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Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

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• (1600)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC)): I'd like to bring this meeting to order. This is meeting number three of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Today we are considering the supplementary estimates B.

We would like to welcome for the first hour the minister, the Honourable Peter Van Loan, Minister of Public Safety. He may introduce the people at the table with him if and when he so chooses. In the interest of time, I think we'll proceed, because the minister informs us that we really only have him for one hour.

Is there a point of order, Mr. Harris?

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): It's just a small procedural point, Mr. Chairman. The other day we had a document that was not in both languages. We now have the translation available for the committee, so I'll table it for the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go ahead and allow the minister some time for his opening remarks, and then as usual at this committee we'll begin with questions and comments from the official opposition.

We welcome you to the committee, Minister, and look forward to the comments you have for us.

Thank you. Go ahead.

[Translation]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is a pleasure for me to appear before you for the first time as Minister of Public Safety. I am pleased to assist the committee in examining the supplementary estimates (B). My portfolio is in that perspective. I would like to underscore some of my priorities.

With me today are four senior officials under my responsibility.

[English]

In most portfolios, I wouldn't think that after three months you were still new, but this portfolio is of such a size that I consider I am still very new and on a steep learning curve, and I thought it necessary to bring lots of help.

Today I have with me Mario Dion from the National Parole Board; Don Head from Correctional Service Canada; Stephen Rigby from the Canada Border Services Agency; Myles Kirvan, who tells me he's my associate deputy minister—I'm not big on titles—;

William Elliott, who is the Commissioner of the RCMP; and Jim Judd from CSIS. Hopefully, they will be able to answer the many questions that are beyond my scope and reach.

The estimates that are before the committee seek funds of \$156.9 million for the current fiscal year, subject to Parliament's approval. The government would put those taxpayers' dollars to good use by helping keep our communities safe for all Canadians. Specifically, we would make important investments in the Government of Canada's national crime prevention strategy, improve Public Safety Canada's emergency management capacity, continue the transformation of the corrections system, and invest in tools that the RCMP needs to fight crime.

[Translation]

Since my appointment last October, I have visited public safety facilities across the country and have met the Canadians whom we serve, as well as our partners. I have spoken with my colleagues from the provinces and territories, my foreign counterparts, and stakeholders and police departments.

[English]

I formed a strong sense of where the government must direct its efforts in the public safety sphere. Let me highlight a few of the government's priorities.

As you know, a secure and efficient border is a key element of Canada's prosperity. That's why we will work to keep the border open to legitimate trade and travel with the United States. In the first days of this session, the government introduced new public safety legislation in the Senate, Bill S-2, amendments to the Customs Act. These amendments contain measures to enhance security and to meet our obligations to our trading partners. I welcome your future review of this legislation once it has passed the other place and comes over to our side.

On the policing front, the Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that the RCMP is an effective and accountable national institution. The interim report of the RCMP Reform Implementation Council concluded that reforming the RCMP is well underway and is headed in the right direction. I'm looking forward to receiving the final report of the council in the coming weeks and to pursuing our efforts in this area.

[Translation]

We have made a commitment to reform the system for reviewing and handling complaints at the RCMP. We have made policy statements to the principal stakeholders and to the provinces and territories that employ the RCMP as a police department. Once those statements have been reviewed, I hope to table a bill in the current Parliament.

• (1605)

[English]

We are also committed to corrections reform. Our government has clearly stated that the penitentiary system does not work as well as it should. We need to implement measures to further improve offender accountability. We also need to continue to put policies and programs in place that will give offenders the tools they need to rejoin society as productive citizens.

Budget 2008 included significant investments to help transform Canada's correctional system, and those efforts will continue, with changes to programming and legislation. Law enforcement officials are constantly being challenged by the growing threats of high-tech crimes. Internet fraud and online sexual exploitation of children are a scourge on Canadian society. We are exploring measures to ensure that the right law enforcement tools are in place to fight the growing sophistication of serious and organized crime. This type of crime increasingly utilizes information technology and outstrips our antiquated legal frameworks, which were designed for the era of the rotary telephone.

[Translation]

It intends to defend this objective through a statement on national security, which I hope to present at the appropriate time.

Lastly, I want to ensure you that we are firmly resolved to combat terrorism, as we promised in our 2008 election platform. We will be introducing a bill that will enable Canadians affected by terrorist acts to bring legal action against those who sponsor terrorist organizations—in other words, to obtain compensation from designated states.

[English]

Members of Parliament and senators introduced similar legislation as private members' bills in the last Parliament. I can assure the committee that public safety remains a core government priority. Tackling crime and ensuring safer communities are commitments we made to Canadians during the last election campaign in the autumn. While the global economic picture has deteriorated since then, one thing remains: security and prosperity go hand and hand and one cannot flourish without the other.

I'm proud to be entrusted with my responsibilities. And I'm especially proud of the achievements of the 60,000 public safety portfolio employees who work hard every day in Canada and abroad to keep Canadians safe. It's the second-largest department in the government by size. It contains capable and professional people in a broad range of areas, and they enjoy a high level of cooperation between them on all the important issues of the day. I appreciate the tremendous support I have received throughout the department, in

particular from the senior staff of the agencies that make up the core of the department's responsibilities.

I thank you for having invited me to appear before you today, and I welcome the committee's questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I want to thank you especially for being able to come here on such short notice, 24 hours. You were also able to line up an esteemed, elite group of witnesses to appear with you. That's quite impressive, in my estimation.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Thank you.

The Chair: We are going to move to Mr. Holland, with the official opposition, for his first comments and questions.

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

Thank you, Minister, and the department officials, for making time to be with us today.

Minister, I wanted to start with something that's become commonplace. We have an enormous amount of fanfare—cheque signings, photo ops—on announcements of different programs. Yet when it comes to delivering the dollars and the programs, there isn't follow-through. Certainly we've seen that happen with infrastructure, and now we're seeing it with crime prevention.

I want to start with a simple direct question. The department had set out for 2007-08 a budget of \$43 million for crime prevention, yet it spent only about half of that, \$19.3 million. Can you give me an explanation of what happened?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I think it comes down to the key words you pointed to in your question: “results” and “follow-through”. In the past, what we felt was happening with the national crime prevention strategy programs was that they were hampered for two reasons: first, they were often short-term projects, single-year, and it was difficult to sustain an effort; second, the results were not measurable. The programs have been refocused. The grants and contributions are being adjusted so as to achieve a couple of things. They are more likely to be multi-year programs, and they are designed to achieve measurable results. These results are important. We need to know if we are making a difference, and if the things we want to see happening are actually taking place.

There has also been a focus on groups at risk. As a result, anti-crime funding is being targeted, for example, at young people, from children to people in their mid-20s. Actually, I think 24 is our high end. So we're looking at folks who might be at risk of going into a life of crime, into gang life. We want interventions at an early stage to divert them from that. Another key target group is offenders who are no longer under supervision in the community.

• (1610)

Mr. Mark Holland: Minister, here's the problem I'm having. The government is not in its first week; you're in your third year. There was a budget announced for crime prevention, something we all agree is exceptionally important. We're seeing less than half of that funding actually given out to a lot of these groups.

The problem I have with what you have said is that your department has still not developed any way to measure these results. So we have a year that's gone by where less than half of the funding was actually provided, where the criteria are not developed, and where the system of results has not been announced.

I used to be a chair of something called the youth partnership initiative, and one of the things I know is that it's these tiny organizations—which are sometimes very hard to get empirical results out of—which make the biggest difference on the ground. Frankly, I have grave concern watching their funding being cut and shoved aside, especially mid-year, when there isn't anything that's been put in place.

My first question is, when are you going to at least show us how your department is going to measure these results?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: First, I think you're jumping the gun a little bit to say that the results aren't measurable. We haven't seen results. The refocusing of the program only commenced in June 2008; that's when Treasury Board dealt with it. So I think to be looking for results from a program where we're only now under the revamped program—

Mr. Mark Holland: Then why cut the funding in half?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: The funding has not been cut. The funding is available, but it is a function of people making applications that match the criteria we're seeking to fulfill.

There were a lot of things funded that, frankly, were not meeting those objectives, or thought to be sufficiently focused to meet those objectives. That's why we set out clear criteria in a refocused program. We think this will give us the opportunity—

Mr. Mark Holland: Give me an example.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Well, I was giving you an example already. We focused on young offenders.

Mr. Mark Holland: No, but can you give me a concrete example of something you felt wasn't getting results, didn't deserve its funding and therefore you withheld funding?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I'm not going to pick on any individual program—

Mr. Mark Holland: Can you give me a single program that was ineffective and which you withheld funding from?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I'll go back to the things we are focusing on.

Mr. Mark Holland: So the answer is no?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: We are focusing on young people ages six through to 24. We're focusing on offenders who have been released into the community and are no longer under supervision. We think that's another area where we can make significant progress. As well—

Mr. Mark Holland: Minister, I only have two minutes.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: You asked the question.

Mr. Mark Holland: I have a way to answer it, because you're not giving me any specifics.

Could you provide to this committee the projects that did not receive funding and didn't meet these criteria specifically? If you

could undertake to provide that to committee, it would be very helpful and would help to answer the question I asked.

But I only have two minutes, and I want to talk about another issue dealing with crime prevention. This has to do with a signed contract that was entered into with the RCMP, when the Prime Minister went to Vancouver and made a public speech and a commitment that he would ensure that RCMP officers would receive wage parity with other police.

Minister, that commitment, that trust, has been broken. What we're seeing now is that the RCMP, those front-line officers, are now facing huge recruitment challenges, because they don't even have the same pay as other police. Frankly, they feel that a trust has been lost, because the word of the Prime Minister and the word of a signed contract has been broken.

So my question to you as the public safety minister is what is your position on that and what are you doing about it?

The Chair: That will probably be your final question.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: First, we've done a number of things for the RCMP in terms of their compensation structure to assist them a great deal. At the intake level, we've introduced cadet pay, something that wasn't there before and that will be very important to assist recruitment. We've brought in performance pay and some adjustment to bring them up to their current level.

The only area that I think is in any contention right now, or on which there is any controversy, is the question of the pay increases being restricted to 1.5% for the next few years. This, of course, is not a policy that's directed at the RCMP. This is a government-wide policy—which you just voted for in the last budget. This is something that I think all parliamentarians understand is necessary at this time of fiscal and economic challenges facing our country. I think the RCMP, like all other public servants and public officials, recognize that Canadians are looking to us to show some leadership and to exercise some discipline at a time when, as we know, many Canadians are losing their jobs and facing very real challenges.

In an ideal world, we wouldn't have to do it for anybody who is on the public payroll—

• (1615)

Mr. Mark Holland: It shouldn't have to be an ideal world to keep your word, but I'll leave it at that.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Right now, in the global economic times we are living, it means that in all cases across the board, the government has instituted this policy, which has been supported, as I said, by the majority in the House of Commons.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We'll now go over to the Bloc Québécois. Monsieur Ménard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Thank you, Minister. First, I would like to join with the Chairman in thanking you for making yourself available at such short notice. In very little time, you have virtually done the complete rounds of your department.

First, I would like to draw your attention to an event that Canada will be proud to hold next year. I'm talking about the Vancouver Winter Olympic Games. Of course, an event of this size in the world today entails considerable security measures.

You realize that, if all goes well on the security front, no one will think of you. However, if something goes wrong and not everything has been done, then I wouldn't want to be in your position.

Do you believe that the \$175 million security budget for the Winter Olympic Games is enough, or do you think it should be increased?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: The \$175-million figure was never generated by the government; it was actually generated by the bid committee. It was their assessment—and I guess the province was part of it—of what the cost would be. It has never been endorsed by the federal government, as I understand it.

The federal government is the lead on security. We have an integrated security unit led by the RCMP out of British Columbia, which has been doing the Olympic preparation. It has assessed what the real needs are and developed what I think is an actual security plan to meet those needs, which, as you say, are a challenge in this day and age.

The budget that is being developed reflects those very real needs. It will be significantly higher than the \$175-million figure that was in the bid book. We're still in the process of negotiations with the province to come up with the final arrangements. We will have details when an announcement is ready. But you can rest assured that the figure will be significantly higher than \$175 million. There will be a sharing arrangement between the province and the federal government for that.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Under the current arrangement, the province would share the bill equally with the federal government. When that amount has to be increased, will the same arrangement stand?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: We will see what the arrangement is when we have an agreement. Right now there is no agreement, so it wouldn't be appropriate for me to predict what it will be.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: You've already conducted a complete tour of Canada's correctional facilities. We hear a lot of rumours. A number of members, their parties' critics in this field, are looking for confirmation or denial of rumours to the effect that, for example, a new penitentiary is being built in Brossard—La Prairie, that the La Macaza facility is being expanded, that the Cowansville facility is as well or that there are going to be new facilities.

Can you confirm or deny those rumours? In general, do you think Canada's correctional facilities are adequate to hold the prisoners who will be sent there in the coming years?

•(1620)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I believe the committee members are familiar with the transformation report prepared by Rob Sampson for Corrections Canada. It laid out a plan that has largely been embraced by my predecessor for the long-term transformation of the corrections system.

One of the elements of it was a move toward some of these regional facilities. At this time a decision hasn't been taken on the construction of new facilities and closures of existing facilities. That's all very premature, and in the current environment you can understand why that's not imminent this week.

We have been moving on the other aspects of the transformation agenda, particularly things to do with programming, to change some of the programs available in the penitentiaries to better meet the needs of prisoners. I found it intriguing that when prisoners were in the intake process, for the first 90 days or so there was no programming for them during that assessment period. With the changing profile of prisoners, I think that was a real gap. That is an area we are moving on right now, so there will be some programming during that assessment period.

It's also important because of the way sentences are being delivered differently, with credit for time served before people get sentenced. A lot of the stays in penitentiaries are shorter than they would have been in the past, and to lose that 90-day period for programming just doesn't make sense. So that is an example of one of the elements of the transformation plan.

There are others that are being moved on, but at this point, in terms of the actual regional structures, the physical buildings and so on, we've provided some integrity money for improvements where necessary to keep things moving, but there haven't been any decisions taken on closures, new construction, or anything like at this point.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: I'm going to turn to another topic raised by the CBC, which has observed that the Canada Border Services Agency has no emergency plan in the event of a terrorist attack. I don't know whether you are aware of that information or whether you can confirm or deny it. If that is the case, can you make a commitment that that deficiency will be corrected? What will be the time frame?

[English]

The Chair: You have 45 seconds left.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: First of all, the Border Services Agency actually plays an important role in trying to prevent terrorist attacks, and we have provided them with additional resources to assist them in doing that in terms of detection technology resources and so on.

In terms of overall management for a particular terrorist event, obviously different terrorist events, different circumstances, require different plans and different responses. I'm not entirely clear what it is you're driving at in the question. From an overall perspective, the government is obviously very active on the front, whether it be CSIS in terms of monitoring the RCMP through the integrated security units, which also link with other public agencies.... The integrated security teams are very important for that kind of response and are already actively involved. For example, in northern Alberta, where we have these pipeline bombings occurring, we have again the integrated security enforcement team involved in that situation.

So there are resources, there are plans. Each response to each situation is different. We can see right now, as we're speaking, exercises underway in British Columbia, in Olympic preparations.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: At Border Services?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Does the Border Service Agency want to comment on the extent to which you are involved?

Mr. Stephen Rigby (President, President's Office, Canada Border Services Agency): Yes, we are involved in all of the exercises that are proceeding right now with regard to Olympic preparation.

I can also indicate, Monsieur Ménard, that we have recently completed business continuity plans for all of our ports and headquarters locations and we will be responding completely to the issue that you just raised.

The Chair: Maybe we can explore that later.

Mr. Harris, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Minister, welcome to the committee. Thank you for coming on such short notice.

Mr. Holland raised the issue with respect to the RCMP with respect to recruitment. This is not a unique problem to the RCMP. Other police forces have the same issue of retention of particularly senior officers who may be able to retire but it would be very good for the force, whether it's the RCMP or otherwise, to keep these people around because of their experience and what they can provide by way of mentoring to younger officers, etc.

One of the concerns and complaints about the fact that the increases that were negotiated with Treasury Board and put on the books last June and put in place were in part going to allow RCMP senior officers to stay, encourage them to stay for another few years, rather than giving them an incentive to leave. That's a concern there. Is the minister not concerned about this issue of retention, particularly of senior officers? And why would the government not treat them differently?

•(1625)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Naturally we are very concerned. I think you have put your finger on one of the important issues and challenges facing the RCMP on the human resources front.

I continue to discuss approaches with the commissioner that can be adopted and ways of working and succeeding on the retention front. There are different reasons for why that happens. In some cases pension structures and so on create advantageous situations for people to leave earlier than we might otherwise like them to. Some people see better opportunities elsewhere. We have to make sure we're competitive on that front. I think we've come some distance to close those gaps. A career in the RCMP is very attractive as an option, and we've seen recruitment, for example, increasing as a result of that. But this is an area that still needs more attention and we're continuing to focus on that.

In terms of the issue of the pay increase being kept at 1.5% for each of the next few years, I think in the circumstances that we have in the general economy at large a lot of people are pretty happy with a job that they can be in and have a 1.5% increase every year. I think the people who are serving the public understand why that kind of discipline measure is required right now. If we compare it, for example, with what we saw in Ontario with the "Rae Days" in the early 1990s—that's a solution that was obviously far more deleterious on people's lifestyles—the capping of an increase at 1.5% is a modest across-the-government measure that will assist us in ensuring we have the resources we need to meet the other challenges in the economy today.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Minister—although I have to say, the police officers in particular regard this as a breach of faith after going through the process of raising these concerns and thinking they had some solutions worked out with the department.

On another point, your department has a line on page 189 of in the supplementary estimates concerning funding for initiatives in support of the five security and prosperity partnership priorities announced by North American leaders at the 2007 summit in Montebello. The item total is \$1.142 million. Could you elaborate on that for the committee in terms of an explanation of what those priorities are and what the money might be going for?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: The security and prosperity partnership five priorities relate to a number of areas. There is only one in particular, I believe, that relates specifically to the public safety aspect of it, and it is essentially working towards ensuring adequate border security while facilitating further trade. The focus is on further initiatives for accelerated processing at the borders.

As to the specific line item in the estimates, perhaps Mr. Rigby might be able to help me out with that in terms of automation. I don't know if it's for FAST, or NEXUS, or what the elements of it are.

Commissioner William Elliott (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): I think that relates to the RCMP. I believe that line relates to security for the leaders meeting.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's related to the current leaders meeting that's coming up?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: The question, as I understood it, concerned the five priorities that are the focus of efforts for the security and prosperity partnership. That would not be one of them, obviously, though having a secure summit is clearly a priority.

Commr William Elliott: That's where the money is going.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: That particular line is simply the backfill funding, after-the-fact funding for the security at the Montebello summit.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: The way these arrangements work—and we're going to have one for the visit of President Obama later this month—there's a standard practice arrangement with the local police forces, and so on, whose resources we call on. After the fact, you tally up all the hours and figure out how much was spent, and then you reimburse them for the security costs, the extraordinary security costs that are a result of the event. In the case of the President's visit, we will have that same sort of situation, certainly with the Ottawa Police, and I expect with the OPP as well.

•(1630)

Mr. Jack Harris: On the corrections side, there's a long outstanding need recognized in my province, Newfoundland and Labrador, for increased facilities, particularly a federal corrections facility in our province, which doesn't exist, although there's cooperation on many levels with the federal government. Your predecessor visited the province not too long ago, and the conditions that the Newfoundland and Labrador justice minister referred to as appalling and backward, in a facility that is over a hundred years old, were quite deplorable. Your predecessor left the impression and practically said, well, the conditions may be terrible, but that is an additional deterrent to people committing crimes, so that they don't have to go to facilities like that.

I hope that's not the attitude and approach that you will be taking to the need for correctional facilities across the country.

Will your ministry, under your watch, look more closely at this issue with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador? Its plans have been on the go for a long time. The Minister of Justice in Newfoundland has spoken out recently of it being a top priority for them. Could you comment on that?

The Chair: A short answer, please. We are short of time.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I think I answered earlier about the physical aspects of the transformation exercise. We are not at the point of decisions being made. That may be coming in the future, but that's not imminent.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired.

We'll now go over to the government side.

Mr. Richards, you're first, and I believe you might be sharing your time with Mr. McColeman.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I will be sharing my time with Mr. McColeman.

Thank you to the minister for making the time to be here to address the committee today. I'm just going to assure you that, unlike Mr. Holland, I will show respect and common courtesy and allow you to actually answer the question once I've asked it.

I'm going to ask you today about drugs and prisons.

There are a couple of prisons just outside the boundaries of my riding and a prison that's actually located just a couple of miles from the farm where I grew up. I've spent some time recently, since I was

elected, touring some of the prisons in Alberta and certainly have seen the impact drugs have in our prisons. Really, in my view, gangs are the primary forces behind both violence and drug use, not only on our streets, but also within our country's prisons. The drugs there are prevalent, and they're a source of power, a source of influence, and a source of revenue for the gangs.

I spoke in the House about a program that was announced by your predecessor to eliminate drugs in prisons. This is certainly a laudable goal, and I think one that is long overdue.

Minister, can you tell me how the money is being spent and what changes Correctional Service of Canada is implementing as part of this anti-drug strategy in our prisons?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Sure.

One of the first observations I want to make, and I guess it's a little bit off the side but it's related to your question, is this. About 80% of the folks we have in prison actually have substance abuse problems. There's another big chunk that have mental health problems. A lot of them are interrelated. A lot of these people would not be in prisons if we had adequate health responses in the community, whether they be mental health or otherwise, but I guess that's not the case right now, and we have to deal with them at that level. Also, I think it gives the lie to those who say drugs are not a problem in the community, because obviously if you have 80% of your people with substance abuse problems in prison, there's clearly a link between substance abuse and criminal activity that's far higher than.... You don't have 80% of the general population with substance abuse problems, so there's clearly a link there. That's something we should be concerned with. We have problems with illicit drugs in prisons. That has been something that was identified in the transformation study by Mr. Sampson.

Correctional Service has been moving, with the support of our national drug strategy, to implement new instruments to help them control that. We have X-ray machines, ion scanners, itemizers, and increased use of drug dogs, and a tip line was established. All these things are helping. I know from my correspondence that people actually are complaining about the ion scanners detecting drugs on their clothes. They say they didn't have drugs with them, but the way these things work is that, if you've been in contact with drugs in the past couple of days, the ion scanners will pick them up. So clearly they're working.

It's like fighting crime. Will we ever solve the problem entirely? That's something to be hoped for. But any improvement will certainly help make the prisons safer for the staff who work there, which is important, and also I think improves the prospects for rehabilitation and recovery, because if you get the drugs out of prisons, you change a bit of that cycle of substance abuse and you also take away some of that underground activity that takes place within a prison, which perpetuates criminal associations, gang activity, and the like. So for that reason it is an important priority, and we hope to see results over time. This is still just beginning to be rolled out. Technology is still being introduced in prisons, and we hope it will make a big difference.

There's another side to it as well, which we're also addressing through the transformation exercise. Again, it is that issue of treatment and improving the treatment we're giving to those who are in the prisons. Where there is a big gap, I think, is actually where they're released into the community. That's where we really need to provide a lot more support.

• (1635)

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks, Mr. Minister.

Certainly I know, from talking to the guards in our prisons, they're very appreciative of the changes that have been made. I know they feel it's making a big difference. So thank you for that; thank you for the actions you've taken.

I'll defer my time now to Mr. McColeman.

The Chair: There's about two and a half minutes left.

Go ahead, Mr. McColeman.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Thank you, Minister, for coming on such short notice and bringing the heads of the various agencies that keep our country safe. It's very impressive on very short notice.

My question has to do with something our committee has put on our agenda for study and action, and that would be the Internet and cybercrime. As we know, the Internet can be a dangerous place. More and more children have access to the Internet, and opportunities for predators to exploit these children increase as well. This is a very serious issue and one that needs to be addressed by our government.

Minister, I saw that earlier this week you made an announcement for a program to protect children from being exploited. Actually, I had the opportunity to make a statement in the House on that. Can you please tell me the specifics of the program you announced yesterday, as well as any other measures you have put in place to both protect children and to find those who use the Internet for evil?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Our government launched a national strategy for the protection of children from sexual exploitation on the Internet. One of the announcements I made yesterday is the renewal of that strategy. There will now be \$71 million to fund activities in this area; it was initially \$30 million.

The bulk of it is through our partner, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, in Winnipeg. I encourage all members of the committee to visit the facility they've established in Winnipeg. That's where the cybertips hotline operates, known as cybertip.ca or cyberaide.ca. It's a wonderful group of people who are very committed to their work. Their work has resulted in 43 arrests so far; I think in two cases, children were removed from abusive situations.

That organization is part of the announcement yesterday. They've launched the "Respect Yourself" campaign, which is going to put a booklet about Internet safety practices into the hands of every child in grade 7 in Canada. It basically cautions them against inappropriate photos and so on being communicated over the Internet, and encourages them to protect themselves and to be savvy against those kinds of risks. I would encourage all committee members to hook up with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection to see the good work

they're doing. We're happy to be funding them. I think their work is excellent.

It's one of these areas where technology is changing and we have to keep pace with it. Governments are often slow to keep pace with it, which is why you often end up with partners out in the community that do a better job of it. This is a case where we've partnered up very well. The RCMP's involved in a big way and we have a lot of success stories all around. Actually, Canada has a very good record on it with some of our municipal police forces, as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kania.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to pick up on something Mr. Richards stated, which is he'd prefer if we don't interrupt you and show you due respect. Most of my questions are capable of yes or no answers, so if you would answer in that manner, please, I won't have to interrupt you. I only have five minutes.

You listed three priorities in your opening statement. The first priority you listed was border security, correct?

• (1640)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: That's a priority, yes. I can't remember if it was the first one. It's a skill-testing question.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Now, you're aware of the fact that on January 30, 2009, Janet Napolitano, the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, ordered an immediate review of U.S. vulnerabilities along our border with the U.S. Isn't that correct?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I would characterize it a little bit differently than that. She asked for a series of reports on a range of issues that are important to her. She's very, very familiar with the southern border; she was Governor of Arizona. So she asked for a review of issues related to the northern border, including vulnerabilities. I know some have torqued that in the media in a much more negative way; I'm not sure I agree with that characterization. I think she is doing what any responsible new homeland secretary would do, which is gathering the information she needs to do her job right. In talking about it with her—and I have talked with her—she hasn't expressed any particular concerns that there are undue threats here. I look forward to meeting with her in person in the near future to carry that forward.

I can tell you that I will be making clear to her that Canada does have a very, very good record on border security, a very good record on combatting terrorism, and that we've been working very well with American Homeland Security and other agencies.

Mr. Andrew Kania: My understanding is that she made a comment that our border is more dangerous or vulnerable than the U.S.-Mexican border. Is that not accurate?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: If you could actually show me that comment, I would appreciate it. I've seen journalists saying it. I actually had my office trace these comments, and it seems one journalist picked up on the request for a report and then ramped it up a little bit, and then another journalist picked up on what that journalist said and ramped it up a little bit, and that's where it seems to have gone. I have not actually seen any suggestion that she has said that.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Okay. Are you aware that she's releasing a report on February 17, 2009?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I understand that it's coming soon, yes.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Have you spoken with her since January 30, 2009?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I believe our conversation was after that, yes.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Are you certain?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I am not certain, but I'm pretty sure.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Okay, will you undertake to advise the committee as to the date of your conversation with her, how long it lasted, and what was advised?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Well, I'll tell you that it was reasonably short. We discussed trade issues, border issues, and the importance of the relationship. We discussed a little bit of her history as Arizona governor. We discussed—

Mr. Andrew Kania: The first question is will you undertake to advise us of the date you spoke with her?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Yes, I'll give you the date, but I'm also giving you what I can answer right now. You wanted to know what the content of the conversation was, and I'm telling you right now.

We discussed her past visit up here. She'd met with the Prime Minister when she was governor and she did a tour on these kinds of issues. She was in Toronto as well, so we talked about that a little bit. We talked a little bit about her speech at the Democratic national convention, where she said she hoped, as an Arizona governor, that the great tradition of Barry Goldwater would be continued. So we talked about some of these things.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Did you provide any written submissions to her between January 30 and now?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I have not at this point, no, but I've just been passed a note from my very capable chief of staff that says our conversation actually took place on January 30.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Have you provided any written submissions to any members of Congress or senators who might be able to influence the outcome of this report?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I don't think that's the type of report it is. It's a report that's being prepared by Department of Homeland Security staff. It's not a political document being prepared by Congress.

Mr. Andrew Kania: So the Canadian government has not provided any written submissions with respect to this study at all?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I can tell you that our Canadian government agencies are in continual cooperation with the bodies that would be commenting—the American border services people,

their law enforcement people. We work cooperatively; we have integrated border enforcement teams.

Mr. Andrew Kania: The answer to the question—

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Specific to that report, we are not writing the report for the Department of Homeland Security, no.

Mr. Andrew Kania: There have been no written submissions whatsoever from the Canadian government. That's correct?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Not on the Homeland Security report, no.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Is this report on the agenda between Prime Minister Harper and President Obama for his visit, and will it be?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: We will find that agenda when it comes. We haven't seen the report. It hasn't even been prepared yet, so whether or not it will be on the agenda will likely depend on what appears in the report. But certainly the issue of security—

Mr. Andrew Kania: Will you ask that it be put on the agenda?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: —the issue of borders, the issue of trade, will be on the agenda.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Since it comes two days beforehand, will you ask for it to go on the agenda?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: We'll see what it is. Certainly the subject matters—borders, security, our relationship with the United States, trade—will all be on the agenda.

•(1645)

Mr. Andrew Kania: Will you ask for this—

The Chair: We'll have to move over to the Bloc Québécois now.

Ms. Mourani, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, Minister, and thank you for being here.

Thanks to all of you, gentlemen, for being here.

I would like to talk to you about Canada's Correctional Service. There was a report, of which I'm sure you are aware, published in October 2007, that provided a bit of a snapshot of the Correctional Service. The Correctional Service acknowledged, in a way, that there was an increase in the number of street gang members being held in federal penitentiaries, which is logical in view of the large numbers of arrests and sentences.

I also have information to the effect that there is only one super maximum security penitentiary in Canada and that, of course, it is in Quebec, and that there are no maximum security institutions in certain provinces. So when an inmate who is a member of a street gang commits violent acts at a penitentiary, you know his security rating increases. If that person has a medium security classification, for example, and he attacks another inmate or staff member, his security classification can therefore be increased to “maximum” or “super maximum”, depending whether or not there has been a homicide. So these street gang members can be transferred to other penitentiaries whose security classification becomes their own. However, there are no “maximum” or “super maximum” institutions in certain provinces. Members of street gangs are therefore transferred between provinces or between penitentiaries.

I don't think that's a very effective measure in the fight against street gangs because all it does is enable dangerous men to contact other members in other provinces and, thus, to expand their network across Canada.

The interprovincial transfer of inmates involving solely—and I mean solely—the members of street gangs or organized crime members is becoming a way for these individuals to create networks and links with other provinces and other members of gangs or organized crime belonging to other provinces in other penitentiaries.

First, have you taken an interest in this phenomenon? Second, since you are somewhat reworking the penitentiary system, will that be one of the considerations in managing members of street gangs at Canadian penitentiaries?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: The problem of gangs is a very real one. It's not just in prisons. Obviously, in the community crime is increasingly coming from street gangs. By the estimates of the Correctional Service of Canada, close to 10% of the prisoners in our prisons have gang affiliations, almost all of which they had before they entered prison.

So with regard to the issue of transfers and the impact of transfers on our national anti-gang strategy, I'm going to ask Mr. Head if he has any comment.

Mr. Don Head (Commissioner, Correctional Service Canada): Thank you, Minister.

I'll address the issue you raised about the special handling unit, which is our most secure facility. We use that facility to hold the most dangerous individuals within the system, and we currently have a capacity for about 90 of those types of individuals. On any given day we have between 65 and 75 individuals held at the special handling unit.

We have been looking at whether there is a need to create a second special handling unit in the country, probably out towards western Canada—this one is located in the Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines complex—to see whether that will give us the ability to manage some of the most dangerous individuals who are involved in organized crime or severe violence within the institutions. Normally, though, what happens is that we try to manage the gang members in the same province. We're well aware of the issues of transporting the issues or

concerns associated with one gang that is moving into the territory of another or trying to establish a territory that didn't exist before.

Sometimes we're not able to do this—you're absolutely right—and we have to move them between institutions or between regions. We have five regions. That's how the country is divided up in our organization. We have the ability in each medium- and maximum-security institution to hold problematic inmates in what's called segregation units, so we're able to take them out of circulation if they are causing problems. But if we get a large influx or a large number of individuals who are causing problems, then we have to look at moving them across the country.

On the flip side, in the case of one of the challenges we have right now, we're starting to see some gains from the activities we're undertaking to get offenders to disaffiliate from gangs and then safely place them somewhere so that they are not continually influenced by existing gang members.

As for the latter part of the question, as we go forward we are assessing what our needs and capacities are for placement and for programs and interventions and, just as important, what to do as these individuals move back out into the community. Even though we can contain them for a period of time, we're concerned about what happens once they go back out under community supervision or reach their warranted expiry. We're taking all of that into account as part of the revised anti-gang strategy we're pursuing within the organization.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go over to Mr. MacKenzie now, please.

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

Minister, my colleague across the table indicated that we had made a number of announcements, and he was concerned about the effect of those announcements.

In one of the announcements, I recall that what the Prime Minister committed was an additional 1,000 members to the RCMP. But another announcement we made was of a stipend for recruits at the RCMP college, which had been eliminated some time previously. My understanding is that when recruits went to the RCMP academy, they weren't paid. I believe sometime last year an arrangement was made to see that they received moneys while they were there in training. I think this has been standard. I certainly saw it, as I think many others did, as an opportunity to aid recruitment.

Do you know or can you tell me how we've made out with respect to adding these 1,000 people? How many additional people have joined the RCMP since that time?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I'll ask the commissioner whether he has anything to add at the end of this.

The recruitment campaign by the RCMP has been very vigorous and active. They have been out in the community with their "We're hiring" campaign, with all kinds of different approaches to raise profile and attract people. It has been meeting with success. From 2005-06 to fiscal year 2007-08 there was a net increase of more than 1,500 RCMP officers, and that continues to grow. Recruitment is going very well. There are strong classes of cadets going through. Obviously, the more than 1,500 well exceeds the 1,000 recruits that was our commitment. We still have more to do, of course, to meet all our targets and keep the force strong and continually deal with the ongoing attrition and retirement, but I think progress is going very well.

In total, approximately 1,900 recruits are going to be enrolled in the training academy for 2009-10. That's a pretty good result, which is in part related to that marketing campaign, in part related to the benefit of the cadet pay that is in place.

Do you want to add anything, Commissioner?

Commr William Elliott: Yes, perhaps with respect to graduates. The minister spoke about enrolment. We will graduate this fiscal year, the year ending March 31, 2009, just over 1,400 new police officers.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Does that give an added number to where we were, additional to the past?

Commr William Elliott: Yes, we anticipate that by the end of this fiscal year there will be attrition, members leaving the force, of just over 700, so we will add double that number to our ranks.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Okay. I appreciate that. That the announcement was made and the results were obtained is what's important, I think.

I did see something on television, which is not necessarily the best way to judge, showing that in British Columbia you had a recruitment day. There was a hall booked. I don't know whether you saw it or heard from your people, but my understanding, from what I saw and heard, was that the hall was full of people looking to join the RCMP.

• (1655)

Commr William Elliott: I guess the good news is that we have so many recruiting events across the country on an ongoing basis that I'm not familiar with that specific event, but I have heard similar reports. There was an event last week in Fort McMurray. Normally we might have half a dozen or ten people there, and we had more like 70.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Obviously there's not an issue at this point with recruitment.

Commr William Elliott: Not at the moment, no. People are applying in record numbers and we are enrolling people in record numbers.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you.

The Chair: Are you sharing your time with Mr. Stanton?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): How much time is left?

The Chair: One minute.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Very quickly, Minister, one of the things that I know Canada has been working very closely on is the western hemisphere travel initiative. I wonder if you could update us on what progress is being made there, especially in light of the importance of travel as well as business between Canadians and our counterparts to the south.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Yes. The objective for us on the western hemisphere travel initiative was to get as many people as possible ramped up with the travel-compliant documents by June 1 of this year, which is the new projected date for implementation.

There has been very strong success. We have 16,811,551 people with passports as of December 31, 2008. We have 187,000 with NEXUS cards, 65,000 with FAST identification, and then there are enhanced drivers licences, the new thing with the provinces that have done it. There's a very small number so far, only 521, but still, that's pretty much on target for where we wanted to be at this point. We're in very good shape in terms of meeting our targets.

There's another statistic that I think is significant and which also will be of particular interest when I chat with the homeland secretary from the United States. It has to do with how many people crossing the border right now have travel-compliant documents. I believe the number for us is that 79% of our travellers already have it. We have still a bit of a gap there, but for the Americans coming across, it's 76%.

So right now, looking at the progress, ourselves against the Americans, the western hemisphere travel initiative is their initiative, and we're doing a marginally better job of already having our travellers with travel-compliant documents to meet those needs. It's not necessarily a good thing that they aren't as far on as we would like them to be, but it is a point to make that we've been working very hard and very vigorously to meet the objectives of that program to make it work. I think that shows strong good faith on our part. It's obviously good for our travellers and for Canadians and it's a demonstration for the Americans.

The Chair: The minute is up, so we'll have to go to Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations, Minister, on your appointment. I'm hoping it slows down your ten percenters that come into my riding.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I have long had an affection for that riding.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: You're going to be too busy for that, I'm sure.

My question, I hope, ties together a couple of the topics we've had tonight: corrections and crime prevention.

Mr. Head might remember my interest in corrections from my days in Whitehorse, when we shared our time there. I was an advocate and a chaplain in the jail there, the territorial facility.

We know there's a disproportionate number of first nations people serving time in our jails. Some of that is systemic. Some of that is circumstantial. There are many, many studies on this.

My concern is that the crime prevention activity being undertaken by your department does not efficiently or effectively target first nations communities to actually help them. When first nations people arrive in jails, the programs are often not culturally sensitive, and they are not helping them deal with some of their issues while they're there. Nor do they help them prepare to go out into the community.

I think this is a national tragedy. I think all Canadians have to bear a responsibility for this. I'm hoping that you, as a new minister, can begin to look at this in an integrated way. I'm wondering what you plan to do.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I apologize for not having fully answered the question earlier on the national crime prevention strategy, but I was stopped by Mr. Holland from doing that.

I didn't get to the third group, which was aboriginals, who are the focus of those programs, and northern communities. They have become part of the new, restructured, refocused program, as I said: the young and those at risk in terms of gang activity; offenders released into the community; and aboriginal northern communities. Those are sort of the three target areas. So they are, as part of the refocused program instituted in June, one of the targets. Hopefully, we'll be doing a little bit more on the front end.

I was in Vancouver a few weeks ago and made the announcements on the crime prevention strategy there. There are five programs we are funding. I made the announcement at an aboriginal friendship centre. Several of them focus on aboriginals—young people—in that community. They are all focused on young people and on diverting them from gang or criminal activity. That's an example of how we are doing that. They are very good programs. I was impressed with the people involved, with the leadership involved, and I'm optimistic that they will yield real results.

One of the problems with these things is that measurement is a tough thing. But you can actually look at individuals who are involved and see what they do down the road. Do they end up going into lives of crimes? Of course, they are long-term, and they take long-term efforts.

In terms of the corrections facilities themselves, I know that there have been considerable efforts made over time to integrate the presence of elders within, for example, the prison system and at parole board hearings. They are increasing the number of parole board hearings that involve having an elder present. So I know that there are considerable efforts being made on that front. There is more to be done, I expect, but I'll ask if Mr. Dion or Mr. Head have anything they want to add.

● (1700)

Mr. Don Head: I have just a couple of things to quickly add. Over the last couple of years we've received a significant infusion of money into the organization to advance the yard sticks for programming, specifically for offenders of aboriginal ancestry. We've been able to do several things. One has been to increase the number of elders who are coming into the institutions. We've created

what we call aboriginal community development officers. They are actually individuals who are helping to bridge the move from the institution back into the community and helping to position people for success in the future. We've created what we call aboriginal liaison officers who are also working with employers to help find jobs for aboriginal peoples as they move back.

In several institutions across the country we've created what we call pathways units, which are very specific to individuals of aboriginal ancestry and provide them with several opportunities, including cultural, spiritual, and programming, that recognize their ancestry. More specifically to the point that was raised about the north, we're embarking on what we call the creation of the northern corrections strategy, and we're working in concert with the three territories as well as with some of the provinces with respect to their concerns about residents in the northern parts of the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I know of your personal good will on this, and I have great respect for it. I have a concern that with the agenda of the Conservative government, more and more resources will be diverted away from these programs, when they should be increased. Instead, they are going toward minimum mandatory sentences and keeping people in jail for too long, people who maybe shouldn't even be in jail. That is a huge cost to our system. Instead of punishing, we should be rehabilitating, we should be redeveloping, we should be helping, and I'm very concerned about that.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Well—

The Chair: We'll have to wrap it up. Just take half a minute, Mr. Minister. You've actually been here five minutes longer than you committed to.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: I caution Mr. Oliphant about buying into characterizations of our agenda. Look at what it is in particular.

Yes, we believe in serious punishment for serious crime, but the reality of our programs also shows a strong focus on the other side of it, such as crime prevention, which we talked about. You can see the refocused targets. They are exactly the areas you're concerned about. I think that is something Mr. Holland was being critical of earlier. We think it's a good thing, and I think it's consistent with what you're telling us you want to see done. I think you see the same thing in the changes happening in the prison system.

Another area where there is a big concern is mental health. It's an issue of great concern to me, because the reality is that there are a lot of people in those prisons who really shouldn't be there. They should be in health-care facilities, but that option doesn't exist anymore, and we're left to deal with it in a way that isn't really appropriate for a corrections system. As provincial de-institutionalization continued, as community support was not provided, people got into that cycle, and it's very tough to get them out of that cycle. We've seen that accelerate over the years. For each new young cohort that comes in and doesn't have that kind of health-care support and bounces around in and out of the courts before finally ending up doing something more serious and ending up in prison, by the time we get them, a lot of damage has already been caused. It really needs a broader, comprehensive solution that involves other parts of society.

● (1705)

Mr. Robert Oliphant: We'll work with you.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate you coming at such short notice once again.

We're going to suspend for a minute and allow you to excuse yourself, and then we are going till 5:30 with the rest of the witnesses.

Thank you very much, again.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Thank you very much.

- _____ (Pause) _____
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The Chair: I think we'll recommence our meeting.

We now are going over to the Conservative Party. I'm not sure who on this side.... Mr. MacKenzie, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to follow up on a couple of comments from Mr. Oliphant. He made the suggestion that the Conservative Party had done everything wrong and had drained the resources rather than adding to them. I took it there that Mr. Oliphant might want to join this side, because I think we have probably exhibited the kinds of things that Mr. Oliphant himself supports, and which we do equally.

I think it's important that Mr. Head had indicated that in the last couple of years resources and money had been put forward to deal with the aboriginal community, in particular. I think we've all certainly seen in the press the issues dealing with the aboriginal community. I wonder if Mr. Head could expand on what that has meant in that timeframe and what timeframe it has been where the additional resources have been put in.

Mr. Don Head: Most definitely.

Over the last couple of years we've seen an infusion of money, as I mentioned briefly, to help us develop our capacity to deliver programs specifically for aboriginal offenders, both in the institutions and in the community, as well as to help to develop capacities out in aboriginal communities to support offenders coming back. As an example, we hired three more aboriginal community development officers—the number seems relatively low, but for us it's a major step forward, because these individuals do a tremendous amount of work—who work very closely with aboriginal communities across the country to see how certain individuals can come back into those communities and be supported.

We will be receiving in this coming year additional money to expand what we call our Pathways units. We currently have nine Pathways units in our institutions across the country. Obviously it's not enough for the number of aboriginal offenders who are in the system. We currently only have capacity for around 500 or so, and about 17% of our population are individuals of aboriginal ancestry.

With this money, we're anticipating that we're able to double those units, so that will bring us up to about 1,000 beds or capacity within the institutions. Within those units we have elders who are working directly with the offenders.

We're implementing aboriginal-specific programs. For example, we have an aboriginal substance abuse program that builds on the research of non-aboriginal substance abuse programming but it takes into account the cultural and spiritual needs of aboriginal offenders. As you may be aware, our legislation requires that we take that into consideration, and we haven't been able to do that in the past with the funding we had.

On the crime prevention piece, more specifically the victims piece, one of the things that was identified in the report of the review panel that was chaired by Mr. Sampson is the need to do more work, obviously, in terms of supporting victims, but more specifically to start to look at how we can support aboriginal victims. Many of the individuals who come into our system have committed offences against their own family members, community members, and to a large extent there has not been the kind of connection there needs to be in terms of reaching out to those people. So we're making a lot of moves in these different areas.

We still have a long way to go. We've got many years of history to catch up in terms of delivering to aboriginal offenders. We still see that our correctional results, as they relate to non-aboriginal offenders, are not as good as they should be, but we're starting to see some small incremental gains and we're trying to build on the successes that we have.

As was mentioned before, the elder-assisted hearings at the Parole Board hearings definitely has been a significant step in the right direction, in terms of, again, helping aboriginal offenders to reintegrate back into the community safely.

• (1710)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I do appreciate that. It would seem to me that we've only got this started in the last couple of years, you're saying. How long would you see before we start to see very concrete results on the outside? My guess is perhaps you're seeing the results on the inside, but as these people are reintegrated into society, how long will it be before we start to see those beneficial results?

Mr. Don Head: I think some of the long-term results are going to take five to ten years, but what we're seeing, as you pointed out correctly, is some incremental gains on the inside, and some on the outside. So, for example, one of the problems we had before is that, specifically in our prairie region, which covers Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, aboriginal offenders were more likely to be involved in violent incidents within the institutions. For those who are involved in the programs, in the Pathways units, we're seeing a decline in their involvement in violent activities and drug-related activities. So these are the kinds of increments we can build on.

As I said, we're only seeing decimal changes in terms of community successes, but that's a far cry from where we were five years ago. So in a very short period of time, we're starting to see the positive incremental changes, and we can build on those. We have a lot of work to do. As the minister pointed out earlier, many individuals who come into the system come in with a multitude of problems, so just to deal with substance abuse isn't necessarily going to deal with the family violence part, or other issues. We've got a lot of work to do, but we're starting to see some progress.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to have to move on here.

Mr. Holland, you're sharing your time with Mr. Oliphant.

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

I'm going to go to the associate deputy minister, Mr. Kirvan, if I could. There were a number of items and unfortunately time didn't permit me to finish, but there are items I can finish with you very quickly.

Can you tell us how many projects receive funding with respect to the crime prevention program, how many were turned down, and how many projects that had been previously awarded funding lost their funding? That's one.

Secondly, the minister, in response to one of my questions, stated that some sort of results-based matrix has been created. That's new to anything I've ever seen. Could you undertake to provide what exactly that matrix is? What criteria are going to be used on a go-forward basis so we can ensure we don't have a half-unsent budget on an area that's as vital as crime prevention?

Can you also give us a timeline on when you can get back to the committee with that?

• (1715)

Mr. Myles Kirvan (Associate Deputy Minister, Deputy Minister's Office, Department of Public Safety): Thank you.

Evaluation is a key part of the new crime prevention strategy to refocus. It's meant to be more evidence-based to begin with, as opposed to the previous regime, which was crime prevention through social development. This is meant to pull out some lessons from the last number of years, bring forward that evidence, and try to assist on that side.

Mr. Mark Holland: I don't mean to interrupt, and I know Mr. Richards is new to the committee, but we only get a very limited amount of time, and that's why I make interjections, so I can be sure I get questions asked.

We've heard a lot of generalities, but I've heard from a lot of groups that have lost funding that they are on the verge of having to close programs, and they're really doing good work. Can you provide what that matrix is so we can have some clarity, both for those groups that have lost their funding and for me? Then my prior question with respect to those: can I get you to say yes or no to providing us, the committee, with that information and a timeline?

Mr. Myles Kirvan: So it's number of projects accepting—

Mr. Mark Holland: How many projects received funding? How many were turned down? What were the projects? How many projects that had previously been awarded funding lost their funding?

Mr. Myles Kirvan: I will undertake to look into it in terms of the numbers themselves, accepted and not accepted. In terms of what the actual projects were, I will check on that too, just to see in terms of the organizations themselves and whether that would be appropriate for the organizations. I'll check—

Mr. Mark Holland: We'd like at the very least numerically, but certainly by actual list of organizations so we can understand. The minister wouldn't provide us with an example, so we could at least take a look at some of these examples, and they could understand and we could understand why they failed to get funding.

And last is the timeline, and then I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Oliphant. How fast can we get this back?

Mr. Myles Kirvan: I'll try to get back to you as soon as possible.

Mr. Mark Holland: Within a month, is that reasonable?

Mr. Myles Kirvan: Yes.

Mr. Mark Holland: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Changing the topic back to border services, when I talked to Mr. Rigby.... There are two parts to this question. One has to do with the cost and the timeline around arming border agents. Where are you on that? There was a concern at the committee last time that the estimate was as much as a billion dollars in ten years to do that.

The second part is about your procedures and statistics around the use of arms, incident reports. Where are you with that in your procedures? And are there difficulties, as has been indicated, where some border agents didn't even know they were to file reports?

Mr. Stephen Rigby: The total budget for the project is \$781 million over ten years, commencing in 2006. We are on plan and on budget to complete it in 2016. To date, in the period ending with the conclusion of last month, we have armed 717 officers. That puts us pretty much where we had expected to be at this time. We're seeing a good success rate in our training and generally good feedback in how that training is being adopted. We have an 88% to 89% success rate on the training at this time, with good follow-up on the remediation. Generally speaking, I can report that the project is going pretty much as we planned. The plans that we have for the next couple of years are unfolding in a similar fashion.

Since we began the rollout of weapons, there have been 38 incidents of weapons drawn. Each of the incidents has been fully reported. There is a panel convened to review the incident report. Each one of the 38 panels has reached the conclusion that the officers behaved according to the procedures and policies that we have for the drawing of the weapon.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McColeman, I understand you are going to be sharing your time with Mr. Richards.

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

Mr. Head, I would direct my question to you in regard to escorted temporary leaves. In my view, our criminal justice system frequently focuses too much attention on the rights of the criminal. Often, this focus occurs at the expense of the victims and the victims' families. I think the creation of a federal ombudsman for victims was certainly a good first step, an important step to valuing the rights of victims. But I know there's more that needs to be done. My predecessor received a number of calls over the years from families of victims who had read in the newspaper of a criminal being allowed out on an escorted temporary leave. Even though they were registered as victims, they were distraught because they were not given any information about the reason for allowing the prisoner out into the community. I'm wondering if this is something that has been addressed.

•(1720)

Mr. Don Head: It is one of the things that we're currently looking at as part of our transformation agenda. There were a series of recommendations in the independent panel review report that talked about the needs of victims. One of them had to do with providing victims with more information about offenders—their progress, transfers, and temporary absences. We're currently looking at that. There are some restrictions in the way the current Corrections and Conditional Release Act is constructed. We're looking at what changes are possible, and we will be bringing forward proposals to address the recommendations in the review panel report.

Mr. Blake Richards: Are there any other measures being implemented to further respect the victims' rights and the rights of their families?

Mr. Don Head: Mr. Dion can probably talk a bit about this as well, because we both have resources to provide services to victims. We received money a year or so ago to put in place 30 victim services unit officers. We have been working hand in hand with the National Parole Board in providing services to the victims. We currently have 5,500 victims registered with us. Since the inception, we're running about 32,000 contacts with those victims and providing them with about 40,000 pieces of information.

Mr. Blake Richards: At this time, I'll defer to Mr. McColeman.

Mr. Phil McColeman: My question is directed to Mr. Rigby. I would like to follow up on the documentation requirements at border crossings. It was quite impressive to hear the minister say that 60 million Canadians now have the necessary passports. I'm interested specifically in the NEXUS program, and I'm wondering how that's being rolled out to get more Canadians involved. I have some personal experience there with my family. I think it's an excellent program going forward. Could you comment on that?

Mr. Stephen Rigby: Certainly. We have had a number of advertising campaigns promoting the use of NEXUS, and we hope to have some more over the next year. At the same time, we have increased the number of enrolment centres around the country at airports and in some places on the land border. Also, because it's a binational program, we work extensively with our counterparts in the United States to make sure travellers on both sides of the border, those in border communities, and frequent travellers such as business people, etc., have good knowledge of how the program works and how they can apply for it, and get the vetting done to acquire the card.

We've also worked extensively with our friends south of the border to make sure that our investments in infrastructure mirror theirs as closely as possible. This is particularly true in the case of the land border, along which there are 16 sites where we have NEXUS capacity. At some of the sites, such as in the southern B.C. mainland, for example, the participation rate for the use of the NEXUS card is really quite high.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Do you foresee, moving forward, border crossings moving to that standard of NEXUS card screening?

Mr. Stephen Rigby: Well, certainly it's part and parcel of the WHTI effort. I think it's the intention of the U.S. government to ensure that they are moving in the direction of having RFID capacity in as many of the documents as possible for individuals they see crossing the border southbound.

For our part, it's something we would like to see expanded in terms of participation and use, particularly at airports, because it helps us deal with volumes, but it also helps in the general vetting of higher- and lower-risk people as we're dealing with flows.

At the land border, at the 16 sites we have now, we are actually covering a pretty good proportion of the high-volume sites. So as we look forward to further investments, and you get into the 20th or the 25th site, you're going to see fewer potential users on a volume basis, so our selection will be governed in part by those sorts of considerations.

•(1725)

The Chair: We're going to have Monsieur Ménard wrap it up.

[*Translation*]

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

My question concerns the Correctional Service. The Correctional Investigator makes recommendations from year to year. When you read his report, you see that he makes the same recommendations from year to year.

What is the problem with his recommendations? Do you think they are bad, that he poorly analyzes the situations, that his recommendations aren't applicable or that you don't have the resources to implement them?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Head: I think it's not an issue of whether the recommendations that have been brought forward by the correctional investigator in the past are good or bad. There's no question from our perspective. We recognize the thrust of the issue that has been brought forward. The problem we have is that sometimes the specific solution that's being proposed is not manageable in the long run or runs contrary to some of the other pieces. For the most part, we're not in disagreement with the root issue. Where there's debate at times is on the best solution to move the agenda forward.

We've been working relatively closely with the Office of the Correctional Investigator over the last couple of years to try to find a better formula for raising issues and bringing forward solutions so that we get out of this cycle of seeing the same recommendation or same type of recommendation over and over again. We do not disagree with the main thrust of his report. We know we have to do work around mental health. We know we have to do work around aboriginal offenders. We've made some significant progress in terms of how we do investigations and the kind of information that's done. We've made significant progress around women offenders. Sometimes the debate is between a specific solution that's being proposed and what is sustainable, or in some cases, what can be funded within the existing budget.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Now let's talk about borders. There are a lot of rumours about the creation of a border patrol, somewhat like what exists in the United States, in cooperation with the RCMP.

Could you tell us whether you have any such plans? If so, when do you intend to implement them and what do you intend to do?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Rigby: The government has indicated that it wishes to examine the possibility of creating a border patrol between the efforts of my organization, the RCMP, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. At the present time we are developing options for the minister's consideration.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: All right.

Ms. Mourani can use the time I have left.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I also have a question for Mr. Rigby. We're hearing a lot of rumours to the effect that the no-fly list that was established in 2007, I believe, contains the names of minors. There are apparently minors whose names appear on that list, youths, children, is that true or false?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Rigby: I can't comment. The no-fly list, as you call it, I believe is a list that is administered by the Department of Transport. What the Canada Border Services Agency deals with is information coming from airlines after the takeoff of aircraft, and we deal with that from a customs and immigration admissibility point of view.

● (1730)

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: All right. No one at this table can answer that question. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Rigby: No. It's Transport Canada.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: All right. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Do you have any further questions, Mr. MacKenzie?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: No.

The Chair: Okay.

I want to thank all our witnesses for coming here this afternoon, especially on such short notice. We'll probably see some of you back here again sometime in the near future.

This meeting stands adjourned.

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