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The Honourable Paul DeVillers

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Wednesday, November 24, 2004

•(1535)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Paul DeVillers (Simcoe North, Lib.)): I'd like to call this meeting to order. It's the meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. The meeting has been called to consider the main estimates for 2004-05.

I welcome the minister, who's here with her entourage. Maybe I'll leave it to the minister to introduce the folks with her.

I'll call vote 1 in order to begin our review of the main estimates, and I'll request that the minister make her opening statement and introduce the folks with her.

[Translation]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

It is again my pleasure to meet with the committee. As you know, I was here only a few weeks ago to participate in your review of Bill C-6, which is the legislation that creates the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. I thank all of you for your comments, and I certainly look forward to another positive and productive discussion this afternoon.

[Translation]

The purpose of today's meeting is to review the portfolio's spending plans for the final three months of fiscal year 2004-2005.

I would like to quickly introduce officials who have accompanied me today.

[English]

Mr. Chair, I will introduce the people who are with me today.

Obviously many of you know my deputy minister, Margaret Bloodworth, and I can't imagine that there are any of you who don't know Commissioner Zaccardelli of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Also with me is Alain Jolicoeur, who is president of the Canada Border Services Agency. I think the legislation that creates that new agency will be before this committee very soon for your consideration.

We have Bill Baker, who is the commissioner of the Canada Firearms Centre; Don Head, who is the acting commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada; and Ian Glen, who is chairperson of the National Parole Board.

And while Mr. Neufeld, Mr. Chair, is a very humble man, I do want to especially acknowledge today the presence of Dale Neufeld, who has done an outstanding job as acting director of CSIS over these past few months.

Thank you, Dale.

The estimates documents we are reviewing today will finalize a total appropriation of \$4.9 billion in funding for the department and various agencies that make up the public safety and emergency preparedness portfolio. How we spend this money is of the utmost importance to Canadians, not only from an accountability perspective, but also because of the work we do. At its most basic level, this work saves lives and protects the very socio-economic fabric of the country.

[Translation]

I do not make that statement lightly. We live in an uncertain world—a world that is more dangerous than at any time in our collective memory. Canada is engaged with our allies in the fight against terrorism.

[English]

Canada will always face a certain level of risk. After all, before 9/11, the Air India bombing claimed more lives, many of them Canadian, than any other single terrorist attack in history. But there is no disputing that the threat environment has worsened in the past three or four years. Current threats to public safety are far more global, unpredictable, and difficult to detect than anything we have experienced in the past. Canadians are aware of this. Although they perceive their personal risk to be low, they know we are not immune from a terrorist attack.

While Canada may not be a primary target for a terrorist strike, we are a named target. The terrorist bombings in Bali, Madrid, and Beslan are tragic reminders that terrorists can strike anywhere, any time. Their brutality knows no bounds.

But the risks to our safety and security are not limited to terrorism. They extend to personal safety as well. There are emerging forms of crime, such as human trafficking, identity theft, child sexual exploitation, and cyber crime. Furthermore, firearms-related crimes such as gun smuggling and gun violence present us with particular challenges at our borders and in our communities. Organized crime is also becoming more globalized and poses a growing threat to safety and security.

Our responses to these must also evolve to deter and reduce crime, as well as preserve the peaceful and open nature of Canadian society. In a country as large and geographically diverse as Canada, natural disasters are an ever-present threat. Floods, forest fires, hurricanes, ice storms, and other severe weather events can hit us at any time, causing social and economic disruption over large regions of the country. In the face of this varied and harsh threat environment, Canadians expect their government to take action to protect their safety, their security, and their economic stability.

I have said this before, but it bears repeating in the light of our discussions today. There is no role more fundamental for government than the job of protecting its citizens. All other rights and freedoms, all other benefits of citizenship in a democratic society, flow from this.

It goes to the heart of why the public safety and emergency preparedness portfolio was created last December. The portfolio has been designed to address a continuum of risks to Canadians, from crime affecting the lives of individuals to natural disasters disrupting our communities to terrorism and other threats to our national security. In short, it is our job to protect the lives and livelihoods of Canadians by ensuring their safety and security. It is our job to constantly evaluate information from domestic and international sources to better assess the whole range of risks we face in order to avert threats and to respond effectively to those that cannot be avoided.

To facilitate this, the public safety and emergency preparedness portfolio brings together key national agencies dedicated to public safety. The former Department of the Solicitor General, the Office of Critical Infrastructure Protection and Emergency Preparedness, and the National Crime Prevention Centre have been amalgamated into a new department. This department and a range of agencies including the new Canadian Border Services Agency, the Correctional Service of Canada, the RCMP, CSIS, the Canada Firearms Centre, and the National Parole Board, as well as three oversight bodies now report to a single minister.

Through this reorganization and consolidation we are better able to link front-end measures such as emergency preparedness, crime prevention, community policing, and border management with back-end interventions such as law enforcement, emergency response, corrections, and parole. The changes introduced by the Prime Minister last December as well as new investments in security have made Canada a safer, more secure country than it was on September 11, 2001.

It's important to understand that we are not alone in strengthening our safety and security focus. Most of our allies have taken similar steps to reorganize and rationalize their approaches, and everyone is committed to doing more. It makes sense for them and for us to be

ever vigilant. The safety and security of Canadians is at stake. The stability of our relationship with the United States, our closest friend and largest trading partner, is at stake, as is our place in the world.

● (1540)

If we don't get safety and security right, if we don't show that we are serious about the threats we face and that we are ready and able to respond to those threats, it will affect our borders, our trade, our economy, and our mobility. That is why we feel the funding our government is seeking through these estimates is critical. It will have an impact in every community across this country—whether through the policing services provided by the RCMP or by protecting public safety through the corrections and parole systems; whether through gun control or our investments in crime prevention in more than 4,300 projects in over 850 communities across our country; whether by fighting organized crime or by ensuring that our borders remain open to legitimate trade and travel but closed to criminal and terrorist entities.

I am proud of the progress we've made over this past year in bringing issues and agencies together to keep Canadians safe. For example, as part of the commitments made when I launched our first-ever national security policy last April, we have created a new Integrated Threat Assessment Centre, ITAC, staffed by representatives from across the security and intelligence community to support and strengthen Canada's intelligence gathering capabilities.

We are also bolstering national security by dealing with threats before they have a chance to get close to Canada and Canadians. The Canada Border Services Agency, CSIS, and the RCMP are all engaged with each other and with international partners in identifying and intercepting persons who pose security risks as early as possible before they get to Canada.

On the emergency management front, a new government operations centre has been established within the department to provide stable, around-the-clock coordination and support across government and to key national players in the event of national emergencies.

No matter what the source, the centre monitors situations that could escalate into emergencies and it helps ensure that the right capabilities are in the right place at the right time. This is an important step forward in emergency management in Canada. We need to sustain and broaden the centre's work in the months ahead to ensure it fully develops into what the government envisioned in our first-ever integrated national security policy. This also includes meeting the commitment to co-locate, where practical, federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal emergency operation centres across Canada.

We also continue to make progress in strengthening our vital security and trade relationship with the United States. This involves many elements of the portfolio from border services and emergency management to policing and security intelligence. For example, we have expanded the use of integrated border enforcement teams, or IBETs, to help ensure the free flow of legitimate goods and people across the Canada-U.S. border while closing the border to criminal or terrorist elements.

IBETs, as many of you know, include many partners—the RCMP, the Canada Border Services Agency, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Branch, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the U.S. Coast Guard, to name but a few of the key players. Federal, state, provincial, and municipal law enforcement agencies are also integrated into these teams. That ensures joint coordination of enforcement and intelligence activities at the Canada-U.S. border.

As an example of further progress on this front, we recently announced a 15th IBET location in the Sault Ste. Marie region and concluded an agreement to co-locate four IBET intelligence centres in which Canadian and American intelligence staff will work shoulder to shoulder to deal with everything from anti-terrorism to trafficking in humans, drugs, and firearms.

In conclusion, let me just remind the committee that these are still early days for the new portfolio and it's important that we stay the course. We must continue to implement key elements of our national security policy. We must continue to work with our allies, particularly the United States, to ensure that our borders remain open and efficient. We must continue to fight organized crime and to deliver correctional services that meet the needs of the Canadian public and of inmates.

• (1545)

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, the work this portfolio does is absolutely crucial to the welfare of Canadians and our economy. This is not a time to be scaling back investments in national safety security and emergency preparedness. It's a time for bolstering our efforts, just as our allies are doing around the world. We must also always be looking for ways to improve our prevention strategies and emergency response capabilities. And we must do this in a way that reflects Canadian values, safeguards our liberties, and respects our laws, our Constitution, and our sovereignty. I hope we can count on the committee's support for this work and to continue this work.

Mr. Chair, I would now be pleased to receive members' questions, comments, suggestions—whatever they might have in store.

Monsieur le président, merci.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

We'll go to Mr. MacKay for the first round of seven minutes.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, and all of the officials.

You'll get only fair, direct, straightforward questions from us today, I assure you.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Can I hold you to that, Mr. MacKay?

Mr. Peter MacKay: You sure can, and I know I'll get the same types of answers.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Of course.

Mr. Peter MacKay: I want to begin with a question on a private member's bill, Bill C-243, that was tabled this week in the House. You would be familiar with that bill. It mirrors a motion that I brought forward back in 1998 calling for a victims ombudsman's office to be set up to address some of the many issues victims continue to struggle with in this country, including promises previously made by yourself and other ministers about funding for attendance at parole hearings, funding enabling victims, for example, to review CCRA audio tapes, get information regarding transfers, get information about offenders' participation in programs that relate directly to their crimes.

I guess the very straightforward question is, why has the government not introduced this bill itself, which I understand receives broad support from all parties in the House, including members of the government, and would surely pass very quickly through the House of Commons? Given this type of unusual non-partisan support, it seems to me this bill could be passed very quickly, prior to Christmas, if you and your department had decided to give it that priority.

The Chair: Madam Minister, I'm not entirely sure that's in compliance with the regulation with respect to relevance, since we're talking about estimates here, but if there's a link and the minister is prepared to answer, then we'll permit it.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Let me tie it in for you, Mr. Chair.

Perhaps someone from the department could tell us how much the correctional investigator's budget is and why it wouldn't be reasonable to have victims receive the same type of budget allocation as a correctional investigator?

Hon. Anne McLellan: We have the budget here. It's not a large budget, I can assure you, Mr. MacKay. My deputy will get the exact number.

But in fact I was very proud, as you probably remember, Mr. MacKay, when I was Minister of Justice and Attorney General to act upon many of the recommendations made by the late Shaughnessy Cohen and other members of a task force. And I don't remember—

• (1550)

Mr. Peter MacKay: I was a member of that.

Hon. Anne McLellan: I apologize. You were a member of that. In fact, we moved on a lot of those recommendations at the time, and I was very pleased to be able to do that.

I am one of those who believe that victims have a very important role to play in the criminal justice system. The justice system has to reflect the fact that victims are those who are left to live with the consequences, in some cases long after criminal acts. Therefore, my commitment was then, and is now, to ensure that we have a criminal justice system that strikes the right balance between obviously the overall societal objectives of the criminal justice system, the rights of the accused, and the rights of the victim and family members and friends of a victim.

In fact, we plan to do more in relation to providing supports for victims. I know one of the issues is travel to parole hearings, which we have not really dealt with, and I'll be frank about that.

Maybe, Mr. Glen, you could respond to that specifically.

But I do believe it is important. We have in limited circumstances provided travel dollars, but it has been in limited circumstances. Therefore it is something I am committed to looking at.

I'll be honest with you: we need some additional resources to be able to do that. It's very few victims who actually choose, and it is their choice, to go to the parole hearing in person. But I take the point that if they choose to do that, we should be facilitating that for them. It is a question of resources.

Mr. Glen, you might like to add something.

Mr. Ian Glen (Chairperson, National Parole Board): Certainly it is a question of resources and I would say also the authority for public expenditure that way. That doesn't rest presently with the Parole Board or with the moneys that are voted to the board for its operations.

That being said, quite a bit has been done in terms of supporting victims, when they want to come to hearings, to in fact be able to give statements, and we've made good progress on that since—

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Glen, can I ask you if you have the budget for the correctional investigator's office?

Mr. Ian Glen: Do I have that?

Hon. Anne McLellan: Yes, it's right here, and it's \$2.9 million a year.

Mr. Peter MacKay: I believe the figure that I have in front of me, Madam Minister, is \$1.7 million that the annual cost of operating a victims ombudsman's office would be. This has been described by Steve Sullivan, who is with the victims resource centre, as a drop in the bucket compared with the massive costs associated with running Canada's courts and prisons.

So again I ask you this directly: Why would the government not make it a priority to introduce the bill itself so that it could receive royal assent, rather than go by way of a private member's bill?

Hon. Anne McLellan: The private member's bill is from one of our own members, Ray Bonin, and we are working with Mr. Bonin... my parliamentary secretary. What I would say is that we have introduced a number of changes to the Criminal Code and a number of services working with the provinces and others, and there are victims offices in every province.

It is not clear to us, even in our discussions with some provincial governments, that they think the best use of our resources for victims would be the establishment of an ombudsman's office.

Perhaps, in fact, we should get those resources, Mr. MacKay, and put them into travel for victims who want to appear before parole board hearings. Those are the kinds—

Mr. Peter MacKay: Or you could do both.

Hon. Anne McLellan: But that indeed takes more resources.

So what I would say, Mr. MacKay, is that I think we have come some distance in acknowledging the role of victims in our criminal justice system. It is always a balance, and we have to prioritize where we put our resources, where it actually makes the biggest difference for the victim and his or her family and friends. It is not clear to me—

Mr. Peter MacKay: What does it tell a victim if it's not a priority and you're not going to provide those resources, if you're calling it a priority and you're not willing to back it up with the money necessary to attend parole hearings to get the information to the victims in a timely fashion?

Just set up a national office, then it doesn't come across as a priority to me or anyone else.

• (1555)

Hon. Anne McLellan: No, what I'm saying, Mr. MacKay, is this. It is a priority for me to see if we can get the resources for those who wish to go to parole hearings to do so. It is not clear to me that the office itself, the additional bureaucracy, is what victims need, especially when there are offices in the provinces. Perhaps we work through those offices, which we have been doing, generally in cooperative ways, a good relationship with provinces and territories as it relates to victims issues, but take our resources and provide things like travel to parole hearings, which are clearly within federal jurisdiction.

Mr. Peter MacKay: The point is, you have a budget of over \$2 million for a correctional investigator to respond to the needs and injustices claimed by those currently incarcerated. You don't have a similar office nationally for victims. That's the point.

I'd like to move to another issue, and that involves closure—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. MacKay, your time has now expired, so you'll have to wait until the second round.

[Translation]

Mr. Ménard, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Minister, I can see that we have the same view of your new department. We agree on the need for it, its name and its objectives. I think you got a copy of what I said when Bill C-6 was being studied.

We're talking millions of dollars here, even a few billion. To put those millions of dollars into a more human scale, you customarily refer to the daily cost of inmates in Canadian prisons. With the budget you are requesting, what are we up to?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan: In terms of the correctional services, the entire system?

Mr. Head, what is the total budget for the Correctional Service of Canada?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: You generally give us the daily rate. For example, I know it's at least \$150.

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan: Per prisoner?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Yes, per prisoner, per day. Don't you have that?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan: I'm not sure we have that at our fingertips—or perhaps we do.

Mr. Don Head (Acting Commissioner, Correctional Service Canada): On the total for the year 2002-03, the average was \$80,780 per year.

Hon. Anne McLellan: That is per year.

Mr. Don Head: I don't have that broken down on a per diem.

Mr. Serge Ménard: That is per year, so we divide it by 365 and we get it per day.

[Translation]

Hon. Anne McLellan: That's right.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Okay. Now, I know that in some provinces, at least in New Brunswick, the federal government takes care of the provincial prison system for people serving a sentence of under two years. How much do you receive from provincial governments for each prisoner, per year or per day?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: I don't have the figures. Under the legislation we have the opportunity to enter into exchange of service agreements with the provinces, for them to hold federal offenders at any given time, and at the same time for Correctional Service of Canada to hold provincial offenders under our jurisdiction.

The per diem costs usually reflect the costs that are incurred by that jurisdiction to hold them at any given day, so they vary between the provinces. I don't have the numbers for each province across the country.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: How many Canadian provinces do you provide with penitentiary services for provincial inmates?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: We have exchange of service agreements with all ten provinces and the three territories, and the funding depends on the actual utilization in any given year. So if we have asked the province to hold a federal offender under the terms of the exchange of service agreement, there would be a per diem cost for each day of utilization.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: I think my question was misunderstood. I'd like to know how many provinces you provide with detention services for provincial prisoners, people who've been sentenced to under two years' imprisonment.

[English]

Mr. Don Head: Again it depends on the circumstances. We will have the provinces ask us on any given day to hold a provincial offender if they're having difficulties, for example, managing some problematic offenders. So the numbers will vary on any—

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: That is not what I want to know. I know that you provide all of the services in New Brunswick. Is that not so?

• (1600)

[English]

Mr. Don Head: No, we provide services under the New Brunswick agreement for any sex offender who is serving a six-month sentence or more and any other offender who may be sentenced to one year or more.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Not for all provincial inmates?

[English]

Mr. Don Head: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Okay. I'm going to move on to something else.

On page 24-6, under policing programs, I believe, reference is made to the first nations policing program. I see that you have \$87 million for that program. Can you tell me how much of that money is for services in Kanesatake?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan: I don't know whether we have the exact number. We were talking about those numbers in the context of Kanesatake not long ago. Obviously, Monsieur Ménard, you are aware of the ongoing challenges related to law enforcement in Kanesatake. The KMP, the Kanesatake Mohawk Police, is a force that is recognized under your police act. There is an agreement between the Government of Canada and the Province of Quebec—

Mr. Serge Ménard: I like your expression, my police act.

Hon. Anne McLellan: I remember another time when we worked together when they were your police, right?

Mr. Serge Ménard: Our police.

Hon. Anne McLellan: So we obviously have an agreement under which we cost-share the KMP.

Margaret, do you have the cost-share arrangements specifically?

Ms. Margaret Bloodworth (Deputy Minister, Department of the Solicitor General (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness)): No, Minister. I have to get the exact numbers. I think the share is around 52% and 48%. I think we're at 52% and Quebec is 48%. The exact numbers, as I recall, are somewhere just under \$700,000 for us normally, but it is more this year, as Mr. Ménard will know, with the extraordinary expenses. But I don't have the exact numbers.

Hon. Anne McLellan: As you know, Monsieur Ménard, there are ongoing discussions around what the size of the KMP should be. I think it's fair to say about those discussions that while probably we and the Government of Quebec agree as to what the appropriate size is, there is some disagreement in relation to that number with at least some. I do believe the duly elected chief and band council, or at least some members of the council, might suggest that the KMP should be of a larger size than the Government of Quebec and the Government of Canada might see as appropriate.

Do you want to add anything, Commissioner?

Commissioner Giuliano Zaccardelli (Royal Canadian Mounted Police): No, not really, other than obviously we do have an assistance role with the Sûreté du Québec.

[Translation]

We work very well with the Sûreté du Québec. We also agree with the position of the federal and provincial governments on the number of police officers who should be there.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Perhaps you could provide us shortly with the exact amount that has been spent in Kanesatake this fiscal year.

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan: We'll get them for you, *absolument*.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Ménard. *Votre temps est écoulé*.

Mr. Comartin, for seven minutes.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just have a quick question to Mr. Glen.

Mr. Glen, I'm looking at a newspaper article that indicated that you got additional funds to reduce the backlog in requests for pardons. I was wondering if you could give us an update on just where that is. That's a major problem in my riding because of the security issues we have to deal with in getting our people to be able to cross the border.

Mr. Ian Glen: It's been quite a challenge for the board to marshal its resources, both human and financial, to address what had been quite a chronic backlog in dealing with applications. I think I can share now with the committee that we've made good progress, and certainly the additional funding has helped us, both in investing in information technology to help us but also for staff pressures. In terms of the volume we get each year, we get over 20,000 applications for pardons in a year, and our processing times, particularly for pardons for people with indictable offences, had gone in excess of two years. We're down to roughly eleven months now to deal with the indictable offences, and we're under three months to deal with the summary convictions. So the additional resources have helped us enormously in dealing not only with the

backlog but in a more timely processing of the new ones that come in as well.

• (1605)

Mr. Joe Comartin: I'm sorry, what's the target for the indictable? What do you want to get it to?

Mr. Ian Glen: We'd like to get it down to well under six months, but there's a lot more resourcing and effort needed to get it there. Some of the changes we're making are to the way in which we handle the applications and again the advances with technology to speed things along. The indictable ones take a bit longer because we do a community assessment that has us go out and deal with police forces across the country. So it's not simply a within-our-own-shop effort to assess the pardons. We need to get more input than the applicant gives us. So it's a more deliberate assessment process for the indictable offences.

For the summary convictions, quite frankly it's a process of determining whether you're within the timeframes. If you're within the timeframes for eligibility by law, it will be granted. It's simply a processing time, and we now do that in under three months.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Madam Minister, I'm not sure if this would go to you or Mr. Baker, but with regard to the Canada Firearms Centre, which is obviously still quite controversial, can you tell us what the situation is now in terms of the proposed budget for this year versus what it was last year?

Hon. Anne McLellan: That is a very good question. In fact, before I turn to Bill, who can give you the specific numbers, let me say and underscore that the Canada Firearms Centre is now on a downward track. There have been substantial reductions in the budget of the centre. We hope to see those in fact continue. I think we have turned an important corner in relation to our gun control program in this country including licensing and registration, and also other parts, training, education, the use of the program by law enforcement agencies all over this country. I think we have turned an important corner and in fact the numbers clearly reflect that. Dare I say that I think Mr. Baker and many of the people who work at the Firearms Centre deserve a lot of credit for understanding how important it is that we're able to talk to the Canadian public about the costs of this product and the benefits of this program.

Bill, I think you have the numbers there.

Commissioner Bill Baker (Canada Firearms Centre): Yes, Minister.

For 2003, the budget that was approved for the Firearms Centre was \$115.8 million. What is being sought this year is \$100.3 million, and that's a reduction of \$15.6 million over the year. As the minister announced in May, it is our intention to bring that down a further \$15 million or so next year.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Next year, 2005-2006, we'll be looking at an operating budget of approximately \$85 million.

Mr. Bill Baker: That's correct.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Do those figures take into account the moneys we transferred to the provinces for enforcement?

Mr. Bill Baker: Yes. That amount for the year we're in is roughly \$14 million to \$15 million, and those are payments to Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island to administer the Firearms Act.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Is there any expectation that 2005-2006 will be the leveling off year, or will there be further reductions after that?

Mr. Bill Baker: I think it's fair to say we think 2005-2006 will represent a more or less stable mode for the Firearms Centre. We are committed, as are all government departments and agencies, to look at continuing opportunities to further reduce the budget through improved efficiencies.

Mr. Joe Comartin: If, as been suggested might happen, the entire budget were eliminated, how many job losses would there be?

Mr. Bill Baker: There are approximately 350 people who are working directly for the Canada Firearms Centre, of whom about half are at the processing centre in Miramichi, New Brunswick. There are a hundred and some in Ottawa doing registration licensing and corporate functions, and 70 or 80 people working in western Canada in those provinces where the provinces opted not to administer the act. In addition, sir, taking into account the contributions that are made to provinces to administer the act, including Quebec and Ontario—most notably—there would be consequential adjustments in their provincial workforces if funding were to cease.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Do you know how many jobs that would represent?

• (1610)

Mr. Bill Baker: No, we don't. This is a contribution agreement, and they staff it according to their provincial requirements.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Of course, Mr. Comartin, it is important to remember that there are some people who seem to think that gun control in this country only began in 1995 or 1996. In fact, there has always been a gun control program in this country.

Therefore, if one eliminated the existing gun control program you would be eliminating parts of a program that have existed for decades in this country. In fact, if you talked to a lot of Canadians they expect that government take seriously in all respects their safety and security, including how we view firearms and how as a civil society we expect our members to take responsibility for firearms. That is decades long; it didn't happen in 1995—that expectation as part of a civil society has existed in this country for decades.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Comartin. Your seven minutes has expired.

Going to the government side, Ms. Neville, for seven minutes.

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Now that the gun registry has been raised, which I was not going to do and I had not planned to do—

Hon. Anne McLellan: Don't feel any necessity to pursue it if you don't want to.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Anita Neville: There's some important information I'd like to know.

Minister, could you tell us how widely used it is by the police both on a daily basis and an annual basis? What I'm particularly interested in knowing is what statistics or information you have as they relate to spousal homicides and domestic violence, if there's been any tracking of the effect of that.

Hon. Anne McLellan: I'll let Bill deal with some of the specifics of your question, but one of the things that is not surprising is that as more people get licences, more people register their firearms, the use of the registry by law enforcement agencies goes up. In fact, I think on average, now, Bill, we get something like approximately 14,000, or maybe even a little more, hits or inquiries a week by front-line law enforcement agencies all over the country.

I was very pleased this year, again, to see the support by police organizations for our gun control program, in its entirety, which includes things like NWest and IBIS, and the extension of the IBIS machine so we can do a better job on the forensic side, the ballistic side, in solving gun crime. The chiefs of police have again reiterated their support for the program, and the CPPA, which is the Canadian Professional Police Association, also, in Saint John this year, at their annual meeting, passed a motion supporting the program. While that is not monolithic, just as support is not monolithic in the House of Commons or elsewhere, I think you see a growing acknowledgement on the part of law enforcement at all levels that this is one more informational tool—one tool—that helps them in terms of having the best information possible when they go into a situation or when they are called upon to investigate a crime, of whatever kind, that uses a gun. The commissioner and Bill can both speak to that.

I think some of the work that we have done at the RCMP national headquarters around weapons and identification of weapons and things is world-class and is used by others in terms of how they identify weapons and so on.

I know people have strong views one way or the other on gun control, but I think it's too bad that we don't understand the totality of our gun control program in this country and the benefits it delivers to all Canadians, even firearms owners, most of whom say they absolutely need to take a safety course and are pleased to get a licence. They may not be so pleased to register a long arm; that's a debate everybody has had. But I think we are now viewed as a model in many respects when you look at our gun control program.

In terms of actual statistics, I think maybe Bill or the commissioner can provide Madam Neville with greater specificity. But clearly, the registry itself is being used more and more by front-line police, and therefore I really do appreciate their two associations, the chiefs and the front-line police, with their vote of confidence this year for the program.

Bill, do you want to add something?

•(1615)

Mr. Bill Baker: Minister, you're absolutely right on the usage. It's 2,000 times a day, and that works out to about 700,000 times a year, police are accessing the Canadian Firearms Centre's registry online, for whatever purpose that might be. It's often prior to making a call to determine whether there might be firearms on the premises and which types of firearms.

On the issue of spousal, certainly we've seen a dramatic decline in homicides by firearms generally in Canada over the last 25 or so years. Certainly the spousal rate has come down as well. I don't have the overall figure in terms of gross numbers, but the chances of a female spouse being the subject of a homicide in Canada is 0.09 per 100,000. That compares to 0.48 in the U.S. It's considerably less in Canada, for any number of reasons.

I should also point out that, as you may be aware, when someone applies for a firearms licence, the application requires the signature of the spouse. If the spouse does not sign the application form, the firearms officer has a duty to contact the spouse and make sure that there are not any concerns from the spouse's perspective about gun ownership in that household. We also have a 1-800 spousal notification line that receives several hundred calls a year.

Ms. Anita Neville: Thank you.

My original question, and I don't know whether you're going to have time to respond to it, was I was interested in knowing a little bit more about the national crime prevention program. I want to know what the costs are, are you planning to renew it, and are there any measurable outcomes, in two minutes or less.

Hon. Anne McLellan: In fact, the national crime prevention program is, I think, one of the true success stories of any government as it relates to public safety over the past number of decades. It works at the grassroots level with local communities all over Canada—well over 800 communities, small and large—to deal with what I call the front end of the system.

We spend billions of dollars on the back end of the criminal justice system, after someone has broken a law—on police investigation, court costs, incarceration, and so on. In fact, what we need to do is look at spending more money on the front end of the system, where you look at the root causes of crime and involve local communities in taking some ownership for the prevention of crime in the first place. That's what our national crime prevention program does.

Again, I was pleased to be Minister of Justice at the time that program got up and running. We have received additional funds for the program. Part of those dollars will sunset on March 31, 2005, and I will be making a request to cabinet and to the Minister of Finance to continue those additional dollars for the crime prevention program.

Last week I was in the Okanagan with my parliamentary colleague Stockwell Day. We attended an announcement involving over a dozen crime prevention initiatives where small communities in the Okanagan Valley have identified the needs and where the issues are around possible criminal activity and possible vulnerabilities within their communities. Communities identify their own resources, community resources, and then put together applications to the national crime prevention program for assistance.

In some cases, small amounts of money are all that is needed to make a difference, to make sure a community can pull together and help young people stay out of trouble, to provide some help, for example, on an aboriginal reserve, education and support for young women around the challenges of FAS/FAE if they are pregnant. There are so many programs.

When you look at the nature of the applications—and you are welcome to do so—at the programs we support across this country that draw upon the ingenuity, care, and commitment of local communities to identify possible sources of vulnerability or possible criminal activity, they come together. It's not a provincial or federal government saying, "Hey, we think this is your problem, and this is how you're going to solve it." It is remarkable and inspiring in terms of these communities and the people who live in them taking hold and identifying for themselves what they want their community to be and what their public safety challenges are.

•(1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Hon. Anne McLellan: I was just getting started, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I could sense that. Unfortunately, we need to go to Mr. Breitzkreuz for two minutes.

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you. We need a little balance here, so I'm going to ask some questions.

I thank you for coming to the committee once again.

Hon. Anne McLellan: It is my pleasure.

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz: I just want to make a comment on some of the other answers you've given to committee members in regard to the cost. I must remind you that I don't even want to go there any more today, because it has been completely futile to ask you, Madam Minister, to answer questions on cost, but when you gave your reply today, you did not include enforcement costs, compliance costs, costs to other departments, or court challenges. Those are costs all in addition to what you have laid out today.

I want to follow up what my colleague was asking here; I didn't intend to do this, but when I talk to front-line police officers, there's a real disconnect between what they tell me and what you are telling this committee today.

For example, this figure of 2,000 hits per day or 14,000 hits per week is very misleading. In actual fact—I don't know if you've been told, Madam Minister—when a police officer accesses the CPIC system, I understand that very often it also searches the firearms registry automatically. He has no interest in what that has to say as far as the information he wants is concerned, but you count that as a hit to the firearms registry and it's included in those 2,000 times per day. I have been unable, after several years of questioning, to find out exactly who and what information they are searching. So that is a very misleading statistic.

I want to ask you, and I think this cuts to the very core of what we're talking about here today, what have been the actual public safety improvements, since 1995, that can be traced as a direct result of the Canadian firearms program? How many violent crimes have been solved because of it? What are the number and type of violent and non-violent charges that have been laid as a direct result of it? What is the reduction in the total number of homicides, the reduction in the total number of domestic homicides, and the reduction in the total number of suicides? How many lives have been saved? This was one of the claims made at the beginning, in 1995, that if it saves one life...

Madam Minister, what are the public safety improvements? I don't need all of these other things that have been spelled out. I want to know directly what that is.

Hon. Anne McLellan: First of all, Mr. Breitreuz, public safety is a broad concept. You can define it in the way you want in terms of how many charges have been laid as a direct result of our gun control program, or how many convictions, and that's valid, but it is equally valid to include the education and the prevention. It is equally valid to include the work that Ann West does, and the work in solving gun crime that our IBIS program does, which we are expanding to three more urban centres. All of that is about public safety, and it is all about gun control and knowing as much as we can about firearms coming and going, where they're owned, how they're held, what they're used for, and where they turn up.

So I am not challenging the fact that those are questions you have every right to ask. What I am saying is let's define public safety the way people need to look at it.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Chairman, I want to raise a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Toews.

Mr. Vic Toews: He has asked a very simple question. We've heard these lectures time and time again. We want to make sure. We understand she has a different concept of public safety, but the questions that were asked here are very simple questions. Why can't she just answer them?

The Chair: The minister is in the process of answering.

Hon. Anne McLellan: First of all, let me say that I'm going to turn to the commissioner for some of the specific questions and we will probably need to follow up with some of the information.

But again, there is a little game that people play. For example—

Mr. Vic Toews: On a point of order, why can't she just answer the questions? We've heard these lectures.

The Chair: She is in the process of answering the question, Mr. Toews.

• (1625)

Hon. Anne McLellan: It's not a lecture, Mr. Toews.

It's an interesting thing that I've been thinking about and have been challenged by, in terms of proving negatives. For example, how many murders and how many break and enters has the presence of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or a local police force in our community prevented? How many? I don't think we have those numbers, and that was part of the question that Mr. Breitreuz asked.

Therefore, I think we do need to understand that there is some information we have, and there is other information we don't have and will never have because I can't tell you, nor can the commissioner, nor can Chief Vince Bevan in Ottawa tell you how many murders the presence of the Ottawa Police Service has prevented.

Mr. Garry Breitreuz: Madam Minister, just for clarification, I was not asking about prevention. I was asking a direct question on how many crimes were solved.

Hon. Anne McLellan: That was only part of your question, Mr. Breitreuz.

Go ahead.

The Chair: The time is up.

Madam Minister, if you can get specific answers to certain questions, you can provide them to the committee.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Could you give the commissioner a minute or two? With the indulgence of—

The Chair: Yes.

Through the committee, we'll get them to Mr. Breitreuz—the precise answers that you're able to provide. I realize that some of them were questions there is no information on.

Mr. Garry Breitreuz: Mr. Chair, can I make the point that she promised the last time she was at this committee to provide us with written answers, and we never got them.

Mr. Vic Toews: We never got them.

The Chair: Well, if she gives us the undertaking, the committee will ensure that you get them, where there is specific information available.

Commissioner Zaccardelli.

Mr. Vic Toews: On a point of order, about three or four years ago the minister was here—I think she was the Minister of Justice then—and I asked the same questions. I never received the answers. Now she's making other commitments.

The Chair: We can't undo that, Mr. Toews. We can deal only with the future commitment the minister has just made to us.

Commissioner Zaccardelli, did you have a brief point on that?

Commr Giuliano Zaccardelli: Mr. Chair, if I could just make some comments, I have to pick up on what the minister said, and it's very important, I believe, that this committee understand this.

She said this is an important tool. It is not the answer to all our public safety issues, but it is a very important tool. The police community is totally behind this, and police officers are thankful that they have a registry they can check to help them when they are in particular situations.

I would like to correct another point here. It was said that every CPIC check is an automatic check of the firearms registry.

Mr. Garry Breitreuz: I didn't say every one.

Commr Giuliano Zaccardelli: I accept that, but I heard that it was every one.

There are over 160 million checks per year done on CPIC. That is nowhere near the minuscule number we're talking about here, per week. It's very important we understand that.

It's hard to prove a negative, but the reality is that Canada is the safest and most secure country in the world. One of the reasons for that is the police and the public safety institutions that we have, and one of those is this registry, which has been extremely helpful to us. On a per capita basis, we have probably the lowest numbers of police officers of any country in the world. So when you're alone, as in many parts of this country, the ability to check a registry that might help you is absolutely crucial.

Our men and women need that registry.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner Zaccardelli.

We'll move on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have three minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have two quick questions.

First, we saw Correctional Services officers put on quite a display of the kind of weapons that can be found inside institutions. Consequently, they are calling for steps to be taken to increase security. I see that in the estimates for the Correctional Service of Canada, in light of the situation, one priority is to improve security in maximum security institutions. Was that priority set in response to the demands of Correctional Service officers? Also, is that just for maximum security institutions, or are steps also to be taken for less secure institutions? Finally, since I couldn't find this information, how much has been earmarked for improving security in maximum security institutions?

[*English*]

Hon. Anne McLellan: You're speaking, Monsieur Bergeron, specifically to safety measures to protect our prison guards in our correctional institutions, and I suppose to protect the inmates against inmate-on-inmate violence as well—generally, to ensure the greater safety of our prison institutions. You raise a very important question.

I am deeply concerned about the allegations, or dare I say, assertions—and I don't mean to call it into question—made by those who serve, and serve admirably, in our correctional institutions around their safety and what they need to be safe, to do their jobs, and keep the inmates safe.

Clearly, federal maximum security institutions are not friendly places. There is contraband of all kinds in those institutions—as hard as we try to prevent it—including weapons. Our guards work awfully hard to try to deal with the violent subculture that exists in maximum prison institutions, be it here or in other countries. We are seeing the development of a new kind of prisoner, and this is being noted not only here, but also in other countries around the world. We may need new kinds of training programs for our officers and perhaps even new kinds of institutions for new kinds of prisoners as the criminal element evolves.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Head for more specific details to your question, but I want the people who work in our prisons to know that

their safety and the job they do is absolutely key to Canada's overall public safety. We can't be blind, we can't be Pollyannaish, dare I say, about what goes on in our federal maximum institutions and what kinds of resources are going to be needed to deal with the conditions that exist there.

Having said that, I am also fully committed to the correctional service commitment to reintegrate prisoners when it is time and is appropriate, because that is the only chance we have as a society of making sure that when those people return, they return with a chance to succeed, as opposed to returning as or more violent than they were when they entered the institution.

There is a reason the United States of America today looks at our system and says, "You probably had it right, in terms of the commitment to reintegration of prisoners". What they are seeing is a degree of violence in relation to prisoners who leave their institutions. Without the opportunity for supervised release, support for reintegration, these people go into the street without family support, without community support, and they return to violence. That should surprise no one.

That is why our approach, I believe, is the right one, but we also must acknowledge that federal maximum institutions are very difficult places. They house people who have committed the worst crimes in this country, and we do not and cannot afford to be naive about that in relation to the people who work in those institutions.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I have to interrupt you again.

Mr. Head, do you have the specific numbers Mr. Bergeron requested?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Head: We're working entirely within the budget that's allocated to us, both the security envelope of about \$348 million, which includes the cost of staff, and our capital vote of about \$136 million. Within our existing budget we're taking several different measures, both on how we interact with the offenders and the physical infrastructure changes within our maximum security environments. We're looking at issues of equipment that we need to provide to our staff, and the training as well.

Everything we're looking at currently is within our budget allocation.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Head.

Mr. Maloney, you have three minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple questions on IBETs. Most of the Canadian participating agencies are funded by the federal government. The exception would be border policing agencies, whether they're municipal or regional, who are tasked with additional responsibilities of having a national interest that other policing agencies in other parts of the country away from the border don't have.

Why is there resistance to assisting these border policing municipal agencies with additional resources, additional funding, to participate in the IBETs? I refer to marine patrols. The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway system is perhaps an excellent example. Why won't we help?

• (1635)

Hon. Anne McLellan: That's a good question. We do help, but perhaps not in the way that some border communities would see as maybe their first choice, which would obviously be for us to pick up the full tab for what is local policing. Whether it's at the border or not, it is local policing. Local policing is guarded jealously in some provinces. Therefore, I think we try to respect and expect that local policing costs, unless there are extraordinary costs of some sort for some reason, are picked up by local communities.

We of course pay for the full costs of the Canadian Border Service Agency and all the customs officers who are peace officers who work at the border. We also have the RCMP at the border, which I believe is paid for by us, unless it comes under certain local arrangements. And Commissioner Zaccardelli and President Jolicoeur can speak to that.

I know it's an issue. It's been raised by some others in other provinces. But local policing, if that is what we're dealing with and there are not exceptional or extraordinary circumstances, is the responsibility of the local community.

Maybe, Commissioner, you might like to add something.

Commr Giuliano Zaccardelli: Thank you, Minister.

With respect to the IBETs and the integration of the IBETs, wherever we can, we do involve the local agency or local police force. And they do benefit from that, because the more resources we have from the federal government.... A lot of the resources that we have received since 9/11 have gone into helping create these integrated teams. We pay for vehicles at times. We pay for overtime. We pay for equipment, radios, and so on. So there is substantial help to these local police forces. We do ask for some contribution on their part, because as the minister said, the crimes we're dealing with or we're trying to prevent are not just federal crimes. Some of them are local crimes. The integration enables us to collectively leverage the resources of the three levels—the municipal, the provincial, and federal where required.

This notion that the federal government does not assist is not accurate. We do. And we not only do it at the borders, we do it everywhere—in Toronto, in Vancouver, in Calgary, and so on. The more resources that the federal government gives us or the border agency, we leverage that in partnership and we often pay for a lot of the O and M costs that are associated with their participation.

Mr. John Maloney: This committee will soon hear from mayors from the Eastern Townships concerned about the potential closure of detachments. Would these closures not diminish the RCMP's capacity to interact in IBETs and other border initiatives?

Hon. Anne McLellan: Let me just say one thing before the commissioner responds. That is an operational matter for the force. Therefore I'm happy that the commissioner is here today to answer that question.

Commr Giuliano Zaccardelli: And I'm glad to answer it for you, Ms. McLellan.

That is a very good question. The issue is always that we never have all the resources we need or we would like to have. The key is to make sure that the resources we do have are effectively used. The restructuring in Quebec that we've gone through, which we've done in Ontario and other parts of the country, is simply to realign the resources so they actually can be more effective and more efficient. We're not taking the resources out of Quebec. We are not abandoning the border. By reallocating those resources we will be able to better and more effectively respond to the border.

As a matter of fact, in Quebec the Government of Quebec has been involved in a major restructuring of policing—downsizing and reallocating. This is a constant thing that we always do. As the criminality changes, the nature of crime and the threat changes. We have to be able to effectively respond by redeploying and allocating resources to the most important threat so that we minimize the threat to Canada. This restructuring in Quebec will make us more effective and more efficient in terms of the threats we face at the border and also inside the border.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Maloney.

Mr. Comartin, for three minutes.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you're giving some of your lengthier answers today. I'm going to direct this to you, but I think it's actually Mr. Jolicoeur I want the answer from.

The Auditor General yesterday released her report on the gathering of information on money laundering. With regard to these reports that are substantially backlogged at the Border Services Agency, there's an indication in here that two additional clerks had been hired, but no indication of how long it was going to take. That's question number one.

Question two is that there was a forfeiture of about \$17 million as of the end of March of this year out of \$46 million that was—I'm not sure, I don't know how the \$46 million was attracted—I think seized. I'm assuming the balance of it was returned, right? And of the \$17 million that was confiscated, how much of it is related to crime—proceeds of crime—and how much of it is terrorist financing?

Hon. Anne McLellan: Alain, do you want to lead off here?

Mr. Alain Jolicoeur (President, Canada Border Services Agency): Yes, thank you.

When FINTRAC was created, we, with them, had to develop some mechanism to transfer information vis-à-vis seizure at the border in cases where people would not declare amounts in excess of \$10,000. It took a while to develop the systems, but now they are in place, and we are basically operating in a way that in fact satisfies the AG.

It's true that we do have a backlog, and we have deployed additional resources to deal with the backlog. But it's important to make a difference between cases, files, or seizures that would link to a significant concern, say, for terrorism, because you asked me for a breakdown. All of those have been transferred instantly. What we're talking about is cases that are less of a concern from that perspective.

In terms of exactly how much of the money has been returned, I just don't have the details with me now.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Are those details you can get for Mr. Comartin?

Mr. Alain Jolicoeur: Yes, I will.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Yes, I'd like to have those.

The indication in the AG's report was that it was a nine-month backlog as of September 2004. Has that been reduced at all?

Mr. Alain Jolicoeur: Yes. At the risk of making a mistake, I think we are around six months and on our way down rapidly.

Mr. Joe Comartin: I don't understand, how are you differentiating between those that are of a crucial nature in the sense that they may in fact reflect terrorist activity and those that don't? How do you judge those? There are other criticisms in here about how some of this material is gathered and how that analysis is done.

Mr. Alain Jolicoeur: Right. Very often a seizure will occur for the reason of available information before the individual arrives at the border, and that is intelligence information that we have. Also, whenever there is a seizure, somebody goes to secondary and we discover anything actually of concern. We would look in our database and then basically ensure that we don't have any specific information that would raise a concern at that level. For instance, we'd work with our lookout list, etc. So we have means to differentiate between high risk and low risk, and it actually is the essence of our strategy for dealing with items like that.

Mr. Joe Comartin: I have just one more quick question, Minister. This raised my concern because in the report also is the issue of territoriality raising its head again, as we heard so often in that work we did this summer and the report we gave you. With regard to that, I think the committee expected that we would have an answer from the government as to where you were going with a parliamentary oversight intelligence committee. Perhaps you could just update us as to what timeframe we're looking at.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Thank you for that question, Mr. Comartin.

The Chair: A brief response, please, as we have to move on to the next—

• (1645)

Hon. Anne McLellan: Do you want me to answer that or not?

The Chair: Yes, yes, go ahead.

Hon. Anne McLellan: First of all, let me thank the members around this table who were part of that committee. I am going to brief the Prime Minister in relation to the specific recommendations. We have already presented him with an overview of the report in writing. I want to sit down and talk to him now, because this will be his committee. It will be a machinery issue, and it will be the Prime Minister who determines the exact nature of this new machinery that will look at security issues. So I will be doing that in the very near future.

I think the committee did very good work. I'm not going to say here that we can agree with every recommendation exactly as they were made, but clearly a committee of parliamentarians to deal with issues of national security is something we are committed to.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister, Mr. Comartin.

Mr. Thompson is next, for three minutes.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Thank you.

It'll be a rather quick one. I don't want anybody to spend all their time on one question, because I have quite a few.

I'm wondering when the big joke is going to stop. What's the tolerance for drugs in penitentiaries? Every warden will tell you it's zero tolerance. That's a bunch of nonsense and has to come to an end. Drugs in the penitentiaries are more available than they are on the streets. When are we going to admit that?

If it's a zero-tolerance policy, I'd like to know why, in a zero-tolerance situation, we spend all the money on bleach programs, clean needles, and all the other apparatus we need to make it safer. It makes no sense. So why don't we stop the zero-tolerance comments when it isn't so?

Because of this contraband that's gathered in the penitentiaries... and I've seen tons of it. I've been to every penitentiary you can imagine, and I have news for the minister: the maximum-security guys aren't very nice, but they aren't very nice in medium-security and minimum-security penitentiaries, and we just learned this year that sometimes in the half-way houses they're not very nice. It's not just those in maximum security; it's a far-spread problem.

But what is really disturbing to me—I've been here since 1993, and in 1994 was the first instance I had to deal with when one of our guards got pricked by a needle accidentally while searching for things. He didn't know whether he was going to get HIV from it or what. We tried our darndest to get protective gloves, and they're still getting pricked by these needles in 2004. Just this week or last week it happened in Kingston Pen once again. Is the guy going to die from AIDS? Is he going to get HIV? There's no way he has a chance of knowing. All he can do is, like the one in 1993-94, go through a series of treatments that are very dangerous themselves. I do not think we are making one bit of effort to really protect our people.

Why aren't they wearing protective vests? The contraband in weapons that I see is absolutely shocking, not just in maximum security, but in all the penitentiaries—what they take from these guys. Our guards are walking around, and they don't even have stab-proof vests. When are we going to take this whole problem seriously?

I'm really tired of hearing about rehabilitation for drugs, when it's usually drugs that got them into the mess they're in, and you're rehabilitating them in a drug centre. When are we going to start being honest in this country, in this system? It is not zero tolerance. We're doing everything we can to protect everybody from the drugs that exist.

I'd like some responses. When can we expect our guards to get the kind of protection they deserve?

Hon. Anne McLellan: I'm going to turn that question over to Mr. Head. But Mr. Thompson, you are right about some things. In fact, I think it is important to be honest, and if we were really honest on all sides—yours and ours—we would acknowledge the fact that these are profoundly complex social problems in our society, and your easy answers don't work any better than our easy answers.

Mr. Myron Thompson: Protective vests work pretty well.

Hon. Anne McLellan: That's not what I'm talking about.

• (1650)

Mr. Myron Thompson: That's what I'm talking about.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Mr. Head is going to respond to that.

In fact, I think you're right. Simple answers to complex problems are usually no answer at all. Government is sometimes guilty of that, and opposition parties are sometimes guilty of that.

Mr. Myron Thompson: Just give them the gear and let them decide what's proper or not. Good grief!

Hon. Anne McLellan: Let me turn to Mr. Head, who can talk directly about our policy in terms of the equipment our guards are provided with—the flak jackets, other protective vests—and the circumstances in which they use them.

Mr. Don Head: Thank you, Minister.

I am going to say that there is a zero-tolerance policy. That is the rate of acceptance of drugs in the institution.

Having said that, are drugs getting into the institutions? Yes, they are. They're getting in there through various means, primarily through visitors who are coming into the institutions. It is through

the excellent work of our staff that a good portion of those drugs are being intercepted at the front entrance of the institution.

The use of tools such as ion scanners for visitors coming into the institutions is proving to be effective. The use of drug detector dogs in the institutions is proving to be effective, and the search that our corrections officers do on a day-to-day basis is proving to be effective. But at the end of the day, do we still have drugs in the institution? Yes, we do. And it means that we need to be more vigilant.

We faced some challenges over the last little while in terms of how people coming into the institutions try to introduce drugs. Over the last year we've experienced individuals from outside using everything from arrows to tennis balls thrown over the perimeter to try to get them in because we have been clamping down at the front end. We've been working very closely with police in these various communities to try to deal with those specific situations.

But do we have a problem? Yes, we still do, and we're trying to work hard on it.

In terms of your question in relation to the equipment, we're working very closely with the national president and the regional presidents of UCCO-SACC-CSN, the correctional officers union, in terms of identifying practices, procedures, training, and equipment that deal with the specific safety issues they have raised. We have a joint committee with the union looking at issues such as gloves. We worked with them very closely and developed a standard for the gloves that will help with the searching and avoid the needle pricks. That has been completed. The union was very pleased with the process. We're working with them very closely now on the issue of stab-proof vests and what the standard should be. We want to be very careful that we don't provide our staff with equipment that is not going to meet the potential risk they may face in certain security levels within the institution.

It's important that we identify what the potential risks are, and more specifically, what the right equipment is—not just any equipment, not anything you can buy off the shelf or buy out of any catalogue; we want to make sure they have the right equipment to do the right job at the right time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Head.

Mr. Myron Thompson: Mr. Chairman, if I may, I want it to be known that in 1994, when I was first on this committee, I heard exactly the same answer to exactly the same problems. Nothing has changed in ten years. I want to make that perfectly clear.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

We'll go to Mr. Macklin now, for three minutes.

Hon. Paul Harold Macklin (Northumberland—Quinte West, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I also have an interest in correctional services, and I have some concerns. My concerns relate to the resourcing of correctional services.

As we all know, most people who do become incarcerated ultimately return to the community. I think all of us are concerned about those who come back into our community and in what condition they come back to us. There are a number of issues I am concerned about.

First of all, what has been our goal for the education level we're trying to achieve within our institutions before people once again return to the community? Based on information I get, the programming with respect to inmates within our institutions seems to have been cut back from where we were. We don't seem to be doing as much programming as we once were. There seem to be staffing cutbacks. I'm not sure whether this relates to the management within the institution itself or whether it relates to the overall budget, but I'm very concerned about whether we're actually properly resourcing Correctional Service Canada to meet the needs of the inmates, and ultimately the needs of society. If we fail to rehabilitate, as is our goal, then I think we're not doing the job we ought to do.

I would like to know, are we properly resourcing? Are we meeting these goals? Am I getting the proper information that at this point we are not putting enough money into programming, and not keeping enough staff? Is my information incorrect?

• (1655)

Hon. Anne McLellan: Mr. Macklin, just before Mr. Head answers the specifics, if you're asking me whether our correctional service needs more resources to do its job, it absolutely needs more resources to ensure we are able to secure our mandate around public safety. Public safety includes everything from having the right physical infrastructure, the right number of guards with the right equipment and training, to the right programs for reintegration, and the acknowledgement of the fact that we are developing in certain circumstances a new kind of prisoner who is going to provide a major challenge for our correctional services.

So if you're asking me if we have enough resources to do all that, no, we don't. Do we need more resources? Yes, we do.

The Chair: Mr. Head.

Mr. Don Head: Thank you.

I'll just add a few specifics there. Currently we spend about \$24 million on education issues within the correctional system, and about \$68 million on programming.

The challenges we face on those fronts are primarily on the community, in terms of having sufficient programs out in the community to support offenders when they're released on day parole, full parole, or even statutory release.

We have some significant challenges in relation to providing programming support to offenders who are coming out with mental health disorders. As you can well imagine, the mental health capacity in the communities has been taxed over the years, and it's very difficult for us to try to accommodate the needs of offenders who are coming out into the community. This is a significant

challenge. The mental health issue is a challenge both inside and outside for us.

We continue to make progress in the types of programs we're putting in place—research-based, with the kinds of results I think this committee would feel proud of. I know many of the international countries we interact with are quite envious of the research-based programming we have. But do we have sufficient capacity to meet the needs of the offenders at any given time? No, we don't. One of the most significant challenges we have coming up in the next few years is the number of offenders who are getting sentences of three years or less, and the amount of time we actually have to work with them from a programming perspective. So we have some significant challenges on the programming front in the coming years.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Head and Mr. Macklin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ménard, you have three minutes.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Minister or Mr. Head, could I have a simple answer to a simple question, which follows on the question Mr. Thomson asked you? When will protective vests be made available to corrections officers whenever they wish to wear one for their protection?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Head: We hope to wrap up our joint discussions with UCCO-SACC-CSN before the end of end of this fiscal year. That's the target we've set in identifying the right kind of equipment and the appropriate equipment they need, and the circumstances in which they will be issued it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: I think it is up to them to decide when to wear a vest for their own protection. Am I to understand that they'll be told not to wear one even if they feel the need?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Head: At this time the practice is that if there is a current threat within any one of the institutions, we have some equipment that is available to individual staff. But in terms of the specific individual issue to staff members, we're working very closely with the UCCO-SACC-CSN in identifying the standards, the circumstances, and the appropriate equipment that would meet specifications and be CSA certified.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: My next question is for the RCMP.

I understand your explanation of the movement of RCMP officers currently at the border. But it is almost as if you're saying that the farther the officers are from the border, the better it will be protected. However, our neighbours to the south keep announcing equipment and reinforcements for border surveillance. Do you really think that the Americans are too worried about bad things coming over the border?

I also know that it takes longer than it used to build a case against a criminal organization. However, when you do, it's because you've targeted and recognized it. If you take your police officers away from the border, so that they don't know who's crossing it, aren't you concerned about lacking information on new groups getting it together to smuggle illegal items over the border?

• (1700)

Mr. Giuliano Zaccardelli: Mr. Ménard, we have a major presence at the border. Withdrawing from the border is out of the question.

Since September 11th, thanks to the federal government, we've added a number of people to the border. We have created integrated teams, as was mentioned. Those integrated teams, that work near the border, are strategically deployed all along the border with the Americans. They are flexible teams that can react according to the situation. They are not stationary. They don't always stay in one place. They can move all along the border.

Our border is 8,000 kilometres long. Stationing officers or agents all along the border is out of the question. What matters is getting information from police officers working near the border, customs officers or our CSIS friends. It's a matter of gathering all of that information and focusing the questioning. Although we're not always at the border, that doesn't mean that we're not paying attention to the border.

Criminal and even terrorist organizations don't stay at the border. They're all over the world. They have to be identified through good intelligence and then targeted. That's what's important.

We have not withdrawn from the border. We have actually increased staff targeting organizations that use the border. They aren't always at the border. Our American friends do exactly the same thing. We work closely with our American colleagues. Our strategic teams are all along the border and they are integrated with our American colleagues.

I can understand people thinking that if we're at the border seven days a week, 24 hours a day, we can better fight organized crime or terrorism. However, there's no need for us to be at the border all the time. It's important to get the intelligence you need to identify criminal or terrorist organizations. That's what's important.

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

[English]

Mr. Warawa, for three minutes.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have questions for Mr. Head. You have the honour of being in the hot seat today.

In my past I was involved with Matsqui Institution on the citizens advisory committee. Mr. Thompson has shared some concerns that are my concerns too about the safety of our staff working in those institutions. I've visited Kent in my area, Matsqui, Mission, and Mountain. The maximum institutions are very dangerous environments. I too believe that we need to protect our staff. I'm disappointed that it hasn't been dealt with to this point.

Those members of our staff who want to have that equipment deserve to have that equipment. To stall for an unreasonable amount of time.... I'm very disappointed. Hopefully the next time you're sitting before this committee you'll be able to report some good news.

Regarding drugs and prison, about 10 or 12 years ago the ion scanner came on board. It was used when visitors came. Your comment was that the primary source for drugs within the prison was visitors. With the ion scanner, you would scan their belt buckles, different parts of clothing, and what not, to see if there was an indication of drugs being on that person. A drug dog, being much more sensitive, is more expensive, but I was told 10 or 12 years ago that it was much more effective. When visitors came to visit inmates, if you had a drug dog there was a higher degree of success of finding those who were bringing in drugs.

That was the problem 10 or 12 years ago, and nothing seems to have happened over the last 10 or 12 years. So I'm very concerned about the drugs that are in prison.

At the same time, the bleach policy came in, and the zero-tolerance policy on drugs. We know there are drugs in the prisons and we provide bleach so they can clean the needles, but we still have a zero-tolerance policy. That seems to be a conflict.

Over the last 10 or 12 years, what has Corrections Canada done to improve the situation of drugs in our prisons? You've acknowledged it continues to be a problem. What is your plan over the next five years to make that environment safer?

What percentage of inmates who enter Corrections Canada have a drug addiction, and what percentage have a drug addiction when they leave?

• (1705)

The Chair: Mr. Head.

Mr. Don Head: Thank you.

Again, over the last 10 or 12 years we've seen the introduction of the ion scanners, we've seen the introduction of the drug dogs. It's only within the last year that we have a drug detection dog at every one of our institutions across the country...with trained full-time staff. We have consistently increased the numbers of searches within the institutions. There's been a gradual increase in terms of the interdiction types of activities within the facilities.

The number of seizures has gone up over the years. Obviously the more time and energy put into it, the more that's going to be seized. Obviously the concern is that the more you seize, it suggests that there's more inside, and we need to continue to look at ways of interdicting the drugs when they come in at the front.

We continue to look at a new technology that's being developed around the world to help with better detection of drugs coming in. One of our concerns with the existing ion scan technology is the issue of false positives, where there's an indication that they may have drugs when actually they don't have drugs. We don't have many cases of the reverse, where it's not indicating that they don't have drugs and they've come through. Having said that, though, there are still ways of defeating the technology.

Now, we don't always have the drug dog sitting at the front of the institution. It's usually meant to be inside searching different areas. However, if there are issues or concerns at the front entrance, the drug dogs are made available.

In terms of your question about the future, one of the things we'd have to look at—and again it would be dependent upon the available resources—is enhancing or increasing the number of drug detection dogs, because they do prove to be a very valuable tool in combatting the introduction of drugs into the facility.

In relation to your question about the numbers of offenders coming into the system who have a substance abuse problem—the broad substance abuse, not just drugs—about 79% or 80% of the offenders coming in have some form of substance abuse problem. On the percentages leaving, to be honest, I don't have the number, so I wouldn't be able to give it to you today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Head.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Do I have time for one more question?

The Chair: We're well beyond the three minutes.

Mr. Cullen, for three minutes.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

I was looking over at Mr. Jolicoeur there and thinking he might feel like the Maytag repairman. I'm sure there are equal issues and challenges for the Canada Border Services Agency.

I had a question. The commissioner talked about this 8,000-kilometre border. We all know about the importance of the border for trade between Canada and the United States and for people coming back and forth. September 11, of course, changed the world, unfortunately in a dramatic way.

I'm wondering, with your budget, Mr. Jolicoeur, of some \$666 million, what you are doing to ensure that we have a safe and secure border and that we're facilitating, as efficiently as possible, the movement of goods and people.

I had a very specific question with respect to counterfeit goods, because there are companies in my riding, especially electrical companies, and the Canadian Standards Association is in my riding. There is a concern that counterfeit electrical products are coming into Canada, which creates a public safety issue.

So I wonder if you could talk generally, and then perhaps zero in on that specific question.

• (1710)

Mr. Alain Jolicoeur: Thank you.

With regard to the 8,000-kilometre border and the answer provided by the commissioner of the RCMP, we work very closely with our sister organization in the United States, and we are benchmarking our activities. CBP, Customs and Border Protection, includes a group that is called border patrol, and that basically does what the RCMP do at the border. The commissioner of CBP in the States would be the first one to say, and he's said it many times, that the approach we have with the IBET, the approach that's based on

analysing and managing the risk, is the approach of the future. It allows us to be able to say that in spite of everything, the border is more secure than it was, mainly because of this new strategy that Commissioner Zaccardelli has been promoting for some time. There is no question about that; it's the better way to deal with the border.

In terms of our budget in the Border Services Agency, the main estimates reflect the \$666 million, but we have to take into account that the agency was created in phases, and that number reflects the situation at the end of March when only the customs portion from Canada Customs and Revenue Agency had been transferred to this organization for financial and reporting purposes. So it reflects only that portion. There was another portion that you will see in the main estimates, more than \$200 million, that reflects additional resources coming from the Revenue Agency, and there will be a new one that will be reflected in the main estimates for next year that is coming mainly from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, but also from CFIA, the food agency.

At that point in time, in reports on plans and priorities you will see a CBSA organization that will have a \$1.1 billion budget to deliver its services. You are asking, is that enough? In my view, no, it's not enough. You ask me whether security is lower. No, I think it's higher, because we're working on a whole lot more, smarter, I would say, than we did in the past year. Having said that, to achieve what we want to achieve, yes, we would need significantly more resources.

On your point about counterfeited goods, we do have a specific initiative on that. We have a group of people who are developing strategies to deal with that. Yet again that's an area where we have to work very closely with the private sector to get information ahead of time and to prepare to zoom into the area of particular concern for us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

I have Mr. Comartin, Mr. Bergeron, Mr. MacKay, and if there's time, if everyone sticks to the three minutes, we'll be able to get to Mr. Breikreuz.

Mr. Comartin.

Mr. Joe Comartin: This is to Commissioner Zaccardelli and Mr. Neufeld. The AG this week made this statement:

Despite the significant outreach efforts by FINTRAC over the past three years, police forces still are sometimes reluctant to share information with it and do not give much weight to unsolicited disclosures by FINTRAC.

In response to that, the finance department said there's this interdepartmental committee functioning. Are either of your agencies involved in that committee? In fact, is this still ongoing, where there appears to be no feedback to FINTRAC? It appears, at least from the determination she's made, that the disclosures they're passing on to your agencies are not being responded to, and perhaps in most cases not being used at all.

There are two parts to that question. One, are you involved at any departmental level—at the tops of the department levels—in terms of trying to resolve this issue, and is it still ongoing that you're not using the information?

• (1715)

Commr Giuliano Zaccardelli: We are involved, that's the answer to your first question.

In terms of sharing information, with all due respect to the Auditor General, I believe the sharing of information is to the maximum within the privacy laws and other laws that we have. So we do maximum sharing. One of the issues does relate to the question of how many requests we can respond to. There is a capacity issue in terms of being able to respond, so we have to do a prioritization of the information that we get, and we give 100% feedback to FINTRAC on that. There is a capacity issue, there's no question.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Were you asked to give feedback in response to the AG? I noted throughout this that neither one of your agencies gave any response.

Commr Giuliano Zaccardelli: I'm not sure on that particular one, although I must say that I did note that the Auditor General did note us as a best practice in terms of audit and evaluation as an agency. So whenever the Auditor General cites you like that, I think I'd like to make note of it. I'm very proud of that.

We usually give feedback. I was not personally involved, but usually somebody in the department gives feedback or input into the final recommendations that come out of the Auditor General's report.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Dale, did you want to add anything?

Mr. Dale Neufeld (Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): I'm not aware today if the committee still exists. I presume it does, but I am aware there has been a committee where we've had a representative from our counter-terrorism branch as part of that group.

I will say, though, there is a lot of one-off meeting with FINTRAC officials where obviously what we're concerned with is terrorist fund-raising and financing. I know we do meet. We'll have a particular investigator or analyst from our counter-terrorism branch meet with FINTRAC on a very regular basis. We also flag for them things that are of interest to us that hopefully they can screen out on our behalf.

What I would say is I know the sums look quite gigantic in terms of what leaves offshore that FINTRAC considers suspicious. Mr. Jolicoeur mentioned earlier that this is like a flash. It's an electronic transfer and it's very difficult to track the eventual end-user of that money. But we take those suspicious transactions very seriously, and I believe we're giving feedback to FINTRAC.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Joe Comartin: I would say to both presenters—not as a question, but as a comment—I think both of you would be well advised to read this, because the impression that this is leaving is that in fact you're not doing that; that you're not having the connection with FINTRAC and that the material is not being used. That is scary for anybody who's working in the anti-terrorism field.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Comartin.

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron, you have three minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to quickly come back to the issue of relocating RCMP officers in Quebec and elsewhere, which may lead to the closure of some RCMP detachments in Quebec.

I'd like to put a different take on an answer that the minister gave us a short while ago when she said, in response to Mr. Breitzkreuz: how many crimes does the presence of an RCMP detachment prevent in a community? I would ask you this question: how many crimes will no longer be prevented because there is no RCMP detachment in those communities?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan: Let me say that as it relates to local policing in the province of Quebec, that's a matter for the Sûreté du Québec. I presume that the Sûreté has local police—my colleague Monsieur Ménard would know better than me—and that local policing is done adequately and, I would presume, to the highest standards in the province of Quebec. The RCMP is not in the province of Quebec, nor is it in the province of Ontario, to be responsible for local policing. That is one of the key differences. The force is not in those two provinces in the same way as it is in a province like Alberta, where in fact it polices under contract. It is the equivalent of the Sûreté in Alberta and therefore is responsible for local policing. The role of the GRC in Quebec is quite different.

Over to you.

• (1720)

Commr Giuliano Zaccardelli: If can just add to that, Minister, our mandate is different.

[Translation]

Our mandate is of course federal. However, when we work in integrated teams, with the Sûreté du Québec or local police forces, we can have a positive impact on communities. By working at the federal level and having integrated teams, we are able not only to have an impact as a result of our federal mandate, but also to influence communities often very positively. Narcotics are not distributed federally; they're distributed on the street. When federal resources are able to work with local police officers, we can have a positive impact.

Someone asked earlier why we didn't help local forces. We do so by working together, by adding our resources to those of the Sûreté du Québec. I would add that we consulted the Sûreté du Québec on this and they backed the decision 100 per cent.

Once again, we're not about to withdraw from Quebec. We're going to redeploy our personnel in order to provide better service to the population of Quebec. In my opinion, the service will be improved by it.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. MacKay.

[English]

Mr. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There are just so many questions. I'd love to have some time alone with you, Minister—

• (1725)

Hon. Anne McLellan: Time alone?

Mr. Peter MacKay: —to ask you questions, of course.

I have to take issue with this suggestion that somehow closing detachments, nine in total in the province of Quebec, is consistent with increasing efforts towards drug enforcement.

In particular, I find it passing strange in terms of Joliette and Coaticook, which, as I understand it, were actually being very effective and had tremendous success in those rural areas, by making arrests, by in fact having busted up several major cannabis organizations within rural parts of the province. So I find it perverse that anyone would suggest that this reorganization was actually going to be for the greater benefit of rural Canada.

That said, I have some more questions with respect to prison guards. In particular, there was an issue that I found very disturbing in your home province, Madam Minister. That is, there was information leaked or obtained somehow by prisoners, private information about guards and their home addresses. It occurred at Kingston Penitentiary, Joyceville, and in Edmonton, as I understand it. What has been done to address this problem, and were there other security leaks?

I would also like to know about security intelligence reports. I've heard from several sources working within Correctional Service Canada that these reports, which many times have to do with serious incidents, go nowhere. They go into the ether after they've actually been tabled. There's no response; there's no action taken.

In one instance, there was a reference made to a senior official, if not a warden, saying that the problem was so big, we had to put a blanket over it and cover it up. That type of response does very little to instill public confidence.

The final question I have deals specifically with a commitment you made the last time you were here, which was that you would provide an explanation as to the huge backlog that exists right now with DNA cases in the forensic laboratories throughout the country. You told us that this issue, which is increasing, as I understand it, in terms of its seriousness.... There are over 1,700 cases with respect to the DNA backlog. The RCMP's reaction to this is to extend the deadline in terms of their ability to process this information, which causes a further backlog in the courts. I know, because I've had to wait on those types of forensic reports, and it causes a real delay.

Madam Minister, I know you can't respond to all of that in three minutes, but closing detachments, pulling back on front-line police officers, not giving prison guards protective equipment and the types of protective mechanisms they need, and not assisting victims doesn't seem consistent with the supplementary estimates and main estimates when you have this enormous white elephant of a gun registry that has proven to be ineffective, that has gone over 10,000 times its budget, that is not connected to public safety. If this is really a priority....

You say there are no simple answers. There are some simple answers here: can that registry and put the money where it's needed first and it will have a real impact on law enforcement and protecting the public in this country.

Hon. Anne McLellan: I want to go to the DNA point, because this is something that I know Mr. Breitzkreuz has expressed interest in.

The commissioner and I have been talking about this. I think there is a pretty profound misconception out there around what is happening over at our DNA laboratory and the fact that the program has been an enormous success in terms of solving crimes and keeping the public safe, keeping police officers safe, and so on.

Mr. Peter MacKay: The question was about the backlog.

Hon. Anne McLellan: That's what the commissioner is going to deal with, because I think there's a misunderstanding around the use of terms like "backlog".

Commissioner, I would ask you to respond to that question.

Some of the other questions that you've addressed, Mr. MacKay, in fact have been dealt with, certainly in relation to prison guards and equipment and the GRC in Quebec. I know this committee is probably going to be meeting some of the mayors, and that will be dealt with.

Over to you.

Commr Giuliano Zaccardelli: Thank you, Minister.

The Canadian DNA data bank is a world-class operation that's being modeled and examined by many countries around the world. We literally take a backseat to no one in the world in terms of the set-up, the operation, and the effectiveness.

There is no backlog in terms of DNA analysis. Every single major case that requires an emergency DNA analysis is done in this country and it's done within 15 days.

Every other case is negotiated and discussed with the police force or the agency that wants that done, and every single one is satisfied. There is a negotiation done, and if there is a reassessment of the case, it goes back into the priority system and they are satisfied.

I realize you're shaking your head, Mr. MacKay—

Mr. Peter MacKay: It's completely inconsistent with the information I have.

Commr Giuliano Zaccardelli: —but there is no backlog in the system. What we have is cases in process. There isn't one major case that is not done within 15 days. There is no country in the world that meets that standard.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner, and thank you, Mr. MacKay.

Mr. Breitzkreuz, you have one minute.

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz: I'll ask my two questions as quickly as I can.

The RCMP tell us there are approximately 176,000 criminals who have been prohibited from owning firearms by the courts and there are another 37,000 dangerous persons who have restraining orders against them. Why are these persons, who have been proven to be dangerous, not required to report their change of address to police or even open up their homes to firearms inspection, but completely innocent licensed gun owners are required to? There's just no logic to that, Madam Minister. I'm wondering if you could answer that.

The second question I have is about the fact that documents that have been provided to my office by the government indicate that less than half the guns in Canada are registered. More than 300,000 owners of previously registered handguns are without a firearms licence; there are more than 400,000 firearms licence owners who haven't registered a gun; more than 300,000 registered handgun owners who still have to re-register their handguns. There are five million guns that still have to be verified, and this is according to the police association's demands of 1999. I could go on, Madam Minister, but there's a huge void there. You've given the impression that this thing is up and running; it's not.

Hon. Anne McLellan: It is indeed up and running. Systems I suppose can always be improved, and that is our goal day after day.

Mr. Baker, do you want to answer some of those specific questions?

Mr. Bill Baker: Yes, Minister.

On the change of address, if someone is prohibited from having a firearm in the country they are no longer effectively covered by the Firearms Act. The Firearms Act only deals with people who own, possess, and use firearms.

• (1730)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Yes, but that's why I asked the minister, where's the logic?

Mr. Bill Baker: In terms of firearms officers, they would have no authority to collect information from somebody who is not a client of the program.

There's been a longstanding argument as to how many firearms there are in the country. There are different estimates, and I accept that. When we report on compliance we report, as you know, on a study that was conducted about three years ago by the government that estimated the number of firearms in the country to be about 7.9 million.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Yes, but that was a telephone survey. If you go to the import and export numbers, it's over 16.5 million.

Mr. Bill Baker: We've never been able to ascertain a 16 million figure. We have just around 7 million firearms in the system right now. There are some licence holders who do not have firearms registered to their name, but there's nothing requiring a licence holder to have a firearm registered to their name. A couple could have a licence, but the firearms are all registered to the husband in that particular relationship, or they applied for a licence and then they disposed of the firearm, or whatever. Through the renewals that we are just starting to get into this year, we'll get a better handle on the exact number of outstanding cases.

Finally, on the issue of the guns to be verified, you're absolutely right. When all of the firearms were initially registered not all the firearms were verified at that point in time. However, all of them are being verified on transfer. That is the way in which we will increasingly ensure the accuracy of the database is as high as it can possibly be.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister. Thank you for your attendance.

Hon. Anne McLellan: It was my pleasure to be here, and I have no doubt that I will be back here fairly often over the next few

months. In fact, some of the questions that weren't answered we will get you in writing, Mr. Breitkreuz, and for Monsieur Ménard as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have some motions to deal with, so we'll suspend for five minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

• (1731)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1744)

• (1745)

The Chair: We'll go on the record. We're no longer in camera.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Chairman, I am asking that this committee consider my first motion, which is in regard to vote 20 for the Department of the Solicitor General in regard to public safety and emergency preparedness. For the Canada Firearms Centre I'm asking that the \$82,080,000 in the budget be reduced by \$20 million.

I would like to make the point to this justice committee that this issue isn't just about gun control. It really is about gross incompetence, the deliberate misleading of Parliament, and the inability of the Liberal government to properly fund real police and public safety priorities. That is the issue. Back in 1995 the Liberals promised Parliament that the entire program would cost \$85 million to fully implement and that all but \$2.2 million would be recovered through user fees in the first five years of the operation.

If we'd been told the truth back in 1995, that it would take about 20 years to fully implement and cost taxpayers more than \$2 billion to fully implement, very few MPs in the House of Commons would have voted for what was then known as Bill C-68. So it's nine years later and the government still won't tell us what the firearms program will cost next year, despite the many questions I've put forward. They won't tell us how much it will cost to fully implement, nor will they tell us how much it will cost to maintain every year after that. We've asked more than two dozen times in the last two years, and every time the minister ducks the questions.

I think the government, really, is living in a dream world of its own making. The Liberals actually seem to believe their own propaganda, that 90% of the guns have been registered. You heard the questions to the minister today. She realizes there are different estimates. I made it absolutely clear that by the government's own numbers those figures are really suspect if you look at the import and export records instead of the telephone polls, which I think are really not accurate. Mr. Chairman, if you were phoned up and asked over the telephone to reveal how many guns you have in your home, you'd probably be very reluctant to do so. Many Canadians are reluctant to do that as well. So I think those are bogus polls. If you looked at the way the 16.5 million guns was determined, not the 8 million that the government claims you'd see, there's really a lot of money that will still have to be spent on this.

So what we are saying is that it's time to stop pouring good money after bad. It's time for this committee to get this billion-dollar boondoggle under Parliament's control, not the Liberals' control. There are ways for the Firearms Centre to save taxpayers tens of millions and without compromising public or police safety. There are far more important public safety measures. There are tens of millions that could be spent where lives would actually be saved, and here's where we believe some of the real savings can be made immediately in the Firearms Centre operations.

The registration of firearms has proven not to be worth the bang we're getting for our bucks, and it should be suspended immediately. Even the Liberals' goal, with their view of firearm safety, targeting law-abiding gun owners—and I made the point in questioning the minister today—can be achieved with the licensing component of the program, and we have not pulled all the funding. The licensing component of the program would produce the results the minister is claiming for the program. So additional savings could be achieved immediately by extending licence renewals indefinitely; relying on existing continuous eligibility measures to ensure the validity of firearms licences; eliminating the redundancy of issuing authorizations to transport, known as ATTs, and authorizations to carry, ATC, and by making these ATTs and ATCs a condition of each person's firearms licence; fourthly, by cancelling the alternative service delivery contract with Team CENTRA, the CGI Group, and BDP.

You'll notice that we did not propose to reduce the \$14.5 million in contributions to the provinces, because we need to meet with the provinces before initiating any savings at that level. We did not propose any cuts to the \$3.7 million in employee benefits, because the employees should not suffer for Liberal mistakes.

● (1750)

We say there really are a lot more important places to put this scarce public and police funding, so these much higher public safety priorities are what we should be looking at and there are much better places to place the money.

We heard the minister before the committee saying yes, we need more funding; we just don't have the funding for this initiative, we don't have the funding for that initiative. I felt like saying, as she was speaking, I know where you can get that money, where it's not giving us the return it should have. There are far more important places to put this scarce police funding and much higher public safety priorities.

I want to give some examples at this point. My second motion ties in with that, and I suppose it will not be debated today. We should be taking this \$20 million and instead funding the improvement of the number and effectiveness of our integrated border enforcement teams, which are, the minister told the justice committee, the future of public safety and security. She requested of the committee, and I quote:

If you people would make a submission on my behalf to the Minister of Finance that we need more resources for our existing IBETs, and more IBETs, I would support it wholeheartedly.

This will do much more to stop the smuggling of guns into Canada than the gun registry would, so I'm suggesting we should take funds and put them in that area.

We should fund the RCMP forensic laboratories to clear up the DNA case backlogs. The RCMP sources I had access to calculated there may be as many as 340 repeat offenders on the loose in Canada because of the inability of the labs to process the backlog of 1,733 DNA cases.

Mr. Chairman, those people are continuing to create crimes; they are threatening public safety, committing horrific, violent crimes because we are not spending money in the right place, and that is such a key point. I'm hoping this point alone would convince this committee that we should be reallocating funds from an area that has not proven to improve public safety to an area that really would.

I'd also like to see us increase funding to help the RCMP fight organized crime, biker gangs, and street gangs. We hear reports all the time of the problems caused here and the RCMP's lack of funding in that area.

Another thing would be funding for victims of crime to attend parole hearings of their attackers. That's one area where we should be putting money. It wouldn't take much; probably less than \$2 million would be needed to fund that.

Another is to replace 25 RCMP officers cut from the Manitoba highway patrol. Again, another use would be funding to fill RCMP vacancies in detachments in provinces across Canada. There are 150 vacancies in Alberta alone. Again, we could use funding to allow the RCMP to suspend its resource deployment program until the justice committee can hear from the mayors and municipal wardens of the regional county municipalities affected.

My colleague, Mr. Richard Marceau, has a motion before this committee, and I believe if he were here he would support this initiative I have, because in Quebec they are closing RCMP detachments, and I think the Bloc probably would—

● (1755)

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Comartin.

Mr. Joe Comartin: I'm not sure how long this is going to go on. Are we facing any time limits here in terms of how many minutes we're each going to be allowed to speak?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Joe Comartin: So none whatsoever for any of us?

The Chair: No, I'm not aware of any.

Mr. Peter MacKay: We can suspend and start this up on Monday if you prefer.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Should the committee set some new rules for this meeting?

The Chair: Okay.

Carry on, Mr. Breitzkreuz.

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz: I think the Bloc would really support this if they realized the impact this would have on Quebec, the RCMP. Mr. Marceau has introduced a motion asking that this committee look into this and hear from the mayors and municipal wardens of the regional county municipalities affected by the closing of the RCMP detachments. This would reallocate money from this and put it into Quebec to help them.

We could be funding to track down the 30,000 people in this country who are under removal orders if the money could be spent finding them, people who have been ordered deported, overstayed their visas. These kinds of things could be funded properly.

We could be funding to help track down and arrest the 199,553 people wanted on Canada-wide arrest warrants. There are another 111,500 wanted on province-wide arrest warrants.

We could be funding to help the police track down 176,091 convicted criminals who have been prohibited from owning firearms by the courts to check to see if they have acquired firearms illegally.

We could be funding to help the police enforce the 37,015 Canada-wide and 2,241 province-wide persons subjected to restraining orders, alternative measures, conditional sentencing, conditional discharge, conditional supervision, open custody—these are for young offenders—probation, recognizance on peace bonds, and suspended sentence.

I would like to also point out that on January 24, 2004, Toronto Police Chief Julian Fantino said that since the guns and gangs task force began conducting compliance checks on residents freed on bail after being charged in a gun-related crime, "almost 50% were breaching their conditions." During such house calls over the last four months, 119 of the 239 accused criminals checked were re-arrested for failing to live up to pre-trial release orders.

That's where we should be spending our money, Mr. Chairman, and that's not happening right now. The government uses the excuse that they don't have the money. Well, that's the purpose of the two motions I have before the committee.

I'd like to respectfully request that you consider supporting both of these motions, even though we've split them. After nine years of misleading Parliament and incompetence in this area, going a thousand times over budget, even by the most conservative estimates, at least 500 times, it's time for this committee to discharge our primary responsibility to taxpayers.

That's the purpose of my motion—to make sure that the money we spend is going to the places where it will do the most good.

I thank you for your time and consideration on this.

• (1800)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Breitzkreuz.

Mr. Cullen.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is sort of unfortunate that we're ending up debating this right now.

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz: Not by choice.

Hon. Roy Cullen: I would just comment that what we've been trying to do, in terms of the government dealing with the opposition critics and members of the committee, is to brief you in advance of bills coming to the House, brief you in advance on a whole host of issues. I must say, I saw this motion and this recommendation about 10 or 15 minutes ago. In the spirit of cooperation, I would hope we'd have a little more advance notice about motions, if we want to have that spirit of cooperation.

I feel that I have to put on the record my rebuttal to some of the points made by Mr. Breitzkreuz.

I would say—with respect, Mr. Breitzkreuz—I think you ignored a lot of the testimony that was given here today, in particular by Commissioner Zaccardelli.

You talk about redeploying resources from the gun registry to other uses. The commissioner argued, for example, with respect to this alleged DNA backlog.... And by the way, this question came up at an earlier meeting. I supplied a response to the clerk dealing with the issue of the alleged DNA backlog that was copied to the members of the committee. Commissioner Zaccardelli has said very clearly, there is no backlog.

You talked about redeploying resources to the RCMP to compensate for these detachment closures. I think the commissioner said very clearly that this is not affecting the effectiveness or the efficiency of the RCMP.

Also, I think the commissioner said very clearly that there is a need for the gun registry. It is a useful tool. They use it every day. In fact, the numbers that were cited in terms of inquiries from police officers is something in the order of 2,000 inquiries per day, notwithstanding your point that any inquiry from CPIC automatically goes to the gun registry. I think that point was refuted, with respect, as well.

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz: No, it wasn't.

Hon. Roy Cullen: On the budget for the gun registry, in the interest of cooperation we met—in fact it was just earlier today—and we took you through the measures the government has implemented to make sure that we cap the costs on the firearms program. In fact, the government is committing in the year 2005-06 to limit the total cost to \$85 million a year, and of that the gun registry component would be capped at a maximum of \$25 million. Once the fees are fully in play, the government believes quite confidently that it can bring in the total cost of that program to around \$55 million a year.

If we look at the statistics on the levels of crime—and I would concede that with some of these statistics it is very difficult if not impossible to link cause and effect—in terms of firearms homicides, spousal homicides, suicides.... You were privy to this information this morning. I will acknowledge that you disputed some of it, but nonetheless the female spousal firearms homicides are down hugely. Suicides by firearms are down enormously. Firearms suicides generally are down. And firearms homicides are much lower here in Canada in comparison with the statistics from the United States, for example, where they don't have gun control measures.

We would acknowledge in terms of the costs to get the gun registry to this point that there were some mistakes made. There was some money spent that could have been spent more wisely. But we're now at a level of \$100 million a year, which is about half of what the gun registry was expending at the peak when it was dealing with the massive amounts of registrations coming in.

We now have the program in a stable environment. We have the costs contained. The government has made some structural changes in the location and the management of the gun registry, and we believe and are very confident that it is now in a stable environment and the costs are going to be contained moving forward.

• (1805)

As I say, I'm not trying to be difficult with respect to your motion, but we have agreed that the second motion is not really a motion, it's a recommendation. If there had been perhaps more lead time, we could have discussed this in a more fulsome way.

I just want to put on the record that we believe the gun registry is serving a very important public safety function and that it is good public policy. The government has responded to the fiscal management of the program and we believe we have it now contained to a point where it's being well managed and will benefit Canadians moving forward.

I think I'll just stop at that point, because I'm sure everyone wants to get out of here. We all have other commitments. But that's at the discretion of the members. I just wanted to put some of those points on the record on behalf of the government.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. MacKay.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm sitting here just having such a difficult time listening to the parliamentary secretary say, with a straight face, that this gun registry is now being well managed. After nine years, the amount of money that has been wasted, without ever being able to put forward a case that is sensible to connect the money that's been poured into this black hole—probably the biggest fraud ever perpetrated on the public purse in the history of this country.... And for the parliamentary secretary to sit here and tell us that it's now being well managed, that somehow now we should take him at his word, *carte blanche*, that suddenly it's all under control now, when, as my friend Mr. Breitzkreuz has just pointed out from the information he has, which I put a lot of faith in—an incredible amount of research has been done to back up his statistics—that the amount of money is somehow justified....

It is down to just \$85 million, Mr. Chair, to manage annually, when we know that the initial estimates were \$1 million. Then it did eventually go up, under Alan Rock, to \$85 million for the total cost of implementation. Then it was going to be cost-recovery and the money was all going to come back within a relatively short time. That simply hasn't happened.

Do you know the point that seems to escape everybody on the Liberal side and anybody who argues forcefully for this farcical firearms registry? Do you know the point that seems to escape everybody? Criminals don't register their guns. They just don't. The Hell's Angels don't line up at the mall at the kiosks and give those serial numbers of their guns to the system. The entire system is predicated on voluntary participation, which is not happening. So we continue to perpetrate this myth somehow that there's a connection between fighting crime, protecting lives, saving people from themselves, in the cases of suicides, and this long-gun registry.

There's also, Mr. Chair, and I want to make this point forcefully, a deliberate attempt at misinformation on the part of this government, a deliberate attempt to mix gun control and long-gun registration. Deliberately, repeatedly, we've heard intermingling of these terms from the government for nine years.

The Conservative Party brought in the most comprehensive safety measures around gun control ever seen in this country. Bill C-17 was all about keeping firearms locked, keeping firearms separate from ammunition. We've had handguns registered in this country now for over 50 years, and they are still the problem in Canada. The instances related to homicide and gunplay on the streets of big cities in this country involve handguns. It's not shotguns. It's not rifles. It's not hunting equipment. It's not Olympic rifles, which are currently covered by this long-gun registry.

The statistics we've seen presented that came, many of them, from the RCMP, linking violence to long guns are, again, totally flawed. When you dig a little deeper, you find out that if a firearm was found to be improperly stored in the case where a domestic assault may have taken place, somehow it was linked to the domestic assault, even if the firearm had never been used or referenced in any way. There are all kinds of statistics that can be put forward on both sides. I'll be the first to acknowledge that.

The biggest number of all, the figure that we have to keep in mind, is \$2 billion, which this registry is now approaching—\$2 billion. All of the statistics we were presented with the other day representing what's happening in the United States, representing the downward trends in violent crimes related to firearms, first of all, those, again, were mixed. They were firearms, but they were long guns and handguns mixed together. The downward trend began long before the registry was even put in place. It went back to the seventies, when the registry wasn't even contemplated, wasn't even a glint in Minister Rock's eye at that point. Yet all of this information again is put forward to the public in a mixed bag to make it look as if somehow this has been a success.

I can't agree more with my colleague Mr. Breitzkreuz when he says that these are lost priorities on the government. When we look at some of the situations we discussed today in this committee—the closure of nine detachments in the province of Quebec—and then for the Minister and officials to sit here and say this is done in an effort to improve law enforcement in Quebec, that closing detachments and taking officers away from rural parts of the province are actually going to help with law enforcement, taking them off the street.... They call it a reorganization.

And somehow, again, this is supposed to make people in this country feel confident with the decisions the government is taking in the area of law enforcement, closing detachments in an area where we know there's a drug problem.

• (1810)

We know that farmers and citizens of those rural communities are actually begging for more protection, and they're being told no, it's a good idea that we close the detachments, take some of the officers away, and redeploy them somewhere else.

Issues that we heard discussed today around the situation within our prisons, where we know in many cases the inmates are running the show.... It's completely out of control: 8,000 litres of illegal brew discovered in our penitentiaries, 1,000 litres in one institution alone; rampant drug use; violence; incident reports that just go missing, including that of the Commissioner of Corrections herself, which appears to have gone missing.

I'll tell you, Mr. Chair, it appears that these are lost priorities on this government if it is suggesting somehow that the money available to the gun registry should actually increase. We should put more money into it, but not into our military. Oh, heaven forbid. Not more tax relief for Canadians, no, wouldn't want to do that. But more money into a registry system that has been an abject failure from start to finish....

Now, what are we doing? We're playing a game because the government doesn't want to face up to the reality that there are a lot of people questioning this, a lot of front-line police officers questioning this. Some of the support that was there in the policing community was bought in the first instance because it was promised that it was going to get DNA data bank legislation that would allow police officers to take DNA at the time of arrest. We know that the minister of the day reneged on that promise.

We know there's a real need, a tangible need, for equipment for officers working within the penitentiary system right now. Prison guards are inadequately equipped. They can't get vests. They can't get collapsible batons. They can't use handcuffs—something as basic as handcuffs—in all instances. Yet we have police on the street who are suggesting that they can't adequately rely on the information that's available on the current gun registry system and they should approach every call as if there is going to be a gun present.

So, Mr. Chair, I don't accept the arguments that have been put forward by the parliamentary secretary. I reject them now as forcefully as I did when he began. They don't jibe with a lot of the information we've received.

We are not asking that we take money away from the department. We're suggesting it be put into an area of higher priority, which is front-line policing. I dare say that the police are in a better position to decide where that money should be spent than the government if it is suggesting that the gun registry needs more money.

● (1815)

The Chair: We have a facilities problem here. There's a meeting that needs to come in here at 6:30. If we're going to continue, we'll

have to relocate to another room, Room 306—unless, of course, we're ready for the question.

Mr. John Maloney: Call the question.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: We're not going to be ready to vote for a long time. It's going to take me a long time to refute what he's just said.

The Chair: We'll suspend here and reconvene in Room 306 in ten minutes.

Thank you.

● (1816)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1819)

● (1820)

The Chair: We'll resume. I understand there's now consent among the committee to suspend this debate and resume it on Monday, when it would be disposed of in the ordinary course of business, I hope.

Mr. Comartin had a motion with respect to the subcommittee on solicitation.

Mr. Joe Comartin: You've had the motion for the better part of a week now. I think I've spoken to all parties. There's a general consensus, although, Garry, I'm not sure your party has decided who your member would be.

I suppose I'm just not going to do an explanation, given the lateness of the hour. We had this committee last session. It's really just reconstituting it with the composition that's set out there. It would report through us to the House.

The Chair: Mr. Macklin...?

Tout le monde est d'accord?

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: We'll now adjourn. Thank you.

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