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Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

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•(0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC)): I'd like to call this meeting to order.

This is the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. This is our 19th meeting and the orders of the day are to examine the main estimates for 2006-07.

We'd like to welcome the Honourable Stockwell Day to the committee this morning. It is indeed a pleasure to have you with us, sir. We understand you are with us for one hour, so we're going to get on with business here.

As is the usual practice at our committee, we will allow you an opening statement of approximately ten minutes. We're not usually too sticky on that. Then we will begin the questioning, beginning with the official opposition.

You may introduce the rest of the officials with you and carry on.

Thank you very much, and welcome.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety): Thank you, Chairman and colleagues, for your interest in the safety and security of our nation.

That is what this portfolio is charged with. Both I and the Prime Minister often say that the first responsibility of any government is the safety and the security of its citizens, and I can tell you that some 52,000 individuals report under this portfolio. As I travel the country and visit border agencies, corrections institutes, RCMP detachments, our CSIS operations, emergency preparedness places of operation, and the offices and support personnel backing up each one of those organizations, I can say with sincerity that the overwhelming majority of these 52,000 people really do have a sense that when they go to work every day or every night—and this is a seven-day-a-week, around-the-clock operation—that they have, in their own way, something important and viable to do related to the safety of our country and our citizens.

Having said that, I'm certainly open to any questions. I want to give members as much time as possible for questions.

We have 52,000 individuals and a budget, depending upon whether you add in the supplementary estimates, that comes in around the \$6 billion mark. It's a significant investment in safety and security.

I understand there's a particular interest related to firearms today by some members.

First let me introduce John Brunet, who is the comptroller for public safety, and when you get down into the minutiae, this man does know it all and faithfully reports it, whether I like it or not. We have Mr. Peter Martin. He is the deputy commissioner of National Police Services. I've asked him to be here, having understood there is some interest in the Firearms Centre. With the RCMP recently taking over that task, he can certainly give updates and be very focused in terms of specific questions you may have to which I may not have answers. Also, we have Mr. Paul Gauvin. He is the deputy commissioner of corporate management and comptrollership, so you will also be able to ask questions more broadly related to the RCMP.

I want to just remind members, Mr. Chairman—and then I'll move directly to questions so that I give as much time as possible to my colleagues to give me questions or advice—when it comes to firearms there are some things to keep in mind. Under our system now, every person who possesses or acquires or wants to possess or acquire a firearm must be licensed, regardless of what the firearm is—restricted or unrestricted. Everyone who has a licence will be recorded in a national database. Information on everyone who has a licence is available to the police forces for their information and for their own security.

Any time somebody wants to assume, acquire, or possess either a firearm or ammunition, they have to produce that licence. That licence is not guaranteed to them for life. They can lose that licence if there is cause, if any firearms officer in any of the provinces thinks that licence should be revoked. Anybody applying for a licence has to go through an extensive background check. If you want to acquire a firearm, for instance, a handgun, that is on a restricted list, the process of licensing is even more extensive. Everybody wanting to acquire a firearm must take a safety course and must also take a course in the safe handling and the safe storage of firearms. Firearms must still be stored, locked, at the place of residence according to government regulations. If you have a restricted firearm, for instance, if you are a sports shooter and you have a handgun, your transportation is restricted in terms of where you can go with that firearm. You must go directly from your home to the gun club of which you must be a member.

Mr. Chairman, we want to focus our resources on the most effective ways of having effective gun control. The Auditor General, year after year, reported significant and in fact at times grotesque waste and inefficiency related to the firearms registry.

This is not an attack on any of the employees who work in those operations. They were dealt a hand and dealt a task that in some ways was impossible for them to maintain.

●(0910)

When it comes to unrestricted long guns, the millions and millions of guns that are out there—shotguns, duck-hunting guns, .22 rifles, .303 hunting rifles, owned primarily by farmers and sport shooters. There are literally millions and millions of them in Canada. The task of trying to record and register every one of those with every single registration number proved to be impossible. The Auditor General herself said the data was not reliable.

We want to direct the funds—our funds, our resources—to the most effective way of gun control. For that reason, we think the emphasis should be on registering every restricted firearm, every prohibited firearm, and every person who wants to own any type of firearm. But to try to match what was at one point to have been close to a billion dollars on a long gun registry of primarily farmers and sport shooters, which proved to be impossible, was not the most effective way to do this. The data was not reliable, said the Auditor General.

Mr. Chairman, we want to focus on reducing tragedies with firearms. We want to focus on those people who would be at risk in even having a firearm. We want to stop people from having firearms who shouldn't have them. There has been, unfortunately, on the expense side a focus on the area where we're having the least or almost no problem, and that is the farmers, the duck hunters, with these millions and millions of unrestricted firearms.

Just as an example, Mr. Chairman, in the year 2003 there were 549 homicides in Canada. Two of those were committed by somebody using an unrestricted long arm—two of them. So here we had the majority of our resources, hundreds of millions of dollars, being directed to half of 1% of the problem, when on the other hand we have a huge number of problems with handguns being used in crimes. That's an area where we have to increase our focus—gang activity and illegal smuggling of firearms.

I share these with you in closing, Mr. Chairman, to remind Canadians that we are very aggressive. In the days ahead, because of what we've learned through the tragedy at Dawson College and in other incidents, we want to and I think we can make our system even stronger and even better in having alert systems in place whereby we can see and perhaps stop somebody who should not be in possession of a firearm from doing something that is wrong.

We will continue to focus on that, on an enhanced registration process and enhanced activity related to smuggling of firearms. We have prevention programs into the millions and millions of dollars, which are going out into our communities right now for youth at risk, for gang activity. That's where we want our focus to be.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and colleagues, for your attention to this. I'm open to any questions or advice you may have. Of course, this isn't limited just to firearms. Any questions at all under the area of public safety, I'll try my best to answer. If I don't have the information or can't get it to you today, I will get it to individuals as soon as possible.

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

As you said at the end of your remarks here, this is not limited just to the firearms issue. We can examine all of the other issues as they are listed on our order paper today.

I've always had a very special interest in this file, however, and I would love to ask questions, but as chair of this committee I will try to restrain myself.

For the first round, we'll begin with the Liberal Party, with Mr. Holland, for seven minutes, please.

●(0915)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Minister and other witnesses, for appearing before the committee today.

I'm going to start with the words of Hayder Kadhim, who was injured during the Dawson shooting. He said that the idea of abandoning a gun registry is senseless. Let me just follow up with a couple of items I want to discuss.

I don't disagree, Minister, that there were problems in the past. I sat on the public accounts committee in the previous Parliament and had the Auditor General before our committee, talking about those past problems. The reality is that the program is working today.

And here are a few other realities. All types of gun deaths, whether homicides, suicides, or accidents, have declined since the registry was brought into force. Death rates involving handguns and long guns are down. The police support the registry. On average, more than 5,000 queries are made daily. Almost 16,000 firearm licences have been refused or revoked since the Firearms Act came into force. More than 5,000 affidavits have been provided by the Canadian firearms registry to support the prosecution of firearms-related crimes in court proceedings across this country.

When we take a look at the cost today, the reality is that the cost of registering weapons is only \$15.7 million a year. On the idea that long guns don't play a role, let me just quote the president of the Canadian Professional Police Association, who said on May 16, "Our last six or seven police officers were killed with long guns."

The reality is that they do represent a risk, so when we have had the success that we have had with this program, I'm trying to understand why the focus would not be on eliminating irritants, on making the program more efficient. Why the interest or why the unceasing push to try to kill this program? Is it ideologically driven? What's the reason why you want to see this program killed when it has been such a success?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Which program are you referring to that you say has been killed?

Mr. Mark Holland: I'm talking about removing long guns from the registry.

Hon. Stockwell Day: When we talk about killing the program, I think it's really important for our citizens not to think we are killing the gun registry or that we are killing the licensing requirements. In fact, we are not. We're making the program stronger.

One aspect of the program has proven to be incredibly expensive, to the point of incredible waste—I'm just referring to the Auditor General's findings—and it has not been successful in its goal. The goal of registering every duck hunter's gun, every farmer's shotgun, every gopher gun across the country, has been unsuccessful. With the number of mistakes that have been made, the impossibility of trying to get registration numbers, and the impossibility of trying to get the correct calibres of millions and millions of long arms, it has been an exercise in futility. That narrow aspect of the gun registry has proven not to be successful.

When you talk about a crime committed with a firearm, in the instances when a long gun was used, if the system itself had been working properly—not the registration system, but the actual system—there's a strong possibility that disaster could have been avoided. One case in point would be the tragic killing of a police officer last year in the province of Quebec. In that particular case, as the officer was approaching the door, the person inside shot through the door with a registered high-powered rifle and killed her. The bullet pierced her armour protection.

Upon investigation, what was very frustrating and agonizing was the fact that this person had committed crimes for which that long gun should have been removed. As a matter of fact, he had a prohibition order. He had been ordered not to own, not to be in the possession of, a firearm. Subsequent to that, he appealed. He went before a judge and he asked if he could please have that firearm because he liked to hunt, and if he could just have it during the hunting season. The judge allowed a criminal who had been prohibited from having a firearm to get his gun back.

This is why I'm talking about limiting the possibility of the wrong people getting firearms. One of our proposals is that if you have had that type of conviction, that is it. You can't go before a judge. We will word it in such a way that a judge is not able to give a dangerous person back his long gun.

That's why we say that hundreds of millions of dollars were used—probably well intended—to go into an area where there is comparatively so little criminal activity. As one of our proposals on the table in the House of Commons, we have said that crimes with guns should have a mandatory sentence with them, yet we can't get the Liberal Party to support us on that.

An hon. member: That's not true.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Well, I'm afraid, gentlemen, that three of the four people on this committee did not even vote to support that. Why not?

• (0920)

Mr. Mark Holland: Well, I think, if we could go back—

Hon. Stockwell Day: But could I just...? I'm really curious as to why not.

Mr. Mark Holland: I want to know, first of all, when you're talking in this particular instance about an individual using a long

gun to commit a crime, what possible rationale would dictate in this scenario that we would have been better off not having a registry? I think the argument has just been made that it needs to be more effectively used or that we need to be tougher on those individuals who are getting these guns. The fact of the matter is, whether or not it's in domestic situations or elsewhere, the vast majority of crimes are not premeditated—oftentimes they are first-time offences—and that when weapons are in a home there is a much greater likelihood of violence occurring.

And it is very helpful for the police to know a weapon is there. I used to be on the Durham Regional Police Services Board, and I can tell you that the program was a vital resource for us.

And these comments—

The Chair: Could you just get to the question?

Mr. Mark Holland: Just to get to a question, if you could go back, you're quoting from the Auditor General. But, Minister, the Auditor General has come before the public accounts committee in the last year and said that the system as it's running today is running very well, and that there are some areas where it can be improved, but she is not describing things as you're describing them. You're describing something that historically may have been there, but it certainly isn't there today. The reality is that scrapping this program, by the most ambitious estimates, would save \$10 million.

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off there, sir.

Mr. Mark Holland: So the question is, if we're only going to save \$10 million by cutting it, and it's been demonstrated in every statistic you can find that it saves lives, why cut it, Mr. Day?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Thank you.

I really think, for the good of the public, we need to stop using the phrase, “scrapping the program”. We're making the gun registration system even stronger. One of the things we are doing to make it stronger is not requiring the farmers, the duck hunters, and others with unrestricted firearms to go through the impossible process of registering those at a cost of millions of dollars. There have been great improvements made in the system, and Deputy Commissioner Peter Martin can talk about them. The fact is, using 2003 figures, half of 1% of the homicides were committed with a long gun.

Why do you not support us in terms of wanting mandatory sentences for people who commit crimes with any kind of gun? We can't get the Liberals to support it. Three of the four Liberals on this committee wouldn't vote to support us on that. The Liberals say, farmers, let's go after them, but to criminals, let's back off. I'm asking for some honest advice here. Why do you not support that? Why do you not support going after criminals?

The Chair: Thank you. We'll now go over to the Bloc.

Monsieur Ménard.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Minister, you say that the firearms registry is incomplete and that the Auditor General stated that it was unreliable because it was incomplete. Nevertheless several million long guns are now entered in this registry. What are you going to do with these registrations?

Hon. Stockwell Day: The information is still there, and the RCMP will decide whether it wants to continue using it. But the fact is clear: the Auditor General said that the data are not reliable...

Mr. Serge Ménard: I'm sorry, Mr. Minister, but we have only seven minutes left.

Hon. Stockwell Day: The information is there...

Mr. Serge Ménard: I know what you said and you don't need to repeat it to me.

I asked you a simple question and you gave me a simple answer: you're keeping the information. The arms that were registered remain in the registry, and the police can access the information if the RCMP says so. Is that right?

● (0925)

Hon. Stockwell Day: My answer was very clear. I said that it would be up to the RCMP to decide whether the information is good or not. It is up to the RCMP to decide, not me.

Mr. Serge Ménard: When you announced your policy, you also said that you were going to restore registration of unrestricted firearm purchased by gunsmiths, didn't you? You said that gunsmiths would handle these registrations...

Hon. Stockwell Day: I wish to clarify something.

Gunsmiths have to keep a registry...

[English]

Mr. Serge Ménard: I think I'm going to ask you this in English because apparently you don't understand my question. That is not what I am asking you.

What I am asking you is simple. You said that you are re-establishing the system of having transactions with arms sellers, that they will have to register the transactions for people who buy guns.

Where would they keep these registrations? What will they do with them? Will they transfer them to a central system, or will they keep them in their stores, as they used to do years ago?

Hon. Stockwell Day: I understood your question, sir, and was in the process of answering it. Pardon me if my French is not 100%. If you had difficulty with it, I can understand that.

Any individual who wants to purchase a firearm of any kind must have their licence. That has to be checked when they purchase a gun. When the transaction is completed, the person who keeps that file must keep a record of that transaction. For every person who sells a firearm, or even if your neighbour wants to just give you a firearm, there has to be verification of the licence and a record kept of the transaction.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Not answering is a way of answering. I will have to make do with that one for the time being, because you do not want to give it to me.

I see that the expenditures for registration activities are expected to rise from \$14.550 million to \$14.654 million. But you've always said that the savings from non-registration would be dedicated to something else.

Can you tell me what savings you expect to make from ending the long gun registry?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Every time someone from here or outside says there isn't a registration system, I have to take the time to check and correct this.

In Canada, in all the provinces and territories, we have a registration system. We want a stronger system than the one the Liberals had. Every time someone says that we don't have a registration system, I have to correct them.

Ever since we have had a good system, the one that is in place now, we have saved close to \$13 million. Simply by transferring firearms registration to the RCMP, we managed to save \$10 million, and then the RCMP was able to save another \$3 million.

Mr. Peter Martin, Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP, who is in charge of the program, can give you more details if he wishes.

Mr. Serge Ménard: I am sorry to contradict you, Mr. Minister, but on page 427 of our documents, we read that the operating expenditures for registration activities and functions alone is rising from \$14.550 million to \$14.654 million. I don't see where the savings are that you're talking about.

I'm going to ask you a question since I don't have much time and you never seem to actually answer the question.

Will the gunsmiths who register the sales transactions be paid? Will they be compensated for performing this job and how much will it be?

● (0930)

[English]

The Chair: This will have to be your final question.

[Translation]

Hon. Stockwell Day: We do not intend to give money to the people who sell firearms. The responsibility for keeping a register is theirs, not the taxpayers'.

[English]

The Chair: There are seven seconds left, so I guess there's not enough time.

Monsieur Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I just want to return to the cost of the long gun registry. I'm substituting for my colleague, Mr. Comartin, and he brought forward the idea with the previous government of a cap of \$25 million for this process.

What would be the savings in the change to the long gun registry? Do you have an amount? I think that's the question many want to know.

Hon. Stockwell Day: That would be hard for me to quantify, but maybe Commissioner Martin will be able to reflect on that.

D/Commr Peter Martin (Deputy Commissioner, National Police Services of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Minister.

It's hard to give you precise numbers, but the long gun portion of the activity accounts for about 20% of what's done in the registry right now.

As Minister Day mentioned, there's quite a comprehensive program on training, on making sure the database on restricted and prohibited weapons is maintained. The infrastructure would still be required for that type of activity, roughly speaking, but it is an estimate.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Could I say \$2 million would be saved?

D/Commr Peter Martin: I would suggest it would be more than that.

Mr. Paul Dewar: We've been told, or it's been made known by the head of the Canada Firearms Centre, that it would be \$2 million.

Hon. Stockwell Day: If I could reflect on that, it's a good question, Mr. Dewar.

If it's 20% of the whole system, this year our costs are a shade over \$83 million, so 20% would be quite a bit more than that. It's not just the cost; it's the difficulty in maintaining the accuracy of the records, especially when you're dealing with the types of firearms that we're talking about, which exist mainly in rural communities, farms—firearms that have been passed down for years, decades, if not longer. Investing in a system that is inaccurate when the money could be more properly invested in programs for youth at risk, for instance, or gang activity, focusing on crime with handguns, where a substantial part of firearm crime happens—

Mr. Paul Dewar: I appreciate that. I'm asking a very straightforward question, and I'm hearing different opinions as to what the savings would be. We're hearing \$2 million, and you're suggesting it's more. We obviously need to do some work on that and we need some clarification.

If I may turn to another topic related to guns, you were talking about homicides. I would like to know how many police officers in the past five years have been killed by long guns. Do we have a number on that?

Hon. Stockwell Day: In the last five years?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Yes, approximately in the last five years. Do we have an idea of how many police officers have been killed due to the use of long guns specifically?

You were talking about homicides, and there have been some very well-known cases recently, in the last couple of years. In the case of those police officers who, sadly, were slain, long guns were used. When we hear you saying in homicides it's not a very significant number, and when we think of the number of police officers who have been slain by the use of long guns, I think it's important to know.

People are very concerned with the safety of our police officers, and if long guns are being used to kill them, I think that needs to be put on the table. I don't know if you have a number, but maybe you could get back to the committee on that.

● (0935)

Hon. Stockwell Day: I can get back to the committee with the precise number. It's a key question, Mr. Chairman.

I can tell my colleague this. In looking at the last couple of years, the one instance in Montreal that I referred to would have been prevented, I believe, had we had a restriction in place for somebody who had a record, as that individual did. He wouldn't even have had that.

The other tragic case this year is of two RCMP constables who were killed with a long gun that was illegally obtained. In the Mayerthorpe disaster, it was also illegally acquired. The system was in place, but the system did not save those lives, as tragic as that was.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Some might argue that to get rid of that component of the registry, as opposed to tightening it up.... That might be another way of approaching it, in terms of policy—tracking the guns, if you will. I know that's an issue you're looking at.

I want to wrap up, and I'll go back to my point that my understanding is that in terms of administration—I know all the other things you were talking about when you were talking about \$80 million—the actual administration of the registry, we were talking \$25 million very specifically. That actually had come down.

My colleague was very specific with the previous government about having a cap, because of all the concerns that had been brought forward, and that the cap be \$25 million. I'm a little puzzled, as we're hearing that it would be a savings of about \$2 million if we have the changes to the long gun registry. I think we really need to have clarification on that, because we're hearing that billions of dollars are being spent, etc., and it might mislead people in understanding what the actual savings would be, and then of course there are the effects of those changes that I've already mentioned.

Hon. Stockwell Day: That's a good point. You mentioned the \$2 million. Where did that figure come from?

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'll get back to you on that. My understanding was—and again, I'm subbing today and I'm looking to my colleagues on this—that it was the head of the Canada Firearms Centre who was telling committee members, I believe, that the actual savings for the long gun registry would be approximately \$2 million.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Okay. I want to get a clarification on that, because the overall cost this year is coming down as \$83 million for the whole program.

Mr. Paul Dewar: That's the whole program, but very specifically on those.

Hon. Stockwell Day: I understand.

Also, it was an interesting suggestion about a cap. What's your suggestion on what would happen if the Firearms Centre came back and said they had to exceed the cap? What would be the remedial—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Like anyone, we'd ask why. I'm from Missouri, show me, and I'd want to know why. We were very critical, no mistake here, about the costs and who was in charge, etc., but I believe in the concept, and I think most Canadians do. You mentioned to improve it. So if we hear that it's going over \$25 million, and my understanding is that it hasn't for that component, I'd want to know why and I'd want to have those people held accountable. How can we make sure that this cost doesn't go over \$25 million?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Thanks for that suggestion. I appreciate that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to the government side.

Mr. MacKenzie, for seven minutes.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I thank the members for being here today.

I fail to understand the reasoning of my friends opposite when they talk about firearms. There's some sort of view that if you register a gun, it won't be used, and that's exactly wrong, and that's why the system didn't work and can't work.

I would like to look at some other areas, although related to firearms. There is \$101 million in the budget, going forward, for arming border guards, and I know that a member opposite, who is not here, called border guards “wimps” because they walked off the job when they were threatened by people coming from south of the border with firearms.

I'm wondering if you could give us an update on where we are on arming the border guards.

Hon. Stockwell Day: You're quite right in talking about the amount that's being directed towards arming our border officers. Right now, the applications have gone out for those within the operation who want to become trainers themselves. We'll be using the RCMP to do the initial training. The RCMP will then train the trainers, and they will work through the system.

By the way, there were 324 people within the CBSA component who actually applied to become trainers, which was, I thought, a very healthy response. Obviously, there won't be 324 trainers—there will be a lot fewer than that—but they'll be able to pick from that group. Their estimation is that the first officers will be trained and ready to serve by July or August of this coming year. There will be up to 300 available and ready to be on site. Following that, there will be training at the rate of about 800 per year, and then if you allow for natural attrition to take place, it will probably net out to something between 625 and 650 per year after that.

There have been different speculations in terms of how long it will take to get everybody trained, and the process itself could be completed—about 4,800 officers—in about six years. But right now it's projected that the funding component, and this is an expensive

thing to do, will be coming forward by so much per year for 10 years.

Looking at the experience in other jurisdictions... When the United States started their training, if we look at how long it took them, we're about on the same timelines. So 300 by July or August, and those will be apportioned to the areas where the greatest need is, and then it will be at the rate of about 800 or so per year, and then you have to allow for some attrition.

• (0940)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Okay. Now, I understand there's been additional funding in the supplementary estimates. Can you give us some information concerning that additional funding?

Hon. Stockwell Day: I can.

In terms of the supplementary estimates, I'll go through it quickly, because there may be some specific ones.

In terms of the RCMP itself, under vote 61, operating expenditures, excluding those for registration activities and functions: \$38,000,000.

In terms of vote 62—again, this is the Canada Firearms Centre—operating expenses for registration activities and functions: \$10,000,000.

Looking at the Canadian Border Service Agencies, vote number 10a, this would authorize the transfer of \$373,500 from Citizenship and Immigration and \$689,995 from National Defence. There are contributions to employee benefits under CSIS of \$35,266,000.

For the Correctional Services, under Penitentiary Service and National Parole Service, there will be another transfer of \$39,040.

I think those are the main ones in front of me right now, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you.

I think something of interest to a lot of Canadians is where we are with the western hemisphere travel initiative with the Americans. Does that involve expenditures on behalf of your department?

Hon. Stockwell Day: This has been quite a journey in terms of addressing something the American Congress put in place; this wasn't from their administration. As members around the committee table will know, about four years ago there was a law passed that everybody going into the United States, by a certain time period, would have to have a passport. That included Americans returning to the United States. The timelines originally on the table suggested that by January 1 of 2007, all people flying in or coming in by ship or boat were going to have to have a passport and that by January 1, 2008, everybody coming in at a land border was going to have to have a passport.

We were very concerned. We've done a number of studies on this. Not only do we think this will discourage travel from Canada into the United States, but we are even more concerned that this will dampen the desire of people wanting to come from the United States into Canada. Americans appear to be more averse to getting passports than Canadians. Just over 20% of Americans have passports and almost 40% of Canadians. There's also the cost that goes with that.

From the time Prime Minister Harper first met with President Bush and his Mexican counterpart at the Cancun meeting, this was the first item on the agenda. As far as the Prime Minister is concerned, this will have a very negative effect on our economy. It's not just the economy, strictly speaking, but even the social economy: the number of people who travel across the border for family reasons, friendship reasons; sports teams, hockey teams, soccer teams. There's a host of things we believe will be unanticipated consequences of that legislation.

We've made achievements. We have an agreement from the Americans that alternative documents will be acceptable. We're just defining what those will be. We've also been successful in having the implementation date pushed back; so far, it's about a year and a half.

I just want to say to members here, and any Canadians who are listening, that by January 8 of this year, 2007, if you are flying into the United States or you're coming in by ship, you have to have a passport. With respect to ferry traffic at the normal points, they'll let you in with two pieces of ID. So if you're flying or coming in by ship, get your passport. With the land ports, you have about another year and a half. We're working on alternatives there.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

This is the second round, and these are five-minute rounds.

Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to say this about a kind of throwaway remark you made, but I think it needs to be addressed.

You asked why the Liberals are not supporting mandatory minimums. I have to say this is a misrepresentation of the historical record, and indeed of the contemporary record. There are more mandatory minimums for gun-related crimes in the Criminal Code, some 20, than for any other crime except murder. Those mandatory minimums were introduced by the Liberal government some 10 years ago when the opposition, your party in its predecessor form, actually opposed them.

In November 2005, following a meeting of federal-provincial-territorial ministers of justice, as the Minister of Justice at the time, upon the unanimous recommendation of those ministers, I introduced a comprehensive legislative package that included targeted mandatory minimums in the matters of smuggling, trafficking, and use of a loaded weapon in a public place.

The issue, therefore, is not having mandatory minimums or not. The issue is why your government has introduced a range of mandatory minimums of such scope and excess, including mandatory minimums, for some, of 10 years, when, number one, all the evidence has shown that such mandatory minimums neither are a deterrent nor are effective; when the very evidence relied upon by the Minister of Justice to support them—that is to say, evidence from the states of Massachusetts, Michigan, and New York, as examples—demonstrated the exact opposite of what the minister claimed; when they have a disproportionate impact on aboriginal people; and when experts have concluded that such mandatory

minimums are wrong-headed as a matter of policy and suspect as a matter of law.

It is not a question that we did not support mandatory minimums. We supported those we felt were effective as a matter of policy and not suspect as a matter of law. To turn it the other way around, why is your government introducing such mandatory minimums when the evidence demonstrates otherwise?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Well, Mr. Chairman, this is why we have Parliament and why we have debate. The member just talked about certain amendments they put in requiring some mandatory penalties that they thought were effective. Well, that's what debate is all about.

In fact, their implementations were found not to be effective. When you have, Mr. Chairman, handgun crime going up, when you have killings and aggravated assaults with handguns in the city of Toronto on the increase, these clearly show that what they had done related to gun crime was not working. In our view, it was not working.

Now, if they want to interpret those particular areas where you're seeing an increase in gun activity as a decrease, well, that's what Parliament's about. You can say that two and two is five and you can debate that if you want. That's what we do.

Just allow me to finish. You started; let me finish.

● (0950)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I think the real issue is—

Hon. Stockwell Day: No, I have to finish. You had your time, with respect, and I listened carefully.

With respect to Bill C-10, which introduced a number of measures that we think—and this is a debate—will serve to reduce crime with firearms, three of the four Liberals present chose not to support it, and that's certainly their right. That's why I say, when we want to put a focus on crime with firearms, I find it curious that they give the appearance of wanting to have a focus on something else.

Now, on the anecdotal side—and anecdotal evidence has to be taken as such, and for security reasons I can only give some information here—our policing forces have told me that in one very densely populated area of our country, and I'd prefer not to say which, both their human and their listening-in intelligence on things that go on shows, from the street, that when we tabled Bill C-10 there was considerable discussion among those who choose criminal activity, and especially those who operate in the area of trafficking in firearms, that we were getting tough, that mandatory jail was probably going to be the result if they were apprehended, and that they were going to move their focus of business.

Now, I don't know what they're going into. I hope it's legal business—I doubt it is—but we're hearing anecdotally that just tabling and moving this legislation through is having an impact on the street. We hope that's true, and time will tell.

The Chair: You have five seconds left.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I just want to say that my whole point in asking the question was, number one, to correct the misrepresentation you made that we did not support mandatory minimums, which was another attempt to say the Liberals are soft on crime. It was a political statement and not an evidentiary-based statement, and, number two, to say that on evidentiary-based terms the evidence is the exact opposite to that which your government invoked for purposes of relying upon the merits of your legislation. Therefore, I say in that sense the legislation that you introduced regarding mandatory minimums was ideologically driven and not evidence-based.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Chairman, I'll just close by saying that I have not used the phrase "Liberals are soft on crime". I've not used that at all today. I'm trying to keep this at a respectful level. It's the member just now who talked about that, and, as a fact, as a matter of hard evidence, Mr. Chairman—

The Chair: Order, please.

Hon. Stockwell Day: —the record is very clear. When we tabled Bill C-10 in the House of Commons and asked for support for mandatory sentences on crime with firearms, three of the four Liberals present didn't support it. That's all I said.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Ménard—

Hon. Irwin Cotler: That does not mean we did not support parts of it—

The Chair: Order, please. Mr. Cotler, your time is up. A little bit of respect, please.

Monsieur Ménard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: My question is for Mr. Martin.

You are here to represent the RCMP. You just heard the minister say that it was up to the RCMP to decide what it would do with the registration of long guns that are already in the system. Can you tell us, please?

[*English*]

D/Commr Peter Martin: Yes, Mr. Ménard.

The key bit of information that's contained in the registry relates to people, where they're located, addresses, and that's part of the licensing program, so it's very important that we have critical information on who is licensed to own and possess a firearm.

When it comes to the determination of information around long guns, a law enforcement agency cannot keep information on citizens willy-nilly. We're governed by the laws of Canada, by the Privacy Act, and what information we contain in the registry will be determined partly by the legislation and what we are allowed to

keep. Information we are allowed and permitted and mandated to keep, we will keep, and we will take steps to make sure that information is current and up to date.

• (0955)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Certainly you're allowed to keep it, since the minister tells you that it's up to you to decide.

If a police officer who found a registered long gun on the scene of a crime turns to your services to find out who the legitimate owner of this arm is, are you going to tell him?

[*English*]

D/Commr Peter Martin: If we are permitted to keep that information, yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: You don't know yet whether you'll be allowed to keep the old registrations or whether you will discard them?

[*English*]

D/Commr Peter Martin: To the first part of your question, that's correct. About information being discarded, again, we cannot keep any information we just want to keep on any Canadian citizen. There are certain rights and privileges around privacy. If we are not able to maintain that information, then definitely, we would have to purge it out of the system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: What a waste!

Now, Mr. Minister, you propose to arm customs officers. This means that a lot of people will have to be trained pretty quickly.

You have no doubt been informed that the École nationale de police du Québec, located in Nicolet, is prepared to provide this training to as many officers as you'd like, and I think that you yourself recognize that there are people at that school who are qualified to give this training.

I also know that the number of officers requiring training is so high that the RCMP is incapable of providing it, within a reasonable length of time, to all the officers who will need it.

Do you intend to use the services offered by the École nationale de police du Québec?

Hon. Stockwell Day: There have been discussions with the staff at the École nationale de police du Québec.

I said that we wanted to use the most effective method for training our customs officers because we want the customs officers of the Canada Border Services Agency to eventually be able to train other officers themselves.

I do not know whether the decision to use the very qualified people at Nicolet has been made, but I acknowledge that there have been discussions.

Mr. Serge Ménard: I note in the budget that you have reduced expenses for Aboriginal corrections. May I ask why you are reducing them?

[English]

Hon. Stockwell Day: Could you give me the precise reference?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: On page 431, it talks about “Payments to the provinces, territories, municipalities, Indian band councils and recognized authorities representing Indians on reserve...”. This is under “Community Safety and Partnerships”. These payments go from \$92 million to \$78 million. Why this reduction?

[English]

The Chair: Minister, you won't find that in your documents. I believe he's on the Internet. You're not going to be able to cross-reference that.

I guess we'll have to come back to that.

Hon. Stockwell Day: I think Monsieur Brunet can help with that.

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Brunet.

Mr. John Brunet (Chief Financial Officer, Canada Firearms Centre): I don't have the specific reference in front of me, but I believe you're referring to Public Safety's main estimates. If you are, the difference is related to the amount of money that we transfer to the RCMP to do first nations policing on behalf of the aboriginal communities. It was simply a change in the way that amount was accounted for. Previously it was in our main estimates as contribution money. Through the year we would transfer it to the RCMP to fund the additional first nations policing that they do on behalf of the department.

In this year's main estimates, the amount was actually shown as operating expenses as opposed to contributions. There has not been a decrease in the first nations policing program writ large. It's just a matter of how it's reflected within the main estimates as it relates to the RCMP services provided.

• (1000)

[Translation]

Hon. Stockwell Day: There were supplementary estimates of \$25.7 million

[English]

under first nations policing services. So I don't think there was a decrease.

If you can send me that, I'll try to connect those dots for you, but I see an increase here.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, could we ask you for another couple of minutes, please, just to complete this round?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Okay, but if the government falls because I'm not on duty, then we'll know what happened here.

The Chair: Mr. Norlock, could you perhaps wrap this up, please?

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): I'll try to make this as succinct as possible, but it may not be.

My interest, quite frankly, is directly related to the RCMP as a result of some of the questions yesterday with SIRC and further meetings of this committee with regard to the information flow in the Arar case. Some disconnects and some problematic instances were observed by me and other committee members. It specifically relates

to SIRC's attendance here yesterday and my discussion with them with regard to best practices as shared by sister agencies in the international community.

One of the differences between Canada and many other international bodies is the fact that there is a lack of a parliamentary oversight committee and the overall numbers of agencies that have information, and also how that information flows from one to the other.

Mr. Minister, has the government—cabinet in particular, if it's possible to discuss it—given consideration to a parliamentary oversight committee that would be sworn to secrecy and that would ensure that, for our agencies dealing with public safety and specifically national security, there is an oversight body of elected civilians who can oversee the total operation of government?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Chairman, I can tell you that we respect the work done by this committee and others on that particular area. It has been a commitment of ours, a commitment of the Prime Minister, that we will eventually have in place an oversight capability of some sort. I want to look at the significant work done by this committee. Mr. Comartin and others have spent a lot of time on that.

We're also waiting at this point, as Justice O'Connor has said he's going to be reflecting on that and we know he has a subsequent report coming out. So I don't want to move ahead. But as soon as we have his reflections, I want to engage this committee and others in terms of what type of oversight will best serve the security needs of Canadians, but also make sure that our privacies are protected.

I'll just close by saying there was an international report released this morning—forgive me if the name slips me right now—that rated countries around the world in terms of their respect for the privacy of information. Of all the countries listed, Canada came second in terms of its respect for and handling of private information.

So I just leave that as a final thought, and I'll be looking forward to working with this committee in terms of what type of oversight committee will best protect Canadians.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Norlock, you may continue your questioning of the officials. The minister will have to leave.

Mr. Rick Norlock: This question again is related to the RCMP. The Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP provides civilian oversight on police conduct. Financial resources of the commission are approximately \$6.5 million for 2006-07, and the commission's priorities include business improvement, outreach, and improvement in management. Do you anticipate any changes or challenges on the part of the commission for public complaints as a result of any recommendations already made by Justice O'Connor in the context of the Arar commission?

•(1005)

D/Commr Peter Martin: I believe when the commissioner appeared before the committee a few weeks ago he had already mentioned that the organization is in the process of implementing a number of recommendations out of the O'Connor commission.

We are constantly looking to improve our performance in all aspects. Under the current regime we have implemented a very comprehensive accountability framework. Our financial situation in the RCMP in terms of accountability and how we manage the organization is the best it has been in a long period of time.

There will always be public complaints. I believe we have a very healthy relationship with the public complaints commission, and we continue to cooperate with them in every way we can.

Mr. Rick Norlock: If I can just carry on a little further with regard to how you intend to improve your accountability specifically in regard to some of the problems identified in the O'Connor commission, I can recall my question to the commissioner when he sat before this committee and indicated that you were going through some internal policy changes and procedures.

My observations, with all due respect to you and to the commissioner, would be the following. And again it's because I care so much about the reputation of police forces. They must ensure, to the best of their ability, to always be above the type of criticisms that O'Connor has identified.

I related to the commissioner, looking at other similar agencies not only within Canada but externally with a view to best practices—and I guess I'm going to be very specific here—wouldn't it be a good idea, as part of that process when you're developing those processes and changes in policy, that you access the opinion of sister agencies in Canada? I would specifically suggest, because of the realities of Canada, that one of those agencies be the Sûreté du Québec and one other large agency in Canada.

That's a suggestion, and I'm asking, Deputy Commissioner, for your opinion on just such an idea.

D/Commr Peter Martin: We are constantly looking at best practices around the country and around the world. One of the great things about Canada is that there's a tremendous amount of expertise within the law enforcement community, within public safety organizations, and we partner with them wherever we can. We look to better ways of doing things.

One of the great things about being a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is that we have a presence everywhere in Canada, and we have an opportunity to work with a broad range of organizations that bring a lot to the table.

With regard to final decisions on policy and where we go, that obviously is a decision that will come from the commissioner himself. I know he is eagerly awaiting the opportunity to meet with this committee again, and you may want to address that with him when he does appear.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chan.

Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Martin, to follow up on the line of questioning from Mr. Ménard earlier, when he asked you about the cost of shutting down the long gun registry, your answer is you cannot quantify because it's complicated. Yet for a long time, since the minister appeared before this committee, both to the media and again today in a statement to this committee, he claimed millions of dollars will be saved—hundreds of millions of dollars.

Did you give that number to the minister, or did the minister pull that number out of the air himself?

D/Commr Peter Martin: I cannot speak for the minister, number one. The RCMP took over responsibility for the Canada Firearms Centre on May 17 and we have been working with the ministry from that point.

As far as what was stated and what was discussed around the figures before that date, I'm at a loss to be able to give you reliable information. My reason for not giving you a firm figure today is I can't give you one. I don't want to give you something that may be misleading and not accurate.

•(1010)

Hon. Raymond Chan: Okay.

D/Commr Peter Martin: I will go back, and I have no problem coming forward with some more refined figures.

Hon. Raymond Chan: The total firearms program is estimated at around \$86 million for the year. That includes the handgun registry, which has to be there. It can't be deleted from that system by cancelling the long gun registry. Even with the estimates saying 20% of the activity is associated with long guns, and if you just forget about the cost of the system, which is applicable to both, if you just take 20% off that \$86 million, which is the whole firearms program, then you are still talking about less than \$20 million.

D/Commr Peter Martin: That's an accurate observation.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Right. So the number that has been floating around for a savings of hundreds of millions of dollars is inaccurate, wouldn't you say?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Again, I don't have intimate knowledge of what was said before, so I can't—

Hon. Raymond Chan: Today the minister said that in his statement to the House.

D/Commr Peter Martin: You'd have to put that to the minister. I can tell you that right now the long gun registry makes up approximately 20% of the workload. You're right about terminals and infrastructure. That's still required. You're still going to have to look after licences and prohibited and restricted weapons.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Okay.

I have a second question, Mr. Martin. In the position of the RCMP, would you recommend the cancellation of the long gun registry?

D/Commr Peter Martin: You've put me in an awkward position.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I don't think he's going to ask the RCMP for—

Hon. Raymond Chan: They enforce the law. Why couldn't the RCMP give an answer as to whether they recommend the long gun registry or not?

The Chair: Mr. Chan and Mr. MacKenzie, with all due respect to our witnesses, they cannot answer policy questions. You're asking a question on policy, and I don't think it's fair to do that.

Hon. Raymond Chan: I'll rephrase it, Mr. Chairman.

Would you think the long gun registry is important in reducing long gun crimes in this country?

D/Commr Peter Martin: The important piece of information in the registry is the licensing. It's people who kill. They use weapons, firearms. The information we're looking for is which individuals have the right to own and possess firearms. When we attend calls, if we have that piece of information, we can take the extra care and attention. So the critical piece of information is who is licensed to carry.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Right, and you're saying you don't have the right to retain that information on long gun owners?

D/Commr Peter Martin: When it comes to ownership, whether you own a prohibited or restricted weapon or a long gun, you still require a licence.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Right, but I don't understand why it is important to register handguns but not long guns. I just don't see the logic. Can you explain that to me?

The Chair: You're again asking a policy question. You should be asking questions on how the program works.

Hon. Raymond Chan: No. I'm asking what the difference is between registering a handgun and a long gun in the prevention of crime.

•(1015)

The Chair: Mr. Martin, it's up to you. How do you want to handle that?

D/Commr Peter Martin: The prime information is on the individual. If we go to a residence on a call, we're not interested in articles in the house as much as the person in the house and what they have available to them.

The critical piece of information right now is who is licensed and who has the potential to have in his or her possession a firearm, regardless of whether it's a long gun or a restricted or prohibited weapon.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Right, so the information about long guns is the same.

The Chair: Mr. Chan, you are way over time already.

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to clarify something before I ask a question about what the minister said today. He didn't say that hundreds of millions would be saved; he said that hundreds of millions had been wasted. He said that 20% of \$86 million—which is the potential savings, because it's related to the long gun registry—is a lot more than \$2 million, as stated by the Canada Firearms Centre.

I have a question on the RCMP and the budget. I'm a tremendous fan and supporter of what the RCMP has done and continues to do in Canada. The RCMP budget this year is estimated at about \$3.3 billion. Is that adequate for your operations?

I know that's kind of a leading question. But more importantly, we're trying to integrate another 1,000 members into the force over a period of time. Everybody obviously wants more money for their operations, but if there are shortfalls—bearing in mind we're trying to integrate 1,000 new members—where are they, and where are the priorities you would start chopping from?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Let me answer the first part and then I'll ask Deputy Gauvin if he could add some comments.

The RCMP has been extremely fortunate in the way we've been supported in our programs over the years. We've seen significant growth, but that's also been the result of significant demands that have been placed on the organization. If you ask any organization today if they have enough to do their job, the answer will obviously be no. You can always do more and you can always want more. More is never enough, but we manage effectively. We set our priorities. I think we're using the resources wisely that have been given to us by the government and the Canadian citizens at large.

Mr. Paul Gauvin (Deputy Commissioner, Corporate Management and Comptrollership, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Over the last eight years the budget for the RCMP has increased from \$1.8 billion to \$3.3 billion this year in the estimates. We think that \$3.3 billion will reach about \$3.7 million because we have supplementary estimates (A) and (B). We're also working on our estimates for next year, and we think they will reach close to \$4 billion.

As Deputy Martin explained, crime is everywhere and it's getting more sophisticated. But I think the RCMP has been treated quite well in the resources it's been given.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: You don't see any limitations in the resources for bringing in the 1,000 new members.

D/Commr Paul Gauvin: We just had a memorandum to cabinet for the federal policing program. In that program we receive about 1,000 person years. Of that, about 700 are members and the rest are support staff. I think the government is still working on others in terms of putting more policemen on the street.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I'd like to switch gears a little and go back to the CBSA and the arming of CBSA officers. We're talking about arming 4,800 officers. What's the total membership of CBSA operational personnel?

Mr. John Brunet: We have some people from the CBSA here. I'll ask one of them to come forward to address the question.

The Chair: I'll invite whoever is here from the CBSA to come to the microphone to try to answer this. Please give your name and title.

Mrs. Candace Breakwell (Director, Legislative Affairs and ATIP, Canada Border Services Agency): My name is Candace Breakwell and I'm the director of legislative affairs at CBSA.

I'm sorry, the question is?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: We're talking about arming 4,800 CBSA folks. What's the total number of agents at airports or borders?

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: I think it's over 5,000.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: So we are talking about arming virtually 100% of them.

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: Yes, just about. It's a little over 5,000.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: That's good. I may have had a misconception.

Mr. Brunet, we talked about WHTI and cards and so on. Do you have an estimate of what an alternative card might wind up costing the department or an individual?

• (1020)

Mr. John Brunet: I'm not aware of any estimates. I believe the card would be administered through the passport office or some other facility, as opposed to Public Safety itself, so I'm afraid I can't answer that question.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: This is a question I would have put to the minister, but in his absence, anyone who wishes may answer.

The Office of the Correctional Investigator's latest annual report concluded that the federal prison system has practices that discriminate against aboriginal offenders. For example, it found that the Correctional Service of Canada routinely classifies first nations, Métis, and Inuit inmates as higher security risks than non-native inmates. It also found that aboriginal offenders are released later in their sentences than other inmates and that they are more likely than other offenders to have their conditional release revoked for technical reasons. The report also says that aboriginal inmates often do not receive timely access to rehabilitative programming and services that would help them return to their communities.

Do you accept the correctional investigator's findings? If so, how do you intend to respond to them? More generally, how do you intend to respond to the problem—and it is a more than serious prejudicial issue—of the overrepresentation of aboriginal people in the prison system?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I think this is beyond the scope of the people here. You're asking these people to answer questions that are part of government policy. Maybe we should have the minister back. It's unfair to put these people in such a position.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chairman, if you'll notice, I prefaced my remarks by saying that I would have put that question to the minister and that I was prepared to have anyone answer who wished to. This is the statement of the correctional investigator, and his annual report

is a matter of public record. We are dealing today with matters that are properly before the committee. This is one of them.

The Chair: Would you regard this as a policy question, or do you feel that this is something the minister should reply to?

Mr. John Brunet: I believe it's a policy question. I know the minister responded to the report when it was issued. He had some positive comments as well as some concerns about the conclusion. In any case, it's difficult for us to comment on that report.

The Chair: Do you have another point of order, Mr. Holland?

Mr. Mark Holland: I would like to speak to the same point of order. In my experience with items of this nature, it is possible for officials to offer what they believe to be the minister's position or the government's policy. They could preface it by saying, "I understand the minister's position is", or "I understand the government's position is". I don't believe Mr. Cotler was asking for a personal opinion. In the future, it's probably best left to the witnesses to decide whether to answer the questions or not.

The Chair: Those answers would be on the public record. So if they choose to just refer you to the public record, that would be sufficient, would it not?

Mr. Mark Holland: Precisely, and that's what I'm saying. They can choose how they would answer those questions, but there are ways of them answering the questions without being put in a position of giving their personal opinions, which might be contrary to—

The Chair: Do you just want to refer the members to the public record, or do you want to make further comments?

Mr. John Brunet: I think it is best to refer to the public record, particularly because, at the invitation of the committee, we were under the understanding that it was to talk about the Canada Firearms Centre, as well as the main estimates. We appreciate that there are a lot of serious policy issues within the portfolio, but I don't believe we have the people here today to adequately address that.

The Chair: Thank you. Do you have any other brief comments?

Okay, that completes our first round. Sorry, it does not complete the first round.

Mr. Brown, please go ahead.

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We haven't really talked much about the Arar situation. But we had the commissioner here about a month ago, and since we're dealing with estimates today, maybe you can tell us a little bit about what impact the O'Connor report has had on the RCMP, what's being done, and how that might affect the estimates.

• (1025)

D/Commr Peter Martin: Well, the impact of the report, obviously, is significant, of course, and as the commissioner mentioned during his last appearance, we are in the process of implementing the recommendations in the report. But as far as a more detailed answer than that, Mr. Brown, I just don't have the information to provide on that one. Again, I know the commissioner is looking forward to reappearing before the committee, and I would suggest that you put that to him when he does appear.

Mr. Gord Brown: Well, that's really what I was interested in today. I had a great deal of interest, of course, in the arming of the border guards, and we've heard about that.

Maybe our witness might want to comment a little more on this concept of a parliamentary oversight committee. Over the last week, we've had a number of witnesses before the committee—we've been meeting pretty well every day this week—and have heard their different views. We had SIRC here yesterday for their views on a parliamentary oversight committee. How might that work with your various agencies?

D/Commr Peter Martin: We currently have a number of oversight activities within the RCMP. As far as the parliamentary oversight committee, again, whatever the government decides, we will cooperate fully with that, obviously. We would welcome any dialogue. Again, this is a pretty big issue, and I think it's probably something you should discuss with the commissioner. I keep going back to it. He's really looking forward to getting back here.

Mr. Gord Brown: I'm sure there are a number of members of the committee who are looking forward to seeing him come back as well.

I guess my concern about the oversight committee is whether you think it might help build more confidence within the public, especially in the RCMP and CSIS.

D/Commr Peter Martin: Well, number one, I can't talk about CSIS.

I think there's a fair level of confidence and support in the public for the RCMP today. Recent surveys we have conducted have identified, in a number of areas, that public opinion sits within the 80th and 90th percentile, and those reports are available if you care to look at them. We are always interested in anything that can improve both our performance and the confidence level that the population would have in the organization.

Mr. Gord Brown: Well, I don't disagree that there is a lot of public confidence in your particular agency. However, clearly that took a hit in the last little while with the situation surrounding Arar and Justice O'Connor's report. So I think that's good.

Thank you very much. I will ask these questions of the commissioner when he comes.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go back to Mr. Holland, please.

Mr. Mark Holland: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Perhaps I could ask the individual from the Canada Border Services Agency who came forward earlier to come forward again, because my questions are going to be relating to your area.

The first question has to—

The Chair: I believe you wanted to correct some information. Now that you're back at the table, could you please do that for us, first of all?

Then we'll come back to you on this one. I won't take that out of your time, sir.

So I'd like to ask you if you would please make that comment that you requested.

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: I will, Mr. Chair. Thank you, and I apologize. In answering your question, I said over 5,000 officers will be armed. There are 7,200 uniformed officers in the region and 5,000, roughly—4,800—will be armed at the marine and land sites.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that clarification. It's very helpful.

We will start your time again, Mr. Holland.

Mr. Mark Holland: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the clarification.

I'm wondering if we could talk for a minute about the implications on estimates of arming the border officers. The first is with respect to training. I'd be interested in hearing both from the RCMP and from you on this first item.

I've expressed a great deal of concern about the training regime that's been proposed. I call it "training light", because of the fact that we have RCMP officers who are experts in handling firearms training a small number of border officers, and then those border officers are training other individuals. I have a policy problem with that, but I'm not going to ask you about the policy problem.

What I'm going to ask is whether you can you tell me the cost differential. On a cost basis, what's the difference between having all of those individuals trained by the RCMP and having RCMP officers train a small number of border officers who then go and train other border officers?

• (1030)

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: The cost of the program, for training and support, as I understand it, will be about \$58 million. I need to confirm that, but those are the figures I have. The decision to partner with the RCMP to develop initial training involved working with professionals in the training. Maybe Deputy Commissioner Martin would like to add to that. It was to ensure that our trainers had the best quality training in order to implement the training.

Mr. Mark Holland: I don't dispute that. My concern, again, is that I would prefer all of them to receive that level of quality of training rather than only a certain number who would then go and train others.

You explained the cost today of doing “training light”, so what's the cost of doing the full-fledged training, the proper training of all officers by the RCMP? Do you have a sense of what that cost would be?

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: No, I don't.

Mr. Mark Holland: Would Mr. Martin?

D/Commr Peter Martin: We have a capacity problem when it comes to training that many people. Discussions up to this point have focused on a train the trainer approach.

You have to be careful. It's not an issue of training on the use of firearms; it's training on the use of force. The use of a firearm is only one element in the force continuum. When you talk about an intervention with an individual, you have to start first with dialogue. The use of force is an escalating process, the final stage being the use of a firearm. So it's quite a comprehensive thing to undertake. In this particular case we just don't have the capacity to take that on. The training of 7,000 officers is a significant job.

We are, however, working with the border agency in order to provide their trainers with the training that they would then deliver within their own agency.

Mr. Mark Holland: I understand that. I think you've underscoring my very point, which is that this is an extremely complicated matter of training individuals on the use of force, who previously did not have that in their job description.

So what would it take from the position of the RCMP to get to a position where you were resourced enough to be able to do that? What kind of time? What kind of money? How much would it take to get the RCMP to do it and do it right?

D/Commr Peter Martin: There again, Mr. Holland, if I tried to give you a number off the top of my head, it would be incorrect. I have absolutely no idea.

Mr. Mark Holland: Okay. I'll have to try to find some other way to get an idea of that then. If you could get back to me, having looked at that, I'd appreciate it.

Can I go to this notion of there being \$100 million over the next two years for the arming of border officers, while we know this is going to be a 10-year initiative? We know there are going to be a lot of costs, not only in the training but also in salaries, because obviously individuals who are now having to use force are going to have to be paid more. We're going to have ongoing training costs.

Do you have a sense—because I haven't been able to get this number from anybody—of what we're looking at over a 10-year period in terms of costs when we're looking at \$100 million over two years? What is the full rollout of this program over the 10-year period of time?

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: I understand that over 10 years it will be \$1 billion.

Mr. Mark Holland: It will be a billion dollars. Can you break that down a little bit for me?

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: I can't, other than in generalities; it will be \$58 million in training and support and program, and \$43 million for infrastructure and equipment.

Mr. Mark Holland: Okay. Would it be possible for you to provide me with a more detailed breakdown of how we get to a billion dollars?

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: Excuse me, I'm sorry, that was over two years, the \$58 million and \$43 million.

Mr. Mark Holland: I was going to say that's a long way to a billion.

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: I don't have those numbers broken down over 10 years. I can't provide another figure.

The Chair: I think all of us at the committee would be interested in that.

We will now have to move over to—

• (1035)

Mr. Mark Holland: Ms. Breakwell didn't have an opportunity to answer.

The Chair: Will you be able to provide that information to the committee?

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: I will certainly try.

The Chair: Okay. That's all we can expect.

Mr. Ménard is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am going to turn first to the RCMP representative, although I will tell you right away that I really liked your explanations about the progressive use of force, the police force principle of intervention, before using firearms.

I want to ask you a specific question. On page 427 of the estimates—I thought that when I was given this PDF version, I had the same pagination as you, but let's say it's the first page of point 25—, there is mention of the Canadian Firearms Centre and operating expenditures for registration activities and functions. We see that last year you asked for \$14.550 million and that next year you're asking for \$14.654 million.

I know, Mr. Martin, that we have to get rid of long gun registration, and therefore you're not including expenses for long gun registration. So, if you register fewer arms and you expect to register even fewer, why are you asking for \$104,000 more to register firearms?

[*English*]

D/Commr Peter Martin: The decision on the registration of long guns has not been passed yet, so at the present time we still have to maintain the long gun registry, although there is an amnesty in place. However, if the legislation does not go through, we are still going to have to pick that up and make sure the information is up to date.

Mr. Ménard, when you were talking earlier about the \$14.6 million, those are the operating expenses for the registration activities. Long guns, restricted weapons, and prohibited weapons are included. When you go down the complete list of expenditures to support the registry, the \$83.6 million has now been reduced by \$13 million; a \$10 million reduction was undertaken when the registry was moved over to the RCMP, and we have since identified another \$3 million.

The way we're doing that is there is a large benefit in putting this over to the force. At the outset the registry was composed with a very high-level hierarchy. The lead person was at a deputy minister one level; there were a number of EX-2s and two EX-3s, so there was a large management structure. We have taken that away. It's now at the DG level. The most senior position in the Canada Firearms Centre is now an EX-3. We have also integrated with the RCMP infrastructure. As an example, there was a self-standing human resource activity, a finance activity, and a CIO—chief information officer—at the registry; all of that infrastructure is inside the RCMP as well, so the registry is now served by the RCMP's HR component, their finance component, and their technology component.

There are a large number of consultants there. The Canadian firearms system that's used to drive the database is a program that was written by consultants. We have taken on those duties and responsibilities.

That's how we've been able to save the money, and the budget right now is down to \$70 million for the registry.

The Chair: You have a supplementary question, Mr. Ménard.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: I asked you why you are demanding an additional \$104,000. I'm told that it isn't the \$83 million entered at the bottom of the list, but rather \$73 million. I confess that I don't understand. Why are we given the figure of \$83 million, when we're getting ready for committee sessions, when the final figure is \$73 million?

I think that they don't want us to ask questions that are too specific.

I'm going to ask you another one. You're getting a budget increase, again this year, and you expect another one next year. Do you still intend to close down nine RCMP stations in Quebec?

[English]

D/Commr Peter Martin: I don't know whether you're asking a question about the registry or Quebec.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: I began by making some remarks about firearms registration, which seems justified because you didn't answer my question.

I ask you whether, further to the increase in your budget, you intend to reopen the nine stations that you closed in Quebec, or whether you have completely given up on land border surveillance.

• (1040)

[English]

D/Commr Peter Martin: Of the detachments in Quebec, the resources that were used in those particular areas have been reassigned within the province to more efficiently address the strategic priorities of policing in the province.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard: I have one last question...

[English]

The Chair: We'll now move over to Mr. Dewar for five minutes, please.

We can come back to you, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Actually I asked two questions. That is all.

It's rather strange that those people use up all the time we're given to make speeches that have absolutely nothing to do with the questions being asked. It's just as if they didn't want to answer the actual questions we ask.

[English]

The Chair: You will have an opportunity to address that in the next round.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Chair.

I have a question, but if it is an uncomfortable policy question, then you can suggest that I ask the minister or someone else.

Just for clarification, under Bill C-10—there was a little discussion on that earlier when the minister was here—my understanding is that for the mandatory minimum component, long guns would be excluded from that proposition. Is that your understanding?

D/Commr Peter Martin: Again, I would defer that one to the minister.

Mr. Paul Dewar: The scenario that has been painted by others suggests that if a criminal goes in to hold up a store and has an unloaded handgun and comes out and is caught, there would be a mandatory minimum applicable under the legislation in front of us, but if the same person went in with an unloaded long gun and came out, they wouldn't have it. I have concerns for your officers and how they deal with that, because it doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

Anyhow, I'm now going to turn to prevention. There's a lot of money coming in to the RCMP, so I'd like to talk a little about prevention. Under the estimates, I turn to community safety and partnerships. It appears to me that there is a significant decrease when we look at the item on page 22-5:

Payments to the provinces, territories, municipalities, Indian band councils and recognized authorities representing Indians on reserve, Indian communities on Crown land and Inuit communities, for the First Nations Policing Program

There's a significant decrease. Is that due to transfers or just lack of demand? What's happening there?

Mr. John Brunet: It's the same sort of topic that Monsieur Ménard was addressing. The support that public safety provides to first nations policing is in concert with the provinces. It's a cautionary program, for which we pay 52% of the costs of policing first nations communities and the provinces pay 48%. In the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, a lot of those agreements are struck directly with first nations communities. The contribution would go to the first nations community, which might have their own police force or subcontract with the Sûreté du Québec or the OPP to provide those services.

In other parts of Canada, where the RCMP provide the local policing force, the agreement between us and the province is to have the RCMP provide that first-nations-related policing to that community on behalf of the community, funded by us and the province. The difficulty comes in because of the Financial Administration Act. In other parts of the country there would be a contribution to the first nation community, which then pays for the police force. In this situation, though, we provide the money to the RCMP.

That funding is simply a transfer. Previously it was shown as contribution funding. In this year's main estimates, it is shown under the operating expenses of that program rather than the contribution program itself. The program funding envelope has not been reduced, but the split between contribution dollars and operating dollars has changed.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Further down the page is "Contributions in support of the Safer Communities Initiative". That has gone up significantly in terms of the two columns, between the estimates 2005-06 and 2006-07. I'm very concerned about the balance between enforcement and looking at investments in prevention. I'm wondering what I can glean from this one line item. Is that a prevention program? Is that budget line about prevention? What is a descriptor for "Safer Communities Initiative"?

• (1045)

Mr. John Brunet: It is about prevention. The acronym is about crime prevention through social development. Again, that's a contribution program where the funding is provided to local communities, local groups, or provincial groups to work with disadvantaged women, youth, youth at risk, youth gangs, etc., to try to prevent criminals from developing in the future. So it's a social action program where we work in concert with provinces and with local communities to try to develop programs that will assist individuals so they don't go down the path of criminal activity.

Mr. Paul Dewar: If I may, just very quickly, I have a very concrete question. In my community there are a number of initiatives the community wants to put together. Where would they go if they wanted to access money for prevention like this?

Mr. John Brunet: The first place would be our website, where we describe the program in detail, but we also work very actively with the Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA, and other social action groups. So there's a distribution of individuals who work for this program, spread across the country, who we are continually working with at the local level to help them develop their capacity and develop projects to reduce crime, targeted to individual communities and districts and areas.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dewar, at the beginning you made a statement. I just need some clarification. Where does that information come from?

Mr. Paul Dewar: It's a scenario that has been painted to me. I can get that for you.

The Chair: On the differential?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Yes. That's an opinion I was given.

The Chair: Oh, that's an opinion and not a factual statement?

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, it's an opinion; that's how I painted it. I gave a scenario and wasn't suggesting—

The Chair: Oh, it sounded like this was.... I needed to know that.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Well, the law is not in place, so anything is speculation.

The Chair: Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I wanted to try to clarify one issue, and then I'll share my time with Mr. Hawn.

Going back, I think my friend Mr. Holland said the training the CBSA would be getting is "training light". I think we need to clarify the process here. The RCMP will train the trainers, who will then be trained to the standard of the RCMP.

Where will that training take place? If you know, would it take place at RCMP Depot, is my question?

D/Commr Peter Martin: It would either be at our training facility in Regina or at our Connaught Range here in Ottawa.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: So to train the CBSA people across the country at the first level, typically the RCMP would do that training at Depot as recruits come in. Would that be accurate?

D/Commr Peter Martin: In our training program in Regina we don't simply introduce members to force and the use of firearms and then leave them alone. Every officer who carries a firearm has to go through an annual training program—

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I understand that. I think I maybe misdirected my question.

When RCMP members join the force, they go through the use of force training, not the firearms but the use of force training, as a recruit at Depot. Then after that there are the annual requalifications, and so on. But to bring the CBSA people to that same level would require them to go to Depot.

D/Commr Peter Martin: Yes, it could be done at Regina, or it could also be done here at our range. Honestly, I'm not up on the details of that program. I understand some of it is still under discussion and negotiation. I can get back to you about what the plans are.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: That's fine. I guess what I wanted to eliminate was the comment that it's "training light". They will not be trained light, but will be trained in the same manner as the RCMP trains the trainers. They will be expected to be at that level in the use of force.

D/Commr Peter Martin: The RCMP would have great concern about being party to any substandard training program.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: That's where I wanted to go.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Chair.

I have a couple of quick questions for CBSA.

There are 2,200 members who will not receive the training, according to current plans. I assume those are the airport folks.

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: I believe, for the most part, they are the airport—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: And why is that?

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: It was studied, and I understand it was determined there is not a risk at airports. There are sufficient personnel, RCMP and others.

• (1050)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I would suggest that's not true at airports. Even in Edmonton, for example, there's a significant physical distance between where the RCMP is and where the CBSA people are carrying out their duties, and I suggest that should be looked at.

On the same topic, though, does that give you any concern with respect to morale within CBSA, where you've got two classes of agent—some who are trained to one level, some who are trained to another?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: With all due respect, I think we're getting into an area that's not part of what these folks could answer.

The Chair: Is that a point of order?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I hate to do that, but you have to be fair, and I don't think that's a fair question.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Hawn, carry on.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Are there any concerns within CBSA with respect to CUTA, with respect to how that's perceived by the members of CBSA?

Is that okay?

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: I'm sorry, I didn't hear the question.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: There are going to be two levels of qualification for CBSA—some who are firearms trained and youth support trained and some who are not. Do you anticipate any concerns within the personnel at CBSA because of that?

Mrs. Candace Breakwell: I wouldn't think so, but I need to...I'd say no.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I'll take that up in another venue, because I don't think that's true.

The Chair: Mr. Cotler, please.

I'm going to shorten these two rounds.

Monsieur Ménard, did you have another question? We have to vacate this room in about five minutes, so maybe a brief question and....

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I'll ask my question on the overrepresentation of aboriginal offenders in the correctional system and reference the discriminatory practices in the correctional system as set forth in the correctional investigator's report, because the delivery of aboriginal correctional programs and services is a legitimate subject matter of inquiry and is a specific budgetary matter in the main estimates.

My question, therefore, looking at the main estimates projection for 2006-07, is why has the total contribution in matters related to the delivery of aboriginal correctional services and programs been reduced by some half a million dollars, namely from \$1,851,000 in 2005-06 to \$1,351,000 in 2006-07, when the problems appear to have been greater than they were before?

Mr. John Brunet: I'm sorry, I don't know the specific reference you're referring to. This is in the main estimates of Public Safety?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Yes. I'm referring to what's under the heading "Correctional Service" with respect to transfer payments, under the heading "Contributions". The overall contributions with respect to the main estimates 2006-07 are half a million dollars less than in the previous year with respect to matters related to the delivery of aboriginal correctional programs and services.

I would have thought the projected estimates would have been enhanced, given the problems as set forth in the correctional investigator's report. Here they appear to have been cut.

Mr. John Brunet: I'm sorry. I'm looking at the transfer payments, grants and contributions, and I don't see your reference to the aboriginal payments.

• (1055)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Under transfer payments, under the heading "Contributions", there are two subject matters—care and custody, and rehabilitation and case management. Under care and custody, there appears to have been a dramatic reduction with regard to payments to aboriginal communities for delivery of aboriginal correction programs and services.

In rehabilitation and case management there's somewhat of an increase, but the overall compendium here is one of a reduction of a half million dollars. I'm saying that appears to be at variance with the report by the correctional investigator to the effect that the problems are increasing and not lessening in the matter of discriminatory practice in the correctional services respecting aboriginal people.

Mr. John Brunet: The reason for my confusion was that within the public safety department, we also have policy work and contribution work to aboriginals and corrections writ large. I was thinking that the reference you made was to Public Safety contributions.

Unfortunately, I'm not familiar with the details of Correctional Services operations. I do know it's a focus of theirs, but I couldn't explain the modification, whether the money was redirected or whether it was used for a different element of aboriginal correctional services. Unfortunately, we'll just have to take that and perhaps have Correctional Services come back to you with an answer on that redirection.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Ménard for two minutes.

My apologies to my government colleagues, but there won't be any more time for questions. Sorry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: The first item on top of the Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada list is for its operating expenditures. Am I to understand that operating expenditures means operating expenses for the minister's office?

It's the first item at the top of the list, under "Department".

[*English*]

Mr. John Brunet: Yes, for main estimates.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: It's under the title "Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness". It's written 25. I have it on page 426 of the document you sent me. You don't have them? In any case...

[*English*]

Mr. John Brunet: Unfortunately, no.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: But you surely recognize the entry. It's written: "Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Department, Operating Expenditures". Are these operating expenditures for the minister's office?

[*English*]

Mr. John Brunet: If the number is \$100 million, that would be for the department generally, in that vicinity. That's for the entire operations of the Department of Public Safety, a portion of which are the costs of the minister's office.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: What is the rationale for the \$62 million increase? We go from \$86 to \$148 million.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brunet: And you'd like to know the main reasons for that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Yes.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brunet: There has been an increase from the government's focus on public safety and emergency management, so there's been a significant increase in the emergency management costs of the department. The department also administers a program for disaster financial assistance, which is a contribution program that it shares with the provinces to reimburse them for costs that are related to natural disasters. That program has significantly increased in the past.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: It's all written down elsewhere, as we've seen. But is there a \$62 million increase for the minister's office alone? These are certainly not contributions, since they come later. These other amounts you told me about appear further down below. But simply for the operation of the minister's office, there's an increase of \$62 million?

[*English*]

The Chair: Your question is on the record.

Please give a brief response.

Mr. John Brunet: Just to clarify, that's the increase in operating costs of the ministry, of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. It's not an increase in the cost of operating the minister's offices. In fact, there's been a slight reduction imposed by the government on operations of ministers' operations.

I could get back to you with the specific cost of the minister's budget. However, that money is related to the ministry itself.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Yes, I would like to know this eventually.

[*English*]

The Chair: I would like to remind committee members—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: There's an increase of \$1.311 million while less work is being done. There's less registration, but it's costing more.

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Ménard, sorry, you're out of order.

I'd like to remind committee members that we have one more session on Bill C-12, so you should be preparing any amendments you have for that legislation and getting them into the clerk as soon as possible. The deadline will be right after our break, the following week.

This meeting stands adjourned.

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