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Chair: The Honourable Jim Carr



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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone. What a delight it is to be back in Ottawa and in this room to see all of these smiling faces. I'm thrilled that we're able to be together in person—some of us, anyway—and virtually with all of those who are calling in from various places across the country.

Welcome to meeting number 11 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely, using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. I would remind you that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk will advise the chair on whose hands are up to the best of his ability, and we will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to the order adopted by the House of Commons on Tuesday, December 7, 2021, and the motion adopted on Tuesday, December 14, 2021, the committee is resuming its study of gun control, illegal arms trafficking and the increase in gun crimes committed by members of street gangs.

With us today, live and in person, we have the Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Public Safety. Also very much alive, but not in person, from the Canada Border Services Agency, we have John Ossowski, president, and Scott Harris, vice-president of the

intelligence and enforcement branch. From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we have Talal Dakalbab, assistant deputy minister of community safety and countering crime. From the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we have Brenda Lucki, commissioner, and Stephen White, deputy commissioner of specialized policing services.

Colleagues, so you know what we're going to do with the time allocation, when you've got 30 seconds, left I will raise this card. For anybody who can't see it, I will whisper "30 seconds". I will be as gentle as I can be and as respectful as I should be about time allocation.

Welcome to all.

I now invite Minister Marco Mendicino to make an opening statement. It's over to you, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Indeed, it is good to be appearing before this committee in person.

[Translation]

I want to start by acknowledging that those of us on the Hill are gathered on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

Thank you for inviting me here today.

Colleagues, I've been paying close attention to the testimony presented to this committee over the past few months. You have heard compelling and enlightening testimony, particularly with regard to remarkable local initiatives that play a significant role.

You heard about OPK, the Winnipeg-based social service organization. You heard that indigenous men and women have been able to leave gang life as a result of the program's outreach and their access to resources and community connections.

You heard about the Bear Clan Patrol, which is also located in Winnipeg and which provides security for the indigenous community and helps to keep the peace in a supportive manner.

You heard about STR8 UP, an organization that serves Saskatoon's at-risk indigenous community, works with former gang members and their families, and supports individuals embarking on a healthier path.

The figures don't lie. As a result of these types of programs, thousands of hours a year of personal skills development and job training have helped promote personal growth, a sense of hope and an alternative to gang life.

At the provincial level, you heard about the work done by British Columbia and the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit. This unit is paired with a program to end gang life. The goal is to provide support to gang members to help them leave the lifestyle.

You heard about initiatives in Quebec that promote strong action through projects such as Operation Centaur. In that province, the project is helping to provide more police officers, medical examiners and correctional officers to support responses and information sharing. It's also bringing law enforcement agencies together to conduct investigations, prevent gun violence and reduce smuggling.

• (1210)

[English]

Mr. Chair, I warmly welcome the attention you and this committee have been paying to initiatives that have been put into place across the country. I look forward to discussing them, and much more, with all partners at the upcoming engagements that we have across the country.

Colleagues, along with the positive signs of progress, you've also heard first-hand accounts of the shared challenges we all face in tackling gun violence. I point to the testimony of Vancouver Police Department Staff Sergeant Michael Rowe. He pointed to the challenge of ghost guns, or firearms produced in part by 3D printing. They are manufactured or assembled from components without a serial number or other markings, making them difficult to detect by conventional systems and difficult to trace. It's a reminder that we're all operating in an evolving and complex environment. It's a reminder that through times of change, we all need to work closely together at every level and in every community.

At my last appearance, I provided an overview of how the federal government is playing a leadership role to do just that. I noted that we've introduced the strongest measures to fight gun violence our country has ever seen. I highlighted how we focused on controlling the use and possessions of firearms. For example, through measures now in place allowing for lifetime background checks, they include criteria that must be considered in deciding whether to grant a firearms licence. I pointed out the ways in which we're limiting access to firearms deemed inappropriate, for example, our ban of over 1,500 models and variants of assault-style firearms with a buyback regime on the way. I talked about how we're tackling illegal firearms, for example, by committing to increase the maximum penalty for firearms trafficking, smuggling, and related offences from 10 to 14 years imprisonment. I spoke about our efforts to reduce gang membership and violence. Those prevention efforts are essential, because the fight involves more than just enforcement.

As my colleague, Minister Blair, has often said, "You can't arrest your way out of the problems on our city streets." That's why, to date, we've delivered more than \$115 million to the provinces and territories to support prevention, intervention, and the suppression and enforcement activities under the gun and gang violence action fund since 2018. I'll add that we've also allocated \$250 million over

five years directly to municipalities and indigenous communities that have a demonstrated history of gun and gang-related harm, who will receive funding to bolster gang prevention and intervention programming.

I also talked about how enforcement investments to deter smuggling and trafficking are making a difference. As members know, the CBSA seizes large quantities of firearms every year from United States citizens, mostly from non-compliant travellers attempting to retain their personal firearms while travelling.

Firearms tracing is also a key tool in determining the sources of and diversion routes for illegal firearms. Approximately 21,000 firearms are seized annually by law enforcement. Our \$125 million in support for the RCMP and CBSA to stop illegal guns at their source and to detect and disrupt gun smuggling is already paying dividends, with over 1,000 firearms seized at the border last year.

I also highlighted that we have invested an additional \$312 million over five years to enhance our capacity to better identify, disrupt and prevent firearms from entering the illicit market. That includes \$15 million to increase the RCMP's capacity to trace firearms and over \$40 million for anti-smuggling activities, which includes building a new Canadian criminal intelligence system that will help law enforcement to target and disrupt criminal activity.

We've seen concrete evidence of the difference these investments are making, complementing the testimony you've heard. Just look at the results of the CBSA's investigation into 3D printed firearms last year. It showed that the work of the CBSA and RCMP, after detecting and intercepting undeclared firearms parts in Mississauga, led to seizures, warrants and arrests through strong action at the border and collaboration with many partners.

Mr. Chair, at the same time, I acknowledge there is more work to be done. I want to reinforce the government's commitment to collaborate with the provinces who want to take action in banning handguns, an issue I discussed with my provincial and territorial colleagues last week at our federal, provincial and territorial conference.

While this committee studies the issue of gun control, illegal arms trafficking and the increase in gun crimes committed by members of street gangs, I look forward to your consideration and debate on new firearms legislation that we will table soon.

I want to close by again thanking all of the members of this committee for their thoughtful work, and I look forward to taking your questions and comments.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

• (1215)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, and for being generous with your time with us.

Leading off the first round, in a six-minute slot, will be Mr. Lloyd.

We'll go over to you, Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming, Minister.

I appreciate all the times you have come before our committee and that you seem to have watched the testimony we're having at committee.

I agree with you that it has been compelling testimony, and some of the testimony you mentioned today has been strong. However, you have been cherry-picking the testimony. We have seen overwhelming testimony from law enforcement and community activist groups, which are doing the great work in the communities you talked about, and a number of victims rights groups, who said that your government's proposed mandatory gun buyback from law-abiding firearms owners is the least effective and most expensive policy you can take.

What do you say to that, Minister?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The advice we get from law enforcement is important. For example, as I mentioned the last time I was here, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police supported our ban on assault-style firearms. We're going to listen to victims groups as well.

I think there is an important distinction between the strategy we have put into place by introducing stronger gun controls, whether they be with regard to the AR-15 and assault-style weapons, or with regard to the additional steps we want to take on handguns. The extension of introducing a ban would be to also have a buyback program put into place.

The reason for that, Mr. Lloyd, is that we are concerned that those guns, which were once legal but are now deemed illegal, could be stolen and be used to hurt and kill people. We have seen that in some recent shooting tragedies, including in my hometown of Toronto. That's why we propose to introduce the buyback program.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Minister, we live in economic scarcity. We have to use taxpayer dollars in the best possible way. We have seen statistics from law enforcement and community groups that have overwhelmingly shown that legally owned firearms are not winding up in the hands of criminals—certainly, there are a few excep-

tions—and that those guns are ones that are transported and smuggled over the border.

You posted on Twitter today about a gun bust of two rifles and four handguns. In your own words today, most of the guns that are being intercepted by CBSA are from “non-compliant travellers”, not from organized crime smuggling operations. We know that is the main source for guns getting into the hands of criminals.

Minister, why are you paying attention to guns seized from American travellers, when you're missing the real issue, which is the thousands of handguns that are being brought over the border from the United States by organized crime?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, we have an obligation. The CBSA discharges its responsibilities to ensure that no one who is not permitted to bring firearms into the country is able to do so, and that is a matter of public safety. I think you would agree with that, Mr. Lloyd.

Secondly, I would point out that we have made significant investments to ensure that organized crime is interdicted at the border. I would point out that, last year, CBSA and RCMP carried out a number of operations that led to a record number of arrests and seized over 1,000 firearms, which could have made their way into our streets and our communities with deadly consequences.

My point to you, Mr. Lloyd, is that we're able to do both. We're able to interdict at the border and official ports of entry where people are not able to lawfully bring in their firearms, but we're also able to attack organized crime to ensure we are maintaining public safety by taking aggressive law enforcement action at our borders.

• (1220)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Minister, while I applaud the work of CBSA in interdicting illegal firearms from non-compliant travellers and from organized crime, clearly it's not enough. We are still seeing many firearms brought to Canada that are being smuggled and we're seeing the government pursue a course of action to seize the firearms of law-abiding firearms owners, spending upwards of a billion dollars or more in this effort. We're seeing, as you said, \$40 million for the border.

Why is this government spending a billion dollars on a gun buyback that law enforcement and community groups are saying will not work, instead of spending more money on getting youth out of crime, disrupting organized crime and stopping the flow of illegal guns at the border?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, the government is committed to doing more, which is why we increased the amount of funds and resources we have invested in our CBSA and our RCMP. We will continue to take the steps that are necessary to give them all of the personnel they need, all of the equipment they need, the technology they need.

We're also leveraging partnerships with our American counterparts. There is a cross-border crime forum, where I hope to be engaging with my counterpart, the Secretary of Homeland Security, in the very short term.

It is a full court press—that is my response to you—when it comes to action at the border. However, we also have to be sure that we are investing in preventative strategies. I'm sure I will have an opportunity to expand on that as well.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister.

One thing that's actually been very clear from law enforcement and from community groups during this committee study is that a certain amount of time is needed in order for rehabilitation to work in the corrections system. By your government reducing mandatory minimums for gun offences and other violent offences, we could be seeing these criminals spend less time in prison, which has been shown to reduce rehabilitation rates. What do you have to say about that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, Mr. Lloyd, as you know, I spent over a decade on the front lines of the criminal justice system and had a very unique and informed perspective on how mandatory minimums work and how they don't work. Our government believes in restoring the judicial independence in our courts, which was deteriorated the last time the Conservatives had the reins of government.

We also acknowledge that where you have hardened organized crime, where they are participating in the illegal trafficking of guns for the purposes of visiting devastating consequences in our community, there needs to be an appropriate sentencing regime. That is why we are going to be increasing maximum penalties for those serious firearms-related offences from 10 to 14 years. We trust that the courts will dispense those sentences, where appropriate, in accordance with the principles under the Criminal Code and the charter.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Now we invite Mr. Noormohamed to take us through this next round of six minutes of questioning.

Mr. Noormohamed, the floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for appearing, Minister, and thank you to the officials.

My first question is for you, Commissioner Lucki. We heard from the folks at the Vancouver Police Department on a wide range of issues. They raised a couple of points. The first point was that they would certainly support the outright ban of high-capacity magazines. They spoke of the need to regulate the replica and imitation of airsoft guns that aren't necessarily either firearms or replicas.

Would you agree with the VPD, Commissioner Lucki?

Commissioner Brenda Lucki (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you for that question. I would agree with anything that would reduce the guns used in crimes or any parts of the guns that would make a firearm more available. I would support anything that would reduce any type of crime with handguns.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Commissioner.

What about the components required to make guns at home? Would you be in favour of more regulation? Would you be in

favour of trying to find ways to stop people from being able to make their own guns at home?

• (1225)

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes. Absolutely. Obviously, those parts put together can create a handgun. Those parts are often imported in pieces that are made available to put guns together. Obviously, when they're used for criminal intent, we need to get those off the street.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thanks, Commissioner.

Well, Minister, you've now heard from the Commissioner of the RCMP. You've heard from the Vancouver Police Department. What say you about the need to support the ban on high-capacity guns, what say you about the need to regulate these things that don't fall into the category of firearms replicas, and what say you to the regulation of components that allow people to make their own guns at home?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed, for raising what is a very legitimate concern around the way in which guns, as well as the different components and elements of guns, can be used to, again, great devastating effect.

I want to assure you and all members of the committee that we plan to take very proactive legislative reform, going forward. I will say that the legislation we are actively contemplating does seek to address the very issue you have put your finger on. We need to be sure that we send a very clear message to those who would try to alter cartridges, and to those who would try to use different components to increase the deadly force that guns can carry out with devastating effect, that this is unlawful, and if they break the law there will be serious consequences.

We plan to give law enforcement all of the tools they need to ensure that those new laws are able to be enforced once they're on the books.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Minister.

You talked about the importance of being able to give everybody the tools they need. One of the challenges is that folks are fighting the tool of misinformation in all of this. There are folks who have advocated for setting up NRA-style gun lobbies in Canada and have been working hard for this. What contribution do those types of organizations have in making it harder for legislation to occur around issues like the ones we've just spoken about?

Then, Commissioner Lucki, perhaps you can weigh in on how much harder it makes your job in policing.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'll say briefly that I am concerned about the degree of disinformation that has made its way onto social media. I worry that, for very deliberate purposes, the efforts of the government and the way in which we are trying to communicate our strategy to reduce gun crimes are being distorted to raise fears among law-abiding citizens, for whom we have the greatest amount of respect. I've visited with hunters and those who participate in target shooting and, frankly, I applaud the measures they've put into place to use their firearms in a safe way. But what worries me is that the steps we're taking through legislation, the investments we're making in law enforcement at our borders and in our communities, and the strategies we're deploying to prevent gun crime from occurring and to minimize its consequences are being distorted in a way that is reckless and wrong. We need to be very clear-eyed about that.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Commissioner Lucki, what does that do to the work you need to do from a policing perspective?

Commr Brenda Lucki: When we deal with misinformation and disinformation, first of all, it often causes other things to happen criminally. It causes people to be more defensive, creating an environment where people feel they have to protect themselves sometimes. The other thing it does is that it diverts the resources that we could be using on frontline enforcement to verify and follow up on the information, and correct and re-enter that information. Obviously, it does divert us from what we need to do.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Commissioner.

I have one very short last question. What would you say to folks who believe that gun buybacks and further enforcement are an attack on innocent, law-abiding civilians?

• (1230)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would say that with our government, what Canadians will receive is responsible and strong gun control to protect our communities. Where we introduce buyback programs, it is an essential tool to get guns that have no business in our communities off our streets, because those guns only have one purpose, which is to kill people. That's our commitment, and we're going to make good on it.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Michaud, it's your turn. You have six minutes.

The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's good to see you again in person.

Thank you, Minister Mendicino, for joining us today. We appreciate it.

You'll recall that, during your most recent appearance before the committee, I asked you about the infamous Quebec firearms route, which we're familiar with. It crosses the Akwesasne territory. Most illegal firearms unfortunately pass through this route, because smugglers are familiar with it and know how to take advantage of it.

The committee met with representatives from the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne. They expressed concern about the situation. They wanted to do more and they didn't feel adequately consulted. The Bloc Québécois suggested the creation of a joint task force made up of members of all the police forces and organizations that could respond. The goal would be to not only share information, but also to send officers into the field who speak with each other and who attempt to respond as best they can.

We heard that information sharing on the ground is lacking. This includes police forces across the border, such as the New York police force; the Ontario and Quebec police forces; the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA; and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP. Perhaps all these people could speak to each other more and engage the Akwesasne police service more effectively, since that service doesn't feel adequately consulted.

Does your government plan to consult more with indigenous communities, such as the Akwesasne community?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for the question, Ms. Michaud.

First, I fully agree that we must stay in touch with the indigenous communities, not only in Akwesasne, but across Canada.

I know that police forces, the RCMP, CBSA and even provincial police forces have forums where they share information in an effort to stop firearms traffickers at the border.

It isn't easy. There are many challenges. That's why the government must continue to add resources and provide funding so that border police have the necessary tools.

I agree with you. We must stay in touch and we must work with the indigenous communities. That's exactly what the police forces are doing on the ground.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Minister Mendicino.

It isn't an easy task. Despite the co-operation, which is certainly in good faith, hundreds of firearms continue to pass through the territory each week. These firearms ultimately end up in the hands of street gang members and youth in Montreal. Unfortunately, this results in killings.

I followed up with the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne after hearing their testimony. One proposed solution was to identify the police service as an essential service. The police chief seemed to say that discussions were being held with the federal government on this issue.

Some reports in the most recent Parliament recommended that indigenous police forces be identified as essential services.

Are you considering identifying indigenous police forces as essential services?

Do you think that this could be useful?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That's a significant issue, Ms. Michaud.

Early last week, the federal, provincial and territorial ministers had a good meeting with indigenous leaders. Everyone brought up this issue. At that meeting, there was a discussion about identifying indigenous police forces as an essential service.

The government is very open to the idea of continuing to work with indigenous communities. We must continue to work closely with them.

A few programs provide more resources to indigenous communities. I know that more must be done, and the government will do it.

• (1235)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

You spoke of the importance of implementing more resources. Representatives of the Customs and Immigration Union told us about the lack of resources on the ground, both in terms of human resources and money.

They also told us that perhaps their expertise wasn't being used to its full potential. They could travel between the different border crossings and monitor rail transportation and shipping. As we know, a number of firearms come in through the Port of Montreal.

Will you increase resources to assist border services officers?

[*English*]

The Chair: There is only three seconds left, but that's impossible. Take 15 seconds, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I have a great deal of respect for all front-line workers. That's why we're continuing to add resources and funding to help CBSA officers. We'll listen to front-line workers and take their expertise into account.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I'll now turn to Mr. MacGregor, who has six minutes, to end this first round of questioning.

The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for being here. I appreciate your opening statement and the responses you've given to my colleagues.

You and I were both here during the 42nd Parliament when your government introduced the Cannabis Act. I remember that a lot of the rationale for that act was a sense that it is wrong to continue to charge and prosecute people through the criminal justice system for personal possession and use of cannabis.

Indeed, we had it confirmed by Ottawa lawyer Michael Spratt during his testimony before the committee how he used to have a fair number of clients who were his to shepherd through the justice

system for cannabis-related offences, and that dropped down to zero after the passing of the Cannabis Act, so it had its desired effect.

The problem for many opioid substances, though, is that they're still on the books under our Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. We have had testimony and, indeed, very public proclamations from the City of Vancouver, the Government of B.C. and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police calling for decriminalization. Indeed, I was very moved at this committee when Staff Sergeant Michael Rowe of the Vancouver Police Department made that very clear connection between the profitability of the illicit drug trade and the link to firearms.

In fact, if you look at what fentanyl has done, one kilogram of fentanyl can now sell for \$1.6 million on the market. That is compared to one kilogram of heroin, which sells for \$80,000. The profitability is driving gang warfare. Gangs are competing for turf because of the obscene amounts of money they can make off the suffering of people in my province and right across this country.

Minister, we have an opportunity before us as policy-makers. We have many notable stakeholders calling for this. Why, then, are we still debating whether to decriminalize drugs and treat them as the health issue that they so very rightly are?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, Mr. MacGregor, I want to thank you for your advocacy on the important issue of how best to tackle opioid and substance issues, and I agree. I think you would hear from a great many experts that this is not always best dealt with on the front lines of our criminal justice system. In particular, you raised the government's reform around cannabis and the transformational efforts that were taken to take simple possession of cannabis out of the criminal justice system, because I think we all agree that was not an effective or efficient use of the scarce resources for our courts.

If I understand your point correctly, it was whether we should apply that same principle to other forms of simple possession of drugs that are under the CDSA, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. You are highlighting that a number of individuals and experts have come forward to support that position.

I think we absolutely need to have that conversation. We have to do it in a way that is principled. We have to do it in a way that really looks at the evidence, and we have to do it in a way that will ensure that we are using the criminal justice system as a last resort.

For people who suffer from substance challenges, I would be the first to acknowledge that simply putting someone who is an addict in jail is not going to solve the problem. What they need is support. They need treatment. They often need mental health supports. That's why I think we need to look at ways to bridge into those other areas.

I also think, just in rounding out my answer to you, that we also do have to be mindful that there are those who are still using fentanyl and opioids, which can be very deadly, for all the wrong reasons. That is where I do believe the criminal justice system is implicated in a way that is responsible.

I was getting at this earlier with Mr. Lloyd's question around the criminal sentencing reform. We do need to also make sure that for those who are trying to visit upon innocent individuals the worst consequences through substances that are highly regulated—

● (1240)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I agree, Minister—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —we reserve that space. That's my point.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I agree, and no one at this table or in civil society is going to dispute the fact that those who traffic in drugs and who are dealing them need to be held to account. However, they are clearly different from those who are using because of the traumas they've experienced in their everyday lives.

My time is limited. Maybe I'll just end with a statement.

You talk about having this conversation. This conversation has been had for the last decade. How many more experts, how many more statistics do we need before we take firm action on this? When people in my community go out and buy street drugs, they are playing Russian roulette with their lives. They just do not know whether or not that hit is going to kill them, but they are addicted. They have no choice. This is how they get through their day-to-day lives.

I implore you, Minister, to use this moment, to do the right thing, and to change policies so that we save lives.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now move into the second round of questions, and I would call on the vice-chair of the committee, Ms. Dancho, to lead off this round.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's great to be here.

Thank you, Minister, for being here again. It's great to see you. I appreciate that you're a frequent flyer at this committee.

We are, of course, discussing the very serious issue of gun violence in our cities. On Friday I visited the Winnipeg police headquarters, and they provided me with quite an immersive tour of what they're doing on the ground to combat gang activity. It was incredible. There was half a million dollars' worth of methamphetamine and wads of cash. I've never seen so much in my life. Also, there was a whole table full of the illegal guns that they seized during this large operation. These operations are ongoing.

Almost monthly they're seizing this many guns and this much drugs and cash.

All the guns they showed me on the table were already prohibited in Canada, so I'm just not clear. Your government is talking a lot about investing several billion dollars in this so-called “buyback” program and a proposed handgun ban, which you mentioned today.

How is banning certain firearms in Canada going to stop the guns that I saw with my own eyes that are already banned and being used to hurt Canadians right now?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I just wonder if you can say with certainty whether or not any of those guns were prohibited under the OIC that the government introduced in the last couple of years, Ms. Dancho. Maybe you can and maybe you can't.

● (1245)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: They were specifically handguns.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would just simply say, as I said to Mr. Lloyd, that to the extent that we can, we are investing additionally to provide law enforcement with the tools they need.

I am actually quite assured that those dollars that are coming from the federal government and being transferred to the provincial government are making their way into your community and are leading to arrests and seizures. That's a proof point, Ms. Dancho, that this government will continue to support law enforcement—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I can comment on that—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'll just say in conclusion that it's not the only thing we can do. It's not just about providing additional money to police. We have to take additional steps to prevent gun crimes from occurring as well. That's something I hope to be able to expand on in my time here.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate that. To be very fair to you, I did ask them about the federal funding they have received and they said it's very helpful.

I did ask about the several billion dollars that we anticipate the buyback and the proposed handgun ban will cost. As with all law enforcement I've talked to, both at this committee and also in person on Friday with the Winnipeg police who are seeing this on the ground, there is a great sense of frustration from police. Their resources are already strapped. They're having a hard time, as you know, dealing with rising gun violence and drug trafficking in our cities. When we speak to RCMP in rural Canada, rural crime is a growing issue as well, as you know.

From what I am hearing on the ground directly from police officers, there are no resources available for them to further extend themselves to now go to law-abiding citizens to remove their firearms.

Are you at all concerned that the measures your government will be implementing with the potential handgun ban and the buyback are going to severely hurt the already strapped resources of police to do their jobs right now to combat drugs and gang crime?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I take the point, Ms. Dancho.

My message to you is that we need to be able to do both. The solutions here are not mutually exclusive. It is not just about picking one lane. We have to invest in the law enforcement that we are doing—and I thank you for the acknowledgement—and that's being felt by your community. We'll continue to do that.

We also need to be sure that the guns we are now prohibiting, like the AR-15 and other assault-style weapons, because they are deadly and their purpose, really, is only to kill people—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Could I just comment on that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: These need to be taken out of our communities. That is the rationale behind having a buyback program.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: One thing that was really interesting was that they showed me a whole array of firearms that your government has called “assault-style”. They showed me two that weren't the same gun, but they had the identical fire power and were identical in every way except in cosmetic terms. One of them had a wood stock and one of them had a black stock. They said that the black stock one was illegal but had the exact same capability of the other gun that was still legal.

There clearly hasn't been a lot of expert advice on which guns you're looking to ban. From experts we've talked to—from police to firearms experts—it seems that the ban you're putting in place has nothing to do with the power of a firearm, but everything to do with how scary it might look. To me, that is a great waste of resources, frankly.

One issue I want to mention to you is something that is concerning. Police are seeing guns being smuggled by train from Mexico, through the U.S. and all the way to our cities. There is a direct line by train from Mexico to Winnipeg. They are seeing a great increase in gun violence and illegal guns that are already prohibited in Canada, which seem to be smuggled in by rail.

The Chair: Sorry, Ms. Dancho—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Could you just comment?

We do believe there should be more resources at our border to check. They said that there were no resources to do that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Minister, you have 12 seconds.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We need and we are investing more resources at the border.

When it comes to the ban of AR-15 and assault-style weapons, we are taking the advice of experts who know which of those categories of guns need to be banned.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Sorry, colleagues, I'm a prisoner of the clock. You know that.

We now move to Mr. Chiang.

You have five minutes, not more or less. The floor is yours.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Minister.

I would like to comment first. My comment and question will be directed to the RCMP and the Public Safety and Justice folks.

I did not hear about smart gun technology until this year. I didn't know that it could be an option to have smart gun technology. In this day and age, all sorts of technologies are in place to secure devices. The police have used two-factor authentication for years to protect their computers. They have e-tokens and passwords. As you know, automobiles have all kinds of safety features in them.

Back in 2018, there was the Danforth shooting, where two young ladies lost their lives. They were in the prime of their lives. The gun used in that shooting was a legitimate gun, but it was stolen from a gun dealer in Saskatchewan in 2015. There was a subsequent lawsuit against Smith & Wesson, alleging that smart gun technology is more than 20 years old, but has yet to be used on guns sold in the United States and Canada. According to the lawsuit, Smith & Wesson had entered into an agreement with the U.S. government in 2000 to incorporate smart gun technology in the design of new weapons in March 2003. That was not the case. The gun that was used in the Danforth shooting was manufactured in 2005.

Can you explain to this committee how we can limit the use of smart guns that have biometric restrictions, or these types of weapons to only the owners of the guns? Is it possible to limit them?

● (1250)

Commr Brenda Lucki: We definitely have to leverage technology. There's so much emerging technology when you talk about guns. There are chips and biometrics. In some senses, they can be used for good and in other senses they can be used for evil.

We need to ensure that we look at that technology.... I would make the comparison to years ago, when we first brought in credit cards. There was no technology in credit cards and they were used fraudulently en masse. When the industry started leveraging technology and bringing in preventative measures, we saw a reduction in credit card fraud. It's obviously not the same as far as the end result goes.

My point is that using technology to be able to trace a gun, find out where it came from, disable a gun when it's been stolen, for example, or allow an owner to be the only person to access it through biometrics would definitely increase safety with gun users. When a gun falls into the wrong hands, for example, through technology we would be able to disable it.

We have to start looking at the emerging technologies and apply them to firearms.

Mr. Paul Chiang: In essence, you're saying if those technologies existed and were implemented, a stolen handgun would be a paperweight to somebody. It would be useless to the thief.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes. Depending on the technology, that very well could be the case.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Would Mr. Dakalbab have anything to add to these points?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab (Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Safety and Countering Crime, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): No. I'm deferring to the expertise of the RCMP on this kind of technology. We concern our policy thinking on any possible incentives or ways to reduce gun violence and gun use. We work closely with the RCMP and CBSA on these matters.

Thank you.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much.

Going back to the RCMP and Commissioner Lucki since you're the federal police department, are most of the guns being used in violent crimes across Canada domestically stolen or smuggled guns?

Commr Brenda Lucki: When we look at where firearms are coming from, in general, we say that about 65% to 69% of the guns that we have traced are domestically—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Commissioner. You have 10 seconds left, please.

Commr Brenda Lucki: They're within the borders of Canada, but of the ones that we are tracing, approximately 13% that we've actually traced are coming across the border.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd now like to ask Ms. Michaud to take the floor for two and a half minutes. It's all yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister Mendicino, I'll use my two and a half minutes to talk about the new bill that you plan to introduce. It may be a new version of Bill C-21. I hope so, because that bill didn't make many people happy, including the firearms lobby and the people who want more gun control.

I want to know your plans for this bill. Will you review the ban on certain firearms announced in the May 2020 order in council?

Ms. Dancho clearly explained the shortcomings of the ban. For example, firearms with exactly the same capabilities aren't on the list of prohibited weapons and are still legal in Canada, while other similar weapons are banned.

Currently in Canada, at least eight semi-automatic centre-fire rifles have been manufactured and three of them have been put on the market in the past few weeks. Manufacturers are taking full advantage of the loopholes in the 2020 order in council by constantly putting new guns on the market and bypassing these bans.

In a debate in the House, I suggested to the parliamentary secretary, Pam Damoff, who is here today, that perhaps we could proceed differently by defining a prohibited firearm in the Criminal Code, rather than taking a piecemeal approach by listing types of weapons. There are always new weapons coming on the market.

Could we explore the option of amending the provision directly in the Criminal Code instead of taking a piecemeal approach?

• (1255)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for the question, Ms. Michaud.

The government remains open to your suggestion that the Criminal Code be reviewed with a view to introducing amendments. This would be part of the work on the government's strategy.

In general, the new bill will bring back some of the initiatives that we tried to launch in the most recent session of Parliament. For example, the "red flag" law is very important if we want to solve the problems related to domestic violence between intimate partners. I'm also thinking of the "yellow flag" law through which we want to do more to address the handgun issue.

We made a commitment with all our provincial and territorial partners. We worked on this issue last week.

We'll work together with you and with all members of Parliament on this bill.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Mendicino.

[*English*]

Next we'll go to Mr. MacGregor for a round of two and a half minutes.

The floor is yours. Talk fast.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Following Ms. Michaud's line of questioning and what Ms. Dancho brought up, it is a fact that the OIC put in place in May of 2020 did ban some firearms, but there still are some that are legal and which have the exact same ability to shoot. They're semi-automatic rifles. They could hold large capacity magazines, but there's a difference in appearance. I have constituents who did own the now prohibited weapons. I have constituents who own variants that are very much the same as the prohibited ones but are still legal. I guess a lot of them might have questions on whether the government will extend the OIC to ban those firearms.

I guess what we're asking for, Minister, is, don't you think it would be worth it to have some certainty where Parliament could have a fulsome debate on this and where the Criminal Code could have an actual definition of what we're dealing with here?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I do, too, Mr. MacGregor, and I think that the short answer is that, as I said to Ms. Michaud, we are looking at a variety of options for the legislation that will come back. I'm keen to study closely the potential for looking at order in council solutions, but equally, whether or not there may be some other ways in which we can strengthen gun control through legislative amendments under the Criminal Code or the Firearms Act.

I just want to assure you that, contrary to what some of our colleagues in the Conservative Party may suggest around taking decisions to ban certain firearms because they look scary, that's not the way we make decisions. We make decisions on the basis of the advice that we get from experts who look at deadly force, who look at the ability to manipulate those guns to carry out even more deadly force—

• (1300)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I understand that, Minister, but it is a fact that there are some that are legal and some that are now prohibited that have the exact same abilities.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That's why, as I have said, we're certainly open to working with you and other colleagues in the chamber to look at both administrative as well as legislative solutions.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: And look, you have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: By my clock I have hit the limit.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Over to you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We will deduct 15 seconds next round.

Then we move to Mr. Van Popta.

Sir, you have five minutes in this round. The floor is yours when you're ready to take it.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

Commissioner Lucki, I want to follow up on a line of questioning I had put to you the last time you were before us, which Mr. Chiang also started down.

As we develop laws and regulations that are designed to keep Canadians safe and guns out of the hands of criminals, we need to understand the problem. For that we need to have good, reliable statistics and analysis.

We have heard from many witnesses, you included, about the source of crime guns, and we're getting inconsistent, even contradictory evidence, so I want to explore this with you to better understand it. You said again just a short while ago that 69% of crime guns are domestically sourced, yet we have had other witnesses say completely the opposite, that 85% of crime guns are smuggled in from the United States.

You're all credible witnesses, so I'm assuming we're using different definitions of what is a crime gun. Statistics Canada was here as well. They said they are working on exactly that.

Perhaps you could comment on that. Do we need better statistics in order to develop better laws?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Our statistics are based on our actual tracing of the guns. We have a lab that traces guns. We trace all guns except for the ones in Ontario. They trace their own; they have that capability. That might in fact give a different number.

But of the ones that we have traced, for example in 2021, 69% of them were domestically sourced. When we look at the 31% left over, they were either smuggled or without importer documentation. That's based on the guns that we have actually successfully traced. Of the just over 3,000—3,200 I think—we have successfully traced the origins of about 2,572.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Good. Thank you.

Potentially there are two problems with that. The first is the definition of a crime gun. It has been suggested by earlier witnesses that perhaps if you have a very broad definition of a crime gun to include any gun found at a crime scene, even if the crime wasn't violent, and that's included in the definition of a crime gun, it's probably not all that useful a measure. It might be a true answer, but it's not particularly useful.

Another problem, of course, is that there is inconsistency in the tracing of actual crime guns across the country. It has been suggested that we need to have a national strategy for tracing all crime guns.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I would absolutely agree with your statement. That's why we have recently been given money in the last budget to increase our tracing capabilities. Right now, like I said, it's about 3,200, but with the new funding we will be able to triple our ability to trace firearms. Then we can make some evidence-based decisions, as you pointed out at the beginning, on the provenance of guns and where they come from. If we come to a point where it comes from a certain area, we can deal with that very succinctly.

It is not mandatory to have guns traced, but in the RCMP we are in the midst of developing policy to make it mandatory so that any gun seized will be traced. Of course, we will have to work with CACP as well to ensure that we can share those policies with other police agencies, because the more evidence we have on those statistics and looking at the trends, the better we are able to tackle the problem.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

Is there a timeline or a strategy for developing that national policy? Are you working with Statistics Canada on that problem?

• (1305)

Commr Brenda Lucki: We've just started on the policy. A lot of it is as a result of the good conversations we have had at parliamentary committees such as this, at which we see some of the gaps. We're in the development of the strategy and the policy. You raise a good point and I will make sure that our people consult with Statistics Canada to ensure that any policy we do have will be reflective and to see if we can standardize it across the country. I do have a Chiefs of Police round table and I'll be bringing it up to them. We'd like to try to speak with one voice, with a bit of flexibility obviously depending on people's environment. I think it would bode well if we were able to do that.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner.

Far away on the “left coast”, we have Mr. McKinnon. I hope it's dry there. The floor is yours. Take it away.

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. It's not good policy to comment on the rain status here.

Welcome to all the witnesses. I'm very glad to see you all and I thank you for coming back and sharing your time.

Mr. Minister, I'll go back to the ever-popular buyback program. In 2019 when our government announced the ban on assault-style weapons, the Ontario chiefs of police issued a statement supporting the move saying that in their view, these weapons had no place in our communities. When the president of the Coalition for Gun Control testified before our committee, she made a point that stuck with me. She said, “I want to remind you that every illegal gun begins as a legal gun, either south of the border or in Canada.”

Minister, I know you've come at this question from many different angles today, but can you speak to the importance of moving forward on our proposed buyback to ensure that we reduce the number of guns that may be illegally diverted into the criminal market?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I can, Mr. McKinnon.

Before I give you the substance of my answer, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the victims and the advocacy groups who've been long, I think, putting forward very thoughtful and concrete ideas to help create safer communities. I want to acknowledge them because I know that for many, the wounds are still very deep. I think it's important that all of us, no matter what our political stripe, really understand and appreciate that the perspectives they bring forward are informed by some of the most difficult tragedies imaginable within our societies. Certainly not a day goes by that I don't ask myself—and I hope we all ask ourselves—what more we need to do. The answer for me does include making sure that we deliver on a buyback program, precisely because of the point that you raised, and Mr. Chiang raised, and many have raised, which is that guns can be diverted, whether they are initially legal or they are then manipulated to being something that is prohibited or illegal, and they can be used to devastating effect.

We heard Mr. Chiang refer to the Danforth shooting, which was in my hometown of Toronto. We need to reduce and completely eliminate that kind of possibility from ever happening, and certainly a buyback program will help to do that.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you, Minister.

I have a minute and a half left and a quick question. Regarding the buyback, I note that within two months we will quickly come to the end of the amnesty period that was included with the prohibition two years ago. It doesn't seem practical in that time frame to expect to be able to implement and deploy a buyback and to provide firearms owners a fair opportunity to utilize it. Can you comment on the imminence or the availability of the buyback program itself and in particular, do you contemplate any extension to the amnesty?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That is a question around the extension that we are very preoccupied with. Certainly, I do want to assure you that in the meantime my department, in consultation with law enforcement as well as with advocacy groups, is doing incredible and pressing work to advance a buyback initiative.

Look, this will be a watershed moment for the country. We've never had a buyback program. Other jurisdictions have, and they've seen successes. We hope to build on those successes. But we are doing this work very much from the point of view that this will be a maiden voyage, so we want to make sure that we get it right. We are going to get it right, Mr. McKinnon. We will make sure there is a way to take those deadly firearms—which we have prohibited because it was the right thing to do—out of communities and off our streets. My commitment to you and to all on this committee is that we will do that work together.

• (1310)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We now head into the third round of questioning, and to lead off is Mr. Shipley.

You have five minutes, sir. The floor is yours.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today. We seem to be running in the same circles lately, and it's nice to see you here.

Minister, I have some questions for you. I'm not trying to put you on the spot; this is just for my own knowledge.

I'm getting heckling from my own side. That's getting awkward.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Doug Shipley: I am not trying to put you on the spot; I'm trying figure this out for my own knowledge.

I am not an owner of a gun. I do not have a possession and acquisition licence. Do you have your acquisition licence, a PAL licence?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: A possession and acquisition licence...?

Mr. Doug Shipley: Yes.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I do not, although as I mentioned earlier today in response, I think it was, to Mr. Lloyd, I have visited some communities and have been privy to some of the education around acquiring a PAL.

Mr. Doug Shipley: It sounds like we're similar, because I don't either. I haven't shot a lot. I've shot once or twice. I don't own a gun. Have you ever shot a firearm?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Okay.

I recently went to the Barrie Gun Club, which is a large gun club situated, obviously, in my riding of Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, not far from you. We'd love to have you up some time. There are too many good people there. I'm sure they'd welcome you with open arms.

It was interesting, and this has been talked about a little bit already today. They laid out a whole bunch of firearms for me on a picnic table, of all things, to educate me a little bit. I was trying to learn and they were showing me different firearms that shoot the exact same way, but some had plastic barrels and some had wooden ones. For someone like me who's not an avid gun owner, who doesn't know a lot about them, I couldn't get my head around why one was banned and one wasn't. You sound like you're at the same level as me—perhaps more knowledgeable, I'll give you that—but you haven't used them much either. Could you try to explain to me why your firearms ban has banned one and not the other?

I'll give you one more example, if I could, Minister. One of the gentlemen there has given some help to farmers in the Oro area for 15 years with their coyotes in the springtime and has used—and I had to look this up because I don't know them—a Ruger Mini-14 for many years. He's an upstanding citizen in our community and has helped farmers with their herds for free by getting rid of some coyotes in the rural area. That gun is now banned. He can't use it anymore, so this spring he is unable to go out and help those farmers, even though he's used that gun for 15 years.

Can you explain some of these differences and how someone like that could now be banned from using that firearm?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, Mr. Shipley, I'd be happy to visit you and your community at the earliest opportunity.

The decisions made around which guns to prohibit and which ones we should not is based on a variety of factors, including, as I mentioned, deadly force, the length of the barrel, the calibre of ammunition that a gun can hold, the number of rounds in a cartridge and the like, and whether or not it can be discharged within a certain period of time. My point to you is that those are the types of objective criteria that go into the decision as to which guns we deem too deadly, such that they require prohibition. You may want to also ask the commissioner of firearms, who's also the commissioner of the RCMP, who is a far greater expert, I think you would agree, than either you or me. Those are the types of criteria that are applied. It's not a “fixed point in time” decision. I'm sure experts continue to look at those criteria in a way that is consistent with the policy decisions that we, as Parliament, make, and which the government puts forward to Parliament for its approval.

• (1315)

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that.

Just to follow up, all those criteria you mentioned—and I am not an expert in firearms—were the exact same, the calibre, the length, everything. One said “plastic” on it and one had “wood”, but I'll leave it there. When you come up, we'll look into that and we'll get that answered ourselves. We can look into that.

I do have another question. Over this study we have heard some great witnesses and some heartbreaking testimony.

One of the people we heard from was Dr. Caillin Langmann. He is an accomplished academic and physician who has written three different peer-reviewed journal articles. All of his articles employ different statistical models and all of them analyze the relationship between firearm legislation and regulations and homicides and suicides.

All of them have come back with the same conclusion, that firearm legislation—which includes buybacks and bans—does not lower overall homicide and suicide rates. Instead, focusing on mental health issues, drug abuse, socioeconomic factors and other systematic factors reduce homicide rates and suicide rates.

Minister, could you tell me then what is different between Dr. Langmann and perhaps you and your government and procedures in going about this with the buybacks and banning of firearms?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Minister, but you have 15 seconds left.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It's like I said to Ms. Dancho: We have to take both strategies and put them into effect. From our point of view, we need to take more action to strengthen gun controls for those guns that are deadly, and we also have to address some of the root causes you have mentioned around mental health issues and others that lead to gun violence and gun tragedies. We will pursue both.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Damoff, the floor is yours for the next five minutes or so.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. It is absolutely wonderful having you here in person. Thank you.

I just want to follow up a little bit on my colleague's question about Dr. Langmann, because I recall asking him a question when he was here, and none of his research goes past 2016. He has not done research on Bill C-71, the extended background checks. I know that the Doctors For Protection From Guns disputes his research. I'm just putting that on the record.

I have a question for Commissioner Lucki.

Commissioner, we had Evelyn Fox here as a witness. She lost her child to gun violence and she indicated that, when people apply for their firearms licences, only 10% of references are checked. She is not the first person I've heard say that when people are applying for their firearms licence, the background checks are not necessarily followed up on. Commissioner, could speak to that, please?

Commr Brenda Lucki: First of all, new firearms licence applicants are searched against police and court data bases in order to assist a chief firearms officer in determining an individual's eligibility to hold a firearms licence. Then the firearms license holders are also under continuous eligibility screening, and the chief firearms officers are advised by police and by courts of occurrences that may affect the individual's eligibility to continue to hold a firearms licence.

That continuous eligibility process enables new, relevant occurrences to be entered into police or court records management systems and to be paired with those who hold a firearms licence, so any potential matches are sent to the chief firearms officer of jurisdiction for further investigation, and most of those decisions to hold or to continue to hold a firearms licence are based on—

Ms. Pam Damoff: Commissioner, I really have limited time and I want to ask CBSA something too, but what about the references? People give their partner of the previous two years as well as references. I'm specifically asking about those. Should we be requiring more checks on those?

Commr Brenda Lucki: They are collected only on the initial application and not the renewal, and they are based on threat, or, if a file is flagged, then they can follow up and do the reference checks.

Obviously if we could do all the reference checks of every single licence, that might give a better picture, but we would never have the resources to do that type of in-depth check on all such licences.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay, thank you, Commissioner.

My next question is for the CBSA.

When the union appeared here, they were talking about an issue with rail. I know we legislated that passenger rail would now go through pre-screening, so they wouldn't be referring to that. It wouldn't be travel like on the Rocky Mountaineer. There are three locations across Canada where passenger rail is now allowed between Canada and the U.S., but I'm just wondering, when it comes to cargo, they seemed to feel that guns were being smuggled on cargo rail.

I'm wondering if the CBSA or the RCMP would be able to comment on whether that's an issue and whether we should be looking at more screening on cargo that's brought in by rail.

• (1320)

Mr. John Ossowski (President, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you for the question.

First of all, I would say that the approach we take is very much dependent on the mode; for rail mode, we rely on advance commercial information. As well, with the rail lines that are trusted traders, the actual materials are considered to be in bond until they arrive in

the country. We have insights into how they maintain the security of the conveyances.

Just to put it into perspective, between two and two and a half million rail cars come into the country every year. When I look at that risk level compared with the traveller regime or other sorts of modes, and given the data and the risk profile, rail is not something that we think is as big a risk as the union conveyed.

Quite frankly, when we do interventions, we don't actually stop at the border. The intervention would happen at the first point where we could do it safely. It very much depends on the goods being conveyed.

What we would like to do is to start working upstream where the rail cars are assembled in the United States, using the intelligence approach that we're focusing on right now, to make sure we're targeting the right train before it gets into the country.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: I'd now like to ask Ms. Michaud to take the floor for two and a half minutes.

It's all yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister Mendicino, we were talking about military-style assault weapons and the buyback program. I was pleased to see your government commit to making it mandatory. This wasn't the case in the now defunct Bill C-21, which proposed to make this program optional.

Thank you for your openness to our proposal to define a firearm in the Criminal Code. I look forward to our discussions on this issue. The Bloc Québécois has been proposing this for quite some time. I'm glad to see the NDP agreeing with us. I think that this could be a good solution.

I'd like to address the handgun ban. In the past few months, your government has suddenly decided that banning handguns is no longer within its jurisdiction. It kicked the issue to the municipalities. We can see that this move was counterproductive. In my constituency alone, there are 56 municipalities. If there were different regulations for each municipality, that would be unmanageable. The idea was to transfer the issue to the provinces, but none of them took the leap and decided to ban handguns.

Don't you think that it would be more productive and effective for the federal government to take this on, since it has the duty to do so, and to develop a federal measure to ban handguns?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Michaud, I share your concerns about the handgun issue.

I know that, in recent months, the situation has been very difficult for Montreal communities. Several tragedies have occurred. A number of people have died, and that's unacceptable.

That's one reason why the federal government, through my department, has taken concrete action. For example, it has provided funding to Quebec and added resources to help the province. I just announced another program for Montreal last week. It's another example of the government taking action for Montreal and your province.

Regarding the issue of the handgun regulations, I've been working, and I'm always ready to work, with my counterpart in Quebec, Minister Geneviève Guilbault. We spoke last week about solutions so that the province can put in place provincial regulations while complying with federal jurisdiction over firearms and handguns.

• (1325)

[English]

The Chair: Now it's over to Mr. MacGregor.

Sir, you have that two-and-a-half-minute slot, and I'm sure you'll be judicious and effective.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: You know I am, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much.

Minister, we had some testimony at the beginning of this committee meeting about the desire of your government—and I share that desire—to get rid of mandatory minimums. Can you just be very clear, based on your experience as a Crown prosecutor, that there will still exist provisions in the Criminal Code to allow judges to modify the potential sentence based on the severity of the crime?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The short answer is yes. There are a number of principles set out in the Criminal Code that allow judges to take into account aggravating factors.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I believe it's section 718.2.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes, section 718.2.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: It's under principles of sentencing.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That's very precise.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: It's very important to get that on the record, because the narrative out there seems to imply that people who are before a court and are being charged with a serious crime are just going to walk away, and I think that is very clearly false.

For my next round, I note that you had an exchange earlier regarding high-capacity magazines. I know it is within your mandate letter to ban the sale or transfer, and also to require permanent alteration.

I wonder why it wouldn't be simpler to take the route of just banning high-capacity magazines outright, because there will always be the danger that someone with the technical know-how is going to allow them to hold more than the legal limit.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I share the same concern. I just want to assure you that we are looking at cartridges and taking a look at magazines. We are looking very carefully, as we did in the last session, at creating new laws to prohibit the alteration of magazines which would allow for a greater number than is permissible.

To be precise, we're open to working with you and others on that question. We will also take the advice that we're getting from the commissioner of firearms and other experts on how best to proceed. However, as you say, there's a very clear requirement within my mandate that we look at this issue very carefully and that we proceed with legislative reform where we can, and where there are other ideas, we will listen very carefully and take the advice of experts on that.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Chair, I took that extra 15 seconds.

The Chair: You did. Any time I can play you even, sir, I'm happy.

Ms. Vecchio, welcome to our committee.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much.

The Chair: We're so glad to have you here.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: You might decide you don't want me after I'm done today, but anyway, it's wonderful—

The Chair: We're going to find out over the next few minutes.

Go ahead.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: We will.

It's wonderful to be here with you all today.

I want to go back a bit to when you put in the order in council, in 2020, following the horrific shooting in April that we saw in Nova Scotia, and also seeing the horrific incidents that are happening in your communities, such as in downtown Toronto, as well as Montreal.

I'm very concerned, though, because we talk about this gun buy-back and we say, "Here's the order in council; we're taking away these guns." However, I notice that a lot of times we talk about violence against women involving firearms and I'm very concerned, because sometimes I think we're selling people a bill of goods that we're going to fix this if we do that.

I'm going to start very simply. In 2018 there were just under 600 victims of police-reported intimate partner violent incidents where a firearm was present, up from 401 in 2013. What is being done to ensure that firearms are not in play when it comes to domestic and intimate partner violence?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Vecchio, I share your concern. Maybe you'll just allow me a moment to explain why this is. I don't want any member of this committee to think that simply by way of introducing bans we solve the problem entirely. It might help. The government's firm belief is that it will help, but we need to do more than just ban firearms.

We also need to ensure that there is appropriate investment in law enforcement at our borders and in our communities, and as you heard from Ms. Dancho and others within your own ranks, the federal funds are being felt within the community. That's good. We should acknowledge that. That is not a partisan point; that is an important fact.

However, we also need to address root causes, and on intimate partner violence, you pointed out yourself that there were some 660 reports and incidents where a gun was present. That's up 60% from 2013, so one of the solutions we're looking at is the introduction of red flag and yellow flag laws.

• (1330)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I want to talk about this a bit, because I do really respect the fact. I go through the applications. I've applied for my possession and acquisition licence. I've done all these things too. My problem is that we all want to get rid of violence against women, and we saw on the shoulders of this the government come out with the order in council, which to me...whatever.

I'm looking at some of the statistics from just about 10 years ago, and 4% of those guns in domestic violence were registered. Only 24% of those people had a possession and acquisition licence. My problem is that the government is trying to fix something where this stuff is already illegal. We're talking about the bad people who are using illegal weapons. We're talking about a person who would impact their family by killing their own family member with a gun. We are talking about a mental health issue here for sure.

I wonder why we're putting so much money into a buyback where illegal people and bad people are still going to be doing these things, and why we're not taking that money and putting more into resources for violence against women and for CBSA, as well as mental health.

Why are we not doing that instead? Why are we not going directly to the core and are just assuming this is going to fix it?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Vecchio, I would submit to you that we are doing both. We are investing in greater law enforcement capacity to go after organized crime and those who would commit intimate partner violence or gender-based violence against women, and we are also addressing some of the root causes by investing more in mental health and by investing more in affordable housing and in greater health care.

To specifically answer your original question, within the context of this portfolio, we are introducing important measures like red flag and yellow flag laws, which allow guns to be taken out of the

hands of somebody who may pose a direct threat to women and girls—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Fair enough—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —and that is a tool and an instrument that we hope to enact as quickly as we can.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I really appreciate that. I think the thing is that we have to do more at the very beginning. When you talk about the root cause, that is where we're going to do it. I just find that with this government there is a really reactionary tone. A lot of times, it's "well, this happened" and, 10 days later, it's "we're going to do this." I don't find that it's the way that.... Did you actually get all of the data to support that?

I have 30 seconds...? Thank you.

I guess my thing is that at the end of the day, do you think this buyback will actually have that impact on violence against women, as you were noting back in 2020 when this came out?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes, and my view is supported by the advice we have gotten from law enforcement, particularly as it relates to AR-15 and assault-style firearms. That was supported by the rank and file as well as executives of law enforcement, and the extension of introducing a ban on that is—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I appreciate that, but—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —to get those guns off our streets and out of our communities.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: —what I'm saying is that only 4% of them are illegal—

The Chair: This is an opportunity to let both of you know that you're both out of time.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Well, I'll take him out later and we'll talk about it then.

The Chair: Colleagues know that I don't negotiate extra time very well.

Mr. Zuberi, you have the next slot, and you have five minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for being here, and thank you to all of the other witnesses.

I'm going to focus my questions on upstream, downstream and diversity inclusion generally. I'd like to start off with Commissioner Lucki.

We heard in previous testimony from Assistant Professor Robert Henry, who is with the Department of Indigenous Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, that “hiring more indigenous officers without changing the culture of policing itself does not actually make a bit of difference”.

For the RCMP, I'm sure you're tuned in to the question of indigeneity, of being culturally sensitive to indigenous people, and I'd like to just hear from you to what extent the RCMP is focused on the issue of indigenous people and to what extent the force is culturally sensitive.

• (1335)

Commr Brenda Lucki: Your comments are well taken, because you can't just assume that if you bring more indigenous people into the organization, they will see themselves within the organization. You have to provide the opportunity to promote within the rank and file, the opportunity to become a leader and the opportunities for training and promotion.

It's all about changing the culture and providing that most inclusive culture so that people can, first of all, in recruitment, see themselves within the organization, but that they feel a part of the organization where they can thrive, not just survive. They need to thrive within the rank and file to become a future leader and, hopefully, a future commissioner.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Yes, certainly.

You touched briefly upon culture and the changing culture within the police force. Can you elaborate a bit more upon that?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, absolutely.

When I got into the chair, I brought in what we call “Vision 150”. It's all about, from start to finish, bringing in the right people and then making sure they are properly trained, and trained with empathy, and bringing in programs that address issues within our society, such as within the BIPOC communities with vulnerable people and teaching them how to deal with that. As well, it's about providing opportunities for people when things don't go right: that they have a place where they feel safe, where they feel trusted and that they can go to.

We've brought in a new independent centre for harassment. We've brought in an RCMP-indigenous collaboration, co-development and accountability office, where it's not just for collaboration outside of the organization, but also allows a venue for indigenous members to come forward if they are not feeling they are being treated with fairness, and where we can be more transparent and provide them with the opportunity.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: We heard also from the president of the Winnipeg Police Association, Maurice Sabourin. He spoke about how he would like to see more resources for intervention.

Do you have any programs that deal with intervention upstream to prevent people getting into gangs that will obviously help mitigate the gun crimes that we're talking about?

Commr Brenda Lucki: That's a great question.

We have a great program in B.C. that I'd like to highlight. It's called the gang intervention and exiting team. It provides that support to the high-risk individuals who are engaged in gang activities.

It empowers those that are involved in gangs to exit. It has counselling services, life coaching, education, employment programming and mental health supports.

We've seen over 20 people in the last couple of years exit gangs because of the support they've received through this gang intervention and exiting team strategy.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

I'd like to turn now to the minister regarding upstream programs that are essentially preventing people from entering gangs and downstream ones in helping people to exit gangs.

Minister, would you like to share any programs or policies regarding those two ends?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you very much, Mr. Zuberi.

It allows me to highlight that in budget 2018 our government invested \$327.6 million over five years, with \$100 million ongoing to establish the initiative to take action against gun and gang violence. In 2019, we actually increased funding for this initiative to \$358.8 million.

I would also point out, Mr. Zuberi, that the government has allocated \$250 million to the building safer communities fund for those communities that have seen a disproportionate amount of gun violence. There are lots of good resources which we will dispense in partnership with communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Colleagues, I'm looking at the clock. The last round is 25 minutes, which would take us a few minutes past two o'clock. With your permission, I'll go that way, or I could cut a minute off of everybody's time and we'll finish exactly at two.

What's your preference? Do we go to five after two and get everybody through in this round? Are you okay with that, everybody?

It will be five minutes late. I'm at your disposal. Is that acceptable?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I know if this spills over into QP I won't be getting any questions from my critic, if she's still here.

The Chair: No, there will be lots of time to go from one place to the other, Minister.

• (1340)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: There will be plenty of time. That's right.

The Chair: Ms. Dancho, I think the floor is yours. You can take your full five.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

I did want to follow up on the issue of rail. When I spoke to the Winnipeg police on Friday, they showed me a map of guns they've traced from Mexico and all over the U.S. There is a direct rail line from Mexico through the U.S. right up to Winnipeg. We have something called CentrePort where we have a massive amount of railcars coming in. The police explained that they do not have the capacity to check all of these railcars. We also heard from CBSA and the union representing their border agents that they don't have the capacity to search all of the railcars.

Police were very keen to express to me that there is a rising amount of drug and gun smuggling compared to even five years ago. It's substantially increased and it's increasing at an exponential rate.

I appreciate the funds your government has given to the border agents. That's fantastic. However, this is a growing issue. Again, I would just say that I think with the billion dollars that your government may be proposing for the handgun ban or the buyback, there would be much more of an impact on public safety if we could search railcars at a higher capacity. That is where police are saying illegal firearms and illegal drugs are coming in.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

In brief, we hope with the additional funds that we have set aside for CBSA there will be more guns that are interdicted and stopped at the border, regardless of the mode of transportation. I would take you back to what President Ossowski said about moving upstream, working closely with American partners to identify the sources of where those guns are coming from and being more pinpointed and targeted, whether it's by rail, land or sea. You may want to put an additional question to him about that.

The technology and the networks that we are leveraging with our American partners are a key part of the strategic plan that we have to stop guns from entering into the country regardless of the mode.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Minister.

I do appreciate the investments made. I just feel that a billion dollars can make a world of a difference for stopping this growing issue that's increasing in capacity as the days and years go by. I saw it with my own eyes.

Another issue is youth diversion programs. Your government has also invested money in that, which I appreciate, but we've been hearing from organizations on the ground that they have yet to see a significant amount of that five-year investment of \$250 million. That hasn't quite trickled down to have the effect your government had hoped.

We heard from Marcell Wilson, for example, who is an ex-gang member. He used to smuggle firearms into Canada almost at an organized crime professional level. He's pretty much an expert in this regard.

We also heard from the Bear Clan, which is an indigenous, matriarch-led organization at the grassroots level in Winnipeg. They're saying that just because something is banned, no one anticipates that criminals who handle these guns illegally, who own them illegally or who possess already prohibited firearms, are going to hand

over their guns to you. I haven't seen any evidence to suggest otherwise. I've asked you this question before.

The point they were making was that if your government is going to spend billions of dollars, please give it to them so they can divert youth from going into gangs. It would really have an impact long-term on gun violence if we can inject a billion dollars, for example, into youth diversion programs rather than to the buyback and the handgun ban.

I think it's urgent and I would much rather see your government divert that money to youth diversion programs.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Dancho, I'm very eager to make the full use of the \$250 million that has been allocated under the building safer communities fund. I assure you that my department and I—we spoke about this last week as well with our provincial and territorial partners—will make sure that money has a positive impact to reduce gun violence.

I will also say that the over \$350 million that we have used to tackle guns and gang violence is not just about enforcement. As you've heard at this committee, some of that money is also being used as a preventative strategy to great effect, even in your own community of Winnipeg. We will do both.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate that. I hope you keep on and make sure that money gets to the grassroots level. I think we can use more.

In my last 30 seconds, Chair, I would like to say that I have a growing concern about redirecting already limited police resources to enforcing this buyback program to target law-abiding citizens who have legally owned firearms that are now going to be illegal within the coming weeks. I'm greatly concerned about the impact on public safety when we're taking limited police resources away and diverting them to something that's not really going to have much of an impact, according to the experts we've heard.

I just wanted to caution that. That's my concern, Minister.

Thank you.

• (1345)

The Chair: Take 10 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We will invest in law enforcement as part of that and ensure that the buyback program gets deadly guns off of our streets and out of our communities while also preventing gun crime.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Chiang, you're up next. You have five minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

My question is directed to the minister. We heard from a number of witnesses that there are gaps in the data we collect on the use of firearms and the violence they inflict. While this study has focused on guns and gangs, if we take a broader public health approach we know that firearms can be used as a coercive tool by intimate partners or be used by individuals who die by suicide.

After hearing from witnesses regarding the gaps that exist, I want to get your opinion on the Government of Canada creating and funding an interdisciplinary national centre of excellence dedicated to collecting Canadian-specific data and conducting research on firearms violence.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Mr. Chiang, for the question.

I agree that we have to invest in institutions like the one you have just described so that, among other things, we are collecting the best available data that can show the path forward to reducing intimate partner violence. It can also show how other communities have been disproportionately impacted by guns and gang violence.

We are going to make the investments into those institutions. We're going to make the investments that are necessary to collect that data. We are going to work very closely with law enforcement, victims groups and other stakeholders, so that we put into place the strategies that will have the best and most positive impact possible.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Minister.

My question is now to the CBSA.

Mr. Ossowski, to follow up on Ms. Damoff's questions about trains originating from the U.S., you had mentioned that it's best for you to be at the point of origin to inspect those trains before they're being loaded.

Do we have an agreement with the United States for our CBSA officers to down in the U.S. to inspect those freight trains?

Mr. John Ossowski: Yes, we actually have an overarching pre-clearance agreement. If you've travelled to the United States you'll know that when you're at a Canadian airport, you can be pre-cleared into the United States. That agreement is reciprocal and we're looking at doing something where we would position our officers in the United States and use intel to target a particular conveyance before the train gets assembled and it gets a lot more difficult to deal with it.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much.

In saying that, do you have the adequate tools and technology to manage these issues?

Mr. John Ossowski: Certainly one of the things that the current strategy is focusing on is the intelligence and working with our law enforcement partners to understand the criminal routings. That's the key part that would drive us to look at a certain conveyance over another. That's where we're really focusing—upstream before it gets into Canada.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Do I have some more time left?

The Chair: Only if you want it.

Mr. Paul Chiang: I have one more question.

The Chair: If you want to give some time to the committee, I'll take it.

Mr. Paul Chiang: I have one more question for the RCMP.

Commissioner Lucki, you had mentioned the gang program out in B.C. that was very effective. Are there any proposals for getting these programs to the other provinces across Canada?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Obviously many of the areas that we police are very small, rural communities, so we try to centralize such programs into the bigger centres. Obviously if we could at every major city.... I know a lot of the municipal police agencies have that. Any time we get something like this gang intervention and exiting team, we share it with all the divisions across the country so they can, in fact.... Maybe they can't do a full-blown type program like what's being done in the Lower Mainland, but they can take parts of it and work with that inter-agency approach because it's much better when we work with the other agencies such as education, health, housing and social services. That inter-agency approach through a hub model is much more effective.

• (1350)

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much, Commissioner.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Michaud, you have two and a half minutes. The floor is yours. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the witnesses who aren't here in person today. I'd like to thank the RCMP commissioner, Ms. Lucki, who often takes the time to join us. We greatly appreciate it.

When we have the opportunity to meet with a minister, we like to ask questions.

Minister Mendicino, I want to discuss the handgun ban. During the election campaign, your government, in order to evade responsibility for having said that the provinces would be in charge of this issue, decided to provide one billion dollars to address it. Some suggested that perhaps the billion dollars was for the gun buyback program. The parliamentary budget officer said that the buyback program could cost as much as \$756 million, which leaves little money for the handgun ban.

I'm curious about where that billion dollars is coming from. Can you break down the different budgets and tell us where the money will be allocated?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for the question, Ms. Michaud.

The government promised to invest one billion dollars in concrete measures to address the handgun issue. We'll use this funding in conjunction with the provinces.

We believe that federal funding could be used by the provinces and territories, and they would appreciate it. However, we'll need to discuss what programs and initiatives they'll develop to deal with handguns.

We must have a good faith dialogue with the provinces and territories to find concrete solutions that will work on the ground. We must be mindful of the perspectives of committees such as yours in order to develop a successful strategy.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I'll spend my remaining time asking you a question about—

The Chair: Ms. Michaud, you have only 10 seconds left.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Minister Mendicino.

Maybe we'll have the chance to talk about figures again, because we didn't really get an answer to the question.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, go ahead. You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I just want to read you a quote from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians. This is with respect to the proposed red flag law. It reads:

...placing the onus on a family member of a depressed person, a demented parent, or the perpetrator of domestic violence to go through the court system is a largely unworkable and unwelcome hindrance to getting guns temporarily out of the home of those in crisis.

They're not the only organization that has raised concerns with the proposed law and placing the onus on someone to go through a court system that can take its time. Would your government be open to changing the law so that there's an automatic prohibition and families are saved that process?

Also, because I want to front-load my questions to give you time to answer, my second question is on the national criminal intelligence system. We did have testimony from the RCMP, who said that the system is built on a platform that is decades old and no longer serves the very effective purposes of exchanging, developing and sharing intelligence between police services. What will your government be doing to address those gaps?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, if it's okay, Mr. MacGregor, I'll take your last question first because I think I can cut to the chase and then expand a little bit on your first question.

We'll continue to make the investments that are necessary to upgrade and modernize our technology platforms so that we're gathering the data we need in conjunction with law enforcement. I'm happy to chat offline with you more about that.

With regard to your first question and the concerns you expressed on behalf of emergency physicians, you are quite right that they are not the only group that has expressed a concern about the potential outing and vulnerabilities of victims and those who face

gun violence and gender-based violence in general. I am very sensitive to that. We are going to work with you and with all parliamentarians to make sure we get our “red flag” and “yellow flag” regime right. I am concerned about ensuring that victims are empowered and can come forward when they choose to without compromising in any way their personal safety or integrity. We're going to work on it together.

• (1355)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We have five minutes left. We'll have two more questions of three minutes each, which means that we will end within one minute of being on time.

That depends on your efficiency, Mr. Lloyd. The floor is yours.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Minister, in an exchange with Mr. MacGregor earlier today, we were talking about high-capacity magazines. Minister, are you aware that high-capacity magazines are banned in Canada, and have been for quite some time?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay, that's good know. From the rhetoric that we're hearing, people seem to be unaware that this has been banned.

You stated earlier that frontline police officers support your gun buyback policy, and yet the National Police Federation, which is the largest union of frontline personnel, has said that your gun buyback program is going to take away critical resources and is not going to be effective.

How can you back up your claim that most frontline police officers support your policies when the union that represents them has come out and said that they do not support these policies?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, Mr. Lloyd, I think my point to you is that, in consultation with many rank and file as well as executive members of law enforcement, there is support for the buyback program.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Certainly there's support amongst individual members, but when we're talking about the statement of the union that represents most frontline personnel, that is a statement on behalf of all of those frontline members. That's a pretty compelling statement.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: By your own acknowledgement, your own words and the question you just put to me, there are different views—one by the union you just referred to, as well as the views of other rank and file members and executive members of law enforcement. My point to you is simply that the government believes that the buyback program is a responsible way to get deadly guns off of our streets and out of our communities.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: In my final time, Minister, May 1 is coming very quickly. I know that many legal firearms owners are very concerned that they're going to become criminals as of May 2. Can you guarantee to Canadian firearms owners that if your buyback program is not up and running by May 1, they're not going to be made criminals because of your government's inability to get this program going?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, I think this committee appearance has largely been an example of how we can have reasonable debate.

We don't agree on gun control—you and I, your party and my party, and our government. Let's be candid about that, but the idea that somehow we're criminalizing law-abiding gun owners does not advance that debate. That's not what we're doing.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: It's an honest question. It's coming up on May 1. What's going to happen on May 2, Minister? This isn't about rhetoric; it's a straight-up question.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. I'll give you 10 seconds to close this off.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We will work with those individuals who were previously in lawful possession of banned and prohibited firearms to make sure that we can transition to the new regime that has been in place since March 2020.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Zuberi, you have the last slot of three minutes. Take the floor, please, whenever you're ready.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

I want to turn the floor back again to the minister around upstream and downstream programs. I know you were elaborating on them. I'd like to hear if you have more to say. As Madame Michaud said, we don't have you every day at committee, so I just want to give you that space and time, please.

Just to preface this a little bit, we did hear, for example, from Keep6ix, which helps those who lived in the gang lifestyle to get out of gangs. Those types of programs are so meaningful, and I personally feel that they help make our country safer and soften the edges of the justice system and policing, which we must do. I just want to hear your thoughts on that.

● (1400)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: You are absolutely right, Mr. Zuberi, and I think it is those kinds of organizations that have come before

this committee that give you a real-life illustration of how we can take federal investments and translate them into safer communities.

I think about the various investments that we have made to reduce gun and gang violence, the building safer communities fund, which I am extremely committed to seeing have a positive impact in our communities and also then, once that funding is there, to get out of the way.

I think we in government have to really make way for young people across a wide array of communities because they are best positioned to offer some solutions around mentoring each other. I often hear within my own community that those who have had experience within gangs and who have rehabilitated are really well positioned to offer advice, consultation and support, as well as others who work within the community.

I think we have to create those spaces, and they're not just bricks and mortar and actual physical spaces. We've got to make sure that we are giving a seat at the table to the people who live within communities and who feel in a very visceral way the negative impact of gun violence on a daily basis, so that they can drive those solutions and take those leadership roles. That's how we're going to reduce gun crime, in my view, and my commitment is to work with you and all parliamentarians to ensure that it happens.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Colleagues, that was a very substantial and important conversation. I thank you all for it. I haven't been around parliamentary committees very long—at least not as a member and certainly not as a chair—but this to me is a wonderful example of how Parliament ought to be working. Thank you all very much for that.

Minister, you've been so generous with your time. The motion said we would spend three hours on the subject, which you gave. On behalf of all of us, thank you very much. I know how intense this time is for you.

Members of the committee, thanks for a job well done. I'll see you all Thursday.

This meeting is adjourned.

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