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Chair: The Honourable Jim Carr



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• (1205)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 26 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

I will start by acknowledging that I am meeting on Treaty 1 territory and the home of the Métis nation.

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. Members and witnesses participating virtually may speak in the official language of their choice. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), 108(2) and the motion adopted on Tuesday, March 22, the committee will commence consideration of the main estimates for 2022-23 and the subject matter of the supplementary estimates (C) 2021-22.

I now call vote 1 under the Canada Border Services Agency.

With us today we have the Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Public Safety, and officials from the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Correctional Service of Canada, the Parole Board of Canada and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Welcome to all.

Welcome, Minister. You have the floor for opening remarks whenever you're ready to begin, sir.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, we thank you for inviting us to join you today.

[English]

I'm pleased to present the 2022-23 main estimates for the public safety portfolio.

[Translation]

I would first like to point out that I am accompanied today by some officials:

[English]

We have Rob Stewart, my deputy minister; Anne Kelly, commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada; President John Osowski of the Canada Border Services Agency; and of course, Brenda Lucki, commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, among a bevy of other officials whom I want to express gratitude to for being here with us today.

I want to begin by stating that I appreciate the committee's studies on matters related to keeping Canadians safe. I've had the opportunity to speak to you on several occasions now on gun control and on gang prevention, both of which I will expand on in a moment. I've also addressed this committee regarding various security issues around the illegal blockades we witnessed in January and February of this year.

[Translation]

I also look forward to speaking with you in a few weeks when you continue your study on Canada's security posture in relation to Russia.

Before I talk about the numbers, I want to once again thank the many dedicated professionals at the Department of Public Safety, who work day and night to keep Canadians safe.

[English]

That's especially remarkable during the time of uncertainty with which we are confronted: a global pandemic, an unfolding war in Ukraine, protests around the country and many more challenges affecting Canadians.

Protecting the public is the government's first duty and among the highest of our obligations as parliamentarians. We will continue to stand up for all Canadians. Just this week, the tragedy in Buffalo reminded us of the despicable and deadly threat posed by hate and racism. Canada is not immune. We cannot turn away from the threat of racism and of the ideological extremism that informs it more broadly. It is our duty to share the collaborative efforts in staving this deadly threat in the face and to make good on our commitment to protect the Canadian people.

This commitment is why Canada's public safety portfolio is the largest non-military portfolio in government, and it's what these estimates reflect in my portfolio, ensuring that we live up to that obligation by backing up that work with solid and reliable funding.

On that portfolio-wide basis, the total authorities sought in the main estimates will result in funding approvals of \$11.3 billion for the public safety portfolio for this fiscal year. That would result in a net increase of \$1.2 billion, or 12%, over last year's estimates. You will see that year over year for the portfolio, funding levels remain stable.

I'll point to four main highlights. For Public Safety Canada, the total funding sought is \$883.5 million, representing a net decrease of \$172 million over the previous year. For the Canada Border Services Agency, the total funding sought is \$2.3 billion, representing a net increase of \$294.6 million, which includes compensation adjustments. For the Correctional Service of Canada, total funding sought is \$3.1 billion, representing a \$257-million increase, and for the RCMP, the total funding sought is \$4.2 billion, representing an increase of \$794.5 million. That includes a net increase for negotiated salary adjustments stemming from the new national police federal collective agreement and an increase in grants and contributions to compensate members of the RCMP for injuries received in the line of duty.

• (1210)

[Translation]

I will briefly discuss the main elements that this amount encompasses so as to provide a breakdown.

[English]

There is a \$345.8-million decrease in funding regarding the disaster financial assistance arrangements program, or DFAA. That's based on forecasts from provinces and territories for expected disbursements under the DFAA for this fiscal year. Due to the unpredictable nature of natural disasters, the DFAA funding levels may be significantly adjusted through the course of this fiscal year. For example, departmental reference levels will be increased in 2022-23 in order to provide advance payments to the Province of British Columbia for several flooding events, including the devastating flooding disaster that occurred in November 2021.

Over the past 10 years, the annual DFAA payments have ranged from \$99 million in 2012 to over \$2 billion planned for this fiscal year. The program has contributed more in the past 10 years than it did in the previous 42 years. It is worth noting that unforeseen circumstances, for example a new disaster or a last-minute amendment to the timing and amount of a province's payment request, can drastically impact the DFAA's annual appropriations.

As I've noted, also in these main estimates are a \$305.4-million increase for negotiated salary adjustments stemming from the new police federal collective agreement and a \$230.3-million increase to help compensate members of the RCMP for injuries received in the performance of duty.

Mr. Chair, these items represent the most significant changes in appropriations. As Minister of Public Safety, my top priority re-

mains keeping Canadians safe, and I look forward to your questions and comments.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Now I will open the floor for questions. To lead us off with a six-minute block, I would welcome Mr. Lloyd to take the floor when he is ready.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for coming, Minister.

Minister, on May 2 you stated in the House of Commons that on the recommendation of law enforcement, you invoked the Emergencies Act.

Given new evidence from the RCMP commissioner and the Ottawa chief of police that they did not ask you to invoke the Emergencies Act, do you still stand by your statement, yes or no?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I do, Mr. Lloyd, because as you heard from Commissioner Lucki, there was consultation, including seeking advice on the powers that were included in the Emergencies Act. It was necessary. It kept Canadians safe. We stand by that decision.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister.

Dozens of churches in Canada were vandalized and burnt to the ground last year alone. Do you consider these to be acts of terrorism?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, I think you would know, from me and from our government, that we stand against all forms of violence. Where appropriate and whenever necessary, we will continue to condemn that form of violence.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Minister, under Canadian law the definition of terrorism indicates that a terrorist act is one that is used to intimidate for political, ideological or religious purposes, and that can include significant damage to property.

Do you consider the complete destruction of churches across Canada last year to meet the definition in Canadian law of a terrorist act, yes or no?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, you will know from previous testimony that I have extensive experience prosecuting terrorism. I am familiar with the definition, and of course, where violence is informed by a political, ideological or religious motivation, it can be prosecuted, but of course, those decisions are up to police to make independently.

Regardless, I condemn that kind of violence, and I think all reasonable and fair-minded Canadians would.

• (1215)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay, Minister.

Can you tell the committee if you are familiar with the following quote? It is “bring forward measures to counter the rise of ideologically-inspired violent extremism and strengthen the capacity of Canadian police and prosecutors to bring to justice cybercriminals and terror suspects to the fullest extent of the law.”

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Of course I am, yes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: What is it from?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It's from the mandate.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: It's from your mandate letter. I'm glad you know your mandate letter. That's very reassuring.

What are you doing to ensure that the suspects—the hate crime suspects—who destroyed these churches, are brought to justice to the fullest extent of the law?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, I think we need to go back to an important principle in our democracy, which is that we, as parliamentarians, write laws and we create policies to address ideological extremism, but we place our confidence in law enforcement to apply those laws, to investigate and to prosecute independently, Mr. Lloyd. I would think that you would agree that we ought not to be going into that function because—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Certainly, Minister, but your mandate letter says that you need to strengthen the capacity of police to bring these criminals to justice to “the fullest extent of the law.”

What are you doing to give prosecutors and the police the tools to bring the church-burning suspects to justice?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, we have strong laws on the books, as we have pointed out, to ensure that criminals are brought to justice, especially those who commit crimes on the basis of religious, political and ideological motivations. Second, we're also continuing to invest in law enforcement, providing them with additional resources—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Is there an investigation into these church burnings? Is there an investigation continuing?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm sorry, but I didn't hear your question.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Are you aware of whether there is an investigation continuing into these church burnings?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, again, as I've said on a couple of occasions, investigations are carried out independently by law enforcement.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Are you not aware of whether or not there's an investigation?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I believe that questions around investigations are best directed to law enforcement.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Minister, an attack against one faith community in this country is an attack against all faith communities. Some national security experts who have come before this committee have stated that certain extremists, particularly those who attack pipelines and burn down churches, are acting with impunity because they don't believe that your government will go after them.

What do you have to say to that? From national security experts....

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, I hope that you, as a responsible parliamentarian, would discourage them from believing that. I would hope that you would say that we are united as parliamentarians in stamping out any kind of ideological—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: This isn't me saying this, Minister. These are national security experts who are saying that these people are acting with impunity because they don't believe that your government is going after them.

What is your government going to do to ensure that these extremists know that they will face the consequences?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We'll call it out. We'll support law enforcement so that they can bring those criminals to justice.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Did you make a statement about the churches that were burnt down last year?

Did you call it out, Minister?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, if you were listening carefully to my testimony, I just condemned that form of violence right now.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Last year, when it happened, did you call it out at the time?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, we'll always condemn that form of violence.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay, but you can't say whether you called it out at that time.

In my community, indigenous, Cree and Métis, along with Franco-Albertans and Catholics, were devastated by the destruction of the iconic St. Jean Baptiste Church in Morinville, and we hope that you will work harder to bring justice to these committees.

I have one final question. Numerous witnesses and studies have indicated that foreign interference played a significant role in several constituencies and led to the defeat of incumbent candidates in the 2021 election. CSIS's 2021 reports cites numerous examples of foreign interference in Canada and how it is a risk to our elections, but it makes no mention of the 2021 election.

Do you believe that foreign interference had an impact on the election results in some ridings in the last election?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Again, I will leave it to the service to comment on foreign interference with respect to their expertise, but I will tell you that we, together, need to be very much on high alert against foreign interference, including—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: When you received briefings, Minister, did they tell you that there was foreign interference in the election?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, if I could just be permitted to finish my response....

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You have 20 seconds.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: What I was saying was that I think we collectively need to be very vigilant and on high alert against foreign interference, including as it relates to our democratic institutions, which obviously includes elections. We need to be sure that as we are on alert we are having very rigorous discussions with our international security partners to make sure they have the tools that are necessary to protect against that threat to our national security.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now I will call upon Mr. Noormohamed to begin his six minutes of questioning.

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

Minister, thank you for joining us. I want to begin by thanking you for the work you do in helping to keep Canadians safe and, in particular, for your unwavering commitment to ensuring that all forms of hate and extremism are condemned. I commend you and the government for that.

Minister, we've heard from many witnesses from different walks of life, including our security services, that the greatest threat we currently face in the country—

• (1220)

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're not getting English translation.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Mr. Chair, I'm assuming that my time has stopped.

The Chair: Yes. Let's try it now.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Minister, we've heard from a number of witnesses, from our security forces, from law enforcement and from academics, that the greatest threat Canada faces from an ideologically motivated violent extremism perspective is from the far right and from white nationalists. Would you agree with this assessment?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would.

Just yesterday, I made a number of statements condemning the recent act in Buffalo as being an act of white supremacy and anti-Black racism, but the point I would just highlight, Mr. Noormohamed, as I think your question strongly implies, is that we are not immune in Canada to either racism or hate. Together we have work to do, which I hope will be advanced by the good work of this committee.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Minister.

With that in mind, then, can you talk to us a bit about the investments the government is making to respond to the rising IMVE threat, about what more you think we need to do about it and about whether you feel that the estimates informed here allow the agency to do that work?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I've highlighted the year over year increases, particularly to law enforcement branches like the RCMP and other partners within the national security sphere, so that they can address the increasingly complex threat landscape that includes ideological extremism, which can lead to the proliferation of hatred, fear and racism and which can then lead to violence, including as it relates to gun violence.

I would also just highlight that it is important that we develop the appropriate laws and policies to call out and condemn all forms of racism. The work we have done as a government—for example, listing entities like Proud Boys, which is a self-declared white supremacist group—is part of the ongoing effort that we together as parliamentarians should be advancing to address and reduce as much as possible racism in our society.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Minister.

I would like to switch gears a bit. As a British Columbian, as you well know, there is a significant concern related to money laundering, particularly as it relates to the real estate market in British Columbia. I know that budget 2022 provides funding to Public Safety to undertake work to develop, design and, hopefully, implement the Canada financial crimes agency.

Can you speak to your view on the timeline around this and, in particular, some of the areas in which you believe this agency will be able to address some of the issues that we are really concerned about in British Columbia?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Noormohamed, I'm happy to take that question and the creation of this new financial agency as work that has already begun, work that I'm doing in collaboration with the Deputy Prime Minister and the finance minister, with whom I share responsibility in the creation of this agency. In addition to giving it the seed money that is required, I would say again that we need to continue to make the investments in our law enforcement at the RCMP and with FINTRAC to make sure that we are routing out money laundering.

I would also just highlight a growing concern that I think we all share on the exploitation of Canadians online, particularly vulnerable Canadians. Through various new platforms, it's important that we put into place the necessary education, prevention and technological protections that are necessary to safeguard Canadians' investments. Certainly the creation of this financial agency will lead to that additional rigour within our financial sector to achieve that goal.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Minister.

There has also been a lot of conversation and a lot of concern about oversight for the RCMP and CBSA, and I think rightly so.

The government committed in the last budget to advance this work. Can you share a little bit about whether those investments are, indeed, being made and what, in fact, that investment will do in terms of addressing oversight with respect to the RCMP and CBSA?

• (1225)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It's a very timely question given that just this morning I tabled legislation that would further strengthen civilian review of the RCMP and the CBSA. More broadly speaking, this is a government that believes very much that we need both oversight and review to engender transparency and accountability so that Canadians can trust in our institutions, including enforcement.

I want to again commend the work of a number of officials that are on this call, including President Ossowski as well as Commissioner Lucki, with whom we work very closely to make sure that there is transparency and accountability. I know they are committed to working very closely with the government to make sure that those mechanisms are in place so that Canadians can have trust in their institutions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I would now invite Ms. Michaud to take the floor for a six-minute block of questions.

Whenever you're ready, Ms. Michaud, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, thank you for being here.

I also thank your colleagues who are with you today for their availability.

Minister, I would like to talk to you about guns. We often talk to each other about it during question periods. We also talked about it during your last visit to the committee. My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I have assured you, on several occasions, of our support for better gun control. However, we still expressed our disagreement on how to do it.

We believe that banning military-style assault weapons piecemeal or passing regulations banning thousands of weapons at a time has the effect of making other weapons, available on the market once the regulations are in place, legal. My party and organizations like PolySeSouvient have proposed amending the definition of assault weapon in the Criminal Code. This would prevent some weapons from falling through the regulatory cracks. Other countries have done this, including the United States in 1994.

I'd like you to talk to us about that, because I know that you recently announced investments for police forces, provinces, and municipalities. That is very good and we agree on these investments. That said, I think there is a way to amend the Criminal Code so that more weapons are not allowed to remain unrestricted for the time being.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Michaud, thank you for your question and your suggestions. We will always be open to new ways to strengthen our laws. Last week, for example, I announced that new obligations would be imposed on firearms dealers. These rules could help prevent gun violence.

As for the question about AR-15 assault weapons, I hope everyone feels the same way. This particular type of firearm has no place in our communities. That's exactly why we banned it nationwide.

I would like to point out that the order in council applies in perpetuity. New military firearms have been added to the list of prohibited weapons. I therefore hope that the practical application of this government decision will reassure the Bloc Québécois somewhat that this work will continue.

For the rest, I am always ready to look for concrete solutions. I have a lot of commitments with my Quebec counterparts. Just yesterday, I had a discussion with Minister Guilbault. Almost a month ago, I was at the Montreal Forum on Combating Gun Violence, at the invitation of the mayor.

● (1230)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: This is more or less reassuring, in that things are evolving extremely fast at the moment. The WK180-C rifle model, which works almost exactly like the AR-15, is on the market and is still classified as non-restricted. I understand that the regulations are updated often, but there are still guns that manage to sneak onto the market that people can go and get without any problems.

By making this amendment to the Criminal Code, I think the problem would be solved. In the last Parliament, your colleague introduced Bill C-21 to regulate assault weapons. A buyback program was proposed, which you later made mandatory.

Can we expect this bill to be introduced before the end of the parliamentary session? Do you have a date to suggest to us?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I hope it will be done as soon as possible. I know that this is a very important, if not essential, issue in this matter. There are some priorities in my mandate that I hope will be outlined in a bill that will be tabled shortly. It will even address the specific questions you have asked me.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I know that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, CSIS, is working on the terrorist entity list, and that's fine. Perhaps the service will need more resources, for example.

In the same vein, yesterday, during question period, it was said that the creation of a registry of criminal organizations could help curb violence in the streets, particularly in Montreal, where there is a gang war. They are the ones shooting almost everywhere in broad daylight and killing innocent people. It was suggested that this proposed registry be linked to the list of terrorist entities, because membership in a terrorist group is a criminal act, while being a member of the Hells Angels or a street gang is not.

Do you believe that the creation of such a registry could help curb violence?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I know we only have 30 seconds left, but there are provisions in the Criminal Code that can be used by police forces to prosecute criminal organizations.

As for the second part of your question, the list of terrorist entities is very important in the current context, given all the challenges related to racism and terrorism.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. MacGregor, I now call upon you to take six minutes to pose your questions to the minister.

Go ahead, whenever you're ready, sir.

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

Minister, thank you for joining us at committee today.

We had the systemic racism in policing report presented to the House 11 months ago, and it was retabled in this Parliament. You were handed your mandate letter in December, which includes some instructions from the Prime Minister with regard to the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission and establishing a legislative framework for indigenous policing.

Here we are in May, Minister, and I think a number of people, particularly indigenous, racialized and Black Canadians, are starting to get a bit concerned with the pace at which you are moving on this file. You have expressed in the House a number of times how important this is to you, but I would like to know when you are actually going to get moving on some of the systemic reforms we need to see in the legislation regarding how the RCMP conducts itself. When I look at the estimates, the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission does not have a budgetary increase that is commensurate with what the agency is expected to be doing.

When is your government actually going to move forward and put forward some real, concrete measures on this?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The first thing I want to say, Mr. MacGregor, is that I share the urgency of those communities, and I want to communicate through you to them and say directly that I agree. We need to accelerate the progress as it relates to reforms of our institutions, including law enforcement.

Earlier today, we tabled legislation in the House of Commons that would enhance a civilian review of both the RCMP and the CBSA as a way of fostering more public confidence and trust.

I'll say a few brief words about reconciliation because you and I have had a number of exchanges on this. I believe we have to increase the speed with which we continue to recruit more indigenous people into law enforcement. I know this is something the commissioner of the RCMP is very dedicated to doing. Equally, in both the oversight and the review functions we are creating—

• (1235)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Yes, but specifically on the statutory timelines, when are those going to be acted upon?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Precisely. Thank you for highlighting that.

The law that we have tabled this morning will speak specifically to codifying timelines in the context of complaints. I agree that we need to accelerate all of this work.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

In addition to my next question, can you make a comment on the legislative framework for indigenous policing? I want to know where we're at with that.

The other broader question is regarding the role of the RCMP in the future. As you know, in my home province of British Columbia, there was an all-party legislative committee of the B.C. legislature that has now recommended that British Columbia start a provincial police force.

In response to Mr. Noormohamed's question, you were referencing the financial crimes agency, which I think is an area that we need to concentrate on. There are muddied waters ahead about what you see the RCMP doing. There are questions about its contract policing. What kind of a role is it going to play with this financial crimes agency? If you can expand on that, I think we need to have some answers.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Certainly.

I would say at the outset that the creation of this new financial agency is still very much in its infant stages. I think we need to contemplate a strong degree of collaboration between this new agency and FINTRAC, for example, which is within the RCMP. I would say that, beyond that, I would be quite keen to talk to you about how you envision the relationship between that agency and other pre-existing law enforcement branches should operate.

Just on contractual policing, I want to take a moment to really impress upon you and the other members of this committee just how important this work is to the RCMP. I think the commissioner would be quite happy to expand on it.

As you know, in your province, British Columbia, the relationship between the British Columbia government and the RCMP is essential in providing public safety, not only in big suburban centres but equally right across rural Canada, including in indigenous communities.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I understand that. My riding is policed entirely by the RCMP. I think the rank and file do amazing work. It doesn't stop the fact that an all-party committee came out with this recommendation. You have a province coming forward asking for systemic reform there.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Totally. I was just going to add very quickly to that so that you can move on to your next question.

I met with first nations police chiefs this morning, and we talked about both stabilizing as well as expanding our work in first nations and Inuit policing, including the codevelopment of legislation that will ensure that we treat first nations and indigenous policing as an essential service. Indigenous peoples are entitled to the same public safety as non-indigenous Canadians are.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Very quickly, in 30 seconds, in our IMVE study, it has been made quite clear to us from a number of witnesses that our national security legislation that governs CSIS and those agencies is in need of a bit of an update, to put it politely.

Do you have any comments on that, sir?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Just that I agree, and as we contemplate those new tools to address the various threats to the landscape, including ideologically motivated extremism, which can lead to violence we need to do that work in collaboration with you and all parliamentarians so that we protect Canadians' charter rights.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, I'm just looking at the time and the time available. If you agree to stay with us for about five or six minutes beyond the top of the hour, we'll be able to have a full second round of questioning.

Is that okay with you?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Of course.

The Chair: Thank you.

Then let's start right away. I will invite Ms. Dancho to begin the second round with a five-minute block.

Ms. Dancho, the floor is yours.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you Minister, for being here.

Recently your department provided a cybersecurity briefing for members of the opposition. When I asked them what the Pearl Harbor event is that could happen to Canada concerning cyber-attacks, one of the things they mentioned was an attack on our pipeline infrastructure, particularly in winter. Would you agree that it would be a considerable threat?

• (1240)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, I'm very happy that you had the briefing. I agree that we need to be vigilant in protecting our critical infrastructure, including pipelines, yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm sure you're aware that the Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack in the United States effectively shut down that pipeline for several hours, and 17 states, including Washington, D.C., went into states of emergency. This is a very real threat. I'm glad that your department seems to be taking this seriously.

On the other hand, concerning the Coastal GasLink pipeline, as you know, there were 20 assailants wielding axes who terrorized workers at the B.C. work site. It caused millions of dollars of damage. They even set up booby traps for when police came to the site so that police couldn't get there. It's very terrifying, what went on there.

Three months later, the RCMP has announced that there are no leads and no information as to their identities, methods or how they funded these eco-terrorist activities. When your officials, some heads of CSIS and the RCMP, including the deputy commissioner of the RCMP, were at our committee a few weeks ago talking about ideologically motivated extremism, they could not tell me whether anyone had been arrested.

Do you find that concerning, that officials in your department who were here to talk about extremism were not following this violent case of extremism?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I wouldn't collapse the officials into one general category, Ms. Dancho. There are departmental officials who are here to support all of us and me and the government in the creation of policies and laws. When it comes to investigations, including who may be charged, those are questions that are best put to police.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Respectfully, Minister, I do feel that this is a bit of an excuse. They were here to talk about extremism and they could not tell me.... They weren't even following this at all. They couldn't tell me whether anyone had been arrested. I find that very concerning. Have you had discussions with your officials since that meeting?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: You may recall that I expressed concern at the time of the incidents that you refer to.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You did provide a tweet, but that was about the extent of what I saw.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I was just going to say, Ms. Dancho, I think it's important not to gloss over this.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I would agree.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We have to place our confidence in law enforcement to do their job when it comes to investigating—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Certainly, Minister. I'm sorry to cut you off.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —and charging. I'm just simply highlighting that parliamentarians have to be cautious about—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You are here to discuss matters in your jurisdiction—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —commenting on ongoing investigations.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: —and those who you are in charge of at the RCMP, who are charged with keeping Canadians safe, as are you, were not able to tell this committee if anyone had even been arrested. They're not even reading the news about this, let alone being informed by their officials. I find it very concerning, and we've seen this escalate.

Perhaps as a result of none of these wrongdoers, none of these eco-terrorists, having been arrested or shown that what they've done is wrong, we've seen—as I'm sure you would know or I hope you would know—in Montreal, that former Conservative minister and senior RBC executive Michael Fortier, while he and his family were sleeping at 1:30 in the morning, awoke to his vehicles in his driveway being set on fire. In fact, the RBC Quebec president has also been a target of this. RBC branches have faced vandalism.

This is continuing to escalate and I would say that public safety is at risk at this point. Would you agree?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I condemn that violence. I think we all should.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Are you concerned about the public safety and the escalation that we're seeing?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Of course. That's why I'm here, Ms. Dancho. We're here to talk about ways in which we can strengthen our laws as well as provide additional tools to law enforcement to keep Canadians safe, as the threat landscape becomes increasingly complex. I agree.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Then why are you not concerned that your officials for the RCMP who were here a few days ago to talk about extremism were not following the Coastal GasLink case? They were not aware. They could not answer simple questions. That tells me that there's a bit of failure of leadership here, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Again, respectfully, Ms. Dancho, I would not say they're not following. I think rather they're being prudent in not wanting to comment on an ongoing investigation—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: They couldn't confirm if anyone had even been arrested.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —which is a very well-established principle within our democracy.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: They couldn't confirm if anyone had been arrested. Don't you find that concerning?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think questions around ongoing investigations are best put to law enforcement.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Do you feel that perhaps there is some leniency here from your government, that you personally have not clearly provided your officials the mandate to follow this case closely? Can you point to any evidence to the contrary?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: On the contrary, I think my officials are extremely alert and vigilant when it comes to threats.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: When they came to committee to speak about extremism, they had no evidence to show that they had been following this case. As you just outlined, an attack on our pipeline infrastructure is one of the gravest threats to our national security, yet your officials could not answer simple questions, Minister. It's very disappointing.

The Chair: We're out of time.

We now move to Mr. McKinnon.

You have a five-minute block of questions, Mr. McKinnon. The floor is yours, sir.

• (1245)

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

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today.

Four of the members of this committee are actually from British Columbia, so I was very glad to hear about the availability of funding for disaster response in the province. I want to talk a little bit more about that and how that's going to play out.

Also, we have a minister of natural disasters. I wonder how your two ministries interact.

Perhaps you could start by telling us the kinds of emergencies that this funding will help to mitigate or to recover from, noting that we're going straight into the forest fire season, imminently. Last year, about a month from now in our time frame, we had a heat dome that killed arguably hundreds of people. We have had the floods that you mentioned. I'd really be delighted to see how this funding can help us.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thanks very much, Mr. McKinnon, for your question and for your advocacy. Having visited your community, I know that you are a very informed and outspoken voice when it comes to addressing extreme weather, including last fall right across British Columbia.

As you pointed out, since 2021, the department has been divided, if you will, into two separate subportfolios. My portfolio deals prin-

cipally with law enforcement and national security and, of course, Minister Blair focuses on emergency preparedness. There is still a lot of co-operation between our two branches. Specifically, as it relates to requests for assistance and the processing of applications for disaster mitigation and relief, Minister Blair and I and our departments work very closely by function of the way the laws are still on the books.

I will say that the reflections in the main estimates are really a broader reflection of the challenges we face around climate change. The devastating impacts we saw around the atmospheric rivers and the flash floods, just recently in Manitoba as well, are really commensurate with, I believe, both the policies and the federal dollars that are going into addressing those challenges in partnership with your province and all provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: As you know, last summer the Fraser canyon community of Lytton was actually destroyed, and there were heavy losses in the Fraser Valley due to flooding.

Is this funding going to help these communities to recover from those disasters or is this money going to be used going forward for future disasters?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It's a bit of both because the funding is designed to be sustainable over a number of years.

As you heard me say in my remarks, the estimates can be adjusted based on extreme weather events, which can manifest rather abruptly and then lead to devastating consequences including as we saw last fall. I think tens of thousands of British Columbians were displaced from their homes. My recollection is that it was in the vicinity of 18,000 or so.

It is difficult to overstate how important it is to be able to get them back into their houses. It is equally important to rebuild the highways that have been destroyed and put in place the critical infrastructure. On one of my recent trips to British Columbia, I saw some of it around the protection against flooding. Putting that infrastructure in place is so important.

These disaster funds are designed to provide sustainable support for those parts of the country that are hardest hit by extreme weather and climate change.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you.

I'm going to stick on the floods.

I note that part of the problem with the flooding we had in the upper Fraser Valley was due to circumstances on the other side of the border in Washington.

I'm wondering if the government is able to work on mitigating those kinds of externalities that triggered this flooding, through border services or through our international relationship with them.

• (1250)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I know I have a very short—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Mendicino. We're out of time. It's the great constraint.

I move to Ms. Michaud.

In this round, you have two and a half minutes. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, I'd like you to tell us about Roxham Road.

When you are asked about it, you often say that it is not possible to close it because migrants will find another way to enter the country illegally. Yet closing Roxham Road is what the Quebec government is asking you to do. You can do it unilaterally by suspending the Safe Third Country Agreement.

You have to be aware that this puts a lot of pressure on the Quebec government. Right now, about 100 irregular migrants arrive every day, and 92% of them do so through Quebec. More than 50% of them are children. So we have to open two school classes a day for these children. It's extremely difficult to house them because of the housing crisis in Quebec and elsewhere at the moment. It's also difficult because many of them don't speak French, and we have to find ways to francize them.

You could close Roxham Road unilaterally. We hear there are discussions with Washington about this.

I'd like to know what the status of this is. Does it remain a solution for you or do you categorically refuse to close this illegal entry route?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Michaud, first of all, I recognize that this puts some pressure on Quebec. That is why the federal government is working very hard to find ways to collaborate to strengthen the integrity of our immigration system, which is so important. I hope everyone is proud of this aspect of our country.

I want to say that we need to make the investments to strengthen the work of IRCC and to protect, at the same time, the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. This is another value of our immigration system. This balance is a function of our two governments working together.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Minister.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. MacGregor, you have two and a half minutes whenever you're ready, sir.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, the shooting in Buffalo was motivated by the great replacement theory, where the shooter published his manifesto and really personally thought the Anglo-Saxon race was being replaced through immigration policies and all kinds of racist garbage.

Where did he find that? Where was he exposed to it? It was online. It was through a very toxic ecosystem and echo chambers.

Pat King, one of the lead organizers of the convoy, was spouting off the same garbage and live-streaming on social media. Back then we might have just passed it off as the ranting of an individual. One

of your officials during our IMVE study said a lot of what you see on the Internet is awful, but it's lawful.

I understand there's a very fine balance here. At the same time, it can have very real and devastating consequences.

Minister, social media companies have come before this committee and they told us they have very robust terms of service. Those terms of service are failing. It's quite apparent they're failing. What are your thoughts? What is your government's approach going to be on holding social media companies accountable for their terms of service so that they are actually enforced?

I understand it's a very fine line between protecting our charter right of freedom of expression...but at the same time what people are being exposed to online has led to some very tragic consequences. I just want to have your thoughts, Minister, on how your government is approaching this very real problem.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: My thoughts are as follows: Words matter. Hate can lead to violence.

The great replacement theory is a conspiracy that is being driven by white supremacists and it is leading to violence, not only in Buffalo but in Canada. We all have to be vigilant, not only within government but right across society, including working with social media. You're right. They have polices. You've seen me in the past call out where I don't think they're living up to those policies, particularly on Twitter, but we have to do this work together.

We have to stamp out hate. We have to stamp out racism.

We have to be sure that we're putting in place the tools that are necessary to prevent these crimes, these awful crimes, from occurring in the first place. I'm committed to doing that work with this committee and all parliamentarians.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I would now invite Ms. Dancho to begin her five-minute block of questioning.

Start whenever you're ready, Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, again, I just want to give you an opportunity to acknowledge that there seems to have been a failure in your department to take the Coastal GasLink pipeline seriously. Can you point to any measure that you have done to show the public that you're taking this seriously?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Dancho, respectfully, you've said now on a couple of occasions that my officials don't take this seriously. That's wrong.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Why is it then that they were not able to tell me and members of this committee when they were invited here to talk about extremism that they were following this case?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think rather what they are attempting to respect is the independence of law enforcement in carrying out investigations, which we all should be very cautious about commenting on. It's not a lack of attention. It's rather, wanting to respect that police are the ones who are best positioned to answer your questions, which, by the way, I agree that you have every right and should be asking. I would just simply encourage you to direct those questions to the police of jurisdiction. They're best situated to answer those questions.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Minister.

I do want to ask you about something else. This is a non-partisan issue actually, so I'll take a bit of a break from that.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Do you mean the rest weren't?

This is a very non-partisan, collaborative—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Well, I wish that attacks on our critical infrastructure were considered non-partisan, but it doesn't appear that's the case.

I wanted to ask you about something quite interesting that's happening in the United States. Again, I'm approaching this just to see if this is something that's on your radar, and it's a bit out of left field, so to speak.

Please bear with me, but I think it's pertinent—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Now we're doing baseball metaphors. This is really great.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's right, but to be serious for a moment, the director of national intelligence in the United States recently released a report concerning unidentified aerial phenomena or UAP. The report discussed the military sightings of hundreds of these objects that exhibit unusual flight characteristics.

As I'm sure you're aware, on Tuesday the United States Congress held its first congressional hearing on this in about 50 years. During that U.S. congressional hearing, U.S. military officials said that the UAP represent a national security risk, particularly with sightings around nuclear plants.

Again, on the face of this, certainly for me, it seems like a bit of a fringe area that is dominated by conspiracy theories, but given that the United States has recently taken this very seriously—the director of national intelligence is talking about this—do you feel that your government should be taking this as seriously as the American government?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I saw reports similar to the ones you're referring to, and I'm confident that our national security apparatus looks at all manner of threats to our national security.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Have you had any briefings about UAP?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: My understanding of this particular aspect or phenomenon is that it would likely fall more under the portfolio of the Department of National Defence, which is the branch that would likely have that mandate. The point that I'm really making is that our national security partners look for potential threats to our national security in every dimension, and as they arise we get briefed and we share—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: To date, have you not been briefed on this? Have you had any discussions?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: On this particular phenomenon, no.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay.

CSIS is in your department. It's in your purview. It's Canada's national security organization that investigates suspected threats to Canada at home and abroad.

Are you aware of any conversations CSIS has had with its U.S. counterpart on this?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I know there's robust collaboration between our security communities, and I would not want to speak for every possible conversation that has occurred between our—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Are you aware of any?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: At this point, no, I am not.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: The RCMP, as we know, has a number of these reports that are public, and it passes them to NORAD. Are you familiar with this protocol?

• (1300)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Again, Ms. Dancho, we're moving into an area that is probably best put to the specific officials, because I don't want to speak about any conversations that they may have had with partners on it. There may very well be some conversations that have been had, but those questions would be best put to them.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Do you feel that the Department of National Defence should be the lead, and that the RCMP and CSIS not play a role?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think there's collaboration among all those departments. As it specifically relates to intelligence, there are, again, strong lines of communication, but from the reports that I've seen, and I'm not looking at the papers that you're looking at, my understanding is that some of that work is being led by National Defence.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I would just conclude, Minister, from a non-partisan perspective, please reach out to your U.S. counterparts to stay informed.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

In this final round of questions, I'll turn to Mr. Chiang, who has a five-minute block, to take us to the end of this panel.

Go ahead, Mr. Chiang.

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

Thank you, Minister, for joining us again today.

This committee is focused on keeping Canadians safe, and this committee has an ongoing study to address IMVE in Canada.

Regarding the \$5 million in estimated spending allocated to the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, could you explain to this committee the importance of education and community outreach as a tool to combat hate, violence and extremism?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chiang, I'm happy to elaborate on that. First, though, let me thank you for your leadership in this space. I know that long before you became a parliamentarian, you worked closely, as a police officer, with communities to keep them safe, including from the kind of awful racism that has beset so many of our communities.

The program that you have referred to is a concrete example of how the government is working in partnership with communities to build more resilience, tapping into local leadership, particularly communities that have been disproportionately impacted and that are at high risk for racism in all of its forms. I would point out that, for the government, this is not just about money. It's about making sure that we listen and make space for leadership from those who have been directly impacted by racism so that we can address it at its root causes.

Whether it's through this program or whether it's through the creation of the security infrastructure program, which is another initiative that is led out of my department, we will continue to work very closely with communities to stamp out racism and hate in all of their forms.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Minister, for your answer on that.

As you know, when it comes to addressing the rise in gun violence, it will take a multipronged approach that sees the government make investments in law enforcement but also investments that build our communities. What investment are we making to ensure that we see a decline in gun violence?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I will come to the investment in just a moment, but I want to highlight for you, Mr. Chiang, and I think for all members of this committee, how much I firmly believe that the strategy to reduce gun violence cannot be about just one thing. It requires doing a number of things at the same time.

We believe we have to continue to look at introducing common-sense laws and rules to ensure that guns don't fall into the hands of the wrong kind of individual. We need to continue to invest in law enforcement to stop trafficking at our borders and in our communities. We also need to address gun violence at its root cause. That's why the creation of the \$250-million building safer communities fund is so critically important. We need to be doing these three things simultaneously.

That's our plan, and we will continue to remain resolved in seeing it come to fruition so that we can stop gun violence.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Minister.

During our study on guns and gang violence, one of the areas that I think caused concern for all of us was testimony regarding the rise in ghost guns. What are you and the RCMP doing to counter the proliferation of ghost guns in Canada?

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

I have had the opportunity to meet with law enforcement leaders in both the United States and Canada who have expressed real concern around the proliferation of 3-D technology leading to the manufacturing of what are now commonly referred to as ghost guns. This is a very deliberate tactic that is used by criminals to subvert

investigations to make it more difficult for police to trace gun violence.

We are exploring a number of different avenues to address that issue. My sincere hope, as I said earlier to Ms. Michaud, is that, in the short term, we will be in a position to have a more robust discussion around new tools to law enforcement to address ghost guns and indeed other alarming trends when it comes to gun violence.

• (1305)

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Minister, for your time.

I have a lot of questions, Mr. Chair, but I will give back the rest of my time to this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chiang. Every second counts.

Minister, thank you very much for being flexible with your time so that we had an opportunity for two full rounds of questions from members of the committee. On their behalf, I thank you for your appearance today.

Colleagues, we will now take a very short break to make sure that the officials are miked up. Then we will resume with the second part of our meeting this morning.

We will see you in a few minutes.

• (1305)

(Pause)

• (1310)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

We will now proceed to the questioning of officials in the second hour.

I will now open the floor to questions and we will begin with Mr. Van Popta.

Sir, you have six minutes. Whenever you're ready, please proceed.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being with us here today.

I didn't see who was here from the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. I'm assuming that there is somebody here to hear this question and to provide us with an answer.

I'm from British Columbia, where there was devastating flooding this past winter in the Fraser Valley, touching also in my riding of Langley—Aldergrove. We heard from the minister, in the first hour, that there is some money available in this year's budget under the disaster financial assistance arrangements program.

My question for the officials is whether there is sufficient money in this year's budget to respond to this disaster in terms of short-term recovery but also over the long term to build up our diking systems and drainage.

Thank you.

• (1315)

Mr. Rob Stewart (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Hi, my name is Rob Stewart. I'm the deputy minister of Public Safety Canada. I'd be pleased to respond.

There is money that has been provisioned for the DFAA. I would recall that, in the economic fiscal update of 2021, \$5 billion was provisioned to deal with the floods in B.C. As things stand at the moment, we are working with British Columbia to assemble an itemized and audited list of expenses that B.C. has incurred, which will then be paid out through the DFAA over the coming months and years. These files take a long time to process, but there is quite a considerable amount of money put aside for this.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you for that, sir.

I met, together with a couple of my colleagues who are also from the Fraser Valley, with Mayor Braun of the City of Abbotsford a couple of months before the flooding actually happened. Of course, we didn't know how devastating it was going to be, but officials there anticipated that there would likely be a problem with the diking system around Sumas Prairie and along the Fraser River. Estimates were about half a billion dollars for each one, to build it up to anticipated water levels and to upgrade them for seismic engineering. That's \$1 billion all together and now we're talking \$500 million to do the repairs.

Perhaps you could comment on that. Are we anticipating ahead of time to prevent future disasters and the expenses that go with repairing after a disaster?

Mr. Rob Stewart: Indeed. I think the British Columbia example has been very instructive. I'll just try to be clear. DFAA pays for expenses incurred with a small amount of money set aside for building back better, as they say. For the most part, it restores existing infrastructure and compensates people who have suffered losses.

There is a disaster mitigation and adaptation program that the government runs through Infrastructure Canada that pays for building newer and more resilient infrastructure. There are monies under that which go to various provinces and territories. I'm not able to speak to the details of that at this point.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: We would love to get those details if you could, perhaps, provide them to the committee.

Still talking about the flooding in the Fraser Valley, a good amount of the flooding came from south of the border, the Nooksack River, which runs completely within Washington state. It also breached its levies and Canada is downhill from there so the water came into the Abbotsford area.

Canada cannot solve this problem on its own. It must work internationally with our American counterparts. I wonder, sir, if you can update this committee on the status of the negotiations with the United States.

Mr. Rob Stewart: I'm sorry. I'm not able to give you any update on negotiations. I can tell you that there are discussions under way, and this is recognized by the United States at a senior level as an issue that should be addressed to build resilience for the future.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Engineering reports have been prepared by engineers working on both sides of the border, and there are several different options available to solve the problem. One is, of course, to build up the levees on the Nooksack River, which is not good downstream for American cities—I'm thinking of Bellingham, in particular. The other is to just let the water flow naturally, and that is over Canadian property, which, of course, would be devastating for Canadian farmers.

Do you have any comments on that? How are we going to resolve that problem?

Mr. Rob Stewart: I do not have a comment on that, sir.

I recognize that there are trade-offs here, and this is why we will have to work carefully and closely with our American friends, but I don't know how that will work out.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: That's fair enough. Thank you.

I've been speaking with people in the insurance industry, particularly those with insurance companies that insure farms, and they're very concerned about the lack of climate change data around flooding. Then I see that in the minister's mandate letter there is some reference to working with private industry, including insurance companies, and I'm assuming that is to help the insurance companies with underwriting risk assessments. Do you have any comments about that?

• (1320)

The Chair: Answer in 10 seconds, please.

Mr. Rob Stewart: There are a number of initiatives under way. We're doing enhanced flood mapping with other departments. We also have a task force looking at insurance arrangements so that we can provide more coverage to people in at risk areas.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Damoff, I turn to you for your six-minute slot, whenever you're ready.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you so much, Chair.

My first question is for the Public Safety officials. I've done a lot of work with Circles of Support and Accountability Canada, also known as CoSA. That organization reduces sexual victimization by providing programming to sex offenders that reduces their likelihood of reoffending, increases their likelihood of successful reintegration and helps to keep communities safe. Most of this work is done by volunteers, and in fact, they have an 88% success rate in the work that they do. I wondered if you could update the committee on the work that Public Safety is engaged in with CoSA to ensure that they're able to continue their important work across the country.

Mr. Rob Stewart: Thank you for the question.

What I can tell you, based on what I know, is that we, in the past, have funded the work of CoSA through one of our standing grants and contribution programs, and we are in conversation with them about other funding coming in the future. At this point in time, we have not reached an agreement on the terms of that arrangement.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You're doing a lot more than that, but I shouldn't answer my own question. I actually went to their fundraising dinner, and they were quite pleased with the work that Public Safety is doing to protect them with provincial and territorial authorities, to be able to expand their ability to raise funds, so thank you for that.

Commissioner Kelly, it's always nice to see you here at committee, and you knew you couldn't get away from here without hearing a question from me.

I had the chance to see the mother-child program at Grand Valley Institution, and I was incredibly impressed with the work being done there. As you know, Grand Valley is doing better work than other institutions in providing this program. I met two indigenous moms, one of whom was from Flin Flon, and because of the distance, it was not working as well as it probably should be in order to keep contact with her kids.

StatsCan said in 2011 that 48% of children residing in foster care placements are indigenous, and the majority of those kids have incarcerated mothers. We also know that the mother-child program leads to a reduction in recidivism. I'm wondering, Commissioner Kelly, if you can talk about what you might be doing to enhance the mother-child program, not just for the babies in prisons but, more importantly, to have the mums connect with their children.

Ms. Anne Kelly (Commissioner, Correctional Service of Canada): Thank you for that question.

Yes, I'm pleased to talk about the mother-child program. As you know, it was implemented in 2001, and it's really to foster positive relationships between mothers and their children. It's available in all of our facilities, including the healing lodge. In the program, there is both a residential component and a non-residential component. The residential component is offered on a full-time basis as well as a part-time basis. Children up to school age can actually remain with their mothers. Then, they can come in on a part-time basis. There are obviously eligibility criteria that they need to meet, and we work with family and social services.

We have had participants in the mother-child program over the years. When I look at, let's say, the last three years, in 2018-19, we had 17 participating; in 2019-20, we had 15; in 2020-21, we had nine; and currently, we actually have four. There are two part time and one full time in Joliette, and one full time at EIFW. It's—

• (1325)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you. I'm going to have to cut you off there because my time is short and I have to move onto something else.

I know you're aware of the program, Commissioner. My comment would be that we're not doing as well as we should be, and we can take away that we need to be doing better with that program. The numbers are not going up in the way they should be, but I appreciate what you're doing to ensure that more moms are part of the program. I really do. We just need to be doing better.

Committee, I want to bring forward a motion. As you know, the minister spoke in his opening remarks about Ukraine and Russia.

I'm going to tie this motion to it. I did give a very quick heads-up to the other parties.

The motion would be that the committee report to the House that the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security:

- a) Express its strong support for Finland and Sweden's NATO membership, as Finland and Sweden are among NATO's closest partners; and
- b) Call on all NATO members to approve their application for NATO membership as quickly as possible.

I'd like to put that on the floor and hopefully quickly go to a vote.

The Chair: The motion is on the floor. Do we have unanimous consent to approve this motion?

I do not see any hands up.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, I just have a question for clarification on procedure.

Can you just confirm that in order to move a motion without the 48 hours' notice, you need unanimous consent to officially move that?

The Chair: That is my understanding.

Clerk, is that the case?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Wassim Bouanani): Yes, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have a point of order, Chair.

If it relates to the business that the committee is working on, you can bring forward a motion.

I would argue that since the minister brought up the issue of what's going on in Ukraine during his opening remarks, it actually does apply. I'm hoping that we won't need a long discussion and that there is all-party consent for this. I think it's within the rules that this is in order without unanimous consent, given his opening comments.

The Chair: The motion is on the floor and put to the committee. It has been read by Ms. Damoff.

Are any members of the committee opposed to the motion?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I'm sorry. I had to step out for a second, but I did catch most of that.

Is it the practice of this committee that notice of motions have to be given 48 hours before they're moved? Is it the case that you're not seeking unanimous consent because the minister had spoken about this and you think it's topical? Is that what's going on?

I just wonder if we are breaching the standing orders in this committee by seeking to put something that hasn't been given proper notice.

The Chair: Clerk, can you provide a comment on that, please?

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, according to the procedures and the routine motions adopted by the committee on the first meeting, 48 hours' notice must be given to the committee before moving a motion. A notice of motion can be given once the member has the floor and is recognized by the chair, unless it is under committee business or it is related to the study or the question at hand.

It is the call of the members to determine whether it's related to the study we have today before the committee.

The Chair: The argument has been advanced that the motion relates to the testimony of the minister. The motion is currently on the floor.

Let me again ask members of the committee if there is support for this motion. If there isn't, we'll have the nays expressed now.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I have just another point to make.

I appreciate the member bringing this forward, but I don't understand why respect was not given to provide 48 hours' notice for this important issue. Perhaps she can explain why that was not done.

The Chair: Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Chair, obviously we always try to give 48 hours, but there are certainly times when issues come forward based on what we've heard through testimony. It is the case in any committee, not just ours, that a motion would be brought forward with 48 hours' notice, unless it relates to something we heard.

I recognize that the questions weren't focused on Ukraine and Russia, but the minister certainly did bring it forward in his remarks. I would argue that because he did that, it means that we can move forward with this motion without 48 hours' consent.

I would just ask that, if the Conservatives are not supporting this motion, perhaps we should just go to a vote.

● (1330)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I have a point of order.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I would hope they would be supportive. I wish I had been there in person today, to be honest with you, so that I could have chatted with Madam Dancho during the break, but I wasn't able to do that. I tried to give her a heads-up electronically, which is never as effective as an in-person conversation. I'm not going to question that.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think I can speak for all the Conservative members and say that we are in support of the motion, but this is a very interesting procedural tactic. I want your perspective on this, Mr. Chair, because if we set the precedent that literally anything a witness brings up could trigger motions around our standing orders, we're setting a really bad precedent.

The reason we have the 48-hour notice is to give members the time to think about what's being put forward and have time to prepare remarks on it. If we set the precedent that, any item a witness

brings up can be used as a justification for putting forward a motion without 48 hours' notice, we're setting a very bad precedent.

If the member is trying to say that she doesn't need unanimous consent to put this forward, I would ask, out of respect for the committee, that we have unanimous consent, rather than accepting the precedent that we can bring up a motion without 48 hours' notice based on what a witness says.

The Chair: Thank you.

Clerk, what is your advice on where we proceed from here?

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have my hand up, Chair.

The Chair: Before that, I would like an opinion from the clerk.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

The Clerk: I would like to inform you that Mr. MacGregor and Madame Michaud would like to speak to this.

The Chair: We have a speakers list here. I see Ms. Damoff's hand up, and then I'll ask the other two members.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

It's certainly within the routine motions, but if the CPC would prefer that we do this by unanimous consent, then let's do that.

The Chair: Ms. Michaud, your hand is up as well. Go ahead.

[Translation]

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

I understand the view of the Conservative members. In the past, I think we've had motions that were put forward without 48 hours' notice, and we all agreed that we should try to come to an understanding quickly, particularly out of respect for the witnesses.

I thought I heard Mr. Lloyd say that he was in favour of the motion. As Ms. Damoff suggested, I think we can proceed with the vote. I have questions for the witnesses before us, and I'm sure my fellow members do as well, so we should go ahead and vote.

I do, however, have a question for Ms. Damoff. I would like to know whether, to her knowledge, the Liberal Party plans to propose a similar motion in other committees. I'm curious as to why it's being put forward in this committee, because it may have been more appropriate for the Standing Committee on National Defence. Other than that, I would be ready to vote.

[English]

The Chair: There are no more hands raised on the floor. Then I think it's left to me to ask if we have unanimous consent to approve this motion. If we don't, may I hear a nay?

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, if I may, with respect to how we proceed, there is no need for unanimous consent to table the motion.

The Chair: Does that mean we follow it immediately with a vote, Clerk?

The Clerk: If there's unanimous consent to accept the motion, the motion will be moved, which is then followed by debate. If there's no debate, we move to the vote on the motion.

• (1335)

The Chair: Okay. The motion has been moved, so we should move to a vote.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, just to be clear, my understanding of what the clerk is saying is that the member needs unanimous consent to move this motion. If she gets it, we can debate it and then we can vote on it.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You're asking for unanimous consent now just to move it. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes. I'm asking for unanimous consent to move the motion.

Do we have it?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Yes, Mr. Chair, at least from the Conservative side.

The Chair: Okay. We have unanimous consent to move the motion. Does that mean we can now move to a vote? Is there any debate on the motion?

Ms. Dancho, go ahead.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to make the Conservative position very clear on this before we proceed to a vote, so I guess this is debate. I'd like to make it clear that Conservatives strongly support the NATO defence alliance. As a founding member of NATO, the peace and security that Canada has enjoyed for the past 73 years has been backed by the collective security promise that any attack on one NATO country is an attack on all.

Sweden and Finland have been reliable security partners to NATO and in the Arctic. At a time when Putin is engaged in an illegal war and occupation in Ukraine, it is understandable that Russia's neighbours are seeking further security guarantees.

Conservatives believe the alliance would be stronger with Sweden and Finland as members, and Conservatives support their applications if they choose to apply to join NATO, which I believe they are.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there other debate on the motion?

Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: It seems that this debate might be more appropriate for foreign affairs or national defence, so I just want to ask Ms. Damoff this. I understand this is an important issue, and we're supportive of it, but why bring it up to this committee? What is the reasoning behind that?

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think Ms. Dancho expressed quite eloquently why this is an important issue. Quite honestly, I don't need to give the honourable member a reason for bringing this forward. It's important to our government. We're studying issues in this committee right now to do with Russian interference in Canada, so I know

it is an issue with shared concerns across all parties in this committee. I don't think I need to give reasons to the honourable member for bringing this forward.

The Chair: Since there is no further debate on the motion on the floor, does that now mean we proceed to a vote?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Can we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: There's a request for a recorded vote. Please proceed.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: Thank you, members of the committee. The motion passes.

Let's quickly move back to questions, because we are running out of time and, as you know, we have some votes on the estimates that have to occur before we break. Question period is looming.

Ms. Damoff, you have finished your block of questions, so I will move to Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Michaud, I think we can give you six minutes. Let's see how far we get. The floor is yours.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for their patience.

My first question is for the Canada Border Services Agency officials.

Just yesterday, Mr. Weber, the president of the Customs and Immigration Union, publicly called on the agency and the Minister of Public Safety to increase the number of border services officers on duty at the border, airports, in particular. In the news this week, we've seen very long lineups and delays in the processing of travellers. In fact, the Conservatives have chosen to raise that issue, and rightfully so, for their opposition day today.

According to the union, not enough officers are assigned to passenger operations, especially at Toronto's Pearson International Airport, where just 300 officers are currently on duty—half the number of officers needed. The union claims that inefficient technologies are also to blame for the delays and lineups.

I want to give the agency an opportunity to respond to the request made by the union yesterday. What does the agency plan to do? Do you think the funding announced is enough to find the necessary solutions?

[*English*]

Mr. John Ossowski (President, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On an annual basis, the CBSA invests significant effort in planning and preparing for peak periods. It usually begins around this weekend, the May Victoria Day holiday weekend. However, as a result of some of the changes in the public health measures, travel has bounced back. We're in that transition phase. We work with the airports very closely, particularly Pearson, given that it is the largest airport, with the volumes it has.

I would say that certainly the airport authority has informed us that they're moving forward to bring more kiosks online to help expedite passages. In fact, it has proven to us that this is the way to deal with these volumes as they go through.

I would also say that it's important for the committee to understand that, because of the public health measures, we're not opening up the same border we had in 2019. People need to be patient and to make sure they're prepared. There are obviously flight convergence times that we don't have any control over, but we work with the airports and other partners to make sure we're efficient as best we can be. I'm confident that as we get into the summer we'll rebalance and we'll have reallocated to make things as smooth as possible.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

When the committee was studying gun and gang violence, we heard from witnesses who pointed to gaps at the border. They recommended increased monitoring of international rail traffic and marine shipping of cargo, which apparently the agency does not seem to check enough. As I understand it, checks are done randomly on the basis of available information on the presence of illegal weapons in this shipment or that car.

Do you think the funding in the main estimates will allow the agency to increase its capacity to conduct checks? Does the agency plan to increase its control and oversight activities? Are you of the view that the funding announced is sufficient for the agency to do its work properly?

[*English*]

Mr. John Ossowski: Obviously, stopping illegal firearms and weapons from entering Canada is an enforcement priority for us. In 2021 we seized over 1,100 firearms, which was double what we did in 2020. We're taking an approach now, with our colleagues to the south and obviously domestic law enforcement partners, to establish stronger intelligence partnerships and relationships so that we can detect and intercept illegal firearm movements before they hit the border.

This work is being undergone right now. We're establishing an MOU with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to better share information and establish that intelligence posture to help us intercept those weapons and intercept the criminal groups with our law enforcement colleagues.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: My next question is for the RCMP officials.

We were just discussing the staff shortage at the Canada Border Services Agency. I was told by the National Police Federation that the labour shortage is also affecting all police departments; unfortunately, you're in the same boat as every other sector, so it's not a criticism.

With the funding in the spending estimates, does the RCMP expect to be able to improve recruitment? Does it have strategies to recruit more officers or plans to offer more competitive pay? What does the RCMP envision on that front?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Brennan (Deputy Commissioner, Contract and Indigenous Policing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Good afternoon, and thank you for the question.

My name is Brian Brennan. I'm the deputy commissioner in charge of contract and indigenous policing. The commissioner was unavailable today.

In regard to your question, I think it would be appropriate that I turn this question over to my colleague, Nadine Huggins, who is our chief human resources officer.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds to answer.

Ms. Nadine Huggins (Chief Human Resources Officer, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you very much.

We are in fact taking very deliberate actions to increase our recruitment and revitalize and modernize our recruitment approaches. We are also following up on attracting experienced police officers—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, I now will turn to you for six minutes.

I believe, colleagues, that's as far as we're going to be able to go.

Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

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

I think my question might be best suited to Deputy Minister Stewart. It's a budgetary question and has to deal specifically with the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission.

The chair has previously testified before our committee that she is often having to make the decision between dealing with complaints from the public and conducting systemic reviews. I think that over the last five years they saw a 21.73% increase in complaints and a 32.19% increase in review requests, so obviously the demand on the agency is increasing. The chair has testified that difficult decisions often have to be made.

Deputy Minister, given that information, why has the budgetary increase been so small from the main estimates for 2021-22 to these main estimates?

Mr. Rob Stewart: Thank you for the question. I will make two points.

First, we recognize that there are pressures on the agency to do its work, and we would indeed welcome further allocations of resources. That's known in the system. As of the filing of the main estimates 2022-23, we did not have any decision.

In addition, as the minister noted today, with the tabling of the bill to establish the PCRC, the personal complaints and review commission, there is going to be an incremental amount of resources that are awarded to the newly renamed commission.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

I have been quickly reviewing Bill C-20, the bill in question, which is establishing a new public complaints and review commission.

Deputy Minister, looking into the future, if that bill makes it to the Governor General's desk and is signed into law, do you have an idea as to what its budget allocation will be—a broad estimate—compared to what is currently allocated to the civilian review and complaints commission?

Mr. Rob Stewart: It will be a very significant increase in its budget.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Can you be more specific?

Mr. Rob Stewart: Unfortunately, not at this time.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: But you stand by the words “very significant”.

Mr. Rob Stewart: Absolutely.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay. Thank you.

My next question is for the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service.

For the last couple of years, CSIS has repeatedly and publicly alluded to the need to update its statute, specifically the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act, to ensure it has all the tools that are necessary. I know that the act dates back to 1984. Certainly, we have had some witnesses speak to the same issue.

Maybe I could have the representative from CSIS indicate to this committee what CSIS is alluding to, specifically, when it wants to have that act modernized. What are you looking for from Parliament specifically? I'd like to have that information, please.

• (1350)

Ms. Michelle Tessier (Deputy Director, Operations, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Certainly. Thank you for the question.

I'm Michelle Tessier, the deputy director of operations for CSIS.

Obviously, with a very complex threat environment, the requirements to look at the variety of data that's available and the changing technology, there are a variety of tools and authorities that we feel we would benefit from, while recognizing that any of the authorities we request need to be well balanced with the privacy rights of Canadians.

Really, it's looking at our ability to use increased data, our ability to move forward in a more streamlined fashion on a number of requirements that we have under the act and our ability, really, to recognize, given the fast pace of technology, the importance of being able to analyze data and the importance of being able to move forward on obtaining warrants from the Federal Court, where we do need a more modern act to combat the threat today.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that response.

My final question might be a toss-up between the Canada Border Services Agency and the RCMP. The CBSA is going to continue to equip officers with risk assessment, detection and enforcement tools in order to strengthen our capacity to intercept illegal substances at ports of entry.

Substances like fentanyl and carfentanil are causing havoc throughout many communities in Canada. What is the trend with respect to those two very toxic substances? Are we seeing a trend toward more importation, or is the RCMP noticing that homegrown labs are starting to take up the slack and are providing the domestic demand that exists?

Mr. John Ossowski: Mr. Chair, I could probably kick that off.

I can certainly tell the committee that, over the last couple of years, we've seen a dramatic reduction in fentanyl and its derivatives entering the country, but a dramatic increase in the precursors to make fentanyl in Canada. I was recently on a trip to our designated sampling laboratory, which is located in the Vancouver airport, and I'm very proud that it has intercepted precursor chemicals that could have led to the production of billions of doses of fentanyl.

I'm very proud of the work we're doing. We're also working with Health Canada to ensure that these precursor chemicals, which aren't listed, become listed, so that we can intercept them.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, that takes us to the end of the first round, and because of our discussion over the motion, that's all the time we have.

On your behalf, I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony and for appearing for this very important study. This concludes this portion of the meeting.

Do I have unanimous consent to call the votes as a group, and dispose of the votes in one motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Shall all the votes for the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023, carry?

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,958,648,984

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$173,061,244

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$591,723,683

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CIVILIAN REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS COMMISSION FOR THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$9,376,774

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Vote 1—Operating expenditures, grants and contributions.....\$2,578,846,421

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$213,793,715

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$201,130,701

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$663,745,982

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE REVIEW AGENCY SECRETARIAT

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$26,523,008

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL INVESTIGATOR OF CANADA

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$4,880,918

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

PAROLE BOARD OF CANADA

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$58,591,187

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$3,016,856,037

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$262,730,335

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....428,273,483

(Votes 1, 5 and 10 agreed to on division)

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE EXTERNAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$5,801,194

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

SECRETARIAT OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$3,409,991

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the votes on the main estimates for 2022-23 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Were all decisions as smooth, efficient and easy as that, we'd have a lot more time to play with our grandchildren.

Thank you, everybody. That concludes the business of this meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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