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Chair: Mr. Peter Schiefke



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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 72 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, March 7, 2023, the committee is meeting to study adapting infrastructure to face climate change.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

I wish to inform the committee that all witnesses have been sound tested for today's meeting for the benefit of our interpreters, and all have passed the tests.

Appearing before us today as witnesses, we have, as an individual, Mr. Patrick Michell, retired chief, Kanaka Bar Indian Band, by video conference. From the Canada West Foundation, we have Mr. Carlo Dade, director of the trade and investment centre. From the Insurance Bureau of Canada, we have Chris Rol, manager and senior adviser, climate adaptation and flood policy; and Craig Stewart, vice-president, climate change and federal issues.

[*Translation*]

We also welcome Mr. Jonathan Chalifoux, mayor of the municipality of Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu.

[*English*]

From the municipality of Norfolk County, we have Amy Martin, mayor; and Sydney Clarysse, project lead, energy and facilities. From Watershed Watch Salmon Society, we have Lina Azeez, director, habitat programs, by video conference.

We will begin now with our opening remarks, and we'll start off with Mr. Michell.

Mr. Michell, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Chief Patrick Michell (Retired Chief, Kanaka Bar Indian Band, As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is Patrick Michell. I'm a resident of Lytton, British Columbia. In 29 days, it will be the two-year anniversary of the Lytton fire.

The Lytton fire wiped out an entire town, destroyed roads, destroyed electricity, destroyed communications and basically paralyzed the region for months. What happened on June 30 of 2021 wasn't unexpected. It was just unprecedented.

My community of Kanaka Bar became aware of climate change as early as 1990, when we got back on the land and saw something different. It was changing. By 1992, the word "anthropogenic" for climate change was indicated, and we came to realize as an indigenous community that the world's earth, lands and water were heating up at an unprecedented rate. This was creating these extreme weather events, which we call "heat, wind, rain and cold".

By 2010, we'd written a document called "Memory, Loss and Sorrow....", which basically summarized contact colonization and where my community was up until 2010. Building on the work that we had done, in 2015 we created a land use plan that assessed all the impacts on our traditional territory.

I believe it was in 2018—I don't have my document in front of me, but I've shared it with the clerk so the committee can reference it—that we created a climate change assessment and transition plan. We embarked on protecting our homes, our people, our property and our infrastructure from those extreme weather events of heat, wind, rain and cold and the ground impacts they trigger, be it drought, wind, fire, flooding or landslides.

We completed the climate change transition report and basically set about protecting ourselves by upgrading, renovating and retrofitting our infrastructure as best we could, but also by designing and building new infrastructure that could withstand this new extreme weather. We wanted to do this not because we were concerned about the economy. We were concerned about our future generations. Our future generations are entitled to have the same access—if not more—to the life and the quality of life that we enjoy today.

My community sits down and takes the resources that we have—people, time, technology and money—and we invest it in our future generations. What we've done to protect our roads, our wastewater treatment systems, our water, our electricity and our communications is not a cost. It's an investment.

In 2021, Kanaka Bar replaced its climate change transition plan with something called the “community resilience plan”. It sets out projects and programs that we’ll be implementing over the next five years to once again re-establish these foundations—foundations that are resilient to extreme weather. We’ve now said that to be resilient means to be able to shelter in place during extreme weather events and then repair the systems that give us quality of life.

We’ve been warning the people who come to our region, the north end of the Fraser Canyon, for years that the infrastructure they built was built quickly and needs to be upgraded. The atmospheric river that hit the region in November of 2021 wiped out the roads—roads that are still not rebuilt—because nobody expected that much rain. We did. We warned people: Change the culvert sizes. Spend \$60,000 today to save \$6 million tomorrow. Do not go into our future in response mode. Change the conversation from cost to investment. Keep our roads open: To do that, replace the culverts from 1957.

The railroad was built in 1884, the CPR, and the CNR was built in 1913. They have not changed out their culverts. These rights-of-way that bisect my region, they maintain their land in a very poor way. I’ve said that in effect they’ve become dynamite fuses to our community.

I just wanted to share with the committee that I am optimistic for our collective future. The fact that this committee is looking at adapting our infrastructure for climate change gives me hope. Our children and grandchildren are worth it.

Thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, retired Chief Michell.

Next we have Mr. Dade.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Carlo Dade (Director, Trade and Investment Centre, Canada West Foundation): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you very much for inviting me to testify.

[*English*]

I will testify in English.

[*Translation*]

I’ll be happy to try to answer your questions in French as well.

[*English*]

The approach I will take with committee today is a little bit different. I like to come at this from a different end of the spectrum in terms of how we deal with resiliency and, specifically, what we do with the recommendations and the learnings from this study. There is an opportunity, I think, to have greater effectiveness for the committee’s recommendations and your learnings on resiliency.

The Canada West Foundation is the think tank—the public policy research, dissemination, education and advocacy organization—for

the four western provinces and is working to create a strong west in a strong Canada.

For the past 10 years, with a collection of national organizations including the Business Council of Canada, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Construction Association, the Western Canada Roadbuilders and recently CM&E, we’ve been working on resolving an existential threat to Canada’s prosperity, which is the decline in global perception of the quality of our transportation infrastructure.

Over the past 10 years and over several governments, there’s been a consistent decline in the global rankings of Canada’s transportation infrastructure. We’ve gone from being viewed as having top 10 infrastructure a decade ago, to 32nd globally in the specific measure of transport infrastructure from the World Economic Forum. The World Bank rankings on the logistics performance index show a similar decline for Canada.

This is a systemic problem. It’s not one strike, one bad flood or one bad winter; it’s a systemic problem. We’ve been working on a systemic solution to the problem with the aforementioned groups.

What the 10 years of research have shown—amongst other things—is that Canada is one of the few G7 and one of the few G20 countries not engaged in national infrastructure planning—long-term, 10- to 30-year planning done on a regular basis with long-term pipelines of projects. You begin to see where this leads to the work that you’re doing on resiliency.

Of the recommendations in our report, there are seven steps needed in the national plan, such as collecting data, understanding the one system for supply chain and logistics that connect the entire country, and being able to turn data into decisions. There is also planning and decision-making based on criteria of national significance. These are long-term, rigorous criteria that apply across decades. This is the opportunity, I think, for the work of the committee: to think about the report you’re writing and how you shape your recommendations to fit into the development of this national plan that will include these criteria.

If you want seriousness about dealing with resiliency and if you want seriousness and rigour in terms of dealing with environmental impacts, the best way I would argue, or that the research shows to be one of the most efficient ways, is to incorporate the criteria into long-term national plans. You signal to the private sector that, above and beyond the reasons that everyone presenting has shown you of the seriousness of the problem, there’s another business case to do this. The long-term signal you do sends this.

I will just conclude by noting that this is not just another report recommendation. The coalition we have with the private sector has been joined by the premiers. The call for Canada's first national infrastructure plan will be put on the table at this July's Council of the Federation meeting. It has the support of premiers from coast to coast. This is something that indeed is coming.

As you think about your report and as you think about the input and the recommendations that you get, I'm here to urge you to shape those recommendations and thinking to fit into the development of a national infrastructure plan.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

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

Next we have Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Stewart, the floor is yours for five minutes, please.

Mr. Craig Stewart (Vice-President, Climate Change and Federal Issues, Insurance Bureau of Canada): Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members. Thank you for inviting IBC to present to you today. Accompanying me is Ms. Chris Rol, IBC's long-time flood expert.

Insurance Bureau of Canada is the trade association for the over 200 companies that insure cars, homes and businesses in our country. I want to recognize that we're in the city of Ottawa and on the unceded, unsundered territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation. I also want to recognize our firefighters at this time, many of whom are volunteers, who are working tirelessly, even as we speak, to help keep Canadians safe.

Last year I co-chaired the advisory committee on disaster resilience and security, which provided very specific recommendations for the national adaptation strategy. Our committee submitted those recommendations to Minister Blair and Minister Guilbeault. We stressed that this country lacks urgency when it comes to building resilience to climate change.

For the past decade, the debate about emissions reduction has consumed all the oxygen in the room. Governments have been playing bait and switch with climate change, amplifying catastrophic wildfires and floods to drive energy policy while slow-walking the serious changes needed to defend Canadian homes and businesses. We all know this is true. This is why we welcome your study.

Our experts on disaster resilience recommended that the national adaptation strategy adopt explicit near-term targets to reduce disaster risk and increase recovery. These five-year targets state that by 2028, for instance, mortality due to extreme heat has been reduced by 70% and annual hospitalizations by 50%; all new construction in areas at high risk of wildfire include FireSmart resilience measures; and over 20% of homes identified as being at high risk of riverine and coastal flooding are protected.

Ms. Chris Rol (Manager and Senior Adviser, Climate Adaptation and Flood Policy, Insurance Bureau of Canada): De-

signed properly, infrastructure programming can help achieve our climate adaptation targets. Here's how.

Actuaries contracted by Public Safety Canada estimate that Canada's losses for residential flooding will amount to \$2.9 billion per year, on average, for the next decade, and will grow from there. They found that only 10% of homes account for 90% of those losses, so when designing a new disaster mitigation and adaptation fund, doesn't it make sense to focus funding on defending those at highest risk? We know where they are. If 1.5 million properties account for 90% of the risk, shouldn't we target funding to at least protect the 300,000 of them at the highest level of risk?

Budget 2023 announced the creation of Canada's national flood insurance program, a massive step forward for which Minister Blair and his officials at Public Safety Canada must be congratulated. When designing that program, we should learn from the American experience. They have created a linkage between the investments a community makes in flood mitigation and the premiums that residents pay for that flood insurance. This way there is a positive incentive for communities to reduce risk, and their efforts are recognized.

With that background, here are our four recommendations for your infrastructure study.

First, we strongly reinforce FCM's recommendation that the fall economic statement should allocate \$2 billion in surge funding for infrastructure that increases disaster mitigation, followed by \$1 billion per year thereafter for 10 years.

Second, the Canada Infrastructure Bank should be allocated a further \$2 billion for disaster mitigation and challenged to find a further \$4 billion in matching private capital. The challenge is too great for the public sector to meet alone. The financial sector has an investment role to play.

Third, infrastructure funding should be prioritized to reach a near-term adaptation target to defend the 300,000 homes at highest risk of flooding by 2028.

Fourth, following the lead of the U.S., premiums for Canada's new national flood insurance program should be designed to reflect the infrastructure investments made by communities that reduce their flood risk.

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you both very much for your opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

The next speaker is Mayor Jonathan Chalifoux.

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

Mr. Jonathan Chalifoux (Mayor, Municipalité Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu): Good morning, everyone.

Thank you very much for having me here today.

I'm going to tell you about a situation in Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu. Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu and Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu are two small villages on the south shore of Montreal. Our region is located at the junction of several highways close to Contrecoeur.

In recent years, we no longer have had the opportunity to build the ice bridge that used to allow our two communities to live in symbiosis during the winter. The winter detour between the two communities is 50 kilometres. Now, with the ice bridge, the journey was 500 metres to reach the other side of the river.

During the summer, we have a summer crossing route. In fact, a cable ferry carries cars and pedestrians. However, the outlook for winter is very bleak.

In November 2018, the municipality of Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu and the municipality of Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu agreed to end the partnership that allowed an ice bridge to be created and used every winter between the two banks of the Richelieu River. In recent years, the opening period of the ice bridge had become less predictable and shorter. Over five years, we only managed to open the ice bridge three times. What's more, the man in charge of the bridge wanted to retire, given his age. Of course, building an ice bridge is an art. Moreover, with changing weather conditions, it is becoming impossible to create this bridge.

We also have the imminent arrival, in our neck of the woods, of a port terminal to be built in Contrecoeur with a fairly substantial maritime portion. We're trying to find solutions so that we can have a year-round crossing at Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu.

We have done some preliminary research to try to correct the problem with a bubble de-icing system to allow boats to cross during the winter. The costs involved are quite substantial. According to a 2019 study, the system alone would cost \$650,000. Today, costs are now estimated at over \$1 million.

The cable ferry is operated by a private company, which has no interest in offering this service during the winter period, although there is the possibility of doing so.

We are therefore turning to the federal government. We need solutions.

There are three ferries on the Richelieu River, but municipalities have no say in the operation of these ferries, since private companies operate them. We'd like the federal government to give us a say in the renewal of permits and agreements for the river crossing. This would enable us to set conditions so that municipalities can benefit year-round.

We could even buy back these ferries to have a longer-term strategy. Responsibility for this service could be transferred to the Société des traversiers du Québec; we could even create an intermunicipal board that would be responsible for it. We need to look further ahead. We need help to build new, modern, electrified ferries, which would enable us to have year-round ferry routes by eliminating ice with ice-breaking ferries.

We'll soon be lucky enough to have a National Shipbuilding Strategy in Sorel-Tracy, which could be put to good use in a project.

Federal government support is essential to maintaining a vital year-round axis for our communities along the Richelieu River. One example is Bell Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, where a year-round ferry route has been in operation for several years. The economic boom on Bell Island has been most positive.

We want to have a year-round system for our communities. This would finally allow us to create links with surrounding municipalities, both for fire and police services, to help us better manage both towns. We could even, one day, merge some municipalities and set up an efficient system between two communities.

Thank you very much.

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

[*English*]

Next, we have Mayor Amy Martin.

Mayor Martin, the floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Amy Martin (Mayor, Municipality of Norfolk County): Thank you very much for the invitation to appear before the standing committee to provide testimony on the critical infrastructure needs as they relate to climate change in my home community.

My name is Amy Martin, and I am the mayor of Norfolk County, a single-tier municipality of close to 70,000 people located in southwestern Ontario.

I'm pleased to be here today in person in the city of Ottawa, which is built upon the unceded Algonquin Anishinabe territory.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize our MP, Dr. Leslyn Lewis.

In part, my testimony includes details relevant to Norfolk County, but also the following recommendations for the committee.

We recognize that successful actions related to climate change go beyond municipal boundaries, and that the federal government is best positioned to provide comprehensive, coordinated supports to the local level. Therefore, we ask that the Government of Canada provide local governments with dedicated, ongoing additional funding in support of critical infrastructure needs that respond to climate change.

Furthermore, we encourage levelling the playing field by way of giving consideration to large, mid-sized and small municipal applications, and having them judged fairly. Rural and urban municipalities of our size are typically competing against the GTA—the greater Toronto area—for funding and resources.

To start, I'd also like to acknowledge the role that FCM has played in helping municipalities, including Norfolk County, in drafting a climate adaptation plan. Without this funding, we would not have a plan.

Norfolk County is located on the shores of Lake Erie, home to one of the five Great Lakes in Canada. We cover 1,600 square kilometres of sandy shores, rich agricultural soil and a forest that sees 25% tree coverage. We're home to a UNESCO world biosphere in Long Point. We are the top Canadian producers of asparagus, tart cherries, ginseng, peppers, pumpkins, squash and zucchini. We have countless Ontario top producers as well. All of this to say that climate change and the environment are very important to us.

Wind, snow and ice storms; power outages and potential power shortages to come; floods and shoreline erosion; and, most concerning, water and waste-water quantity and quality concerns, coupled with far-reaching food security alerts—the growing infrastructure gaps Norfolk County faces are alarming. The climate concerns that are associated with the gaps are staggering, yet largely unfunded.

A previous FCM deputation informed you all of the infrastructure gap that many municipalities are facing, with high demands for repair and/or replacement totalling an estimated \$175 billion, and these figures do not account for climate change infrastructure.

One project in isolation, in Norfolk County, totals over \$390 million. Our interurban water infrastructure upgrade plan adds much-needed capacity and efficiency, as well as a safer water drinking system for our community. With infrastructure upgrades like these, we don't have resources left over to prioritize climate change initiatives. We simply don't collect enough money to address our critical in-house concerns.

Norfolk County has an annual \$119-million operating budget; however, we only budget for \$102,000 in climate change initiatives, totalling 0.0019% of our annual funding. This happens for many reasons, mostly because of our resources and our internal debt limits, but we simply can't prioritize more.

This is all the more detrimental to a community when we have a climate adaptation plan that has identified Norfolk County as very high risk, compared to other years, for flooding, which is directly associated with our high risk of delay in first responders. Our high risk of power outages attributable to adverse wind, snow and ice storms is directly related to our high risk of contamination and flooding of drinking water systems, which pushes surface material into our water sources. Our high risk of supercharging and flooding of stormwater management is also listed.

In 2023, we simply cannot allow this to occur, yet municipalities aren't equipped with the financial resources to update our infrastructure.

Our climate adaptation plan warns of the high risk of decreased agricultural output and productivity. This is attributed to develop-

ment and increases to drought and temperature changes. Drought puts us at very high risk of greater demand for municipal water supply and depleted groundwater resources.

The list goes on and on, totalling 18 initiatives from moderate to very high risk, and 13 of 18 are high or very high for Norfolk County. We simply cannot afford to fulfill our routine infrastructure upgrades such as keeping our taps on, let alone switching our focus to climate change initiatives that we fundamentally agree with.

This testimony doesn't allow time for a discussion on shoreline protection, greening our assets or planning sustainable housing initiatives with our planning department, despite the fact that we know our population will grow by 50% in the coming years.

● (1125)

However, we respectfully submit our testimony and recommendations to the committee, and we would be happy to supply you with any additional information, including our studies, upon your request.

I have brought the lovely Sydney Clarysse here with me today, our project lead at Norfolk county, to speak to any energy or facility needs that may suit the committee.

Thank you very much for your time.

● (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mayor Martin.

I have a quick note. We did conduct a study on a particular aspect of shoreline erosion. I invite you to peruse that in your free time.

Next we will have Ms. Azeez.

Ms. Azeez, the floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Lina Azeez (Director, Habitat Programs, Watershed Watch Salmon Society): Thank you for the invitation to speak to this committee about adapting infrastructure to face climate change in Canada.

My name is Lina Azeez. I am the habitat programs director at Watershed Watch Salmon Society.

We are a salmon conservation organization based in British Columbia. I'm calling from my home in Port Coquitlam on unceded Kwikwetlem territory.

I am also representing the indigenous-led lower Fraser flood plains coalition. We are a group of organizations and experts with the shared goal of helping B.C.'s flood recovery and management efforts achieve the best possible outcomes by addressing systemic challenges and improving flood planning for our region.

The Fraser River is one of the world's greatest wild salmon rivers. Salmon are a keystone species and integral to the cultural security of Fraser first nations, the local economy and the very identity of British Columbians.

The lower Fraser, roughly from Hope to the Salish Sea, is heavily populated and developed, with agriculture, industry and homes filling in the flood plain that is protected by about 600 kilometres of dikes, over 100 pump stations and 500 floodgates. Many of these flood structures are either blocking side channels, tributaries and sloughs that should be salmon habitat or killing salmon outright, so we are working to ensure that salmon and their habitats are better considered in flood mitigation and adaptation strategies.

A 2015 provincial dike assessment found that 90% of dikes do not meet current standards and are not well adapted for the changing climate, which is bringing us bigger and more frequent floods. We also have aging and undersized floodgates and pump stations. These deficiencies are putting our region at extreme risk of climate-induced high water events like the kind we experienced in November 2021. It has been estimated that the recovery cost of that single flooding event will top \$5 billion.

We need to invest in flood mitigation. As noted in the national adaptation strategy, each dollar invested in mitigation and preparedness saves as much as \$15 in disaster recovery, yet we also know from the lower Fraser dike assessment that we need new approaches to managing flood risks because upgrading all the existing dikes was found to be "prohibitively expensive". Fortunately, we are not stuck with the flood management options designed in the last century, but we need to be proactive and thoughtful in moving forward with proven, modern solutions.

Together with lower Fraser local governments and first nations, the LFFC identified five principles for a made-in-B.C. approach that incorporates the pillars of the "Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction" and commitments of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that the Government of Canada is a signatory to. These principles are reducing risk and adapting to climate change, advancing reconciliation, ensuring thriving salmon in coastal and freshwater ecosystems, supporting sustainable economic and resilient communities into the future, and ensuring that everyone is part of the solution.

Provincial ministers responsible for emergency management and the B.C. flood strategy have voiced their support for these principles. We ask that the federal government also support the principles aligned with federal commitments to Sendai, legal obligations under UNDA and salmon recovery. Essentially, infrastructure for a changing climate must be multi-beneficial. This means keeping our communities safe while also supporting salmon recovery and other values. This can be accomplished through integrated planning and sustained proactive funding.

For example, natural defences, also referred to as nature-based solutions, have to be ranked highly in funding programs such as the DMAF and DFAA, which make large infrastructure investments part of disaster recovery. At present, DFAA requires building back to the same standards and encourages communities to rebuild in high-risk areas that might otherwise not be covered by private insurance because they can be confident of a government bailout. This is inherently counter to the concept of adaptation. We need modernized flood plain maps, identification of risk and a focus on resilience and adaptation planning.

Natural flood defences can include making room for rivers to flood safely, restoration and protection of wetlands and flood plains, increased absorption capacity in upper watersheds, strategic relocations and supporting farmers in flood plains to adapt their agricultural practices.

There are many natural infrastructure and fish-friendly solutions that will keep our communities safe and build resilience into the ecosystem, allowing salmon and other species to thrive. These solutions all need to be supported by DMAF, DFAA and other federal infrastructure funding streams with big, bold and creative investments.

The watershed security fund can also help, and we'd like to see federal matching funds to support watershed health, which in turn can directly benefit our built environment. In our region, DMAF has supported the innovative living dike project in Boundary Bay. Projects like this should be the norm not the novelty.

● (1135)

In summary, adapting our infrastructure to be resilient to a changing climate in the lower Fraser requires two key components: sustained funding for a regional flood resilience plan based on the five principles; and funding and incentives for multi-beneficial, nature-based and fish-friendly infrastructure solutions. This is essential for community and for ecosystem health and safety, and it is necessary to ensure that supply chain networks and that communities in regions, like the lower Fraser, are not subject to repeated disruptions.

A principled, strategic approach offers a way forward in a complex region like the lower Fraser.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to any questions

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

We'll begin our line of questioning today with Dr. Lewis.

Dr. Lewis, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for coming today.

My first question is for Mayor Martin.

Mayor, I want to thank you for your testimony and for your presentation today to the committee. I appreciate your leadership in Norfolk, and I appreciate the work that you're doing for our community.

You mentioned a bit about the damages that have been caused by regular flooding and, largely, by the infrastructure gap. Is there sufficient government attention and priority given to municipalities like Norfolk when it comes to the safety and the climate-related concerns that are having real impacts, not projected years in the future but right now, today?

Ms. Amy Martin: Thank you for the question.

In my opinion, no. Otherwise, we would be regularly applying into those funding streams, and we would have a plan to further adapt to the level of flooding that we're seeing in our communities.

If I may just piggyback on that, the other issue is that a lot of private property ownership is mixed in with the municipal lands. We can do our part if the funding becomes available, but what happens to those private landowners? Are they doing their part as well?

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you.

You also spoke about high risks and high-risk areas that aren't being addressed and funded proactively. I'm concerned—and I know that you are well aware of this situation—about the orphaned gas wells that the government is not addressing. That's a significant issue that is posing an ongoing health and safety environmental concern. It may not fit into the disaster mitigation and adaptation funding presently, but, if left unresolved, there may be catastrophic damage from explosions and from environmental leaks. Can you speak to that issue?

Ms. Amy Martin: Absolutely. Thank you for the opportunity. I didn't have enough time to fit that into my testimony.

Ontario alone has 26,000—that we know of—abandoned gas wells. That doesn't mean all of them are leaking or are erupting, but it does mean that we don't know when they're going to leak and to erupt. Norfolk County is home to 2,600 with one leaking gas well right now in our community that has cost us over \$1 million. With an all-hands-on-deck approach, with all our staff, from our health unit to our operations and roads team, trying to manage hydrogen sulphide and a leaking gas well, we've had to evacuate community members. We're ill-equipped to handle this with our finances and resources.

What I hear from our provincial partners is that, for the federal government's additional funding to the provincial partners, to make its way down to the municipalities, it would go a long way. I think we're going to see this as a really systemic, deep-seated issue in all of Ontario—I can't speak to outside of Ontario—in the coming years. We know we have 2,600 in Norfolk County alone, and one gas well with over \$1 million.

There are a lot of health and safety risks, and our EMS team isn't equipped to respond either. We don't have in-house monitoring to determine if it's a high-risk area, and if we need to be evacuating our residents. Is it something our fire department deals with? Is it something the health unit deals with? It's a big issue, and I think we're going to hear about it a lot in the coming years.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: I'm also concerned about the federal programs and that they aren't sufficiently assessing the needs of small communities like Norfolk. Meanwhile, basic infrastructure needs are not being prioritized correctly. I'm thinking of things such as water infrastructure upgrades, which are essential and have problems that get exacerbated with flooding. Could you speak to that for a moment?

• (1140)

Ms. Amy Martin: Yes. Thank you for your comments. I couldn't agree more.

It's \$390 million and growing every day just to upgrade our five waste-water and water treatment plants and to try to amalgamate them into one facility that is state-of-the-art and that has high-end technology that helps us if there's a flood. It elevates the systems. It preserves the quality and the quantity.

I've put some pictures in our submissions for the members to review as well that are quite alarming in fact. In Norfolk County alone, we have one community with a full stop, a full moratorium, on development as we were in a 2,500 cubic metre deficit of water daily.

When municipalities can't afford to upgrade their infrastructure that simply keeps the taps on in 2023, I just don't know how we get creative and bold and how we make investments that can help us create sustainable communities for years to come. A lot of climate change initiatives are directly tied into the groundwater—the quality, the quantity and the infrastructure with which we pump that water.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: In saying that, are there any specific changes you believe government could make to better prioritize the more equitable distribution of federal funding to smaller municipalities like Norfolk?

Ms. Amy Martin: Thank you. Yes, I skirted that first part of your question.

Absolutely. As I said, we were put into a basket where we're competing with the greater Toronto area, but we're massive. We're a small municipality and we have "county" in our name, but that's more of a branding strategy than representative of what we are. We need to be treated equally and given consideration of size. I think some of the provincial methods we're seeing are audits of our books to determine how much funding we have: Do you have the money and resources? What are your debt limits? Can you take on additional funding?

If the federal government could review those types of things, instead of simply gapping us together with other municipalities with the same population size, I think it would go a long way.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mayor Martin.

Next, we have Mr. Rogers.

Before I turn the floor over to you, Mr. Rogers, on behalf of this committee and the 12 or so Canadians watching us on CPAC right now, I would like to wish you a happy 70th birthday in advance, my good man.

Voices: Hear, hear!

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. I'm looking forward to it on Saturday with my family.

We have some great witnesses here today.

I welcome all of you. I thank you for your background and the information you're bringing to this committee. I think it's extremely important we hear from the municipal sector, the Insurance Bureau and so on. Any recommendations, of course, we truly appreciate.

As a past mayor and member of the FCM—I sat on the board for four years—I truly understand where Mayor Martin is coming from. I know the FCM has put forward tremendous programs on behalf of municipalities across the country, big and small. I think our government has responded very well. In many of their programs, they've announced.... For example, the gas tax fund was doubled. In other programs, in terms of infrastructure, there's been a tremendous amount of money spent across the entire country.

Of course, I realize the challenges you have as a mayor. I've been there. I understand where you're coming from. There never seems to be enough money to deal with the issues. Thank you for your comments.

Chief Patrick, I particularly enjoyed your commentary when you talked about extreme weather events, protecting future generations and investing in preventative measures. You referenced, of course, the Lytton fire and the floods in B.C. It seemed as if you had a couple of other preventative measures you wanted to talk about, or

things you'd like us, as a government, to invest in to support all towns across this country in terms of wildfires and catastrophes.

Chief, do you want to make a comment or two further on that?

Chief Patrick Michell: Yes, thank you.

I think what's very important here is that.... Let's use an example: The Lytton weather station recorded a temperature of 49.6°C in June 2021. Most of the regions with what I'll call "non-official weather stations" were showing an excess of 50°C, with the highest at 55°C.

One of my recommendations is to create a new system of weather stations. If we're going to have a climate change adaption strategy, we need site-specific data. We need to know your wind. We need to know your temperature. We need to know your precipitation.

We've forecasted, at Kanaka Bar, a 6°C change in regional temperature by 2050. That's what we're preparing for. Our only concern is that it's happening sooner than we thought. Our three weather stations at Kanaka Bar, 18 kilometres south of Lytton, were recording in excess of 50°C.

If we're going to adapt our infrastructure of rails, bridges, roads, water systems and waste water, we need site-specific data. Give Canadians information—data. It's the old saying of "garbage in; garbage out." If we're now using data that is out of date, we're not going to come up with a proper plan.

I will consider—

• (1145)

Mr. Churence Rogers: Chief, I need to get to the Insurance Bureau people for a couple of questions. I really appreciate that. That's extremely concerning—the numbers you're referencing for temperatures.

For the Insurance Bureau folks—perhaps Mr. Stewart—I had a meeting with some folks in my office on Tuesday morning. We talked at length about the challenges the Insurance Bureau people are facing, as well as insurance companies and so on across the country. There are extreme wildfires happening in Nova Scotia now, with 150 homes destroyed and so on.

I wonder whether you have any suggestions about preventative measures that our government needs to take, along with provincial and municipal governments, in order to prevent future forest fires. Are there forest management practices that can be employed, or things to mitigate floods and that kind of thing?

Give us the benefit of your experience and what you've seen.

Mr. Craig Stewart: Thank you, MP Rogers, for the question.

Yes, we actually know what to do. The consultations around the national adaptation strategy surfaced. This wasn't just IBC. This was IBC with the FCM, Canadian Red Cross, Salvation Army and a broad group of experts who are on the front lines. We came up with very explicit recommendations about what needs to be done to better protect.

It starts with infrastructure. That's probably the biggest thing. As Mayor Martin mentioned, the investment in resilient infrastructure, or infrastructure that builds resilience for communities, is one of the biggest things that could be done. In addition to that is awareness for Canadians of the risk they face, or the elevated risk, where the government has committed to a flood portal, for instance, and any homeowner can type in their address and say, "What's my risk and what can I do about it?" That is so important. It's something that we as insurers can then also point to. On policy renewal, we can say, "Here's your risk." We can point to that flood portal.

At a community level, it's implementing FireSmart measures. Yes, forest management practices are part of it, but at the community level, it's essentially making sure that homes are built to FireSmart standards so that you're not using cedar shake shingles, for instance, if you live in a tinder-dry forest and these sorts of things.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Churence Rogers: I remember when Fort McMurray had a major fire and we had a gentleman come to our municipal sector and talk about how municipalities, communities and individuals actually invite the fire into their doors because they plant trees around their property closer to homes. In the case of Nova Scotia, a prime example is that there are large subdivisions with huge building lots that are totally treed. Once a fire starts, it has tons of fuel. There's very little chance that you can save a house in those conditions.

Going forward into the future, in terms of the Insurance Bureau of Canada and other groups, we need strong suggestions and measures. I would invite you to do a written presentation to this committee that we could use as part of our suggestions to the federal government to take preventative measures going forward. That's the point I want to get at. It's—

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

Yes, we invite you to submit that to the clerk. We'd be happy to have it as part of our report.

Thank you, Mr. Rogers, and thank you, Mr. Stewart.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all the witnesses who are with us today. This is an important study that affects just about everyone in the territory of Quebec, but also in the territory of Canada. I suppose we could have heard from an infinite number of witnesses. The ones we selected are the cream, if I can put it that way.

I'd like to start with Mr. Chalifoux, the mayor of Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu.

Earlier, you told us about the problem posed by the disappearance of the ice bridge over the Richelieu River, between Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu and Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu.

At our last meeting, we received the mayor of Saint-Ours. This is not the same ice bridge. In fact, several ice bridges along the Richelieu River are no longer practicable.

Mr. Chalifoux, could you tell us more about the impact on your community of the disappearance of the ice bridge in winter? What financial decisions must households make to ensure their future and the vitality of their community?

Mr. Jonathan Chalifoux: Economically, it affects jobs. People are no longer applying for a job at a company across the river, for example at Nortera, a food company, and vice versa. There are quality jobs to be had with the upcoming expansion of the Port of Montreal in Contrecoeur. There's a pool of interesting workers who aren't applying for jobs on either side of the river because the 50 km detour is too long.

This also affects medical care. There's no health clinic on our side, in Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu, but there is one in Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu. People no longer go to a doctor on the other side knowing that, three months a year, they'll have to travel an extra 50 kilometres. It's difficult for seniors, people who are more vulnerable or have mobility issues.

There are also major repercussions for local services.

I've talked a bit about fire and police service partnerships. We're experiencing climate change, and we need to be increasingly prepared for it. It would be possible to work even more with fire departments on the other side of the river. I'm a trained firefighter myself, and I'm involved. Communities on both sides of the river could help each other out in a major event, and would benefit greatly from it. Both Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu and Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu need firefighters from the other side. Yet, because there's a three-month break, we're not working on collaborative projects.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: At our last meeting, we received the mayor of Saint-Ours, who came to talk about the fact that he would have liked to see the infrastructure of the Saint-Ours locks used or, at least, made available to municipalities. This would have provided a year-round link by extending the locks, making it possible to build a bridge to cross from one side to the other. It would appear that this has been considered in the past, but the project has not been completed.

From your side, in Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu, if such a project ever went ahead, would you see it as positive? What impact would it have on your community?

Mr. Jonathan Chalifoux: Such a project would certainly be positive, because it would reduce our transportation time between Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu and Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu. It would cut the 50-kilometre journey in half. It's not optimal, but on our side, there are solutions we could use year-round. We really are a central hub between the two bridges, both on the Sorel-Tracy side and the Belœil side.

We occupy a central location, but, in reality, we would have to extend the Saint-Ours infrastructure that has been partially put in place.

On our side, I believe there are boats with air bubble systems that would be better suited to provide year-round crossings. As I said earlier, it's really the current owner who doesn't want to embark on the adventure. So we really need to help Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu move forward.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I have another question for you, which relates more to the issue of water levels. Every spring, the water level in the Richelieu River rises due to spring flooding and snowmelt. We also get the impression that, because of climate change, these level increases are becoming more and more significant.

The federal government exercises some form of water level management through locks, notably at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Chambly or Saint-Ours. I'd like to know the quality of the communication you have with federal decision-makers regarding decisions that are made on water level management and marine traffic.

• (1155)

Mr. Jonathan Chalifoux: It's always difficult in this regard. There's very little communication between us.

I'd like to point out that with climate change, the riverbanks are much more prone to erosion. Previously, between the two systems that regulate the level of the Richelieu, there was ice from December to April. Now, we have several freeze-thaw episodes. Instead of one cycle, we're now on four or five. This winter, we even had periods of a month or two without ice. So there are a lot of episodes where the ice goes down the Richelieu and erodes the banks even more.

Wildlife is also affected by all this. However, the main problem is really erosion due to ice and the cycles we now have four or five times a year instead of just one. The situation is more difficult.

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

I also thank Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Next we have Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Zarrillo, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you so much.

I wanted to focus on water. I've heard a lot about water and around management of water, whether its flood, whether it's drinkable water or whether it's water for agriculture. Even today, as

Mayor Martin introduced, how much is there capacity for enough water?

Today is B.C. wild salmon day, so I am going to go ahead and initially ask my questions of Ms. Azeez around the management of water. You mentioned the water resiliency fund, or the water security fund for B.C. The government has brought \$100 million to the table, and a matching fund from the federal government would be beneficial.

Can you expand a bit on how that could help in the management and the protection of water?

Ms. Lina Azeez: Yes, and thank you very much for your question, MP Zarrillo.

The B.C. watershed security fund aims to support local communities to make decisions that make the best sense for them. That way, \$100 million really does not go very far, and we definitely need to see more money invested in watershed security of all kinds. That's based on values that communities identify as important.

For example, our flood plain coalition, the lower Fraser flood plain coalition, is a hyperlocal group focused in the lower Fraser region, and we need funds to support our work in bringing communities together, having conversations, convening forums and building good relationships and trust. Through that, we will be able to identify important values that will support building resilience in this region. It's an incredibly complex region. The current commitments toward the watershed security fund do not support this kind of work.

Another example in the community that I live in, Port Coquitlam, is a fish-friendly pump station that is looking at a cost of about \$14 million to protect upstream industry and homes and to allow salmon to move through. Port Coquitlam has applied numerous times to DMAF, the disaster mitigation adaptation fund, and is not able to access that money. Perhaps through watershed security, which would include the values of fish and fish habitat, they would be able to upgrade this very important infrastructure to protect the communities and ensure salmon are able to move through.

That's from a very fish-focused and flood plain-specific perspective, but watershed security really does apply to communities up and down a watershed and really does allow them to focus on the values that they know need to be addressed within their communities.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

I think even about the hydro dam that is up in Coquitlam there. When those initial contracts are signed, the hydro dam was allowing only a certain capacity of water to be used amongst the community. I know that a couple of years ago, when there was a drought, there were additional charges to the community because they needed to release more water from the hydro dam, but I also know that those hydro dams affected fish and salmon habitat in terms of their being able to come home.

I wonder if you have any comments about industry and the legacy contracts with industry that are now not keeping pace with the growing density that's happening in our communities.

• (1200)

Ms. Lina Azeez: With regard to the dam in Coquitlam on the Coquitlam River, Watershed Watch is part of the Coquitlam River watershed round table, in working with industry in our watershed to try to ensure that all values are looked at in an equal way, that the needs are balanced and that the demands on that waterway, on that reservoir, are balanced. I'm sorry, but I don't think I'm fully able to answer your question.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm going to move on to Chief Michell.

I wanted to ask about the indigenous knowledge, the indigenous lands and how important it is for the partnerships that we need to build across government and community to have the indigenous knowledge there and even around the water. Do you have comments you'd like to share for that part of the study?

Chief Patrick Michell: Thank you.

My first thing could be controversial. The collective conscious knowledge that my community has and my nation has is getting out of date. We're not adapting to these changing extreme weather events. What's important, though, is that you bring to the table 8,000 years of knowing, as a reference, and you complement it with the weather stations, but we've also started gauging. We have water-gauging stations on all seven of the creeks here, because water is necessary for ecosystem health, drinking, irrigation, fire protection, energy production and, most importantly, sharing.

From a water perspective, the issue that's facing my region—and potentially Canada—isn't water quantity. It's water storage with timed release for those six purposes, so I think it's integral that we understand where water is going to be running out. During June 2021, groundwater wells were also depleted. It wasn't just surface streams. It was groundwater as well. It's very important that water, as one of the foundations of life, be truly invested in.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm going to close out, in the 20 seconds I have left, with the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

There was a mention of enhancing the CIB to get that \$2 billion in, but then to get additional from partners. I'm very interested in exploring partners. What kinds of partnerships do you believe would be beneficial with the CIB?

Mr. Craig Stewart: Very quickly, the Canadian Climate Institute just released a report in collaboration with Addenda Capital, which is the investment arm of Co-operators insurance. It laid out a number of ways in which you can attract private sector capital in basically resilient infrastructure without increasing debt load on municipalities. There's an active conversation with CIB under way right now. We will send that report to the committee.

The Chair: Thanks very much to you both.

Next we have Mr. Muys.

Mr. Muys, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses here for a great discussion so far. We have been blessed in this study to have quite a number of witnesses with insight.

Before I turn to questions, Mr. Chair, I would like to introduce a motion. It has been provided to the clerk. I understand it's in both official languages. It will be circulated, obviously, for consideration at the next meeting. The motion is as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), the committee undertake a study on the Supplementary Estimates (A) 2023-24; that the Minister of Transport and Transport Canada's Chief Financial Officer, and the Minister of Infrastructure and Infrastructure Canada's Chief Financial Officer, each be invited to appear for no fewer than 2 hours; and that these 2 meetings take place as soon as possible.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Muys. The motion is now tabled.

Please proceed with your line of questioning.

Mr. Dan Muys: Thank you.

Let me ask questions first of Mr. Stewart and Ms. Rol. I know that Mr. Rogers, who doesn't look a day over 50, by the way—happy birthday to him on the weekend—has given you an invitation to provide a written submission. If you can't answer this question in full in the few minutes here, I would certainly invite you to include it in the written submission.

With regard to the committee you chaired on disaster resiliency plans, did you look at other jurisdictions and what they've done? Are there examples elsewhere that we can learn from?

Mr. Craig Stewart: Yes. Thank you for the question.

Canada is in a very interesting position in that national adaptation strategies have been tabled by countries around the world. It's actually now a UN requirement. Certain jurisdictions, such as New Zealand and Britain, have done an excellent job of it. They essentially set up these strategies to be tabled every five years. They are reviewed in advance by doing a risk assessment: How is the country changing as a result of climate change? How is the risk profile evolving? They then develop a suite of mechanisms and programming, etc., in order to respond to that risk in an iterative manner.

Setting targets is absolutely essential. What gets measured is what gets done. New Zealand is probably the one that's the furthest ahead on this in terms of being able to essentially say that you're going to reduce the risk to wildfire by this much, using these indicators, and then measuring how you've gotten there.

In private sector business, setting targets is rote. It's what we do. We need that level of rigour if we're going to realistically reduce risk in a systemic way across this country. That committee came up with a suite of targets that we submitted to the government.

• (1205)

Mr. Dan Muys: I like this discussion about planning and pre-planning. This builds on some of the testimony from the last meeting as well.

Mr. Dade, you talked about that. I come from a private sector background as well, where you have KPIs and a plan and goals and targets and milestones. Maybe you can amplify that here. You gave the example of transportation infrastructure and how we have fallen from 10th to 32nd. I think you had seven steps that you were going to suggest. Maybe you can elaborate a bit more on that in the context of planning.

Mr. Carlo Dade: I won't elaborate on the fall. We have a full report out on that. Unfortunately, we couldn't make it available in French as well. We didn't submit it to the committee, but it's available online.

In terms of planning, as the insurance company mentioned, the incorporation of analysis of risk and measures to mitigate risk are parts of national plans, not just in New Zealand and the U.K. They have separate plans, as you mentioned, but it's also part of their national infrastructure planning.

Infrastructure Australia is the model we're looking at for Canada. It incorporates this in its national infrastructure planning. This gives you an enforcement lens for your targets and your reductions. You don't have to then set the targets and idiosyncratically go out and search for projects to which to try to apply them. If you have a long-term national pipeline of projects and criteria, those projects—your most important projects for the long term—are vetted through these criteria. It gives you a focus to be able to enforce and have greater effectiveness for the measures.

It's something that we've been lacking that our competitors have. It's also why we've fallen in the rankings. It's not one flood. It's not one strike. It's the fact that countries don't think we have this coherent comprehensive view, and they think we don't do planning—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dade.

Thank you very much, Mr. Muys.

Next we have Ms. O'Connell. The floor is yours for five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

Through the course of this study, I'll say it's incredibly refreshing that in this forum, there seems to be absolutely no debate that climate change is real, that the impacts are significant and that the impacts cost Canadians dearly—not only financially, but in your communities across this country.

It's really disheartening that if we walk across the street, even just this week.... We've heard time after time during this study about the very real human impacts. Meanwhile, just across the street, we are still hearing some members claiming that these incidents are just stupid guilt trips. In dealing with the issue of climate change and infrastructure mitigation, the importance of addressing climate change and its impacts, first, is crucial, but so is how to

mitigate our infrastructure in our communities to adapt for what is inevitable, unfortunately.

What I've consistently heard across the board from various spectra of witnesses is that all tools in the tool box need to be on the table. It can't be just disaster mitigation funding. There can't be just federal funding. It has to be all orders of government. It has to be private sector, public sector and research. Municipalities, of course, are on the front lines.

To the Insurance Bureau of Canada, I appreciated your comments about the Canada Infrastructure Bank, because this is just one tool—another tool in the tool box—that we've seen is doing big projects in dealing with emissions reductions, etc.

Just yesterday, Mr. Poilievre said he would cancel the Infrastructure Bank. That's one of the first things he would do. That was a \$9.7-billion federal investment that has actually attracted \$27 billion of overall infrastructure funding. That would either mean, if it was cancelled, that taxpayers would have to fund \$27 billion just to be equivalent—meanwhile, you've asked for an increase in that—or that it would be removing other federal funding to our mayors and municipalities. They're here saying they need more of this funding for municipalities because their budgets can't handle it.

To the Insurance Bureau of Canada, can you speak to why the private sector investment, in dealing with climate change adaptation, is crucial?

In one of your answers recently, you talked about also helping to keep the pressure off municipalities. Can you elaborate on why this tool in the tool box is going to be crucial in dealing with our infrastructure gap?

• (1210)

Mr. Craig Stewart: Thank you for the question, MP O'Connell.

The Canada Infrastructure Bank has terrific promise on the adaptation side. The scale of the problem, as you've heard from witnesses, is far too great for any level of government to address alone. The private sector should be at the table. The private sector should be viewing this as an investment opportunity. We should be able to crowd private capital into these projects. We have companies with investment arms that are actively looking for projects right now. This isn't hypothetical. You need some sort of mechanism or broker to blend that capital and come up with the term sheets.

What the Infrastructure Bank does is assume risk at the front end and then at the back end, and it makes it easier, basically, for private sector capital to flow into these deals. That mechanism, in our view, is very important if we're going to meet this challenge together.

We actually hold the Canada Infrastructure Bank. We know it's taken a bit to get going. It's a very ambitious enterprise, but it's a necessary vehicle to make sure that the private sector is also at the table.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Have you heard anyone say that municipalities across the country could make up across the board the \$27 billion of the investments in these projects? Has any municipality put up its hand and said it has so much funding that it can't wait to make more investments?

Mr. Craig Stewart: No, of course not.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Of course not. Thank you.

I don't know that I have much more time.

Mayor Martin, you mentioned about the gapping. I just want to be clear. The ICIP program was actually prioritized by the provincial government. I believe that's where you're referring to the gapping of municipalities. In our programming of application base, it's based on the merit of the project and not in combination with where you're located or the size of the municipality.

Ms. Amy Martin: I would just suggest, if there was any flow-through funding to the province, maybe a partnership on how it's sent down to us.

However, yes, I understand. Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I share those frustrations on how they've distributed those monies. I'll be sure to raise that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. O'Connell.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue with Mr. Chalifoux, from Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu.

You've come to talk to us today about a difficulty you're experiencing. You no longer have an ice bridge, in winter, and it has become very difficult to get to the other side. I'm sure you're not the only ones in Quebec and Canada in this situation. I assume there are ice bridges elsewhere in Quebec and Canada, which are also threatened by climate change.

On this committee, when my colleagues presented initiatives that encroached on Quebec's areas of jurisdiction, I bristled. In this case, however, waterways are a federal jurisdiction. In my opinion, the federal government has a role to play in helping communities that can no longer use the infrastructure they used to use that has disappeared because of climate change.

How could the federal government support you in this transition, so that you can still have connections? I imagine everyone considers these links necessary for their community.

• (1215)

Mr. Jonathan Chalifoux: It's obvious that the federal government will have to provide money. It will also have to help us with permits for private shipowners crossing the river. We have no control over these cable ferries that have been on the Richelieu River

for years. As a municipality, we should have the right to impose obligations on these private operators. It doesn't matter how good a project we present—a system that thaws the ice, or the little ice that's left—if these shipowners don't want to sign up to it, it's going to be problematic. We should have a say.

In my opinion, the most beautiful thing was the ice bridge. It was as if the two banks of the river came together to create an entirely different dynamic during the freezing period. That's now lost. The repercussions aren't just economic, it's deeper than that. There's the social aspect. The people of Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu and Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu have worked together for centuries. With the disappearance of the ice bridge, families see each other less.

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

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Next we have Ms. Zarrillo.

The floor is yours. You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

I'm going to ask Mayor Martin and go back to the Insurance Bureau. This is just to talk about the abandoned wells a little bit.

I'm interested to know if you believe that industry needs to be accountable today for the contamination and negative impacts that were not considered 50 years ago. How would that look?

Ms. Amy Martin: Thank you for the question.

The answer is yes. However, in our experience, we have a very difficult time tracking down those private landowners. Those businesses have closed. They've gone bankrupt. The members who were associated with that business have passed. That is when we see the deterioration of the infrastructure that occurred in the capping of the well. It's not for lack of trying.

The answer is yes, but I believe it's difficult to do.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Can you just give this committee a little bit of an idea of that challenge? Is the federal government helping in any way to find out who those landowners are to get some accountability and assistance?

Ms. Amy Martin: To my knowledge, the federal participation currently on gas wells is limited. We have seen provincial funding come through, but I know that it's not enough and I know that it's not sustainable. It's a knee-jerk reaction to a problem. It's not a proactive approach to how we're going to handle them in the future and our planning for the next stages.

We know in Wheatley, Ontario, there was a rather large explosion in the downtown core urban centre with regard to a gas well, as well as in Norfolk County. It's reactive. It is trying to monitor it, cap it and then move on to the next one.

I'm not very well versed in the exact role of the federal level at this point in time. To my understanding there isn't funding coming home to the provincial level to be distributed to municipalities.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Okay. That is a risk.

I'm going to ask the same question to the Insurance Bureau around whether or not industry needs to be accountable for that contamination. Again, 50 years ago, this wasn't on the table.

How would that look?

Mr. Craig Stewart: It's not an area we've spent a lot of time on. It's been an issue, as I understand it, since the 1990s. It's been a known issue in Ontario, which the government has had to grapple with.

The reality is that these are unfunded liabilities, at the end of the day. Those should be addressed somehow at the outset—through bonds or whatever—when these companies are set up. Now that they're gone, I don't know exactly how they could be tackled. Ideally, going forward, this sort of situation shouldn't be permitted to exist.

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

Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

Next, we have Mr. Lewis.

Mr. Lewis, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses this morning.

The first question, through you, Mr. Chair, is for Mr. Dade.

I love the fact that you're talking about long-term planning. You mentioned 10- to 30-year forward planning. I would suggest that's probably not enough. I think we need further planning than that. In a previous life, I worked with a company that fixed sewers without digging them up. It's called cured-in-place pipe. Ironically, we did a lot of work at Haldimand and Norfolk. As a matter of fact, we fixed the manholes at your local landfill, so I'm very acutely aware.

The reason I bring that up, Mr. Dade, about planning....

By the way, I don't own the company anymore. I have no interest there, so there is zero conflict of interest.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Chris Lewis: I bring it up because it's important to suggest saving money and stretching municipal dollars further. This type of technology costs 20¢ to 25¢—the cost of original open cut, dig and replace.

I'm curious. What other industries, sir, are you looking at for the 10- to 30-year plan, and how can the government help be a conduit—pardon the pun—to ensure municipalities are getting great opportunities to save money and stretch those tax dollars further?

• (1220)

Mr. Carlo Dade: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the honourable member from Essex for the question.

In terms of 10 to 30 years—taking the bits in order—what the best practice shows internationally is that these are our competitors, this is what everyone has and this is the range used for Infrastructure Australia, the U.K. infrastructure commission, Malaysia, New Zealand, etc. This is the range that works for transportation infrastructure.

We're talking about the assets and systems that move goods, people and factors of production in and out of the country. We haven't looked beyond this. We've kept our focus on the infrastructure that earns two-thirds of our living in this country—transportation infrastructure—but this benefits municipalities. If we had long-term planning for this type of infrastructure, municipalities could adjust investment attraction based on the infrastructure that will be coming online. It needs to meet the growth in demand. The growth in production can be tailored and factored into this.

One of the other elements of the plan—

Mr. Chris Lewis: Answer very quickly, please, Mr. Dade.

Mr. Carlo Dade: Okay.

Infrastructure Australia provides assistance to municipalities so they are able to participate in national planning. This is something the Canada Infrastructure Bank was originally, potentially, envisioned to do, but it's half of the bank's mandate. It hasn't been fulfilled or picked up.

Mr. Chris Lewis: Thank you so much, Mr. Dade. I appreciate that.

I don't have a question for you, Mr. Stewart, but I want to say thank you very much for recognizing the firefighters. I was a firefighter myself for seven and a half years. It means a lot that you would recognize them.

I have about a minute and 40 seconds left.

To you, Madam Mayor Martin, your area is very similar to Essex. It's incredibly similar to Essex. When we talk about food production, we're the greenhouse capital of Canada. We talk about flooding, and we have the flooding issues. We talk about you being a county. We're Essex County. Wineries.... By the way, ours are better than yours. Ironically, both MPs' last names are Lewis.

My question for you is with regard specifically to flooding.

By the way, as well, just next door to me, in Chatham-Kent—Leamington.... That explosion is, obviously.... Wheatley is where that gas was from. It very much hits home. I almost feel as though I'm home today when listening to you, Madam Mayor.

Do you work closely with your conservation authority? Obviously, we have the Essex Region Conservation Authority. I understand it to be true that you have a conservation authority. What can the federal government do to work with those conservation authorities closer? I realize they're legislated provincially, but I think we may be walking past an opportunity. Do you have any thoughts?

Ms. Amy Martin: Yes, Long Point Region Conservation Authority is excellent, as we heard from one of the other speakers, with data, with presenting us with information, with presenting the community with warnings about high-water risk, high-flood risk, high winds. There's a lot of ongoing communication that happens between the conservation authority and the municipalities.

If I can plug the opportunity, it's resources. We know that the water's coming. We know that the wind is coming. We know that we're going to see power outages. We don't have the resources in place to protect the water treatment plant when the power goes out or to build up some enforcements to protect our community, our roads and our small businesses from the flooding. We certainly don't have the money for the shoreline erosion.

Thank you very much.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mayor Martin.

Thank you, Mr. Lewis.

Next we have Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Badawey, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to concentrate on the business of government in a whole-of-government approach, recognizing, of course, that this is a fluid conversation.

I guess I'm going to direct most of my attention to the mayor with respect to the how and the what. We all understand what the what is. It's pretty consistent today, but how does the federal government be a better partner with our local communities and stakeholders to create that resiliency that we're speaking about through leveraging financing that mitigates the financial burden on property taxpayers?

I recognize that in your budget, for example, this year alone, there is an 11.5% increase in your water and waste-water budget and a 9.6% operating increase in your levy, blended at an 8% increase. You're looking at about \$837 million or \$838 million between now and 2032. It's quite heavy, so I get it. However, how do we mitigate that in terms of taking that burden off the property taxpayers and, of course, the water bills, in particular, to partner under a disciplined approach that has been established in Ontario? I see that your disciplined PSAB, as well as finance asset management plans, are very noticeable.

We have shoreline protection, asset management, adaptability, natural infrastructure, maintenance investments, etc., from the one side. From the other side, we have carbon pricing—what they call the carbon tax—revenues coming in to you at 10% of the overall that's being collected throughout the country. There are the Canada

community-building fund, which is the former gas tax fund; the NTCF; the green building fund; the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence announcement that was made this year at \$420 million, partly for our shoreline protection and, of course, resilience; and additional funding envelopes.

I have two questions, and this is the how to the what. Would it be advantageous to consolidate or repurpose some of these funding envelope programs under one program—such as the ICIP program, which I'm sure you're very aware of—that concentrates on climate resiliency to satisfy the capacity that you speak about, or would it be advantageous to, under the existing programs, focus on climate resilience as a scoring matrix priority when applications are being submitted? That is question one. When I get my second question out, the rest of the time is yours.

How do you envision a whole-of-government approach at the federal level and including all levels of government, integrating, as you mentioned, capital planning to ensure strategic investments—as were mentioned at the end of table, worst first—toward infrastructure resiliency? Every investment affects each department due to financial pressures on both resiliency and growth-related costs. Housing is affected by infrastructure, by finance, by heritage—the whole of government, all levels of government. An example of this is what you work with then. You have different departments: planning, operations, HR, emergency, and so on and so forth. With that, how do we, at this level, create that resiliency, create that partnership, create that flow, that fluidity, within our government but also including all levels of government?

The floor is yours.

Ms. Amy Martin: I'm going to go really high level, and then I might pass it over to Sydney. You're more in her wheelhouse.

With regard to your first question—how does the federal government help—again, it's funding, and I know that we've beaten that to death. It's maybe taking a look at a comprehensive insurance plan and taking an active approach on that instead of leaving it with the provincial level. Insurance is so high on a good day, let alone with all of these climate factors that we're seeing, so assistance through insurance....

Then, with regard to your second question, the high-level answer is that it's a multijurisdictional approach. If we're only helping Norfolk County and Haldimand County or Essex county don't opt in, what are we going to do? It's a multijurisdictional approach.

All of those funding sources are in Sydney's wheelhouse, so I will preserve my time and pass it over.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Sydney Clarysse (Project Lead, Energy and Facilities, Municipality of Norfolk County): Thank you very much for the questions.

With regard to the Norfolk County climate change adaptation plan, 13 of the 18 climate risks that were identified through the vulnerability assessment were very high or high risk. Of that, eight of the 13 involved were water, waste-water infrastructure and water quality, which you know has a trickle-down effect on several facets of the community.

In terms of funding, a lot of the funding that we're seeing today is looking for shovel-ready projects, but when you want to even upgrade your water and waste-water infrastructure, or be resilient and adapt that infrastructure to face climate change, the issue is that it's not always shovel-ready. When you're a small municipality, it's hard to justify continued spending on in-depth studies. I would say that's definitely a big question.

• (1230)

Ms. Amy Martin: One plan, one funding stream.... Can you comment on consolidating funding streams?

Ms. Sydney Clarysse: To be honest, I don't have a preferred option for that, just from my personal opinion.

I have applied to the GICB funding program for facilities, and that was basically based on a dollar amount per greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Obviously, that's more mitigation, so potentially the climate risk index....

Mr. Vance Badawey: Perhaps I can just throw this out there, Mr. Chair, because I know I'm at the limit.

Working with the FCM, one of the things that we're trying to do as well is to consolidate lots of the opinions in terms of the funding packages and the envelopes, whether it be a building fund or whether it be a green fund. It's a fluid conversation and, with that, comes the priorities.

All of you have made great points, and I want to thank you for that.

Ms. Amy Martin: If I may, FCM typically opens up loan funding envelopes, and our debt limits are extremely high. In the next 25 years we'll be over the 25% provincial allocation. In the next four years, we will be at our 15% internal debt limit, so the loans aren't always applicable.

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

Thank you, Mayor Martin.

We will move on to our next line of questioning, and we'll give the floor over to Dr. Lewis.

Dr. Lewis, you have five minutes.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you.

I'm just going to make a statement of fact and ask if Mayor Martin agrees with this. It's just touching back on the orphan wells.

I'm sure you're aware, Mayor Martin, that Alberta was given \$220 million last year for abandoned wells reclamation. Many environmentalists would ask the question, and the question was

asked today, about oil companies being responsible for the externalities and paying the costs of the externalities that they cause. That is also associated with capping the wells. They often cite Alberta and Saskatchewan, but Norfolk County and Ontario, in general, are very different.

This is with respect to the orphan well situation. Our oil and gas industry existed over 100 years ago. It is not a recent industry. That industry was developing, and it existed long before the oil extraction industry of the west, so many of these wells are now on private lands. Those homeowners were never part of the industry, yet they are left with the costs of orphaned, not abandoned, wells.

Would you agree with that statement?

Ms. Amy Martin: Thank you for the question.

I would agree with that statement.

When I answered earlier about payment and dissolved companies and so on, I was referencing the private specific wells, not giving consideration to a broader industry at large.

You raise an excellent point. We see many farms that have used these wells to heat their homes and to work on various initiatives across the farm, and now these private landowners have these wells. I think we're looking at two separate types or categories of wells, but my previous answer was not to the larger, broader industry. It was to the specific individuals who played a role in capping or not capping before moving on.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: My next question is for Mr. Dade. Canada doesn't have a national trade infrastructure plan, and you talked about this. Is Canada an outlier in this situation by not having a national infrastructure plan in place, in comparison to other nations?

Mr. Carlo Dade: That's correct. The European Union auditors did a study to benchmark the performance of transportation infrastructure planning in the EU. There were two Canadian academics who took part in the study. Of the countries they surveyed, Canada was the only one that didn't have permanent, long-term national infrastructure planning, and we did stand out like a sore thumb.

When Prime Minister Harper went to the G20 in Melbourne, the Australians had Infrastructure Australia and infrastructure planning on the table, and we learned that then. As everyone went around the table, it dawned on the then prime minister that Canada stood out.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: I'd like to hear from Mr. Stewart and Ms. Rol a little bit more. You spoke about the interconnectivity of government funding from infrastructure funding and private funding and how important the private initiatives are.

I would like to hear more about what role you think they play in future mitigation and adaptation initiatives with respect to planning into the future so that we're not just dealing with situations and catastrophes as they happen.

• (1235)

Mr. Craig Stewart: I'm going to focus on the national flood insurance program as a unifier. What insurance does is it prices risk. Right now, our system is that we have 10% of the population exposed to high flood risk, and they rely on government bailouts, which is essentially free insurance. The incentives are all wrong.

Once that national flood insurance program is set up, it's being designed so that it can be expanded to other perils, if needed, from wildfires to earthquakes. Once that's set up, then you can put the incentive system in place by saying that, if communities invest in infrastructure that reduces the risk, their constituents will pay less in terms of premiums. If homeowners take measures to protect themselves, you can also build those incentives in, such as we do with house fire right now when you're interviewed on your insurance policy as to whether you have a fire extinguisher or you live near a fire station.

It's about setting the whole framework from where we are now, which is basically perverse incentives, to a system of positive feedback and beneficial incentives.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

Thank you, Dr. Lewis.

Next, we'll go to Mr. Chahal.

Mr. Chahal, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us today.

I represent northeast Calgary, Calgary Skyview. The city of Calgary has experienced some real major climate events, for example, the 2013 floods. We've seen two hailstorms. The last one in 2020 did up to \$1.5 billion of damage in my northeast Calgary communities. There was flooding on Deerfoot Trail, on our roadways and in homes. There were 35,000 homes damaged and 35,000 vehicles.

I'll start with the Insurance Bureau.

I'm a former city councillor. We had asked the Conservative provincial government for support for our communities. In 2013, we saw a response. We saw support for the floods. We saw no support when our council recently asked the provincial government for support, exactly to the points you have made today on supporting communities by being able to bring resilient roofing forward so people can build back better and build more resilient homes and communities to reduce those insurance premiums. There was no support; nobody showed up. There were different approaches to different storms.

We have other issues as well when it comes to a broken insurance system. I wish there was an insurance company here to answer some of these questions.

We had a high volume of claims. We had an ill-prepared insurance industry to deal with those claims, particularly in newcomer communities.

Has the insurance industry learned from that past example, and have they improved their practices to ensure that folks who face

these challenges are better served in language, potentially, and that there are on-the-ground supports to help them get through that process?

Mr. Craig Stewart: It's a very important question. Frankly, it's a difficult one to answer. I'd say we're still learning as an industry.

With regard to that event that you referenced, the \$1.5 billion in losses, there were 100,000 claims that resulted, far more claims than came from Fort McMurray. There were 100,000 claims from a 20-minute event. We were overwhelmed. We simply don't have the appraisers. We don't keep that many people on standby to be able to deal with an event of that magnitude, and it's continued.

Postpandemic, the private sector across the board has been dealing with labour issues. How do we get staff and retain staff? It's frankly still an issue that we grapple with, especially when events happen in eastern Canada. Most of our adjusters are out in western Canada, because that's where the bulk of the events are. We've run into it. We do run into it. We run into it with the tornadoes that happened in Ottawa. We're still running into it in events across the country.

We're trying to do better. We're absolutely trying to do better. It's on our radar. CEOs talked about it at our last board meeting. We need to do better, but the scale of these events is a challenge for everyone.

Mr. George Chahal: Thank you.

I'm going to ask you a few more questions, and I'm going to ask you one about your recommendation.

Before I go there, do you think the insurance system in Alberta is broken? Do you believe that discriminatory geographic practices are occurring? I'll give you an example. For a resident of mine, a constituent of mine, who lives in my constituency in northeast Calgary...and I've run examples of this myself. I picked two postal codes. Northeast Calgary was \$2,218 and southwest Calgary was \$1,500, for the same coverage on a vehicle. How does that happen?

In my community, working-class newcomer communities are paying their bills, just getting by and working multiple jobs, but they are getting hosed when it comes to insurance. How does that happen? I say "discriminatory geographic practices", but through the underwriting practices, I would say, are there discriminatory practices for newcomers in this country when it comes to underwriting?

• (1240)

Mr. Craig Stewart: I don't believe there are any discriminatory practices when it comes to underwriting. Essentially what happens is that underwriters will take a look at risk, and geographic factors do play in. It happens on property, and it happens on auto as well.

Unfortunately, we're facing an absolute epidemic of auto theft in this country, and Alberta is the biggest part of the problem. We're working with the RCMP and Canada Border Services to try to address this. The losses have escalated so rapidly that we're just trying to figure out how to come to grips with it, and that's part of the problem.

Mr. George Chahal: That's also in Brampton, with an issue with the same disparity.

I know that my time is running out. Is there a role for the federal government to intervene to make sure this doesn't happen when the provincial government has taken absolutely no action to reduce rates or cap rates, so that folks in my constituency and other parts of the country—like Brampton—who are paying way more aren't unfairly charged?

The Chair: We need a 15-second response, please.

Thank you.

Mr. Craig Stewart: The insurance industry is regulated from a provincial level when it comes to its insurance market. It is a provincial regulatory issue.

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

Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

I'm realizing that my powers as chair are dwindling as the days and weeks go by.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

During the witnesses' opening remarks and the exchanges that followed, many spoke of the importance of natural infrastructure. I liked this, because it's not a natural reflex for the average person. Yet natural infrastructure most likely plays a big role in mitigating climate change and the consequences it can have on our communities.

A few years ago, the Canadian government acquired the famous pipeline to be built through British Columbia. This decision was highly controversial because we know that oil consumption increases greenhouse gases, which in turn significantly increase climate change. At the time, the federal government promised to plant 2 billion trees. I did a quick calculation earlier. For example, if you divide 2 billion trees by 338 ridings, that would be about 6 million trees per riding, which is a lot of trees.

Ms. Martin and Mr. Chalifoux, in Norfolk or Saint-Antoine-sur-Richelieu, could such a policy, already announced, of massive tree planting along waterways benefit riverside communities like yours? For example, if there were a willingness to bring these trees to your communities, you could use them effectively.

I'd like Ms. Martin to answer first.

[*English*]

Ms. Amy Martin: Thank you for the question.

I love trees. Norfolk County loves trees. We'd take the trees, but we have 25% tree coverage already, and we struggle to preserve what we have due to high development booms, maintenance requirements and resources to plant the trees, water the trees and check on the trees. I'd never say no to trees. We'd find a spot to put them, but I think it's such a bigger issue. I'd rather have money for water, but thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you.

Mr. Chalifoux, do you have anything to add?

• (1245)

Mr. Jonathan Chalifoux: We're taking all the measures we can, but it's not just a question of having trees: we also need to redevelop the riparian buffer strips in such a way as to allow greater resilience during floods. Trees are part and parcel of ecological landscaping, which would bring significant benefits. It's not just the river; all agricultural waterways need to be redeveloped too.

We have the space, but not the financial means to carry out projects. This program would involve the entire revitalization of riparian strips, whether it's the Richelieu River or all the agricultural watercourses that create a very rapid movement of water. The current is faster than it used to be.

Of course, if measures are adopted to control the volume of water flowing into the river, this will benefit everyone.

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

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Next we have Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Zarrillo, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

I want to go back to Chief Michell, please, to talk a little bit about how an ounce of prevention equals a pound of cure.

Certainly, it's a very unfortunate situation in Lytton, and I know you saw that first-hand. As we think about modernizing and about more resilient infrastructure, I wonder if you could share with us around utilities and just your personal first-hand experiences of what we need to do better in Canada in regard to infrastructure.

Chief Patrick Michell: Energy production is critically important, because we need to power our infrastructure. I've been advocating for smaller-scale diversification of renewable energy throughout British Columbia and Canada so that when our large grids go down, we don't have to go without. Our water systems need energy. Our waste-water systems, our food production and our homes need energy. It's critical, then, that through this partnership of five governments—indigenous, municipal, regional, provincial and federal—we pool our resources. Those resources are people, time, technology and money. It also means we need information.

From a purely energy perspective, we do need resilient, sustainable and affordable energy.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

I'll go to the Insurance Bureau of Canada for my last question. Again, it just relates to utilities. I know that in my riding of Coquitlam we have a lot of greenfield. The development community does not want to invest in underground electricity. This is an issue.

Do you have any thoughts around how we have more resilient utilities that lower the risk? I'm talking about homeowners and residential.

Ms. Chris Rol: There are some things that can be done on the level of infrastructure, and not just power infrastructure. I think we need to think about resiliency not just for existing infrastructure but also in planning to make future infrastructure resilient. We have a problem with our existing infrastructure when it comes to remediation, but we need to plan better. We need to plan with a view to the future, not just looking at past climate and past challenges on the weather side but also looking to the future and building almost a physical infrastructure life-cycle assessment. What job are we asking that infrastructure to do over the next 20, 30 or 40 years? Make sure we're planning to build something that's fit for purpose.

I think there are standards and there are things that are being done by standard development organizations to develop best practices. There's a best practice document for flood-resilient new communities and flood-resilient existing communities. Those are the sorts of things communities should think about.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we will go to Mr. Albas.

Mr. Albas, the floor is yours for five minutes, sir.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being here today.

Actually, I'm going to pick up on that last point about municipalities being able to so-call build back better. I've seen in places like Princeton...and particularly Merritt. In Merritt, for example, the bridge has not been restored yet because they're not being allowed to build back better. They're being told that they have to utilize the same standard, even though it's been proven that the Coldwater River has the capacity to sweep through and wipe away the bridge, as it did before, if they bring back what they had before.

Is this something that the insurance bureau is seeing more and more? Does it need to be tackled by provincial governments?

• (1250)

Mr. Craig Stewart: The answer is yes.

Building for future conditions, not existing conditions, is essential at this point. The insurance industry is looking at how, essentially, through our policies, we can encourage building back better to a higher standard than what was there before. It's essentially a dialogue between provinces and levels of government about how to come up with the funding to make that happen.

Somebody mentioned the Sendai framework earlier. It's sort of the main tenet internationally, and it's an approach that we support.

Mr. Dan Albas: I had a conversation with Fire Chief Brolund of the West Kelowna fire department, a very able person with a great team there. They have hired a FireSmart person to help with interface issues, and WFN, Westbank First Nation, has done a lot as well. Logan Lake barely escaped from a devastating fire in 2021, and Premier Horgan, at the time, said that it was because they made those investments in FireSmart B.C.

One of the things that I have, though, is that I see, in my province, continued issues with forest fires. While I do recognize that climate change is part of the issue, the other question is conservation practices. Do you have concerns, as the Insurance Bureau of Canada, that provincial governments are not properly funding those kinds of things? In what kinds of ways can we look to help prevent forest fires? Municipalities sure can do some things, but they can't do everything.

Mr. Craig Stewart: There is a question about—and it was brought up before—forest management practices. There have been some studies done around what could be the role of wetlands around municipalities, encouraging wetland rehabilitation, etc., where humidity might be able to play a role. There is, obviously, the active conversation around firebreaks around municipalities.

However, you need a comprehensive approach. The work on wildland-urban interface—which, again, we support—in B.C. is another....

Mr. Dan Albas: Again, I'd like to get to those practices because we had approximately 300 firefighters from British Columbia and Alaska when many of the fires started in 2021, and they were there to assist the Americans. There are a lot of decisions that happen where.... We didn't have the manpower in British Columbia to be able to effectively fight those fires.

Could you give us some more concrete examples of what forest management practices need to change?

Mr. Craig Stewart: I'll have to get back to you with a report. I don't have specifics on it.

Mr. Dan Albas: If you could just table that with the committee clerk, that would be helpful—just so that we have that.

Lastly, I'll just touch on flooding and whatnot.

One of the things I've heard about your industry is that it requires extensive flood mapping and other risk assessments—again, on whether a community is FireSmart, etc.—and that those will have a profound impact on rates.

Is there enough mapping going on in places like British Columbia and, in fact, across the provinces to allow your industry to function so that it can make sure that, for people who are in unsafe areas, governments and those ratepayers will through price mechanisms, rather than governments having to put oodles of money... I think that's the first-level thing we should be asking provinces.

Mr. Craig Stewart: We've come a long way.

With regard to flood mapping, seven years ago the flood maps for this country were terrible. We relied on what we received from Natural Resources Canada as an input. However, now there are global private-sector firms that model Canada for flooding, and their models have come a long way in the last seven years.

Public Safety Canada has taken pretty well all of the existing models and created a comprehensive—probably it's the best in class—flood model for the country, and that's what's going to be used for the actuarial analysis for the national flood insurance program.

I would say that, whereas flood mapping was more of an issue several years ago, the private sector innovation in the area, combined with the recent investments that Natural Resources Canada is using to improve the base mapping, have meant that we're in much better shape than we used to be. However, those maps do not predict future conditions. They are all about what the risk is now, and we have a ways to go, not just in Canada but everywhere around the world, on how we improve the maps to address that.

• (1255)

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

Thank you, Mr. Albas.

Finally for today, we'll go to Mr. Kelloway.

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

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thank you, and I'll be sharing most of my time with MP Chahal.

I wanted to make an observation that MP O'Connell mentioned today, and everyone was agreeing obviously with the fact that we can all come to a common consensus on climate change, the climate crisis.

Back home, MP Lewis mentioned he was a firefighter, and it prompted me to say that all levels of government back home are working hand in glove on what is a “once in a lifetime” event, we were told. In eight months, we have had two “once in a lifetime” events—a massive hurricane in Cape Breton and a massive fire event that is tearing the lives down of people in my community.

The work we do here and the work we do as a committee here is absolutely important—and I'm only here for one day. In the work you do, whether you're the Insurance Bureau or whether you're a municipality, the time for pointing fingers is over. The time for taking data and turning it into decisions is here.

I wanted to make that comment and pass my time over to MP Chahal.

Mr. George Chahal: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, MP Kelloway, for those remarks.

Mr. Stewart, I want to go back to you, because you ended off by saying that it's provincial jurisdiction. Too many people in my northeast Calgary constituency have been refused insurance or are paying exorbitant costs. It's provincial jurisdiction. This is unfair for my constituents in northeast Calgary, and folks across the country, who face similar challenges wherever they are.

Our provincial Conservative government has not protected northeast Calgarians and has not supported us when we went through this crisis. It was left to city council. It was left to communities to do this.

You said earlier that national flood insurance is a “unifier”. I believe you made that remark. Is there a role for our federal government to intervene in provincial jurisdiction when it comes to insurance?

Mr. Craig Stewart: I wouldn't say that the role is necessarily to intervene. I would say that the federal government has a leadership role to play in trying to address these gaps. Canada is becoming a riskier place to insure. The reinsurers—those are the companies that we pass risk onto globally—have raised the rates for Canada by up to double for some portions of this country in the last year. As a result, that means that insurers are paying more, much higher premiums, and they're passing that on to the customers. It's not just your community that's feeling the pain. I'd say the pain is being felt across the country, because Canada is becoming a riskier place to insure.

How do you reduce the risk? Whether it's on auto.... Do you have some sort of national auto theft strategy that the feds could lead with the RCMP? Is there something we could collaborate on in that area? With the national flood insurance program, that's a terrific step forward. It's essentially saying we are going to intervene in the market by entering the market. The federal government is actually saying they're going to be underwriting flood insurance for the country. It's a massive step forward, in partnership with us. We fully support it. It keeps insurance available and affordable for those who live in high risk...and building it to expand to address other challenges when they emerge is also important.

I'd say it's not only a northeast Calgary issue; it's across the country. Your constituents aren't paying more, because of that one hailstorm. It's a trend. We're seeing a worrying trend.

Mr. George Chahal: The trend is that folks in northeast Calgary prior to that hailstorm were paying much more. That's the problem. This hailstorm has just made it that much worse.

When a provincial government does not initiate or call it a disaster, so they don't have to spend a dollar to get some dollars from the federal government, that's also what happened. How do folks who live in my communities...? The role of government is to step in and support people when they're going through these challenges and crises. Whose responsibility is it when the provincial government is not willing to spend any money, not willing to support people and not willing to step in and do its job? Whose responsibility is it?

That's what happened with our Conservative government in Alberta during that hailstorm. They took a different approach, under Premier Redford, during the floods. During these storms they took a completely different approach of inaction. Who's responsible then, and who steps in to protect those people?

• (1300)

Mr. Craig Stewart: I'm going to deliberately sidestep that specific question and say that an alternative approach is to address those incentives that I mentioned before.

The federal government stands up a national flood insurance program, funds it and backstops it, but then relies on the provinces to keep it affordable by undertaking the necessary program to reduce the risk at a provincial level. We have to be really smart and innovative around these exact questions. How do you make sure it's in the provinces' best interests to act for their constituents?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

Mr. George Chahal: Thank you so much for your testimony today.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to thank all the members for their great lines of questioning today.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for appearing and for sharing their important testimony with us for this very important study.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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