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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

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Chair: The Honourable Marc Garneau





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Friday, June 10, 2022

• (1300)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to Meeting 25 of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

[English]

We're gathered today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

Before we get started, committee members, is there a motion to adopt the list of additional witnesses provided to you in the context of our fourth study? The clerk did not receive any other names to add to the list in the past week, so we will be proceeding with the list provided by the analysts.

Could I have somebody with a motion to accept the witness list that was provided to you?

**Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** I'll make that motion, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Battiste.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** It looks like a unanimous vote. Thank you for that.

[Translation]

Today, we will continue our fourth study, which pertains to sovereignty, security and emergency preparedness of indigenous peoples in the Arctic.

[English]

On today's first panel, we will be hearing from Mr. John McKearney, fire chief and president of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, and he is accompanied by Tina Saryeddine, executive director of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs.

We are expecting another witness who may or may not be on with us yet, but we're going to proceed right away anyway: Chief April Martel of the K'at'l'odeeche First Nation. Hopefully, she will be online very shortly.

[Translation]

I wish to remind all participants of the Board of Internal Economy's requirements regarding physical distancing and the wearing of masks.

[English]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I'd like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members or witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are offered in English, French and Inuktitut for the meeting today. Please be patient with the interpretation. There may be a delay, especially since the Inuktitut has to be translated into English first before it can be translated into French, and vice versa. The interpretation button is found at the bottom of your screen in English, French or Inuktitut. If interpretation is lost, please let me know and we'll fix it before we carry on. The "raise hand" feature at the bottom of the screen can also be used at any time if you wish to speak or to alert the chair.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly to help the interpreters. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

[Translation]

May I remind you that all comments must be directed to the chair of the committee.

We shall now begin.

As usual, the witnesses will each have five minutes for their presentation. We will then move on to a question and answer period.

[English]

Without further ado, we'll call our first witness, Mr. John McKearney.

I don't know how you plan to speak or whether you're going to share your time with Ms. Saryeddine, but the two of you combined have five minutes for your opening comments. The floor is yours.

• (1305)

**Mr. John McKearney (President and Fire Chief, Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all of the committee for your precious time. I will speak and then I will ask Ms. Saryeddine to answer questions, as well, if that works.

Thank you for inviting the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs here today. For the record, my name is John McKearney. I speak to you from the unceded territories of the Lil'wat Nation and Squamish Nation. I am the current fire chief for the resort municipality of Whistler, British Columbia. Prior to that I was the fire chief for the City of Vancouver and I have been in the fire service for 42 years. I am the current president of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, and I am joined here today by the CAFC's executive director, Tina Saryeddine.

Our remarks will focus on four key themes: Canada's Arctic and northern policy framework, the importance of implementing the first nations fire protection strategy across the country, general issues in the fire sector, and what an action orientation to problem solving in the north might look like.

Canada's Arctic and northern policy framework provides a reasonable starting point for addressing severe disparities and inequities in the north impacting primarily indigenous peoples. It provides a vision essential for our indigenous peoples, for a collective conscience of our country and for our international security—a triple bottom line, which increases the urgency of action.

However, while it is a start, the chapter on safety, security and defence and its fifth objective to increase “whole-of-society emergency management capabilities in Arctic and northern communities” are high level. Unless we missed it, there is nothing at all on fire or on how mitigation, response or preparedness for emergencies or fire situations would occur.

How might this be addressed? Next week we will have the pleasure of partaking in a discussion with Minister Hajdu and the indigenous fire chiefs on the first nations fire protection strategy. It outlines priorities and specific goals framed within six areas—one, partnership with the first nations leadership and fire protection; two, fire prevention education; three, community standards; four, fire service operation standards; five, climate change; and, finally, six, critical infrastructure. This is a thoughtful and well-conceived strategy that focuses on education for indigenous leaders. They are the ones who make the decisions and allocate resources in their communities. If they are aware and empowered, they will make the right decisions. The strategy also links fire safety and disaster risk reduction, which creates economies of scale. It calls for the implementation of FireSmart strategies, which are essential given the increasing climate issues.

Exceptional work has also been done on the creation of the indigenous fire marshal office, now known as the National Indigenous Fire Safety Council. It has important principles for fire education, prevention and funding for indigenous communities. They still await the signing of the contribution agreements.

Moving quickly is critical because, in the north, implementation is significantly more complex than it is anywhere else in this country. In preparing our notes for today, we had the pleasure of speaking with the fire chiefs in Inuvik and in Yukon, who described how the absence of fire technicians and the existence of so many fly-in-only remote communities make simple tasks like inspecting fire and life safety equipment lengthy and expensive.

A melting permafrost creates flood issues like those never experienced before. That's along with wildfires and grass fires. Situations in which you have four or five families living in what was built as a single-family home reduce the intended lifespan of a house through greater wear, condensation, humidity and normal wear and tear. Finally, builders need to be held to account for construction quality. Currently they are not because of funding, permit and reimbursement issues.

On the issues of critical infrastructure and climate change, you already know that the federal government is leading its “Let's Talk Critical Infrastructure” and “Let's Talk Adaptation” consultations. We recommend strong linkages between those learnings and this study. If 30% to 40% of Canada's collective critical infrastructure assets are in critical condition, we can only imagine that things are far worse in the north. There may be no infrastructure in some areas, so more than three levels of government must collaborate. For example, according to the chiefs up north, the cost of water-supply infrastructure can be as high as \$10,000 per meter.

These are difficult challenges, but there is an opportunity. Canada is the second-coldest country in the world. We can be world leaders in how we live successfully, peacefully, strategically and safely in northern and Arctic regions with and through the leadership of indigenous communities.

• (1310)

We need to have gear such as self-contained breathing apparatus that can operate effectively in these severe cold climates, a water supply that is resilient, infrastructure that succeeds in Arctic blasts, transportation systems that thrive in the cold, and even tourism that stimulates local economies.

Finland seems to have taken this approach. The CAFC was asked recently by the Finnish fire chiefs association to partake in a study to tour the northern and Arctic countries' fire and emergency systems. This is costly, but Canada may be well served in investing in such a study program to aid in knowledge generation.

While some issues in the north are unique to the north, there are other issues in fire and emergency management that are quite common to all rural communities in our country. We would like to share these with you.

First, a high reliance on volunteers in the fire sector is a precarious form of emergency response. The supply is also dwindling nationally. You may need to create incentives for fire technicians and fire professionals to experience the north and possibly subsidize transportation. It's the only way we can get expertise up there.

Second, right across the country, and I imagine no less in the north, the all-hazards response training and equipment is falling behind the times. We've recommended to the federal government to bring back something along the lines of the former joint emergency preparedness program, applicable to all parts of the country, especially since new innovation and climate situations mean new training and equipment requirements in fire departments. Addressing this will require an economy of effort and investment. Please make sure that local communities are telling you what they need.

How can all these issues that are common in the fire and emergency service be addressed, not only in the north but all across our country? We have recommended to the federal government that a structure similar to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Fire Administration be implemented in Canada. Recognizing that collaboration with indigenous communities would be essential, we believe the secretariat being formed around the new Minister of Emergency Preparedness is a good start. We encourage maximum collaboration.

In closing, Mr. Chair and committee, I'd like to thank you for inviting the CAFC here today. Your task is enormous but full of promise for Canadians. We often say in the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs that we stand on the shoulders of giants. When our indigenous, northern and Arctic regions succeed, we all succeed.

Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. McKearney.

Madam Clerk, has Chief Martel, our second witness, joined us?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Davies):** No, sir, she hasn't. She might join the second panel. Apparently, she has her hands full with something.

**The Chair:** Very well.

Given that we'll probably have only Mr. McKearney and Ms. Saryeddine with us, we'll proceed with the first round of questions.

Mr. Shields, you'll be the first to kick us off. You have six minutes.

**Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

Fire Chief, you went through an incredible list. I'm sitting here thinking that if we could implement one-tenth of what you said, we would be achieving something. It was an incredible list.

There was something, though, that was interesting. I know there's a lot of money in it, and you know it as well as I do. You talked about builders. You talked about accountability. I'm thinking that there is something, in the sense of a process, that we should be able to do; we do it elsewhere.

What are the roadblocks to doing that with building in the sense of accountability? Could you talk a bit about that?

**Mr. John McKearney:** Thank you, Mr. Shields.

At the risk of not being coherent on this, when we talk to our indigenous leaders, there is a construct that happens in these communities whereby the structure of paying for this is complicated and is such that there is not a lot of oversight. Couple that with the fact

that there isn't a structure as we would have in normal communities, in all the areas where we live, where you have inspectors who are inspecting the phases of the construction. That is a gap there.

I will turn it over to Ms. Saryeddine, if there is anything that I've missed.

**Dr. Tina Saryeddine (Executive Director, Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs):** Thank you, Chief McKearney.

Chief McKearney has explained it really well. In other communities where there are significant government resources for permits and bylaws and, as Chief McKearney said, inspections, these problems don't exist. There is the compounding element of the structural supports within the indigenous communities to be able to do those inspections and have those bylaws and resources in place that would be in other communities.

Also, as we understand it and as Chief McKearney has said—this is something that was explained to us from the National Indigenous Fire Safety Council, and I may be getting it slightly wrong—a key consideration is the way the funding is flowing, what steps are reimbursed and in what order, which is part of what is creating the accountability. We'd be happy to try to provide more information afterwards through a letter, but we'll do it in consultation with the National Indigenous Fire Safety Council.

• (1315)

**Mr. Martin Shields:** I appreciate that and appreciate any further information.

It sort of reminds me of the situation when we talk about water and potable water. We can build all the infrastructure we want in the sense of water, but unless we provide the necessary education and training, we are just recycling the process of building and rebuilding. Would this be similar in the sense that we need to work at the education? The fire chief mentioned education as one of a number on the list that he had, which was fantastic.

Education is a critical piece to this. If we can educate people, the capability is there. We just need to understand that we need to provide the resources for the education so the capabilities then can be used to empower. He used that as well.

Is there any response to that comment?

**Mr. John McKearney:** Thank you, Mr. Shields.

Yes, I think your comments are spot-on. We would refer back to the collaboration with the indigenous leaders. All these communities are very different. They have very complex issues, and one-size-fits-all is not there. I think you're spot-on with it, but the fine-tuning would be through the leadership of those communities.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** They would very much agree in the sense that we are not needing to write the rules, but we need to provide the resources in the sense of education.

You're very familiar with fire halls across this country, with 80% volunteers, and I see the significant training that goes on. I find different scenarios of training in different particular fire halls. When you're in rural, there is the cattle rescue unit. Now, you're not going to find a cattle rescue unit in a lot of places, but in a rural area like mine, there it is. That's what you're talking about. It needs to be built for the situation, thus the communication empowerment as they need it for their community.

Is there anything more you would like to say about how we can do that?

**Mr. John McKearney:** If I may, I'm going to turn it over to my very brilliant executive director, Tina, to answer that question.

**Dr. Tina Saryeddine:** Thank you, Chief McKearney.

I think you've said it well, Mr. Shields. The message that we've gotten in reading the strategy is that the decision-making has to be in the local communities through the leadership of the governing structures there and providing the correct information, almost as if those individuals would be the decision-makers for emergency management and for fire, which would require their education, the same education that one might have in a municipality. It's recognizing that those are the decision-makers and that they would need the information to apply it to their local situation.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Thank you.

You mentioned Finland. I was going to ask about the Arctic Council, until you said that. Are there any other Arctic countries that you have been involved with, in communication with or know of besides Finland?

**Mr. John McKearney:** Tina, do you want to speak to this?

Go ahead.

**Dr. Tina Saryeddine:** Sure. Thank you.

Through the chair to Mr. Shields, the Finnish fire chiefs association has actually put together a study group. A number of their peer countries are together. While we haven't had direct communications with them, we were discussing with them how we would organize information sharing. It was really interesting when we had the chief from Inuvik and the chief from another one of the northern cities—it's escaping me right now—one of the comments they made to the Finnish representatives was that it takes a very long time to have the transportation just to get from say, Inuvik, to Ottawa, much less to do these study tours, which are huge. It also helped them to understand the size of our country geographically.

One of the challenges is actually time, but also resources. One of the things they had done was say that they would pay for organizing the study, but everybody would pay for their transportation and their time from the office, so to speak, which is a challenge. We haven't had a lot of discussions yet. We're trying to figure out what the best way to do that is and if it's the best use of resources and time at this point.

• (1320)

**Mr. Martin Shields:** That's an excellent point in the sense of the resources that are required.

I'm out of time. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Shields.

We'll probably get back to it anyway.

Mr. Powlowski, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Thank you.

Welcome, Chief. We're used to having chiefs here in front of this committee, but not your kind of chief.

Welcome, Ms. Saryeddine.

I worked for a few years in Norway House, which is a Cree community in northern Manitoba. I remember one particular fire there where three kids came in with either burns or smoke inhalation that required them to be on ventilators. I'm sure one of them has suffered his whole life because of facial burns.

As I recall, when I asked the community who got those kids out, they said it was community members. I'm sure they must have had some kind of fire department but they weren't the first responders there, so I know this is a really important issue.

Norway House is a bigger community. With 5,000 people, it's probably big enough to have permanent fire services, I'm guessing. A lot of the fly-in communities are small. They're 300 or 500 people and not only do they have inadequate fire services—Chief, you spoke a bit about it—but many of these communities are also subject to flooding at the same time.

How do we remedy this situation of small communities of, say, 300 people? They need to have people who can respond to health crises, to fires, to water, and there are only 400 people. You can't be an expert in everything.

Do you have any ideas as to the practicalities of how to be better at responding to emergencies?

**Mr. John McKearney:** It's an excellent question.

In my province here, we see that differential or that gap. We've had 59 fire deaths in this province in 2021. A significant number of those fire deaths, unfortunately, were in indigenous communities. I think it really has to go hand in glove with helping them out with equipment and training, but also with fire education.

The communities have to wrap their heads around, for instance, a working smoke alarm. That's the safest way to ensure their families are safe, especially when homes have, unfortunately, three or four families living in them. Try as we might, as the national representative body of the fire service, to get everybody to ensure they have working smoke alarms in their homes, it still is not being heard.

We go back to this: It has to be at the leadership level of those communities.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Does indigenous services provide those communities with smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors?

**Mr. John McKearney:** I don't know that answer. I know we do it in some provinces. We do it in this province.

I don't believe it reaches the indigenous communities to the extent that it does in smaller communities in this province. It's a gap, sir.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Ms. Saryeddine, you're an academic. What policy solutions and options are there when dealing with small communities and getting them the emergency capabilities?

**Dr. Tina Saryeddine:** Thank you for the question and thank you for the compliment as well. I hope I can live up to it.

One thing we talk a lot about, especially in small communities, is building right from the start. As Chief McKearney said, it's the education piece.

We have a wonderful program called "The Fire Chiefs Ask" where we try to have messaging go right out to the public, which helps them know what some of the strategies are that they can use. This year we had the privilege of collaborating with Minister Blair on this.

You gave the example of flooding. How do you prepare your home when it's coming to flood season? There are effective and useful strategies that many of us may not be aware of. Getting those out in a way that's culturally appropriate, in the right language and positioned in the right way for the audience is, I think, a very effective strategy.

Thank you for the question.

• (1325)

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Given the fact that both forest fires and fires within homes are big threats to a lot of isolated communities and that flooding is often also a big threat, are there any programs to train people from those communities in both those things? To be more like a general practitioner in terms of emergency responsiveness would seem to me probably one of the only feasible ways of doing it.

Are there such programs? I know you train firefighters. I don't know how you train people in terms of flooding.

**Mr. John McKearney:** Yes, there is, and the fire service in general is changing to meet the climate changes we're experiencing. Again, it's in these smaller communities, to have people in the communities investing in their learning and their preparedness for this.

It does happen. The FireSmart strategy is common across this country, and it's just as necessary in an indigenous community as it is in a rural community elsewhere.

I'll give you an example of where we see promise. Last year, in British Columbia, we had a record-breaking wildfire year. I think there were about 50,000 evacuations here. There was a significant fire up in the northern Kamloops region, called the Sparks fire. B.C. Wildfire, which is responsible for wildfires, was not meeting the responsibility that they should meet, and they quickly understood that they were not including the indigenous people in those communities.

That discussion has gone on, and that's been recognized by the B.C. Wildfire Service. The indigenous people in these communities know their territory. They can get out in front of the stuff. The will is there. It's just that they have to be empowered, and there has to be collaboration with them.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Powlowski.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Greetings to all my colleagues of the committee.

Mr. McKearney and Ms. Saryeddine, thank you for being here and for answering our questions. Your presentations were informative and we are very appreciative.

First of all, since I am not a specialist in the field, I would like to know whether the fire services in northern indigenous communities are members of your association.

[*English*]

**Mr. John McKearney:** Mr. Chair, I apologize. I lost my French when I was eight years old, when I left Gatineau.

**The Chair:** Perhaps Ms. Saryeddine caught that.

There's an interpretation button on your screen. If you put it to English, there will be a translation provided to you in your headset.

Ms. Saryeddine, perhaps you could give it a go.

**Dr. Tina Saryeddine:** Thank you.

Am I using the right channel for English?

**The Chair:** Yes. You can go ahead and speak.

**Dr. Tina Saryeddine:** Yes.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

If you don't mind, Mr. Chair, I will respond in English. My French isn't quite as good.







It happened over the last year and was, I believe, province by province and territory by territory. Allowing that application from fire departments for their infrastructure funds to be eligible for that former gas tax fund, the Canada community-building fund, was a really positive development and is something that we want to thank all of you for.

I don't know how it applies to all communities, but I hope it does apply, and certainly, like Chief McKearney said, if there's anything we can do, you know where to find us. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

We'll now start a second round. We'll go as far as we can.

I have Mr. Schmale up first.

Mr. Schmale, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our two witnesses here.

My question is going to continue on the path that Mr. Shields had taken regarding builders and partnerships with the federal government.

I guess you were talking about partnerships with the federal government in terms of ensuring builders are living up to their end of the deal, if you will. Maybe you could expand on that. What I'm trying to narrow down is that, especially off reserve, municipalities are responsible for building permits. We have provincial building codes. How are the feds involved?

Maybe I'll start with that and then get to my second question.

**Mr. John McKearney:** If you don't mind, Tina, I'll start and pass it on.

What has been explained to us, if I understand them correctly, by the indigenous fire marshals' leadership, is that, in some of these communities, they don't receive funding until the project is done. There is a need for the band—as I understand it, if I can use that term properly—to fund it first. There is a problem with that construct. Sometimes it leads to accepting substandard construction. Those are the types of areas they've explained to us that are problems.

They have also explained, and that's why they're trying to promote the first nations fire strategy, although I don't think I called that quite correctly. I think this committee understands that and has accepted that. By that, the bylaws, the structures, would allow for inspections similar to every other community. There have to be certain thresholds, annual inspections, safety inspections and such.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** When you said substandard construction, in that case it's more of a cash flow issue, more cutting corners to try to deal with the money they have.

**Mr. John McKearney:** That's one element of it that's been explained to us, yes.

Tina, is there anything you can add to that?

**Dr. Tina Saryeddine:** Thank you, Chief McKearney.

Yes, through the chair, the other piece is the enforcement piece. I think you already mentioned it. There are just those two pieces, the funding and the enforcement.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** In terms of the inspections, what jurisdiction would those fall under? Do you know off the top of your head?

**Mr. John McKearney:** As we understand it, they don't have the same processes in their communities. They're autonomous, but there's a gap in those regulations, those enforcement needs. That's the problem.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Is there also an issue with building material as well? Some building material might be more flammable than others, just to cut costs. Is that an issue as well or is it...?

● (1345)

**Mr. John McKearney:** Yes, the issue is probably not so much the material. We see that in a lot of communities where corners are cut, where there's no fire blocking and where there are gaps.

Again, the worry on any of this is the travel of smoke and fire in a structure where it can get hold and it can travel and run. Modern-day building materials and modern-day furnishings show us that we have roughly three minutes to effectively get at that fire. After that, it's certainly gone past the room of origin. It's involved the whole structure.

I can't say enough about, at the very minimum, working smoke detectors throughout these structures to get people out. The houses can be rebuilt. It's a very difficult time in everybody's lives when that happens, but at least people can get out and get out safely.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Okay. Maybe just quickly give us your thoughts.

The last year was tough with some of the wildfires out in British Columbia. What kinds of conversations are you having with your provincial counterparts in different parts of British Columbia, or even right across the country, on measures and things that can be done by all levels of government to help reduce the risk of wildfires in the future?

**Mr. John McKearney:** Thank you. I'm going to let Tina expand on that a little bit further, but we're very fortunate to see, in some of the mandate letters and some of the work that the federal government is moving forward with, that it is really looking at a national perspective as it relates to the WUII, the wild-urban interface issues. There's some funding. I think it's about \$34 million.

Tina, you can correct me on that.

It's trying to connect the dots between wildfires, which are a provincial responsibility, and structure fires, which are municipal responsibilities. Having oversight by the national body, by the federal government, to have consistent training as it relates to the wild-urban interface fire—which is different from a house fire and different from a structure fire—and equipment in readiness in our communities are key.

Tina, what are your comments?

**Dr. Tina Saryeddine:** Thank you, Chief.

I know we have brief time, so I'll just add to that the application of FireSmart principles right across the country in all communities. These are principles that help people prepare their homes in areas that are at risk.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

We'll now go to Mr. Weiler for five minutes.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I'm also very grateful for the service of both of our witnesses and all you do to keep our country and our communities safe, and of course, Chief McKearney, for keeping Whistler safe.

As part of the budget this year, there is a significant investment of over half a billion dollars to fight wildfires. In part of this budget, there's funding to train 1,000 additional firefighters, as well as to incorporate indigenous traditional knowledge in fire management.

How does the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs work with indigenous leadership to incorporate traditional knowledge in fire management? What advice can you give this committee on this topic?

**Mr. John McKearney:** Thank you, sir, for your question.

One area that we believe strongly in, which could really support the disconnect between what is municipal or regional responsibility to the federal government, is the secretariat and creating a similar responsibility embedded in the federal government that looks at all these pieces—and especially this piece—similar to the U.S. Fire Administration or FEMA. They have their structure, but they're embedded right within the federal government.

That's what the CAFC has been working towards to see if that's palatable. We believe it is a way of better connecting the provincial fire leadership and responsibility to the federal level. That would be one area.

Tina.

**Dr. Tina Saryeddine:** Thank you, Chief, and thank you for the question.

Through the chair, Chief McKearney already alluded to this, so I'll just expand on it a little bit more. Through the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, it would be important to be able to connect all the players and all the protocols with indigenous practices and the knowledge that our indigenous communities bring. The real risk is doing these almost legacy opportunities in silos.

One challenge is that, if we're going to have these 1,000 firefighters trained, we need to have the full team determining how that's going to happen. There may be this idea that you can train individual firefighters as individuals, but you need the departments and the equipment involved. We've already talked about what happens when there's a disconnect between infrastructure, equipment

and training. You need that intersection of all of the pieces—the chiefs, the fire chiefs, the individuals, the communities and the resources. Opportunities to expand organizations like the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre with all of the players would be very helpful.

We have instituted a new climate committee at the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, which is looking at those issues further. We can provide further recommendations after the meeting as well, if there's interest. Thank you.

● (1350)

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** I would venture to say there is definitely interest. If you could please submit that in writing afterwards, it would be much appreciated.

Earlier on, you mentioned some of the barriers that are faced in having specialists such as fire technicians in remote areas and the possible incentives to recruit more people to do that work. I'm just curious how you'd approach that in indigenous communities.

Do you see there being more opportunities to train locally or do you see a need to train and bring in someone from outside the community to provide those services?

**Mr. John McKearney:** Thank you.

Ideally, it would be people in the community who have the desire and the capability of learning these. Obviously, it would have to start with an external mentorship of some sort.

As was mentioned about the fire trucks, those are no different from any other vehicle. They need constant care and attention to keep them operating properly, so you need members in that community to take on that responsibility. That would be right across all the communities.

Incentivizing communities to be autonomous and to be able to take these on, I think, is the most practical way to move forward on that.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Thank you.

This is maybe my last question because I can see my time is running out here.

On the critical infrastructure piece, we've heard from prior witnesses in this study about the major issue with having one access road. I was hoping you could speak a little more towards some of the issues about access, when you're looking at infrastructure. How might we approach that as part of the two consultations that you mentioned that we're leading right now?

**Mr. John McKearney:** Thank you.

We see it in B.C., but I'm not sure of all the other provinces. Every community now really has to put forward a wildfire defence plan. That speaks to evacuation, the one way in, one way out.

Those are unique to each of those communities. Whistler is no different. Whistler has 15,000 residents, and then we double that at least when the tourists come to town. We have two or three communities that have one road in and out. This is a work in progress.



**Mr. John McKearney:** I've had the distinction of working for the City of Vancouver, with its value set as it relates to embracing reconciliation and including indigenous people in what we do. As the fire chief I've been involved with a number of opportunities there to listen and been proud to take part.

As I shift into my other roles, into Whistler, it's no different there. I don't know about the other provinces, but I can tell you, in B.C., there's the unfortunate situation that we're going through right now with the residential school issue. Over the last decade the growing respect for the indigenous population has made me a better leader, and I think it has made us.... I don't think; I know it has made us a stronger community. I think that's only going to grow.

My work with Tina and the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs is replicated there as well.

Thank you.

• (1400)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

This brings our panel to an end.

I'd like to thank, on behalf of the committee, Fire Chief McKearney as well as Ms. Saryeddine. Your testimony was very important today. Obviously, the issue of fires, whether they're wildfires or whether they're fires in people's homes in remote communities, is an extremely important issue that this committee is seized with. We do appreciate your taking the time and answering our questions. This will be very useful input to our study. Thank you again.

With that, we will suspend very briefly in preparation for the next panel.

Thank you.

• (1400)

(Pause)

• (1400)

**The Chair:** We'll get back to business.

I'd like to first of all welcome our two witnesses for this next panel.

We have Professor Whitney Lackenbauer from Trent University, as well as Mr. Anthony Moore, First Nations' Emergency Services Society.

Just before we begin, I have a reminder for the two witnesses. You can speak in the language of your choice. In terms of listening, for you, Mr. Moore, on your device there is an ability to hear English, French or Inuktitut, depending on which you wish to hear this in.

For you, Mr. Lackenbauer, on your Zoom screen you'll see, at the bottom, that there is a small globe signifying interpretation, where you can choose which language you wish to hear, because all three languages will be spoken during this panel.

The way we proceed is that each witness begins with five minutes of opening remarks. I would ask you to stick to the five minutes, and then we follow that with a question period.

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

Without further delay, I now give the floor to the first witness in this group.

[*English*]

Professor Whitney Lackenbauer, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Professor, Trent University, As an Individual):** Thank you.

I'm very honoured to appear before the committee today from my home in Oxford County, which is on traditional Anishinabe and Neutral territory, covered by the Upper Canada treaties. By taking the time to acknowledge the land that I stand on, I remind myself of the long history of silencing in this country and the need to speak the truth on a journey towards reconciliation.

Your current study on Arctic sovereignty, security and emergency preparedness of indigenous peoples covers a lot of terrain that is near and dear to my heart. I'm going to touch on a few topics in my opening statement.

In terms of Arctic security writ large, the framework that I typically employ to conceptualize Arctic threats is one that differentiates between threats that pass through the Arctic, threats to the Arctic itself and then threats originating in our Arctic.

I want to focus my opening statements on threats in the Canadian north, most of which I see as related to our ability to respond to humanitarian and environmental emergencies caused or exacerbated by climate change: from tundra fires and wildfires to melting permafrost and coastal erosion to flooding and landslides, as well as risks amplified by heightened human activity in the north, such as pollution and spills, or maritime and air disasters.

My team adopts an all-hazards approach to identifying measures to anticipate, mitigate and respond to risks in remote communities and austere environments. Our focus is on how we can improve whole-of-government and intergovernmental responses and work towards more holistic whole-of-society approaches to build resilience and enhance emergency management.

Canadian Rangers are an example of a community-based capability within the Canadian Armed Forces, who provide important grassroots local responses across the spectrum of risk. In full disclosure, I am honorary lieutenant-colonel of the 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, which spans our three northern territories. I am a huge proponent and promoter of the Canadian Rangers. I see the Rangers as a distinctly Canadian military solution that embraces northerners and indigenous peoples as the heart of what's needed to encourage and leverage subject matter expertise, capabilities and local relationships in ways that are attuned to both community and national needs.

The Rangers serve as the eyes, ears and voice of the Canadian Armed Forces in remote regions. They guide southern-based soldiers who deploy to our north. Due to their presence and capabilities, Canadian Rangers regularly support other government agencies in preparing for, responding to and recovering from a broad spectrum of local emergency and disaster scenarios.

Over the last couple of years, Rangers were a key component of Operation Laser—which, of course, was the military's response to COVID-19 in isolated communities—while continuing their established roles in responding to heavy flooding in places like Lake Vermilion, Hay River and Kashechewan. They evacuated communities threatened by forest fires, responded to plane crashes and supported ground search and rescue.

We should note that residents of Canada's remote regions, and particularly indigenous peoples in our north, already serve in the military in very high numbers per capita, as Canadian Rangers.

One straightforward way of bolstering emergency management in remote communities is to improve the coordination between the Rangers and other first responder organizations, such as the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, volunteer search and rescue organizations, indigenous guardians programs and volunteer firefighters. Relationships are key.

Better horizontal and vertical coordination of the diverse array of actors involved in security, disaster and emergency management means embracing a multisectoral approach, changing how we talk and working together across jurisdictional boundaries before, during and after emergencies.

I echo previous witnesses before the committee when I call for greater clarity about who is responsible for what aspects of emergency management, what capabilities exist at local and regional levels, how these capabilities might be better integrated and coordinated, and where there are gaps in our processes that must be addressed.

We have positive examples of successful communities of practice, like the Arctic security working group, co-chaired by Joint Task Force North and the territories, which works well at a pan-territorial regional level.

We still face major challenges in information sharing between departments, agencies and governments, and with local actors. This inter-agency and interasset information sharing and coordination was a major theme and recommendation of the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Inquiry Respecting Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons, led by Commissioner James Igloliorte of Labrador.

In my view, improved information is a key opportunity space that can be acted upon immediately. This requires a cultural change in how federal actors think about their role in not just ingesting relevant information for federal purposes but also providing information to first responders at the speed of relevance.

• (1410)

One possible initiative that could help to synchronize different lines of effort would be implementing an Inuit Nunangat community public safety officer program, which Calvin Pederson, who

you're going to hear from next Tuesday, our colleague Dr. Peter Kikkert and I have proposed. This would provide communities with officers responsible for search and rescue, all-hazards emergency management, fire prevention, land and marine safety, and emergency medical assistance, all integrated under one hat. I'd be pleased to discuss this in more detail in questions and answers if you wish.

Finally, I see important opportunities related to strategic infrastructure investments that align defence and security needs with the well-established priorities of territorial, provincial and indigenous governments. Priority areas include communications, both broadband and satellite; improvements to airfields; port and harbour facilities; and sensor systems that enhance our domain awareness in both the environmental and human dimensions. Also, addressing infrastructure deficits in the north that create vulnerabilities in the security sphere should be synchronized wherever possible to also address persistent social, health and economic inequities in the region.

To wrap up, relationships are key. Indigenous peoples and northerners are key to local solutions to meet evolving human and environmental security threats in the north, and we need to better share information in anticipation of emergencies, during emergencies and in discerning lessons afterwards. All of this is contingent on more fully adopting whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to emergency management, which will bolster resilience, security and sovereignty.

When we come up with a sober appraisal of the security situation in the Canadian Arctic, I hope that we will align smart investments in Arctic defence and security with civilian priorities and assure that they provide multi-use or military and civilian benefits wherever possible.

Thank you. *Qujannamiik.*

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor Lackenbauer.

We'll now go to Mr. Anthony Moore.

Mr. Moore, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Anthony Moore (President of the Board of Directors, First Nations' Emergency Services Society):** [*Witness spoke in Nisga'a and provided the following text:*]

Simgigat, sigidim haanaḡ, k'uba wilksihkw ganhl k'ubatk'ihlkw. Ksgook ni dim t'ooyakshl Sim'oogit Laxha wilt ginamhl amaa sa tgun loom.

[*Witness provided the following translation:*]

Ladies and gentleman, first I would like to thank God for giving us this beautiful day to have our meeting.

[*English*]

Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you to our Creator for bringing us this day.

I wish to thank you all for the invitation to come today. It was a little short notice, so I don't have everything fully prepared.

Regarding FNESS and the work we've been able to do over the last few months regarding emergency management, a lot of it stemmed from the specific work that came mainly from the floods and fires that have occurred over the last five years, and, in particular, the atmospheric flooding that occurred over this past winter.

A lot of the work FNESS has been able to accomplish stems directly from working with those communities directly affected and having the support of our staff and being able to pull in staff on short notice to reach out to those communities and give them the supports they were lacking, given the rapidness of the incidents themselves.

In terms of what we are looking to do over the next few years... We just completed our strategic planning this past winter, and we are going through a current restructuring of FNESS to better align ourselves with the four pillars of emergency management. The action we're taking, we hope, aligns with the goals and strategies of what both the Province of British Columbia has planned as well as the Government of Canada for responding to emergencies across the province.

In these disasters, we—and I, personally,—have had the ability to witness first-hand the effects the communities are still going through at this current stage. There are many communities that are still displaced with very few plans in place on the recovery side of it to ensure that they have a plan they can understand to get themselves back home.

In addition to that, in areas such as Lytton, where the entire community was devastated by fire, we have witnessed those members being displaced for months at a time, exceeding the limits of what response agencies, such as EMBC, are capable of and will followed-through on.

What we're witnessing is that the communities themselves—their elected members and their administration—are dealing with the long-term financial effects of having to deal with their community members to ensure they feel comfortable and safe, and that they are well attended to.

When it comes to the other aspects, the First Nations Leadership Council for British Columbia is currently developing an action plan to alleviate a lot of this work by increasing the amount of funding that comes through FNESS in the event of larger incidents that may come down in the future. With the wildfires slowly increasing and with Environment Canada predicting, in particular, in B.C., multiple heat domes, we can only anticipate more natural disasters. FNESS is uniquely lining itself up to be that response agency for first nations communities in British Columbia.

Thank you.

● (1415)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Moore.

We'll now proceed with a round of questions.

I have Mrs. Stubbs up first, for six minutes.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

Mr. Moore, I think many of us can only dream of being as comprehensive and articulate as you were, speaking primarily extemporaneously and, as you said, on short notice. Thank you for your testimony.

Dr. Lackenbauer, I noticed that you focused your remarks on threats in the Arctic itself. I want to thank you for that, and for the additional information you gave. I wonder if you would, in this part, touch on what you believe to be the top threats or connected priorities through the Arctic and to the Arctic.

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer:** Thank you. I'd be delighted to.

When I think of threats through the Arctic, threats that emanate from outside of the Canadian Arctic region and would pass through or over the region to strike at targets outside of the Arctic, I see these as inextricably linked to continental defence writ large.

I think it's important for the language that, when we're talking about North American defence threats, we're focusing on great power competition. We're looking at what's playing out with non-like-minded states—competitors like China and Russia—and looking at what is primarily going on in the technological domain. We're looking at what they're doing with next-generation ICBMs, with hypersonic glide vehicles with warheads on them, and what we're looking at in terms of advanced cruise missiles.

The Arctic factors into this, because some of the sensor systems that we need, detection systems, and some of our intercept capabilities, working in partnership with our allies, particularly the United States, are deployed in the Arctic. As we've made commitments to increase our military presence, a lot of that is going to relate to sensor systems and domain awareness that serve a broader integrated deterrence mission. The emphasis here is that a lot of these are military threats passing through the region.

When I say “conventional” military or “nuclear” military threats, those we have a long history of balancing. When I think of threats to the Arctic, I don't see these as primarily falling within the “conventional” military domain. There are military threats. There are cyber-threats. There's competition going on in the information domain that are below the threshold of armed conflict competition. They are threats that are playing out now and will continue to play out in the years ahead.

I think a lot of the threats to the Arctic relate to possible malicious intent associated with foreign direct investment. It could be foreign scientific research practices that have intentions that aren't what they appear to be on the surface. They can relate to attempts by foreign actors to influence proper democratic discussions that we're having as Canadians about Arctic priorities.

The primary threat, however, to our Arctic is climate change, and that's a threat that, unfortunately, we can't address at just an Arctic level. It requires global action, but it is a threat multiplier, a threat amplifier and a crisis multiplier for those of us who are responding to emergencies in the north. It really is a complicating factor.

• (1420)

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Thank you for your comments.

I think many Canadians, and probably elected representatives as well, would be skeptical of and surprised by the possibility that there could be real potential security threats from foreign actors to the Arctic and to Canada in general, although academics and experts like yourself, as well as DND-associated experts and security intelligence officials in Canada, have been sounding the same alarms.

What would be your view of the level of preparation, militarily and defence-wise, to prepare for or to mitigate those threats? What would you see as the top priorities that should be addressed? What are the main barriers?

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer:** Thank you. Those are excellent questions.

First of all, I would suggest that we need to be very clear in identifying what we see as particular Arctic vulnerabilities that are beyond the capacity of our national or allied solutions to meet these threats.

Often, we treat everything Arctic as if it is inherently different from the suite of risks and threats that we face across Canada, so I think the first set of questions asks what is specifically “Arctic” about those threats. After that, we can assess whether or not we have the right capabilities and, most importantly, relationships to be able to meet them.

In terms of immediate-term priorities, I think it's improving our domain awareness. It's our situational awareness of what is happening within our Arctic and recognizing that a lot of the activity is not going to be overt and it's not going to be military. It's not going to take the form of a conventional challenge to our sovereignty, which is something that we love to fixate on.

A lot more of these challenges are competition for narratives. It's trying to shape what we want to be as a country, what our opportunities are for leadership domestically and internationally within the Arctic and ensuring that we have the right relationships, not only across government departments and agencies, but across governments. It must be centred on northerners first and foremost, as the most important source of information in detecting a lot of anomalies in the environmental and human space. Who better than northerners themselves to determine if something is out of the ordinary in the conversations happening on Facebook or with people coming to their communities and interacting in strange ways?

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Stubbs.

We'll now go to Ms. Atwin for six minutes.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses today. I would like to begin by acknowledging that I am speaking to you all from the unceded and unsurrendered Wolastoqiyik territory here in Fredericton, New Brunswick. It's also Purple Shirts for Clean Water day here in New Brunswick.

I'd like to start with you, Mr. Lackenbauer. We've been going to you a lot. I appreciated your testimony today.

You mentioned the importance of discerning lessons after a disaster. I'm wondering if you could speak to some of the key lessons that have been learned over the last five years—or maybe even two years, because it's been such a tumultuous time. I'm wondering if you could highlight those.

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer:** Yes. Absolutely. That's a wonderful question.

I'm going to refer, if it's appropriate, to a particular initiative of undertaking with my team and many of the first responders in the Kitikmeot Region of the central Arctic within Nunavut through a Kitikmeot search and rescue round table. Again, I'm reporting on behalf of some of these real subject matter experts, the practitioners on the ground, in identifying challenges.

What they're seeing, and this also relates to some of the COVID activities, is an increasing caseload of demands on the time of first responders. It relates to changing environmental conditions, loss of land safety knowledge, food insecurity, and hunters and fishers taking greater risks on the land. When I say land, I mean sea, ice and land, if we're speaking in an Inuit Nunangat context here.

They talk about gaps in training or coordination of training across different organizations that they belong to, and about some of the shortages in equipment that would enable them to do their jobs better. They have concerns about volunteer burnout. With the same group of people often being turned to and asked to come out, it eventually drains their energy. There is a lack of mental and physical health supports for responders. They talk about overly burdensome administrative requirements and reporting requirements for people who are volunteering, and about difficulty coordinating, co-operating and communicating across the community, territorial, provincial, regional and federal levels.

One of the other areas they often raise is slow response times from southern-based search and rescue assets. That begs the question of what types of assets, then, should be predeployed in the north in terms of federal assets? How much more can we go and build that resiliency and support capacity-building efforts on the local level to bolster that local ability or regional ability to respond to these as a solution that is made in the north and by the north?

• (1425)

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Excellent. Thank you so much.



I'm ashamed to say that I didn't know a lot about the Canadian Rangers, so I think this is such an important opportunity for us as parliamentarians but also for Canadians. Maybe just to flip that question to the other side, can you celebrate some of the successes of the Canadian Rangers program? What can we learn from this in terms of ensuring that it's a sustainable program that is supported with the resources it needs?

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer:** Thank you. That's my dream question.

It wasn't preplanted, I promise.

Rangers, as I mentioned, are often described as the eyes and ears of the north. I love to say that they are the eyes, ears and voice in remote regions, as the late Peter Kuniliusie, a Ranger from Clyde River, Nunavut, once described them. Rangers are part of the Canadian Armed Forces reserves. They are members of the military who are serving, but in a distinct form of service from our regular forces or our primary reservists. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Rangers. Many of you were probably in the House when it was announced that it was the year of the Ranger, which was wonderful.

Since May of 1947, they've provided lightly equipped self-sufficient mobile forces that support a whole range of national security and public safety operations. They conduct patrols within their homeland. It's a way of showing the flag but also sharing knowledge with one another. They report unusual activities or sightings. They collect local information that's relevant to the military and other partners. They often work with other members of the military and members of other departments and agencies involved in domestic operations. There's a lot of high-profile involvement and assistance with search and rescue efforts. In many Ranger patrols, particularly in the provinces, that is very much the bread and butter of what they do.

They also assist in a direct way with natural disasters like forest fires and floods. In the pandemic response, they are the interlocutors or liaison people within their community. They know which elders probably should be the priority for evacuation or movement to a central location, or who requires assistance with breathing and therefore needs to get to the community centre with a generator first. They speak the language and offer that reassurance. It's an incredible group of 5,000 Canadians living in more than 220 communities across the country, the majority of whom are indigenous. The official statement is that Rangers speak 26 different languages and dialects, many indigenous.

In my mind, they are a wonderful example of what we can do when we harness this tremendous capacity that we have in our communities and that resides in our indigenous peoples. They are really a great example of how diversity and inclusion is truly a force multiplier for our military and for our first responders.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Atwin.

We'll now go to Monsieur Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to Mr. Moore and Mr. Lackenbauer for being here.

My first questions are for Mr. Moore.

With regard to resilience and responding to emergency situations, during this study, witnesses have often referred to the importance of including the communities themselves in the response. The communities are often the first responders in the event of an emergency.

What do you think of that? What are your thoughts on the role of community services in emergency response? Is there good cooperation with other services? Is the knowledge that communities have of their own territory utilized? How can we ensure that the communities have all the necessary resources in order to be resilient?

• (1430)

[*English*]

**Mr. Anthony Moore:** When it comes to communities themselves and having their responders be involved, in emergency management that's one of the early preparedness statutes, where we work with each community to ensure that they're able.

For the first 72 hours, as an example, we ask those communities to be able to handle it themselves while we prepare for the larger-scale response of whatever incident it is. When it comes to the PREOCs, the provincial regional emergency coordination centres or the emergency operations centres, themselves for each of those individual incidents, we are asking that those communities impacted bring somebody who has that local knowledge of where they are to the emergency operation centre because of that local knowledge.

If there's, for example, a huge wildfire rolling through a community that is impacting two or three communities, we ask them to send a representative to the emergency operations centre where we, FNESS, also have a representative, a technical specialist, who works together with those communities to identify their specific interests that they wish to protect, whether it's a specific house, a specific cultural site or even something as simple as gravesites.

When we have that information, we're able to plug that into our internal system, for which we use Lightship. It's a very vast online mapping tool that allows us to input information on the fly with any device—a cellphone, iPad or laptop—using GPS coordinates that are usually pretty accurate when we have other instruments available.

Having them take part in training is another example, with our Lightship and what we call our strike teams. We go out into those communities and make sure we map out and use GPS for those specific sites that they've identified for us. We send in other teams such as structure protection units, as an example, for a threat of a wildfire, or Tiger Dams in the event of flooding.



What I'm hearing from Nunavummiut, for example, is that it's ensuring investments going forward are providing Rangers with the training opportunities they require to make sure the Ranger instructors, who work with them at the community level, are able to do so on a regular basis.

There are also movements right now to revisit the equipment usage rate, which is paid to Rangers for using their personal vehicles and equipment while they're out doing official tasks as Rangers. This is something that Rangers, for the most part, very much appreciate, because by being able to invest that money in their own equipment, they don't have to ask permission to take it out when they want to go berry picking or fishing. They're using their own equipment, and the military almost pays them this money like rent. They're revisiting whether or not the amount is enough, and there's an expectation that the amount will go up.

Another very recent development is ensuring that Rangers qualify and are paid for isolation allowance, depending on which individual community they're in, to make sure that like anybody else working in those communities, their Ranger pay is supplemented by an acknowledgement of the costs of living in those individual communities.

Those are some of the either past investments or areas of focus right now. There has been quite a bit of investment in the junior Canadian Rangers program. This is a program supported by the Rangers. Junior Canadian Rangers are children between the ages of 12 to 18, very representative of the north and very representative of their communities in terms of who's joining. There's roughly an equal number of young women and men in the junior Canadian Rangers, which is also interesting. There's a significant investment, as well, in ensuring that the youth program, which is supported by the military, is flourishing.

I hope, Ms. Idlout, that addresses that question a bit.

• (1440)

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** Absolutely.

You already answered a portion of my second question, so I'll change what I was going to ask as my second question. I will ask you to make a recommendation as to how we as a committee can ensure we increase those investments, because I do frequently hear from my constituents that, as volunteers, when they have to use their own capital like snowmobiles and boats, that "rental" is not sufficient when those capital items are so expensive and the cost to repair them is so high.

What kind of recommendation would you make to ensure that is increased sufficiently to meet the needs of Canadian Rangers?

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer:** Taking what you just said, and turning it into an affirmative statement, is one I would support completely. It's really important, in light of inflation right now and in light of the cost of living, and realizing the importance of the Rangers, especially in this year of the Rangers, that we really see this as an investment in communities, an investment in families and an investment in subject matter expertise, which is really meaningful. At the same time, it's also increasing the budget envelope available for Ranger training and Ranger pay.

Another one that I've often heard at the community level, if I've been a good listener, is that Rangers really want challenging training opportunities. That also means having Ranger instructors who are able to go in sufficient numbers to work with them. A specific recommendation would be to ensure that the Canadian Army is treating Ranger instructors as a priority, and that investing in Ranger instructors, who in turn support the Canadian Rangers themselves, is an investment in Arctic sovereignty. It's an investment in security. It's an investment in safety, and ultimately it's an investment in communities.

• (1445)

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

We'll go to a shortened second round now.

I have Mr. Schmale up for five minutes.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses.

I might continue on with the professor. It's great to have a professor from Trent University there. I'm going to guess you're in Peterborough. I'm coming to you from Lindsay, Ontario, which is just a little bit down the road. I appreciate your contribution.

Maybe I will pick up on a comment you made in your conversation with Ms. Stubbs. I think I heard it correctly, but please correct me if I'm wrong. You talked about threats that don't look like what most are used to or that appear like foreign investment or research initiatives on the surface, but might have other objectives.

Did I hear that correctly? What did you mean by that? Can you expand on it?

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer:** Absolutely. Canada has often welcomed foreign direct investment in several sectors of our economy, with non-renewable resource extraction being prime among them. There have been concerns expressed about what foreign direct investment from non-like-minded state sources might mean in terms of our Arctic sovereignty and security.

The clear example is Shandong Gold's attempted acquisition of the TMAC Hope Bay mine, which was blocked on national security grounds by the federal government. That would be an example of a concerns about foreign-owned companies or companies backed by foreign state-owned banks developing a toehold in strategic parts of the Canadian economy, in the Arctic or strategic locations in the Arctic, and potentially acquiring infrastructure. This is not a unique challenge set facing Canada. Other Arctic states are balancing the same considerations.

Another concern relates to activities of foreign scientific actors. Let's say a research icebreaker is operating in Canadian Arctic waters. We want to make sure that the research being conducted is actually that which has been approved and that the findings of that research are being released transparently, as is required under international law. There are also concerns about whether that particular practice is really pursuing the research it's claiming to be doing, or whether it's being done to gather bathymetric or hydrographic data about the seabed in anticipation of future activities by that actor. I'm not trying to be too cryptic here. I hope I'm not, so please push back if I am.

At this stage, I think these are risks and I think we've done a fairly good job of managing them, but we need to remain vigilant. Here's where it's very important for us to be mobilizing all the different sources of information we have—be they different sensor systems, the information being gathered or marine security operations centres on the coast that are synthesizing information.

We also really must make sure we have those connections with northern rights holders and stakeholders who have often been approached in the past with some of these opportunities and in turn really must be reassured that they have the support of Canada as whole in dealing with some of this uncertainty, particularly around foreign direct investment. I think it also requires the federal government, if it's going to step in and block certain initiatives on national security grounds, to be prepared to step up with some of those strategic investments.

Minister Garneau, I know that you, in your former hat as minister of transport, were overseeing a lot of the work being done in terms of transformative transportation infrastructure investments and what those could enable in the north. All of those investments also have a benefit in allowing us to increase our ability to sense what's going on within the region at the same time as improving resupply, improving health of communities and serving as a catalyst for more diversified economic development.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you for those comments.

You have a very impressive resumé, by the way, Professor. It makes me wonder what I've done with my life.

We talked about Russia. I believe, if I heard correctly, that you also mentioned China and their interest in the region. Should China be treated the same as Russia or is Russia still the threat—I guess it's safe to call it that—to the Arctic?

• (1450)

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer:** Thank you. I think that is an absolutely core question that not enough people are asking.

I think they're different threats. Again, even “threat” is strong language when we're thinking about what they are to the Canadian Arctic.

Certainly, in light of the absolutely atrocious war that Russia launched on Ukraine in 2014 and has further accelerated in the last few months, my trust level for Russia is very low. However, I think within a Canadian Arctic context, it's not particularly coveting our resources. In essence, there are some natural alignments in our con-

cerns about certain changes to the status of shipping routes in terms of access for international transit traffic and so on.

I don't think, within a Canadian Arctic context, that Russia is primarily a competitor. It is in terms of North American defence, the defence of Europe, our allies and NATO. It absolutely is. It's an urgent challenge that needs to be met—and we are meeting it with our allies—but I don't see it as a primary threat in the Canadian Arctic or to the Canadian Arctic.

For China and its interests, I do not see it at this stage as a primarily military threat. I see it, primarily, as a risk relating to foreign direct investment, clarity of what China's interests are within the region, and scientific activities as a way of normalizing the presence of a country that has self-declared itself to be a near-Arctic state. It is suggesting that this, somehow, gives it a status somewhat close to that of Arctic states, but it has no bearing in international law or the international order.

I don't think that China is inherently an adversary in the Arctic, and it's not necessarily best to jump ahead and frame it as such in a specific Arctic context. However, we have to think about and be vigilant in how we're looking at China, as both a potential collaborator on certain initiatives—like mitigating global climate change—and, at the same time, an economic and strategic competitor in the global context, and what that means in terms of our relationships in the Arctic.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

We'll now go to Mr. Weiler for five minutes.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for joining today on short notice, as well as for your very thoughtful and energetic testimony so far.

My first question, through you, Mr. Chair, will be for FNESS.

Given that FNESS's work is throughout B.C., I was hoping they could share with this committee what proportion of British Columbia's 204 indigenous communities currently have emergency plans in place.

**Mr. Anthony Moore:** For the communities that we have been dealing with, emergency plans really vary. There are all-hazards plans. There are hazard-specific plans. We've been working with about 150 of the communities. A lot of them are grouped together because of geography. As an example, in the Lower Nicola, there are probably five or six communities that are really close together. It's a two-minute drive between the communities.

When it comes to the north, though, there are few communities that have a fulsome plan. If they have a plan, they rarely have the capacity to have a full-time emergency coordinator to be able to implement said plan.

With that being said, we have been working, as FNESS, with our emergency department—or our mitigation department, as we're labelling it—to try to coordinate with those communities that don't have a plan and supply them with one. It's been a little difficult, at this point, because some of them are still dealing with COVID, for example. They haven't opened up their community for us to come in. We have many other supports that we're also trying to provide to them by way of wildfire training on mitigation, planning and things like that, as well as for structure fires.

When it comes to the communities that have a plan, there are probably about 15 to 20, off the top of my head, that have a full-time emergency coordinator position to go along with these plans. A lot of times, we're finding that, even if they have a plan, it's sitting in a binder in somebody's desk or has been sitting on a bookshelf for five or six years and rarely gets opened up.

We're trying to communicate with these communities and bring them an emergency specialist or an emergency officer. We've increased our capacity to be able to do this by hiring about four or five extra officers to go to these communities and work with them. We've even built EOC kits for those communities that don't have a plan in place. We have an all-hazards, super-generic plan to at least get them in the right direction for what they should be thinking about, but there's so much work that still needs to be done.

● (1455)

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Thank you for that.

I can imagine it may be difficult to take a plan off the shelf, but in situations like that it's certainly better than not having a plan at all.

I want to maybe continue on that topic a little bit. We talked quite a bit about response here, but I'd be very curious if you could explain to this committee a little bit more about the work you're doing on mitigation and on fuel management. Do you have any recommendations for this committee on how the federal government could better partner with FNESS to be able to assist in these types of services?

**Mr. Anthony Moore:** We do a lot of work in mitigation, especially when it comes to wildfires. We have on-reserve fuel funding grants that communities are able to apply for, but it's only a maximum of \$75,000 if they prove that they are high risk.

What we're finding is that, through each of the communities we deal with through their community wildfire protection plans, if they have one in place already, it's out of date by seven, eight or 12 years. Doing those, you need a registered forestry professional to go in and physically walk through each community, through the exterior of it, and determine what hazard level it is based on their findings: how deep the duff layer is, what types of trees are there, what type of vegetation there is and how healthy it is. All of those factors determine how high risk that community is.

When it comes to what supports can be improved, there is the increase in funding that these communities can apply for to be able to get this work done. As an example, just updating a community wildfire protection plan with a registered forestry professional is based on the amount of hectares that person does. I just did it this last year with two of my four communities. I can only afford to do

two with the Nisga'a nation where I work. That work cost me \$47,000 for this RPF to come through and determine exactly what we knew, but we had to get an RPF stamp of approval on it—that we are high risk in those two communities.

Following that, we needed to apply for fuel treatment. FNESS does a lot of that fuel treatment work and can coordinate with communities on how to get it done. They do lots of training and have the capacity in some instances to be able to go to the community and conduct that work, but it does cost a lot of money. It's about \$2,000 per hectare, give or take, in the Okanagan, and about \$8,000 per hectare in the northwest, where I live. This is because if you live in the Okanagan you drive through and you can see the ground everywhere you go. There are trees maybe six to 10 metres apart on a regular basis. Whereas where I live in the northwest, just about an hour north of Terrace, I have to walk sideways through the trees. I have to crawl and climb over. As an example, the work that we did for eight square hectares took five months of work for 20 guys.

It varies in the amount of time and the amount of funds it takes for each of these areas, and I'm not even talking about the north-east. I'm not talking about the Vancouver area or the central interior of British Columbia where all these topographies are very different. There are some areas that are completely flat or with rolling hills. We have mountains shooting out of the lakes and rivers where we live, where we have an 80% incline to get to the top and we're supposed to clear as the raven flies, like flat on a map, a certain amount of area.

It's very difficult to say what Canada can do in partnership with FNESS, but that hopefully gives you a little bit of insight into the issues and the various types of issues. To be able to answer that question thoroughly requires a little more technical explanation that we probably don't have time for here.

However, there is increased funding for these areas that FNESS has already established, such as the on-reserve fuel funding or the community resiliency investment grant and things like that, to be able to conduct large-scale work over multiple years instead of reapplying once a year, year after year, because grants themselves are very incumbent on the people who apply for them. It requires a lot of reporting throughout, and especially in the final reporting a lot of labour-intensive coordination in all the documents and photographs and GPS, spatial data and things like this, to be able to prove that we did work there.

Hopefully that answers your question. I tried to break it down as easily as I could.

● (1500)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have another question for Mr. Moore, related to what he just replied and to his answer to my previous question.

Mr. Moore talked about the importance of having an emergency response centre in each region. Why does he consider it important to adapt the response strategies and the actual responses to the needs of each community and each region, rather than using a single approach, that is the same everywhere?

[English]

**Mr. Anthony Moore:** British Columbia is very sparse, with very different geographic tendencies. When we talk about breaking down our offices, as I mentioned, we have two main offices, and they are primarily in southern B.C. and strategically placed because of those hazards that are typically there. When it comes to the floods and the fires that occur throughout the province, in the past when we tried to get resources from, say, Vancouver, because that's where we keep our flood equipment—storage issues are always a big issue right now—trying to get them to the north past those areas when the Okanagan is flooding is difficult.

Last year was a perfect example this past November, when the entire south was cut off, the entire metro Vancouver area. All of our resources in North Vancouver could not get anywhere beyond that, and the equipment that we have in Kamloops is more geared towards wildfires, so it didn't have the flood response equipment necessary to be able to support those communities. That's one of the reasons why we are trying to work towards having something similar to what the regional districts have for their regions or what the EMBC breaks out for regions, and also what B.C. Wildfire has. They all have it broken down very similarly: the northwest, the northeast, the Cariboo central interior, the south, metro Vancouver and Vancouver Island.

This plan allows us to coordinate our personnel and our equipment to be able to respond to any community. Let's say there are more fires in the Kamloops area but north of Kamloops, and that there are northern communities on the other side that we can't get to. We can bring resources down from the Prince George area, as an example, and support those communities, or vice versa. It's about having that ability and that capacity to be able to respond from multiple angles or pull in multiple resources. B.C. Wildfire uses this model as well. If there are a lot of fires going on in Kamloops, they pull their resources from the Skeena district, where I live, and from the central interior and Bulkley Valley interior, to the south, leaving minimal resources up there because there's nothing going on, so that they can all move to where the hazards really are that are impacting communities.

That's basically what we're trying to do—to mimic what successful regional offices have already established.

• (1505)

[Translation]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Clerk:** I'm sorry. The chair has been disconnected.

Mr. Schmale, could you take over?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale):** I can, yes. I don't have the time. I wasn't looking at the time.

**The Clerk:** There's only one more person left to ask the last question, and that's Ms. Idlout.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jamie Schmale):** Okay. I will start the time now.

Ms. Idlout, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

I'm going to complete my line of questioning that I had for Mr. Lackenbauer.

Just for comparison's sake, I wanted to ask you, do members of the military have to use their own capital when they do operations in the north?

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer:** Again, it will depend on which members of the military are involved, because the Rangers are just a form of reservist. For regular force members and primary reservists, they are expected to use the military equipment and vehicles that are provided to them, the logic being that they are expected to be standardized and that the system will procure the equipment that everyone will use.

For the Rangers, the logic is that, because each community's needs are different, it would be overwhelming on the military system and probably not the most effective for the Rangers themselves to have this system provide them with that. In essence, the model has always been, if Rangers living in their communities are best attuned to what the needs are to operate in their areas, perhaps they can choose what vehicles are best, what forms of equipment are best and what type of tent is best to use. The military will instead compensate them for using that equipment. As I was alluding to before, what I see as one of the primary benefits is that it allows individuals to acquire equipment that they own. They don't have to turn and ask permission from the military to go and use it when they want to go out with their families or travel to another community.

To me, this is one of the big differences from the Coast Guard Auxiliary, where, through the small boats program, they've been provided with very capable marine search and rescue boats but members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary are not allowed to use those boats to go beluga hunting or to go narwhal hunting. Those same individuals, if they go out in their personal boat as a Ranger, are paid for the use of that boat while they're using it as a Ranger and then, in turn, when they take off their Ranger hat and their hoodie and they want to go out and catch a whale, they can do so, and it's their personal equipment.

I'm sorry. I jumped ahead with your question there.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** No, that's okay.

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer:** It's one of those reasons that I know the Ranger force is a different form of service.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** Thank you.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Ms. Idlout, that was your two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** Was it, seriously? Could I ask one more question?

Can you provide us a little bit more information on that recommendation that you mentioned about that new job that you suggested so that we could understand how important that recommendation is?

**Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer:** Thank you.

This is a proposal that I've put forth with Peter Kikkert and Calvin Pedersen, whom you're going to hear from next week, based on conversations in the Kitikmeot Region with other Nunavummiut rights holders, stakeholders and first responders, recognizing strengthening community safety as a central priority along the lines that my fellow panellist has identified.

As we conceive of it, this program would provide communities with two or more full-time public safety officers who would be responsible for search and rescue, all hazards emergency management, fire prevention and land and marine safety, and, if required, emergency medical services. It would be about creating a program to build off local knowledge, Inuit *qaujimajatuqangit*, and the community relationships of officers, while providing for the space to develop new capabilities. Having a central individual in each community in Inuit Nunangat who could serve as this hub, this focal point in terms of coordinating efforts of all the different first responders and gratefully breaking down the silos of responsibility that exist across agencies responsible for community safety and security in the north, treats this almost like it's a community resilience hub.

Perhaps there would even be multi-purpose buildings constructed to function as centres for community safety activities for all those different groups at the community level. There are other models out there. You can look at what the Cree have set up in Eeyou Istchee territory for public safety officers, the Kativik civil security department in Inuvik and village public safety officer programs in Alaska, with similar models in Yukon and Northwest Territories.

We see this as a great opportunity to really enable and coordinate a lot of those community-level efforts. I'd be happy to provide more information to the committee in writing if you're interested.

• (1510)

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** All right, perfect.

Thank you, witnesses. That was good, extra time, probably because you might be a constituent of mine, so you could have gone a little longer.

Thank you to our witnesses for coming to the meeting and contributing to this process. We have a very interesting study to go on. I'm assuming that the chair is not back on. I can't see him—

**The Chair:** I just got back on, but I know it was ably handled in my absence.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** “Remarkably adequate” is what I like to say.

It's all you, Chair. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Vice-Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses, as Mr. Schmale was saying. This is an important study, and we very much appreciate both Professor Lackenbauer's and also Mr. Moore's giving us their insights on some very important issues. We very much appreciate your taking the time for today's meeting.

With that, this panel is concluded. For the benefit of the members of the committee, we will probably be presenting our housing study report as early as Monday now that it has been approved. Second, this morning, at the liaison subcommittee, our travel budget was approved. I just wanted you to know that.

We'll be meeting next Tuesday at 3:30.

With that, thank you very much everyone. This meeting is adjourned.







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