's a certain diversity, but also when there's diversity at the executive table, or when any executive in the organization represents that diversity.

Daniel Gobeil: Okay.

Can this diversity give you opportunities to fill vacant positions in certain regions of Canada or in various locations?

Commr Michael Duheme: I wouldn't limit myself to the issue of diversity. The challenge we face—and are currently addressing—is really the journey, from start to finish, of someone who offers their services to the organization. In short, it comes down to that. It's about improving the entry point because we're losing too many people at depot. The attrition rate at depot varies between 15% and 20%.

Imagine the following: There's a capacity for 1,200 cadets to graduate in a year. If we take 15% to 20% of that away, that's money out the window because we didn't do a good job from the outset of identifying the right people, those we believe have the right skills and core values needed to become police officers.

• (1250)

Daniel Gobeil: Thank you very much.

There was talk about surveillance earlier. You mentioned drones. How long have new technologies been used at the border to support the RCMP's work?

Commr Michael Duheme: The government made an initial investment of \$660 million for the borders a long time ago. That immediately enabled us to mobilize helicopters, improve the drone program that we have within the organization and deploy additional staff and technology.

We have also been able to deploy technology to ensure compatibility with our neighbours to the south, the U.S. Border Patrol, with whom we have an excellent relationship. We work together with that organization across the country.

Daniel Gobeil: Okay. I would like to make one last comment to congratulate you. We were talking about 20,000 hiring requests. Yes, we think there's room for improvement in terms of timelines, but when I hear about six-month timelines and a four-month target, I think there's still important work being done. We want this to continue over the coming years with your target and your plan, which is still very ambitious.

That will be all from me today. Thank you.

Commr Michael Duheme: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member for his comments.

I can say that the organization, the senior executive committee of the RCMP, is well aware. Commanding officers in each division know that the priority is recruitment. If we don't hire the right people, if we can't attract the right people to the organization, we're working for nothing.

I can also tell you that I have been a member of the organization's executive committee for at least 15 years, and this is the first time I have been excited about recruitment, because a process is being changed, finally, and we're seeing concrete results in terms of progress on the changes.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to begin the fourth round, and then I'm going to have a truncated fifth round. I have all the members in order. We'll get out of here at about 1:22. That's just for everyone's planning purposes.

Mr. Hallan, you have the floor for five minutes, please. It's nice to see you.

Jasraj Hallan: Thank you, Chair. It's an honour to be on this committee.

Ms. Hogan, thank you and your team for the incredible work on this report.

I'd like to start with the commissioner. Commissioner, the government promised 1,000 new RCMP personnel. The Auditor General says we need around 3,400 new frontline officers. You've stated that it's about 750 in the next three years. Do you think that's enough?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm sorry. What's the last number you said before you said "that's enough"?

Jasraj Hallan: You claimed at this committee that you'll have 750 officers hired in the next three years. Do you think that's enough?

Commr Michael Duheme: It's important to highlight that the 750 police officers will be dedicated strictly to federal policing, which is a mandate that no other law enforcement covers.

Jasraj Hallan: Do you think the 1,000 target that the government has set is enough?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would say I welcome the investment, because we haven't seen an investment of this nature in federal policing for a number of years.

Jasraj Hallan: Is it enough?

Commr Michael Duheme: If you ask any chief of police if it's enough, it's never enough, because we always want to do more.

Jasraj Hallan: That's fair. I would agree with that.

Commissioner, the Auditor General also found that your recruitment target was set by available funding, not by operational needs. Who set the funding level? Was it the RCMP or was it the government?

Commr Michael Duheme: When it comes to the funding of our cadets who go to Depot, the funding model is also a split share with contracted provinces. The provinces and territories have about 30% of the funding that goes in there, so you look at—

Jasraj Hallan: My question was, who set that funding? The Auditor General says the number was also set by the funding, not for the operational needs. Who set that?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm speculating, but I'm pretty sure that the force gen was submitted through the organization to government, based on our capacity to bring people in and improve the number of troops we have.

Jasraj Hallan: Okay. The government gave that number.

Commr Michael Duheme: It was based on our recommendation...which provides \$214.1 million to support the efforts of force generation.

Jasraj Hallan: Did you ever tell the minister that the number of officers they've promised is not enough?

• (1255)

Commr Michael Duheme: No. The simple fact is that we understand the context we're in. Our obligation with frontline policing is federal. It's a first-time investment of 1,000 people within federal policing. We welcome the news.

Jasraj Hallan: Given this Auditor General's report saying that we're at less than half what we need and what the government has promised, will you tell the minister that we don't have enough?

Commr Michael Duheme: The minister is well aware of the Auditor General's report. I did have a sit-down with him when it first came out. I want to be clear that the Auditor General's report is really focused on the frontline policing side of things and not necessarily on the federal policing side of things.

Jasraj Hallan: Exactly, but we're still well short of that.

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, we are. The measures we're taking in place to accelerate recruiting and accelerate people, and the review that's being done at Depot to see if we can—

Jasraj Hallan: Are you able to table since last year and up until now how many have been recruited? Just give us a breakdown, month by month, of how many new recruits have been hired.

Commr Michael Duheme: I can share with you that—

Jasraj Hallan: If you could, table that to the committee. I have only a limited amount of time—

Commr Michael Duheme: Just to be clear—

Jasraj Hallan: Can you commit to that?

Commr Michael Duheme: So that it's clear, I'll commit to giving you the last three years of the number of applicants, the number of cadets loaded in troops and the number of graduates. I can break it down into applicants—

Jasraj Hallan: Can you also give us the number of rejected applicants?

Commr Michael Duheme: You could factor that in from the cadets that are trooped in the Depot and the ones who graduated.

Jasraj Hallan: Okay. Thank you.

Commissioner, you said to this committee in your opening statement about diversity that it's a priority for you guys for staffing. In the Auditor General's report, nine out of 11 divisions are below critical staffing. Was diversity a higher or lower priority when you were trying to fill vacancies?

Commr Michael Duheme: Diversity always remains a priority. I can share with you that—

Jasraj Hallan: Is it higher up on the priority for you when you're hiring or is it lower?

Commr Michael Duheme: I don't think it's shifted, other than it has always been a priority for the organization as we move forward. I can assure you, having gone to Depot several times in the last two years, that in our troops going through Depot, there's more diversity than I've seen when I was there.

Jasraj Hallan: The reason I'm asking is that the Auditor General stated in her report that it was a problem when it came to hiring. Do you recognize what she has said and that it is a problem?

Commr Michael Duheme: I think in a point in time, Karen, in her work that was done.... We've put programs in place to educate people and to sensitize people to what policing is all about. I mentioned the DICE program earlier. There's a similar program for the indigenous.... There's a huge success there; we are exposing people who had little knowledge of it to policing, and they now want to become police officers after three weeks.

Jasraj Hallan: That's fair.

The Chair: I'm afraid that is the time. It goes by. I did give you a couple of seconds while you were negotiating with the commissioner for what would be in the package he's going to send to you. I'm sorry about that.

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

Jean Yip: Following on the same vein, I noticed that your opening statement said increasing “diversity” and that there were some under-represented communities aside from the indigenous communities. What are some of those under-represented communities?

Commr Michael Duheme: Some of them are obvious, as I've shared earlier. When you look at our recruiting for Inuit people, for example, it is a challenge because of the demographics that exist in Nunavut. There's a smaller pool or basin that we can recruit from.

There are efforts going on, and in the first nation, indigenous, Métis and Inuit strategy coming out in March, we are factoring that in. Our commanding officers in both Yukon and in the Northwest Territories, as well as Nunavut, are doing excellent work up there with the communities and their advisory committee, as well as in how we better recruit the people we want.

Jean Yip: Why is the Yukon at 7.9%, versus the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, which have higher percentages?

Commr Michael Duheme: Percentage of....

Jean Yip: Vacancy. It's under exhibit 5.

That's all in the north. Is it because the Yukon has a greater population to select from compared to the other territories?

Commr Michael Duheme: On that note, historically, it has never been a real challenge to get people to go to the Yukon. The others are a bit more challenging because there are more remote postings in the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut has even more. Every detachment in Nunavut—I think there are 23—is a fly-in. You can't drive to them. Iqaluit is the headquarters in Nunavut. Every other detachment is a fly-in detachment.

You can appreciate the fact that when I went through training, a lot of people were seeking a northern adventure—and it was an adventure. It's a good way to be embedded in community policing. It's completely different policing. This sense of adventure is harder and harder...because when people have to mobilize a family, or if they're divorced and have shared custody, it's a challenge sometimes to get people up to the north.

We've developed different strategies to staff some of the northern detachments.

• (1300)

Jean Yip: You spoke about some of the successes associated with the pilot program regarding applications. When will the RCMP fully integrate the pilot program's strengths into the process? How far along are you in the process?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'll let Adam answer that because he hasn't said anything yet.

A/Commr Adam Palmer: Thank you for your question.

The pilot ran from February until August. It is now completed. We will be doing an after action report on the pilot with, I believe, seven recommendations that we want to see implemented force-wide. This will be coming to the commissioner for final approval.

We hope that before the end of the year, we will have those approvals and we will start rolling out the same methodology we used in British Columbia and the Yukon to every province and territory across Canada. It's coming forthwith.

The program I mentioned about the other entry pathway for experienced peace officers begins on October 20. All of these things are right around the corner and happening quickly.

Jean Yip: How do we match up with the Five Eyes in terms of the application process?

A/Commr Adam Palmer: I'm glad you asked me that. We have looked around the Five Eyes: the U.K., New Zealand, Australia, the United States and Canada. We did an extensive review.

In addition to the good review done by the Auditor General, we also did an internal audit review of Five Eyes recruiting in large agencies. We looked at all the big places across Canada that you would think of. We looked at indigenous policing across Canada. We helped find gaps, different ways of doing things better and things we were doing well, but areas we can improve upon. We've implemented all of those areas that we can improve upon.

The biggest one was a hybrid recruiting model, injecting regular members back into the recruiting process with public service employees and using a queueing theory so that we're basically focusing on the high-value applicants.

We found issues with some of our processing steps, such as psychological screening, and ways to improve them to make them more similar to what other police agencies are doing. We're shortening the timeline between steps, being non-linear and concluding a lot of recruiting steps in a short period of time without diminishing the requirements or the quality of applicants coming into the RCMP.

We're doing all of this to make sure that we get really good people into the RCMP in a timely manner to meet our contract obligations, as well as our federal policing obligations.

The Chair: You have time for a shorty.

Jean Yip: What financial barriers are there for recruits?

Commr Michael Duheme: Are you referring to recruits or cadets who go through training?

Jean Yip: You mentioned this in your opening statement.

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, it was with regard to cadets. The financial barrier that was overcome is that when cadets go to Depot, there's an allowance for every two weeks. We were able, through our minister, who's supportive, to double that to, I think, around \$1,200 a month or every two weeks, which is comparable to other police forces across the country.

I mentioned earlier that if you look at the average rate of people coming to Depot, we've heard in the past that people could not go to Depot because they had to keep their job and look after their parents. This is a way to bring us up to par with other police forces and ensure that we can attract more people by having a reasonable allowance for the cadets when they're at Depot.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Duheme, I'd like to come back to the issue of Roxham Road. Its closure has increased the danger at the border. It was your colleague, Sergeant Daniel Dubois, from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who mentioned that. Allow me to quote him. In a recent Radio-Canada article published on September 17, he said that if we're talking from a strictly operational point of view, it's clear that Roxham Road was helping to keep everyone safe. I would like to know what you, as commissioner, think about that.

Have you suggested any concrete measures to the government regarding this issue?

Commr Michael Duheme: When it comes to the Roxham Road issue, the reason the infrastructure was put in place is that, as you know, it had become what I'm going to call a highway to enter Canada. The infrastructure was there. It was well known by the organized groups that were taking people there.

I would point out that the closure took place as part of the agreement with the United States, the Safe Third Country Agreement, which forced Roxham Road to close down.

• (1305)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: We're talking about the Entente sur les tiers pays sûrs, in French.

My question is the following: Do you agree with what your colleague is saying? He says that the closure of Roxham Road had put people in a more unsafe situation, particularly your officers.

Commr Michael Duheme: The question is whether it's necessary to reopen Roxham Road, given the agreement with the Americans that exists nowadays but didn't exist at the time. That's why so many people were attracted to Roxham Road.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'm not talking about the agreement; I'm talking about the security risk. That's your primary mission as an organization—public safety and the safety of your officers. Your colleague mentioned that there's a security risk, because people are now entering from all over and it's more difficult. Allow me to quote him again: He said that they have to search for and locate people lost in the woods, which understandably taxes their own resources.

You're understaffed, you have recruitment issues, and you have to cover a vast border, rather than a single port of entry. You're telling me that's not a problem. Who's telling the truth? Is it you or your colleague Mr. Dubois?

Commr Michael Duheme: There's no doubt that if I close a port of entry that's the main port of entry from the United States to the province of Quebec, people will spread out to other places, and that creates risks. However, I must admit that police work is full of risks. It's necessary to know how to assess risk to ensure that people are working safely.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: What is your recommendation to the government? That's what I want to understand.

Commr Michael Duheme: I have no recommendations to make regarding the reopening of Roxham Road. The agreement with the United States still stands.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

I'm speaking from a strictly operational perspective—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, but you'll have another turn.

Mr. Steinley has the floor next.

[English]

Once again, Mr. Steinley, you have the floor for five minutes.

Warren Steinley: Thank you.

Commissioner, I'm going to read you something. You tell me if it's true or false.

It states, "The RCMP is launching the most significant expansion of federal law enforcement capacity in a generation. Following the Prime Minister's announcement, we are adding 1,000 additional federal policing personnel over three years to our workforce. This could lead to a new and exciting career opportunity for many RCMP personnel.

"Expansion at a glance: 750 regular members; 250 civilian positions, civilian members and/or public service employees. Focus: border security, national security in fighting transnational organized crime, including firearms trafficking, illicit drugs, human trafficking, financial and cybercrime.

"Commanding officers have received releasability targets spanning over two years that will support the timely transfer of regular members to federal policing. Civilian positions, CMs and PSEs will be staffed through external processes and posted on the Government of Canada jobs website. We encourage those interested to check regularly on the GC jobs website for upcoming opportunities.

"Call to action for interested members: Update your career preferences in HRMIS identifying federal policing job codes or preferred postings; check available lateral opportunities; visit the federal policing RM staffing page. If you have any questions on career preferences, job codes or lateral opportunities, contact your divisional career development and resourcing adviser. We are looking to first fill the new positions with employees from within our organization to meet staffing targets for this year. This approach will ensure we retain valuable operational experience, organizational knowledge and leadership ability.

In the RCMP, a project management office will be established to accelerate this initiative across the country. The goal is to hire 350 regular members into federal policing this year. Plans are under way for a new federal policing training designation. More information will be shared on this in the coming weeks."

My question, Commissioner, is this: If you're going to hire 350 regular members into federal policing, how will there be a total of 750 new RCMP officers? You wrote this.

Commr Michael Duheme: I don't recall sending it to you, but you have it.

The 750, as I mentioned, is spread out over three years. The first scale is 350. I committed earlier that if you want to see the target rates for every commanding officer, I'd be more than happy to share this through the secretary of the committee.

Warren Steinley: I know, but I feel as though we're playing semantics. If you're going to hire 350 regular members—this went out to regular members—that takes them off the streets. How does it equal 750 new RCMP officers if you're taking 350? Would it not be a target of 400 new officers?

Commr Michael Duheme: These are a total of 750 new federal positions and, as I mentioned, with that first tranche of 350, the Surrey detachment is closing, from which I can take over 200 people. We took close to 100 people who we put in federal policing. I have, probably, close to 200 to 250 people who have zero impact to the front line. That is zero impact.

I will share with you that, for a number of years, contract policing was being prioritized before anything else, but now the government has turned to federal policing. It has not “incentivized” but invested in federal policing, and it expects us to balance the needs we have. We have two specific mandates. The government has a contract with the provinces and territories and has bolstered the investment into federal policing, which we haven't seen in at least 10 years to 15 years.

• (1310)

Warren Steinley: I understand that Surrey.... Is that not taking people who used to be on the streets and adding them to the federal initiative? I think you're beating around the bush, Commissioner, because I think the total number of new RCMP officers you are going to get to is 400.

Commr Michael Duheme: If we can increase the number of experienced police officers joining the organization....

I want to highlight that I have a responsibility to balance the needs of the organization as well. There are several people who have expressed a desire to come to federal policing, but I also have a responsibility to sit down with the commanding officers to understand the impacts in certain areas. I have two priorities to manage right now. The government is responsible for the contract with regard to frontline policing and federal policing, and we'll drive both priorities forward.

Warren Steinley: I appreciate that—I do—and I thank you for trying to have that balancing act. All I'm saying is that I have a responsibility to Canadians to get to the actual truth. The government promised and said, “We're going to make your streets safer by adding 1,000 new officers on the streets.” That's what it made Canadians believe, and that is blatantly not true.

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm not going to defend the comments of the government, because I don't want to get into the political arena, but I want to say that the mandate of federal policing is transnational. If you look at Operation Giant Slalom—with Ryan

Wedding and the number of drugs that were coming into Canada, into our communities—that's the strength of federal policing. One of the mandates we have, which no other police force has, is to work against transnational crime at the international level and to try to prevent things before they get into our communities.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I go back to you, Ms. Tesser Derksen, for five minutes, please.

Kristina Tesser Derksen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks so much for those very thorough answers to some merry-go-round questions.

I want to follow up on the first line of questioning that I had for you, Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner, with respect to indigenous, Métis and first nations recruitment. You were talking a little about the DICE program. Could you expand a little more on that? I'm hoping to maybe get from you a prognostication on how you see that affecting the vacancies in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, which my colleague MP Yip mentioned.

A/Commr Adam Palmer: Thank you.

With regard to DICE, which is the diverse and inclusive precadet experience, and the IPTP, which is the indigenous precadet training program, both of those are entry pathways for diverse communities across Canada to come in, experience the RCMP and decide whether they want a career. The commissioner mentioned earlier some of the successes from that. We have had a number of members who have gone on from DICE to become regular members. From the indigenous precadet program, we've had 84 people who have gone through the program and have gone on to become regular members of the RCMP, as well as numerous people who have gone on to be very successful public service employees. We are running two troops of that this year, so this will be a great entry pathway.

Also, one thing we're doing in recruiting transformation is trying to break down some of the barriers. When you come into DICE or you come into IPTP, you don't then have to go back to the beginning of the line in the recruiting process, because you've already done quite a bit of that.

I would like to mention something also on diversity because it has come up quite a bit—there have been very good questions about diversity, and rightly so—to show you that we're on a really interesting track. Currently, our first nations, Inuit and Métis population within the RCMP is at 6.3% of regular members, and the population in Canada is at about 5%, so our baseline is very good. Sometimes people think it's not, but our baseline is actually very good.

As for visible diversity, minority groups within the RCMP, right now diversity is sitting at about 16%. To give you an understanding of where we're heading at Depot, if you look at the current Depot troops going through right now, diversity is sitting at 25.5%. The diversity of the new people coming in is much higher than that of the people already existing in the RCMP. We're on a good trajectory, including 20% who are bilingual speakers.

• (1315)

Kristina Tesser Derksen: That's great.

I appreciated the question of my colleague MP Hallan about the impacts or the additional pressures that might come along with recruitment when you are trying to meet those targets of diversity. I acknowledge it's a necessary thing that we do in Canada because it aligns with our values and the values of the RCMP, but I also acknowledge that it perhaps causes an additional amount of resource stretching or work for your folks—work that you happily do and do well, so thank you for that.

I want to ask about the changing trends in crime. You touched on this, Commissioner, when you were talking about the computers we carry around in our pockets. With respect to cybercrime, there are sophisticated international organizations wreaking havoc in our communities as well.

I feel as though it's the job of law enforcement to try to anticipate what types of trends are going to be coming along in the future. Could you comment on the internal structures or policies that you have to evaluate and respond to...and even to anticipate the types of skills that you're going to need in the new members you're recruiting in order to address those kinds of futuristic crimes that we're seeing?

Commr Michael Duheme: On the crime tendency, you may recall that the crime severity index is down in Canada in many places. As to the new trends and the resources, skill sets and equipment required, I participate in the annual meeting of the Five Eyes, and that's a table at which like-minded countries come together and discuss different priorities.

Kristina Tesser Derksen: On that, if you wouldn't mind, include in your answer a comment on the lawful access legislation. I know it has been a point of much discussion in this context.

Commr Michael Duheme: I don't know if I have enough time.

The Chair: You probably do not, so you should answer those questions in order.

Commr Michael Duheme: I'll say very quickly that for skill sets and equipment, those are discussed with regard to police forces across the country and internationally as well, and we adjust to trends that we see through our criminal intelligence branch.

As for lawful access, it's a legislative framework proposal that would help speed up the investigations without infringing on the rights of people. It's in a tight judicial process that, to my understanding, should be audited after the first year. There's reporting after the first year, I think, but it's a tight legislative process that helps expedite certain things within an investigation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

There will be one more government member asking questions if you have further comments on that issue.

This is our last round. It's going to be a three-minute lightning round.

Mr. McCauley, you'll open it with two and a half minutes; I'll then go to the Bloc, and then the government member will close it out for the Liberals.

Over to you, Mr. McCauley, for two and a half minutes.

Kelly McCauley: Thanks.

Commissioner, quickly, going back to the 750, is this intended to be 750 net new? Will you transfer from within and then replace those with outside hires? I see a nod. Mr. Palmer nodded already.

Commr Michael Duheme: It's body language.

There will be 750 new positions with new funding for those positions.

Kelly McCauley: All right, but you're taking from within. You're already short 2,700, so you're going to be further short elsewhere.

You mentioned that when transferring them from Surrey, you're going to transfer them without any operational effect. Why were they even hired, then? What do they do? You mentioned that you're transferring them from Surrey without compromising operational efficiency. What are they doing right now?

Commr Michael Duheme: In the scaling down of police officers from Surrey, some of them went to federal policing, and some of them went back to frontline policing.

Kelly McCauley: You're 2,700 short, you're transferring 300 or 400 from within and you're hiring 300 net new, maybe. How long is it going to take you to get up to the operational standards required?

Commr Michael Duheme: We've asked our audit committee to...because one of the concerns I saw from—

Kelly McCauley: Just give me a year.

• (1320)

Commr Michael Duheme: Pardon me?

Kelly McCauley: How long will it take?

Commr Michael Duheme: If you could allow me—

Kelly McCauley: I don't have time. How long?

Commr Michael Duheme: There are 41 troops loaded at 32 people per troop, and there are 32 people graduating. In four years, we will get to net zero.

Kelly McCauley: It will take four years. Okay.

The report says it costs \$247,000 to “attract and train”. Could you provide the committee a breakdown of the \$247,000 noted, as well as what it costs the DICE program to attract and train?

We're out of time, so provide that to the committee, please.

Commr Michael Duheme: I will try to provide it to the committee, but it's the Auditor General who looked at that funding and came up with \$247,000.

Kelly McCauley: Provide us with the DICE info, then, if you can.

Commr Michael Duheme: I can get the DICE information—

Kelly McCauley: Wonderful.

Commr Michael Duheme: —but I'll have to work with the Auditor General to understand the \$247,000 breakdown.

Kelly McCauley: She can be difficult to work with, so I wish you the best of luck.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Kelly McCauley: Anyway, thanks very much. I appreciate it.

Commr Michael Duheme: That's the reason I'm here.

Kelly McCauley: Do I have any more time?

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds, if you have a last question.

Kelly McCauley: I'll be really quick.

The 2019 AG report noted an issue around hard body armour: the lack of it. We submitted an Order Paper question about a year ago, asking if you had fulfilled that. We got a response back that the RCMP doesn't know because it can't track.

How are you ensuring that the members are protected and have the required hard body armour when the answer to the Order Paper question said that you're not able to manually track across the country?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'll give a quick answer.

My travel across the country.... There's a set amount of body armour, heavy body armour, in detachments that members will grab and put in the car. I touch base with our warrant officers on a regular basis, and no one has shared with me that there's a shortage of hard body armour right now.

Kelly McCauley: Does it concern you that they say they can't track?

The Chair: Thank you.

That is the time, Mr. McCauley.

[Translation]

Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, you have the floor for just one minute and 15 seconds.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Duheme, in the last budget, the government cut your operational budget at the RCMP by 2%.

What are the direct consequences for your organization?

Commr Michael Duheme: The 2% budget cut represents a loss of about \$96 million. Most, if not all, of those budget cuts were made at headquarters. The impact on operations is minimal.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Will there be any impact on recruitment?

Commr Michael Duheme: It shouldn't have any impact on recruitment, because the executive committee and I have established the priorities for what needs to be funded. As everyone knows, recruitment is a priority for the organization.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay. That's a concern for me as well.

I would like to ask you for a written response on five points: since 2023, the authorized, filled, vacant and actually available positions in Quebec by main role; the unmet needs among border units and border police; the transfers and reassignments of police officers between units in Quebec, particularly those carried out for border operations and at Roxham Road; the units affected, the duration of those reassignments and their aggregate operational consequences; and the Quebec-specific breakdown of the needs related to the national police officer shortage identified by the Auditor General.

To conclude, what are you missing? What would you ask the government to do to really be able to accomplish your mission?

Commr Michael Duheme: I have no other requests, apart from honouring the commitments regarding the mandate I was given.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Osborne, you'll close us out for about two and a half minutes, please.

Tom Osborne: Thank you.

I want to clarify some of the rhetoric we've had, and I'll do so in a couple of ways. I want to make a statement. It's been said by our minister that we are committed to supporting policing that is effective and responsive to the safety needs of all Canadians. The \$1.7 billion is a multi-year investment in the RCMP. This is a historic investment. It is based on a request from the RCMP. With the investment that has been put in, it will take the RCMP roughly three years to get those 750 new policing officers. Is that correct?

Commr Michael Duheme: That's correct.

I will reiterate the fact that, over the years, when there are budget cuts, predominantly federal policing suffers because you get 100% of your dollar when you cut it. It doesn't affect the contracts that you have with the provinces and territories. As I said earlier, this is the first time I've seen such a significant investment in federal policing.

Tom Osborne: The other aspect that I want to approach is the 250 essential positions. I will call them "essential positions" because these positions are absolutely essential to the RCMP, and they are essential to effective policing for the RCMP. Can you confirm that this is correct?

Commr Michael Duheme: It's correct, and it's part of the whole ecosystem in which frontline policing and federal policing work together to protect Canadians.

Tom Osborne: This announcement of \$1.7 billion over multiple years, the capacity of the RCMP to recruit these 750 officers and the 250 essential positions over three years.... That is your capacity. The government is committed to continuing to support the RCMP, and once you reach those thresholds, the government will continue to support the RCMP. I wanted to address the rhetoric from the other side that makes it seem as though something nefarious is happening.

• (1325)

Commr Michael Duheme: I have the full support of my minister and, for the brief appearance that I've had with the Prime Minister, he's fully supportive of law enforcement writ large.

The Chair: Thank you all. I appreciate it.

I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony and participation in relation to the report on recruiting for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police from the 2026 spring reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

The witnesses are excused. I have a bit of committee business. It will take less than a minute.

On Monday, October 5—the notice will be coming out in the next few hours—we'll look at the management and impact of the benefits delivery modernization program. That's from a motion from the committee. We finally have all the witnesses lined up.

On Thursday, October 8, we're meeting in camera. The OAG has requested some time with us, at which point we'll probably turn to line by line, one of Ms. Yip's favourite activities.

The clerk will distribute three reports in the next couple of days—one next week—that we'll begin to tackle over the next few weeks, before the Auditor General's tabling of her autumn reports. The date is to be determined.

This meeting is adjourned. Thank you very much.

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