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Chair: The Honourable John McKay





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• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Colleagues, I see that it is 3:30. We have quorum.

It's our privilege today to welcome Minister Blair to the committee for his first appearance, although he is no stranger to appearances before committees.

Colleagues, I made an executive decision to extend his time—a one-time extension—from five minutes to seven. In anticipation of that, I hope we're all appropriately caffeinated.

With that, Minister, I'm sure you'll introduce your colleagues. We look forward to what you have to say for the next few minutes.

Thank you.

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will, if I may, take a quick moment to introduce my tablemates. To my far left is Chief Caroline Xavier from the Communications Security Establishment. My deputy minister of national defence, Mr. Bill Matthews, is here. I think, perhaps, he needs no introduction to this committee, but our chief of the defence staff, General Wayne Eyre, is here. From the judge advocate general is Colonel Stephen Strickey.

Let me begin my remarks by simply saying thank you for your kind invitation. As you noted, Mr. Chair, this is my first appearance before this committee.

If I may, allow me to begin my remarks by saying that I very sincerely hope.... I have tracked the work of this committee and I think it's done some exceptional work over the past many years. I have had the opportunity now to meet with a number of the members—in particular, my critics—but all of us, I believe, are committed to many of the same things.

I very sincerely hope that in the future, I and the people before you will be able to work with this committee in order to bring about positive change for the Canadian Armed Forces and to ensure that Canada has a robust and well-equipped armed forces in order to support and protect Canada's interests at home and abroad.

I also want to begin my remarks by saying that my first priority, my goal, is really centred on the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces. I think that is our first obligation. We can, and I'm sure we will, have a number of conversations about various equip-

ment, platforms, ships, planes, submarines, ammunition and artillery. All of those things are important, and it's good that this committee will focus on them, but I want to assure all of you that my first focus is on the men and women who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. I think they are the strength of the organization, and I'm very mindful of my responsibility—and, if I may say so, our collective responsibility—to them.

First of all, it's to make sure that they have a work environment that is inclusive, respectful, supportive and safe for every member of the service, and that we provide them with the appropriate supports to make sure that we can attract the very best and the brightest to the Canadian Armed Forces. I became really struck by some of the challenges we're facing as I visited some of the bases and wings, and I hope to have an opportunity to do much more of that.

I listened very carefully to the men and women who serve there, and they've talked to me about some of the challenges they're facing with housing, child care, getting a family doctor and some of the really significant challenges that make it difficult for men and women to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. We have to address those things, and I want to assure you all that I'm committed to that.

I also wanted to be very clear that I'm building on the excellent work of my predecessor, Minister Anand. It is my intention to continue to work with our team and all of you to keep moving forward so that we can meet the greatest challenges the armed forces are facing today and also into the future.

This comes down, as I've said, to three very important aspects. These are the people—as I've already mentioned—modernization and operations. Today I'll take a brief moment, if I may.... By all means, cut me off and I'll come back to these things later upon questioning.

I've already spoken to you a bit about the people. I wanted to also acknowledge the important work of Madam Justice Louise Arbour. The 48 recommendations that she has provided provide us with an excellent road map and a path forward to implementing her recommendations to create a protected, respected and empowered environment for everyone who serves.

I want to assure you all of my commitment to ensuring that we will implement all of those recommendations, but that we will do so in a way that is thoughtful and consultative. I'm going to come back to this later on, if not in my remarks then certainly in my response to questions. This is because, frankly, I need this committee's help to make some of the important decisions of how we implement those recommendations in a timely way but also to achieve the intent of creating a really supportive environment for everyone.

Similarly, I can tell you as well that the chief professional conduct and culture is about to launch a public database for all of the defence team research and policies related to sexual harassment and misconduct. This is in response to Madam Arbour's recommendation. We've taken some very important steps just in the past few weeks to begin to put into action some of those recommendations, but we're also going to have to bring forward legislation.

● (1535)

In bringing forward legislation, the only path to that, in my opinion, is through this committee. Rather than just come to this committee when the legislation is drafted and drop it in front of you and ask you to then report on it, I would like the opportunity, Mr. Chair and members of this committee, to work with you in making sure that legislation is the right legislation. That doesn't in anyway preclude your ability to deal with it as a parliamentary committee and as Parliament should after that legislation is dropped, but I'd really like your help in getting it right. It's too important not to get it right, so I'm going to come to you and ask you for that help.

With respect to modernization, in 2017, as you're all very well aware, we launched the "Strong, Secure, Engaged" defence policy, SSE. Since that time, we've actually made some real progress. For example, we have received four of our six Arctic and offshore patrol ships. I happened to be in Halifax a few weeks ago for the International Fleet Week and had the opportunity to see one of those ships. Let me also suggest that the delivery of four of those ships was not without its challenges, but we're making real progress on it.

We have invested in armoured combat support vehicles to replace the current LAV fleet. We've made some very significant progress in procuring the F-35 fighter. We have obtained many smaller but significant items such as new night-vision goggles, replacement firearms and other matters, but it's important to acknowledge to all of you as well that the threat environment is evolving rapidly.

To address the challenges, we've also announced and launched a defence policy update, DPU. The SSE remains our primary road map for the military's future, but through the DPU, we are building on that policy to ensure we're ready to meet our biggest threats across a variety of domains.

We have begun critical work in bolstering continental defence, and we are investing over \$38 billion over the next 20 years to modernize NORAD. I've had a number of discussions with our American colleagues and the U.S. ambassador. In that regard, I will be able to speak to that more if you have questions. We will be continuing to work with our U.S. partners to ensure NORAD remains capable of protecting North America now and in response to emerging threats in the future.

As I've said, the shape and scope of modern warfare are evolving, and we are investing in our military so that it will have the capabilities it needs.

With respect to operations, you're all aware...and many of you had the opportunity to visit our people in Lydd in the U.K., and in Europe. You're well aware of the work they're doing. I'm not going to repeat all of that for you, but I want to acknowledge something that's been primarily my responsibility through Operation Lentus. In previous responsibilities, over the past four years I have been calling upon the Canadian Armed Forces every time Canada needed them. When we had the pandemic and we needed help in the long-term care facilities in Ontario and Quebec, and when we had devastating floods, wildfires, hurricanes and other natural disasters across the country, Canada has called upon the Canadian Armed Forces over and over again.

I'm sure the general will tell me how many times that is, but, for example, they've been fighting fires so far this summer for over 120 consecutive days.

**General Wayne D. Eyre (Chief of the Defence Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence):** It's 131.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** It's 131 consecutive days in this country.

First of all, I want to acknowledge that has been impactful on the Canadian Armed Forces, but I also want to take the opportunity to say thanks, because every time Canadians needed them, they were there for them, and it reminds me how important the CAF is. It reminds me how important the men and women who serve in the CAF are, and it reminds me, as well, how proud all Canadians were and how grateful all Canadians were that they were there for us. We'll do everything that is necessary to make sure that we are there for them as they continue to serve.

That's it, Mr. Chair. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister Blair.

We have Mr. Bezan for six minutes.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, welcome to the committee. I know that you've been at the committee before, but not for National Defence. I'm glad to see you here. Have you received your mandate letter from the Prime Minister yet?

● (1540)

**Hon. Bill Blair:** No. I have not yet received a new mandate letter. I'm acting on the mandate letter that was provided to my predecessor, Minister Anand.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Okay. When you have that, it will be made public, I hope, or at the very least will you table it with the committee?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I would be happy to share it. It's my mandate letter, but it's a responsibility I think we all share.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Okay.

Over the past several days, Canada has gone through a major embarrassment with what happened in the House of Commons. As someone of Ukrainian descent, I will say that it's something I've been very disturbed by and very concerned about how the problems we've experienced and the lack of response from the Prime Minister on this for five days have impacted our reputation on the world stage.

Have you had a chance to talk to Minister of Defence Rustem Umerov from Ukraine about this and reassure him of Canada's support?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I have not had the opportunity to.

I know where he is right now and I know who he is working with, because there are other international visits that are taking place in Kyiv with him right now, but we did reach out, and we have communicated our deep regret for what took place in the House of Commons last Friday.

Actually, James, if I may, I would take the opportunity right now. I, like all of us, stood in that House. I rose and came to my feet. I was not acting on complete information, but I personally deeply regret that, and I would acknowledge my individual responsibility and apologize for it.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Have you had conversations with any of our allies who have shared concerns about what happened here in the House of Commons and its impact on Canadians' support for Ukraine in this brutal war with the Russian invaders or the support of our allies? We have seen some pretty strong rhetoric coming from our ally Poland, for example.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Subsequent to the events of Friday, I personally have had conversations this week with the ambassador from the United States and with the high commissioner from Australia. We spoke briefly about that. They did not express concerns directly to me. I think they understand how unfortunate this was and frankly how embarrassing for Parliament. I did not hear from them that it was affecting their confidence or our relationship.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I just want to state for the record that Conservatives stand with Ukraine. We support the government's support for Ukraine and everything you've done. We actually just ask you to do more. That is unwavering. Ukraine must win this war.

I also want to echo your words to the great men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces for the work they're doing here in Canada and in Operation Laser, Operation Lentus and Operation Vector. It's been just outstanding and something we all take pride in but, as a committee, we've seen the guys working in Operation Unifier training Ukrainian soldiers in the camp there. We've seen our guys and the great job they're doing in leading EFP Latvia.

We're certainly grateful for each and every one of them, but we have a problem with getting and keeping new recruits in the Canadian Armed Forces. It's been eight years now that the Liberals have been in power, and I don't think we've ever had troop strength so low. We've heard at committee here that it's around 16,000 short. I

know that when I sent in an Order Paper question back in April, which Mr. May actually signed, troop strength was only about 8,000.

What is the actual number? How short are we with respect to the number of members we have in the Canadian Armed Forces today?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** In the last three years we've lost more people than we've been able to recruit, but we're turning it around.

I'm going to turn, if I may, to the chief of the defence staff, because he shared with me just a few moments before I began to speak what I think is some pretty good news in that regard, and I think we should share with the committee—

**Mr. James Bezan:** We'll deal with that in the second hour when we just have General Eyre and the officials.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Yes.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I want your comment on what you see as the shortage, what the number is, and what you are going to do about it as Minister of National Defence. General Eyre has said in the past that the existential threat facing Canada is that we don't have enough men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** There are a number of things the Canadian Armed Forces is doing in order to improve our recruitment. For example, the Royal Canadian Navy has a program under which they're bringing people in for a 12-month period. There are eight weeks of training and then they're deployed on ships and given a lot of different exposure to different functions within the navy. All of that, I think, is a really good way to introduce people.

I'd also say that when I was in Halifax for the International Fleet Week, seeing those sailors walking around the streets of Halifax in their brilliant white uniforms was an inspiration to me, but I also hope it was an inspiration to all sorts of young people who witnessed that and saw that there was a career to be had in the Canadian Armed Forces.

● (1545)

**Mr. James Bezan:** My last question before I get cut off by the chair is this: Where are we at with "Strong, Secure, Engaged" and having the defence policy update? The Liberals promised a plan on how to get things built and how to fund that. According to the PBO, the money that was supposed to be attributed is already \$10 billion short. We have ships rotting out right now. We're hearing that we have frigates that are having trouble getting to sea and submarines that we can't keep in the water, yet all the major projects to replace those are sliding to the left and it will be years before we see any replacements.

Where's the DPU, and how are you going to make sure we actually get the money spent to get the kit our troops, our sailors and our air crew need?

**The Chair:** Unfortunately Mr. Bezan has run out of time on his question. I'm sure we'll come back to it.

Colleagues, I'm trying to get in two full rounds, so I have to be fairly disciplined, because I'm sure you want to talk to the minister.

Mr. Fisher, go ahead for six minutes.

**Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to you and your team, Minister Blair, for being here.

Thank you very much, General and Colonel, for your service to our country.

We have talked a lot in this committee about recruitment and retention, and you heard these things touched on already today. Focusing on the importance of building a more inclusive and diverse defence team and ensuring that everyone who serves in the CAF or who works at DND has a healthy workplace, free from harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct and violence, are going to help recruiting efforts and help retain the amazing skilled personnel we have today.

You've acknowledged that not your personal mandate letter but the Minister of Defence's mandate letter makes it very clear that reforms are necessary and an absolute priority. I'm interested in hearing about why this is a priority for you personally as the new minister. I recognize that culture change isn't going to happen overnight, but can you give us a snapshot of where we are today on these reforms and where you personally are hoping to go?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Thanks, Darren.

I think this is the most important question, because sometimes you have to put more than just words to a commitment to the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces and ensuring that they have a work environment that is truly safe and where they feel supported, respected and included.

One thing the Canadian Armed Forces has embarked upon is an effort to bring greater diversity and to recruit women into the Canadian forces in greater numbers, as well as indigenous people and people who have a diversity of perspectives and who know what it's like to be an immigrant, for example, or to face discrimination.

By the way, that diversity and those perspectives are going to make the Canadian Armed Forces stronger, more resilient and more capable. However, if we're going to attract that diversity and keep it within the organization by nurturing it and supporting it into leadership positions, we have to make sure that we take all the steps necessary.

I also want to acknowledge that there is so much about the Canadian Armed Forces that is a proud tradition. It's a commitment to serving us and to sacrifice. They have a long history of coming to our aid when we need them. They have served in incredibly difficult circumstances and fought bravely on behalf of this country. There is much for the Canadian Armed Forces to be proud of.

At the same time, we know there have been incidents within the forces when people have felt less than respected, have not felt supported and have not felt safe. Women have experienced sexual harassment. People of colour have experienced racial discrimination. All of these things cannot be tolerated in the modern Canadian Armed Forces. I'm not the only one who believes that, because I've heard from the general and his entire command team that unwavering commitment to supporting the men and women of the service.

We are making some real strides. For example, Justice Arbour's recommendations are extremely helpful in this regard. I met yesterday with the external monitor, Madame Therrien, who is giving us monthly reports and publishing quarterly reports and updates on the progress that is being made. I think that's incredibly valuable as well.

We've been able to take some steps very quickly, for example, on recommendation five, with respect to the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault offences arising within the Canadian Armed Forces. We took interim measures in response to that. There are going to have to be legislative changes, but we put some measures in place so that 100% of the new cases are now being referred into the civilian criminal justice system.

We also heard very clearly about concerns within the recommendations regarding the duty to report or even having access to the Canadian human rights...to have complaints investigated. We're taking very quick steps, but let me also say that there is much more to do.

Don't get me wrong. I've never served in the Canadian Armed Forces, but I had the opportunity to wear a uniform for a long period of time, and I had the responsibility for a very diverse uniformed workforce. I knew there that it was my responsibility to make sure that I protected and made safe every member of that service. I believe that same commitment exists within the Canadian Armed Forces.

It is my first priority. All the investments in boats, planes and equipment are important, but none of them will help us achieve what we need to achieve if we don't create the right environment for the men and women who serve in the forces. It has to be our first priority.

● (1550)

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** Thank you very much for that, Minister Blair.

Back home in Nova Scotia, folks are very proud of our Arctic offshore patrol ships. When the *Margaret Brooke* was touring the Arctic, everybody—me included—was bursting with pride.

There's a growing interest in this region in Canada's north. It's no secret that since the start of Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine, there's even more interest.

Can you speak to some of the investments that we're making to promote and defend our Arctic sovereignty, and what we're doing in partnership with our allies in the north?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Thanks for the question. I agree. It's an absolutely critical one for us.

We have international obligations to NATO. We'll be happy to chat later on about how we are supporting our enhanced presence in Latvia and the other things we're doing. We are supporting Ukraine. We're significantly increasing our presence in the Indo-Pacific and being consistently present there.

I believe our first priority must be the protection of Canada—that is the first responsibility of the Canadian Armed Forces—and being present in the Arctic.

The threats that Canada currently faces in almost every incident are coming from other hostile nations active in that region. We need to be present there. It's one of the reasons our government announced a few years ago a \$38-billion investment in NORAD enhancement. Investing in such things as over-the-horizon radar systems and over-the-polar radar systems is important, but that in and of itself is not enough. We need to be present there. We need to make sure that we have those Arctic offshore patrol boats present and that we support the ranger program and the presence of the Canadian Armed Forces.

We've invested in the F-35 jets that are going to give us—

**The Chair:** We're going to have to leave that shopping list right there.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** We're going to have to leave that until the next round.

**The Chair:** Yes, indeed.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** That's a lot of investment.

**The Chair:** That's a lot of investment indeed.

Madam Normandin, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** It's a pleasure to have you here today, Mr. Minister. Thank you for your availability.

I'd like to start with a question about your former role. This summer saw an increase in climate crises, particularly forest fires. For much of the summer, you were the Minister of Emergency Preparedness, and one of the responses you had to the lack of provincial or federal capacity was to call in the army. However, now you're on the other side of the looking glass in a context where we know that climate crises are going to increase, and we have an attrition phenomenon in the armed forces where we risk having more and more difficulty responding to demands and threats.

Do you have any guidelines on how to deal with the increasing use of the armed forces in domestic operations?

[*English*]

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Thank you for the question.

If I may, let me speak a bit about the wildfires that took place in Quebec. It is primarily the responsibility of the provincial authority and local authorities to respond in the first instances to those fires, but I was in close contact with François Bonnardel, from the Quebec government, who quickly identified that they needed some help.

We did call upon the Canadian Armed Forces, but we also went looking for other resources through the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, CIFFC, in order to access additional resources from other provinces, first of all. In my conversations with Minister Bonnardel, I personally reached out to the United States and made arrangements with their FEMA people to gain access to additional firefighters, firefighting equipment and water bombers in order to provide that assistance. We were very fortunate, and the Canadian Armed Forces were able to quickly respond, as they did, by the way, for the fires in Nova Scotia, in Alberta, in the Northwest Territories and in British Columbia. There was a very significant deployment of those resources.

I had conversations at the time with the chief of defence and, of course, we've had many more robust conversations about the impact of those deployments. I think it is one of their responsibilities to be there for Canadians when we need them, but it had a very significant impact on their capabilities and their capacity to respond to other duties in Canada and around the world. It impacted on their training facilities, and I believe it also had an impact on the men and women who serve. Responding to those very difficult and dangerous situations can be a real challenge for them. They were away from their families and their communities for a period of time.

I think it's incumbent upon us, even though we call upon them and we take full advantage of that resource, to always remember the cost that the Canadian Armed Forces and their members are paying for that service. We're working very carefully with our provincial partners to make sure that we find every way to help the provinces when they need our help and to help Canadians when they need our help, but also to make sure that we're mindful of the impact it's having on the CAF.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the forces who fought the fires.

I'd like to go back to Mr. Bezan's question. The Strong, Secure, Engaged policy provided for a 70% increase in spending over 10 years, and we know that all departments are being asked to make \$15 billion in cuts. We often hear about places where the Department of National Defence won't make cuts. We know that it won't cut infrastructure, international aid or equipment procurement.

So I'd like to know where these cuts will be made. That's the question I haven't had an answer to yet.

[*English*]

**Hon. Bill Blair:** It's a very difficult and challenging question.

The fiscal environment in Canada right now requires that, when we are spending Canadian taxpayers' dollars, we do it carefully and thoughtfully. I've always looked upon the expenditure of tax dollars as an investment in creating public value for Canadians. It is incumbent upon all of our departments to make sure we're doing that as carefully and appropriately as possible. At the same time, I also want to assure you and every member of this committee of our unwavering commitment to make sure that we support the Canadian Armed Forces, the people who are doing the work, and that we get them the equipment they need. We are looking very carefully at expenditures. It may require, for example, that we make different choices.

The first thing I would offer in response to your question is that we would start to reduce significantly the professional services that we sometimes contract, and then you and I had a conversation about the excellent work that a private company does in supplying services to the college at Saint-Jean. I went back and shared that with our colleagues and said that we need to be careful that we don't cut something that's producing real value and is a good expenditure.

I wanted to share that with you because I thought it was a very good intervention, but we do know that we have to look very carefully at expenditures. It may actually require that, for some of the investments we know we have to make, we make them over a longer period of time in response to the current fiscal situation, but I want to assure you of our commitment to still get that job done.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much. I'll continue quickly.

One of the reasons people often join the Canadian Armed Forces is to be able to take part in missions abroad. Currently, military members train for six months in Canada, then continue their training abroad or train others abroad, without actually taking part in missions. However, we haven't kept our promise to participate more in international peacekeeping missions, such as the blue helmets, or in some other way with the United Nations.

Does that concern you?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have one and a half seconds to respond to that.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** The answer is, yes, we'll look at that, but the navy is doing something where it's allowing somebody to sign up not for three years but for 12 months. We'll learn from that experience and see if there are other ways in which we can encourage people to come into the service.

**The Chair:** Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Thank you, Minister, for appearing today.

Thank you to all the guests here.

Canadians were really shocked to hear the story of ex-corporal Arianna Nolet, the military sexual trauma survivor who was denied her day in court because of the failing justice system in her case. In his ruling to stay her case, the judge stated that the case had an albatross of nine months of delay under the military justice system clamped stubbornly around its neck. We've heard warnings that this is only a first case to be thrown out due to the concurrent jurisdiction issue.

This can be solved very quickly with a simple bill in the House. I think that you could make some significant changes with a piece of legislation like that. However, in terms of the larger reforms that are necessary, Arbour herself called it "the graveyard of recommendations". Getting that bill right, I know, is of concern to you. You've expressed that before and today as well.

I think we need that comprehensive plan, as you said, and to work beyond partisanship. I'm also concerned because, when we heard from the external monitor at this committee, she specifically said that there was no comprehensive plan yet.

I'd like to know how that's changed. I know it's been a short time since you've become minister, but I would like to know how that's changed. I would like to know that we're providing the survivors with justice as quickly as we possibly can, so I'm wondering if you would act to bring forward legislation to end that concurrent jurisdiction issue to ensure that every survivor can get their day in court as they need it.

● (1600)

**Hon. Bill Blair:** First of all, I can't eliminate that albatross of dual-jurisdiction time simply with legislation. The Jordan decision is a decision that the court will take notice of. If a case has already spent a long period of time in the military justice system and has now transitioned over to the civilian system, the civilian system has an obligation to take into account that time.

Don't get me wrong. I understand the frustration and hurt that all victims will feel. They seek justice, and they seek some resolution. I think we also have an obligation to find every way to support them during that process.

With respect to dealing within the legislation, first of all we have taken interim steps to make that transition, and all those cases are now being referred to the criminal justice system. I am also struck by the urgency.

I'm going to jump back a little bit. I also met with the external monitor yesterday. We talked about the need for a well-articulated strategic plan. I'd like to work on that with all of you, quite frankly. We've had some conversations already, but I think there's much more work that needs to be done.



In coming forward, I don't believe it might be possible. If you have a different perspective, share it with me, please, but I think it would be very challenging to address all 48 of Justice Arbour's recommendations in legislation within the time period that we currently have available to us. It would just simply take a long time. Therefore, one of the conversations I want to have with all of you is this: Help me prioritize, and help us determine what we can and must deal with very quickly.

I'm hoping to bring legislation before the House early in the new year, because I need a window to pass that legislation. Also, I think that helping chart that path forward is part of articulating a strategic plan for moving it forward. It's also going to require, I think, a collaborative effort on all of our parts.

I will come back to this committee, and I'm going to ask for some help, not just in passing through a bill that we bring forward but in actually crafting that bill.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Ultimately, that would be a very complicated bill that could take a lot of time and, like I said, right now you could end this concurrence of jurisdiction issue with something more simple. There's also the power that you hold as minister to task this committee with the creation of that bill in, hopefully, a very non-partisan way. Would you be interested in that?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** As I've already articulated, I would very much like to be able to come with my team to this committee and to work with all of you. I believe that it is complicated and we have hard choices to make. Frankly, those choices are mine, but I would like your input. I'd like your advice on those things that this committee would prioritize. Many of you have really important perspectives on this, and I want to understand that.

There's also a broad consultation taking place with our Department of Justice officials. There's a broad consultation taking place with victims and with Justice Arbour and the external monitor. At the same time, I would like very much to be able to work with this committee—I hope I'll have the opportunity to do that—in addressing those things that you'll help me identify as the greatest priorities.

That's not to suggest for a moment.... I want to be very clear. All of Justice Arbour's recommendations are important. Some of them can be done fairly quickly. Some of them will take more time. I want to be able to make the right choices, to do the right thing and to make real progress on this. I think we have an opportunity to do that, but there's an urgency to it. I will bring forward a clear articulation of a strategy to move forward, but I am going to come back to you and ask for your help.

● (1605)

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Ultimately, many people have talked about the defence policy update. In fact, as I recall, the chair said earlier in the spring that it was soon to arrive. We didn't hear a date. We didn't hear any sort of timeline from you on that. Could we get one?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** As soon as I have a date, I'll share it with you. It's a priority for me. There is important work going on. I'm relatively new to the portfolio. I hope my arrival hasn't delayed that decision, but I need to be up to date on it because we're putting in work on it. I have been well briefed of its importance.

The threat environment has changed significantly. There are many new things that we need to invest in and work that needs to be done. The chief of defence and my deputy minister have been very clear about the importance of that work. I'll move forward with that as quickly as I can.

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

Next is Shelby Kramp-Neuman for five minutes.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Thank you.

Earlier this year, General Eyre was asked this question: Is Canada's military ready for the challenges ahead? His response was, "No. That's why it's so important we reconstitute our force, get our numbers back up [and] that we get the capabilities in place that are relevant for the future security environment".

Recognizing that the intent and the goodwill are maybe there, we need to hone in on tangible metrics to ensure progress is actually happening. How many applicants has the CAF had since the reconstitution order was announced?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Just give me one second. I'll look that up because I'd like to give you an accurate number. Somebody has to point me at it.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** If you don't have it right at your fingertips, perhaps you could circle back to us in a note.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** It's 30,000 this fiscal year.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** This fiscal year so far, 30,000 people have come through the door and put their hands up, and we're working through those applications.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Do we know how many of these applicants are citizens and how many have been through as a result of the permanent resident program?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Yes, Ma'am. It's about seventy-thirty. Seventy per cent are Canadian citizens, and 30% of the new applicants we've received are coming from permanent residents.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Thank you.

For a successful applicant, what is the average length of time from application to acceptance of a prospective CAF member?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I may have to turn to our officials to tell you that, because I'm not sure of the amount of time, but I will point out for you that one of the challenges we have been facing is in what we refer to as background checks, particularly for the cohort of permanent residents. We've also recognized that they've all been subject to background checks through IRCC in order to become permanent residents, so we're working with IRCC to see if we can use the work that was done there and apply it to expedite this process.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Could you suggest how this process compares to that of our ally nations or NATO allies? Also, how can we get troops through the door quicker?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** It is a question that I've raised with our ally defence ministers, but also, the general has been kind enough to introduce me to a number of people. Almost all of our like nations are facing the same challenge in recruiting. It appears, by the way, as I've been told, that only the Marines so far are not struggling in getting recruits through the door. It is a challenge, but I think it's also an opportunity.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** It appears to me that the problem is the delay in processing the applicants. If we have a million applicants wanting to get through and we can't process them, what's the holdup?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** There are 30,000 applicants, and we're working through them as quickly as possible. First of all, it's really important when they are hiring.... They are also intent on hiring the very best of people—

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** It's a reconstitution effort—

**Hon. Bill Blair:** We're also looking for certain skills that will enhance the capability of the Canadian Armed Forces.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** I respect that, but if the reconstitution effort has focused on recruitment, is there any focus on recruiting the people who actually process the applicants? Is prioritization given to human resources and medical trades?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Yes, ma'am. I will tell you it's an important part of the work we are doing in the defence policy update, looking at not only people who process recruits but investments in digitizing some of those systems so that we can move more efficiently.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Excellent. Thank you.

Here's my next question. Earlier, you mentioned the naval experience program. How many individuals are currently taking part in this?

• (1610)

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I think there were 142 applicants. I had the opportunity to speak to the rear-admiral about it. There are, as I understand it, about 345 more people in the queue who are being processed.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** How quickly is that onboarding happening?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** It's onboarding fairly quickly. They have been able to move fairly quickly in that program. Because it's a relatively short period of time, it's almost like a probationary period, whereby the navy can determine whether this person is right for the navy and the person can determine if the navy is right for them.

I think there's real value in that program.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Okay.

Let's talk retention. Recently, your department updated the post living differential to the Canadian Forces housing differential, which was met with near universal condemnation by forces who have time in.

The PLD needed to be updated. However, your department, along with the Treasury Board, did so in a manner that severely impacted long-serving members in a negative way. In some cases, people will actually lose money for getting promoted. This is including the increase in pay your government brought in at the same

time. The provisional post living differential does nothing to address the core concerns of our forces members.

What substantive actions will you take to fix this issue?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** We've already done a number of really important things. First of all, we've added more money into that fund to make it more accessible to more people. There were some changes that were made because we saw that people in the lower ranks and the lower pay grades, particularly, were not getting access to the funds they needed, so we made it available to far more of those lower pay grades. There was obviously an impact on the higher pay grades that did not require that same level of support.

However, recognizing the impact it was having on people—and I think this is an important point—we implemented a program of phased implementation so that the support they receive will be reduced by one-third in the first year, two-thirds in the second year and—

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Okay. Perfect.

Just in the interest of time, I have one last question. Have you met with your predecessor and current Minister of the Treasury Board to discuss the burdensome regulations that Treasury Board places on defence? Is there any effort to give your department more latitude or agility in making the time-sensitive decisions that are necessary in the CAF, without having the Treasury Board stamp everything?

You can answer yes or no, if you'd like.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I have not had an opportunity to speak to my very busy colleague in her new role.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Fillmore, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister Blair, General Eyre and team, thank you very much for making time for us today.

I am sorry I'm not with you in person today. I'm in Halifax.

Minister, I want to start by saying thank you for attending and, in fact, opening the first-ever Halifax International Fleet Week. You've mentioned it a couple of times in your testimony already. That was in September. It was in time to complement Operation Cutlass Fury, the NATO anti-submarine warfare exercise hosted every two years by the Royal Canadian Navy.

As I think you heard while you were there, we welcomed somewhere between 1,200 and 1,400 sailors from our NATO allies, who joined our own Royal Canadian Navy sailors for an incredible agenda. There were ship tours, concerts, information booths—including recruitment booths—receptions and a very hard-fought rugby game with the Royal Navy.

I want to take this moment to recognize on the record the incredible team at the RCN under Vice-Admiral Topshee, including Rear-Admiral Josée Kurtz and fleet commander Trevor MacLean and his amazing team, who brought ships out from behind the curtain of CFB Halifax right onto our city's waterfront. It was incredible outreach.

I'll give you some quick stats. HMCS *Moncton* had 3,800 visitors over three days. HMCS *Margaret Brooke* had 4,500. HMCS *Fred-erickton* had 4,500 people over three days. In just one day, HMCS *Glace Bay* had over 1,000 people. Over 50,000 everyday citizens came down to the waterfront and took part in these festivities. Downtown businesses recorded their best-ever second weekend in September for business.

I have to say that all of this is incredible for the inaugural year of what we're going to be doing every two years as Cutlass Fury continues. The impact of this was that it really exposed Canadians to what our serving members do on behalf of Canadians and our NATO allies around the world every single day.

I wonder if you could reflect for us on how you view these kinds of outreach initiatives as a tool for the Canadian Armed Forces going forward.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Andy, if I were 50 years younger, I'd have signed up myself.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Me too, sir.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** It was a terrific day. You and I have talked about this. We witnessed it first-hand. I have to tell you how proud I was. I could also see that on the faces of Canadians on the street and on the docks when visiting those sailors. As someone said to me, "It's going to be hard for any sailor in this town to buy a drink tonight." I thought it was a great opportunity for the people of Halifax, for Canadians, to acknowledge the pride in the armed forces and to say thanks. It really was quite extraordinary.

When I reflect on the importance of these events, I think we need to do more. When we have Canadian Armed Forces members who are in a flood-ravaged community or helping evacuate people out of a fire zone, it really is an opportunity for Canadians to see how truly valuable they are. Sometimes when we talk about the Canadian Armed Forces, particularly in foreign deployments—don't get me wrong, because those overseas expeditionary deployments are critically important to Canada's interests—it sometimes feels a little bit remote for the average Canadian. During International Fleet Week or deployments or even when some of our bases open up their doors to invite in people in the community, I think it's a really great opportunity to demonstrate how really important the Canadian Armed Forces are, with all their proud and glorious history, to our country and its future.

I guess I'm vigorously agreeing with you. It was a terrific day. I was very grateful to have the opportunity to participate.

• (1615)

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Thanks for that.

You gave a wonderful impromptu and unrehearsed recruitment speech right on the jetty by HMCS *Sackville* at the opening ceremony that was very well received and very well observed. Thank you for that.

The recruitment booth had a tremendous amount of action as well, with a number of people visiting it over the three days. It will be interesting to see, when stats become available, what kind of blip that caused in recruitment in Halifax.

Shifting to the NATO component of this, we're very excited to be hosting DIANA, the defence innovation accelerator for the north Atlantic, in Halifax very shortly. We have the Halifax International Security Forum, which is really about global partnerships. Of course, we also have fleet week. All of this is positioning Halifax as a way to illustrate Canada's role in NATO.

If you have any reflections about outreach through the NATO lens rather than the recruitment lens, that would be interesting to hear.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I'm glad you mentioned DIANA. I did have an opportunity, when I was at the Ukraine Defense Contact Group and meeting with a number of our NATO allies who are present in that forum as well, to talk a little bit about Halifax. We talked about the investments that Canada is making. I also had an opportunity to talk to the Secretary General of NATO. I'm very proud of the investment they're making in North America. They think Halifax, because of its history and the community there, is a great place for NATO to put its foot down in North America. We talked a lot about that.

I would also reflect, if I may—

**The Chair:** Well, no.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** —if the chair lets me finish my sentence—

**The Chair:** We've had enough reflections on Halifax.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** You're welcome any time, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** This is becoming the Halifax defence committee.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I'm sorry, but we had a really good day out there—a good week, actually.

**The Chair:** I know. I feel like the Grinch who stole Halifax.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Two years from now, you'll all have to come with us. It's worthwhile seeing.

**The Chair:** You have two and a half minutes, Madame Normandin.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Minister, I would like to hear what you have to say about transfers. When it comes to retention, we often hear military members say that transfers are very difficult for their families. When the family isn't happy, the member can't be happy at work. Military members complain that members of the chain of command are often insensitive to this. They seem to think that, since they've been through it themselves, the military members can do it too.

Has any thought been given to making transfers more flexible?

[English]

**Hon. Bill Blair:** If I may, I've been hearing the same thing. I've talked to people about how difficult it can be to find a family doctor. I spoke to a colonel who told me his 12-year-old daughter's not talking to him anymore because she had to uproot from her high school. Those are very human things. Those are very real things for families. At the same time, we clearly need to be able to deploy people into areas where they are required and into new jobs. It's part of their commitment when they join the Canadian Armed Forces.

However, I think there are things we can do. I've been talking a lot about how people are able to access housing; how they're able to access a family doctor; how they're able to access child care, which is so important to families; and how we're able to provide other types of supports to help facilitate those moves, because it is impactful. It's hard on them. They've shared that with us.

One of the things I've also learned is that we talk about the people who join the Canadian Armed Forces, but their families kind of sign up too. There's a real impact on families. That's why I think it's very important, in all our work to find ways to support the men and women of the service, that we also think about ways to support their families.

• (1620)

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

On another note, in June, the department announced the qualities that would be sought in the people who would form the committee to review the role of military colleges.

Could you tell us what progress has been made in forming the committee, and what the time frame is for reviewing the role of the military colleges?

[English]

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Yes. First of all, we're bringing forward a new committee that's going to provide oversight. I'm hoping that we'll be able to announce that in the coming weeks. A lot of work has been done. We're looking forward to that.

We're also looking at the leadership in those colleges. Just recently.... We're already going through a process at the RMC in Kingston, looking at a new official to be responsible for that unit. It's difficult to make sure that we get the right person.

It's extraordinary to me.... I just really learned that the Canadian Armed Forces has its own education system, its own health system and its own housing system. It provides all services to its members. It has its own justice system and its own policing system, for exam-

ple, so I think those colleges are critically important places for leadership development. We have to make sure that the behaviour in those places is conducive to learning and supportive of the men and women who pass through those education institutions. That's a priority and a commitment.

**The Chair:** We're going to have to leave that answer there.

Colleagues, there is no discipline in this committee thus far.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** I blame the chair.

**The Chair:** Yes. I think there's enough blame to go around here.

Ms. Mathysen, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Union of National Defence Employees represents about 19,000 people who proudly serve the Canadian defence community. They also, of course, fall under your purview. They are firefighters, engineers, workers on the base. They support the military, and they are essential for our security.

Sadly, for almost her entire tenure, your predecessor refused to meet with the union leadership of those workers, for which I had to call her out. However, there are major problems with the contracting out of public sector work. For example, to this day, there are postings on the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services page for non-public-funded jobs that are below the federal minimum wage.

I'm wondering how you're working to ensure that there is oversight of the CFMWS.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** We had an opportunity to chat about this the other day. It is a concern to me. I will undertake to meet with the union leadership to discuss these issues.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Can you provide a timeline of when you will meet with them?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** No, I just said that I will do it. You can help me reach out to them and get that timeline.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Interestingly, it's my understanding that they actually already have, so I would hope that you would look into that to ensure that you follow up on that letter that they have sent you.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Yes, Madam. I have not yet seen the letter, but I'm more than willing to meet with the union leadership. I believe in organized labour, and I'd like to talk to them.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Perfect.

Can you tell us why those non-public funds for employees, 40% of which are members of military families....? Why are those employees being paid less than the federal minimum wage?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I don't have an answer for that. I wasn't aware of that. You have brought it to my attention, and I'll look into it.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** As you know—and we're hopefully talking in committee shortly about Canadian military housing—they are short thousands and thousands of units. Canada owns quite a lot of land that could be used, potentially, for some of those military houses. They're underutilized lots. They are near bases. Will you consider partnering with non-profits and co-operatives to transfer land for the development of affordable housing close to base so that military families can stay close to base, and to help deal with those skyrocketing rent costs?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** What I will undertake is that we are looking at a number of what I believe could be very innovative solutions. There is a significant deficit of housing for Canadian Armed Forces members—almost 7,000 housing units, as I understand it. I think there are some very innovative ways—you've referred to a couple of them—but we're going to examine all of the ways that we might be able to move forward.

As you've already indicated, we have land. We don't necessarily have enough resources to do that, but there are some very innovative ways that we could approach that and get that done.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Okay. We're going to leave it there.

Mrs. Gallant, you have five minutes.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Thank you.

Minister, what do you consider to be the most imminent external threat facing our nation?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I could talk in geopolitical terms. Quite frankly, Russian activity in the invasion of a sovereign country I think is a direct threat to the rules-based order that is an agreement among nations on how each nation should be secure. I think that is a significant threat to us. It's one of the reasons we so vigorously support the efforts of Ukraine.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** You don't see a threat on our territory.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I'll get to that. We're also seeing other hostile nations, and I would reference particularly China, demonstrating a disregard for that rules-based order. There are other nations as well. I think there is a very significant threat. It's one of the reasons we work so carefully with our allies in order to secure that. We're making significant investments to do that.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** What do you see as the emerging battlespace domain?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** There are a couple of places. I'm very concerned about the Arctic. The Arctic is a place of vulnerability for us, but I might reference not just the physical domain but also the cyber domain. I think that is a very significant challenge to us. I have the chief here with me. I'm sure she'd be able to be more full-some about that. We are being attacked in that domain every single day, every hour of every day, and it is necessary for us to vigorously defend Canada's interests in that domain as well.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Have you put any plans in motion to start defending our low-earth orbit domain?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Yes, ma'am. We work very closely with our allies in that regard. There has been a significant increase in the capacity and capability of those who are hostile to our interests. We are working with our allies to respond to that.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** It's very difficult to have even one of our submarines in the water at a given point in time. Where is Canada in the procurement of a replacement submarine for the Victoria class?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I have been briefed that the Victoria-class submarines are still in operation, obviously, but they are aging out, and—

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** No order has already been placed. Has the procurement process not been started for the new fleet?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** We have not made an order, but there is work ongoing in order to look at the best path forward for Canada. There are a number of options available to us. We are also speaking very closely with our allies.

I would also mention that the chief of defence and I have had discussions quite recently with some of our allies with respect to some work that is being done, particularly among our Five Eyes allies, with various platforms and investments that we believe will inform the decisions we have to make with respect to the replacement of the Victoria-class submarines.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Troop morale is at the lowest it's been in a quarter of a century. How will you instill the confidence in our military members that they've lost after being put into theatre without helmets, food provisions, reliable transport, modern anti-tank weapons, counter-drone systems and a dedicated short-range air defence system to guard against helicopters and tech planes?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** We did not put people into harm's way without helmets, but I'm aware of what you're reporting on.

I think we do that. We address the morale, first of all, by creating that safe, inclusive and respectful work environment for every member of the service. We also do that by demonstrating our commitment to make significant investments in the ships, the planes, the platforms and the equipment they need to make sure they have a modern capability. I've come to understand how important kit can be to the men and women who serve.

Finally, I think we also do that by our expeditionary and domestic engagements. People join the Canadian Armed Forces and I think are proud to serve in these deployments in Latvia, in the Indo-Pacific region and around the country.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** When will our first extra supply ship...or next supply ship be delivered?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I don't actually have the schedule for that. The deputy minister might be able to provide that in the next round of questioning.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** We'll do that later, then.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Yes. I was going to suggest that you ask him.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Okay.

What steps are you taking to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces have the naval capabilities, air support, air defence, ground support and firepower that we ask of them when we ask them to do it?

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Those procurements, the ones that we have already committed to, are moving forward apace. I think we remain on track. Although there are always challenges with the delivery of some of those very significant investments, we are proceeding with them.

As well, I've had a number of conversations. There are other procurement decisions that we are on the cusp of making. I'll announce that when it's the appropriate time.

• (1630)

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

Mr. May, you have the final five minutes. Welcome back to the committee.

Before you start your questioning, I want to thank you, on behalf of the committee, for your work in the last two years. You contributed mightily to the functioning of this committee, which I think functions at a pretty high level. I know that you did a lot of work, and I just wanted to publicly acknowledge your last two years. Thanks.

You won't get that every day.

**Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.):** Wow. I don't know what to say to that, other than I hope that doesn't count against my time, Mr. Chair.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Yes, your time is up.

**Mr. Bryan May:** I am very pleased to be subbing in for a very capable new parliamentary secretary who wasn't able to be here.

Thank you for that, Mr. Chair. I'm going to have to clip that. We're going to put that out there for posterity.

To go back to you, Minister, your first question from Mr. Bezan alluded to some potentially good news. I would like to hear that good news regarding recruitment and retention from General Eyre, if that's possible.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** It is. I think the fact that we've reversed the trend... The general, in the next hour... I might suggest that the best use of the time is to let him use that hour, but we've reversed the trend. In fact, the number of people joining is now exceeding, for the first time in nearly three years, the attrition, the people who are leaving. That is good news. I think it is reflective of some really outstanding work that the Canadian Armed Forces and our recruiting teams have been doing across the country.

I'm going to take a moment for two things.

In 2025 is the next supply ship. I got you an answer. I tried to get you an answer as quickly as possible.

Can I also just take a moment? I don't want to take it from his time, but I also wanted to thank Bryan for his exceptional work.

Even when I was named as the new Minister of National Defence, he spent a lot of time with me. He talked to me about his many visits to bases and wings right across the country, and he shared with me what he heard. It was incredibly important. I just wanted to acknowledge that. His heart is in this. He has been an incredible advocate for the Canadian Armed Forces in our government. I'm hoping he'll continue to be so.

Thank you.

**Mr. Bryan May:** Thank you, Minister. That was very special.

He's going to start calling for time now....

**Hon. Bill Blair:** He always does. It's okay.

**Mr. Bryan May:** I wanted to talk a bit about—and you've alluded to this—how a number of us had an amazing opportunity to travel overseas this past summer to the U.K. and to Latvia, Poland and Estonia to visit with a number of our troops over there. Everywhere we went, our partners and allies said that they wanted more Canada.

You've said a bit about it already today, but maybe you can elaborate on Canada's contributions to international peace and security on the international stage, not just in Europe but also in the Indo-Pacific.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** I think we've all heard the call from our NATO allies, for example, and from some of our Five Eyes partners, about the need to increase Canada's capabilities and participation in the region. What I've observed—I went and visited them as well, Bryan—is that, God bless them, our people are punching way above their weight.

I had the opportunity, like all of you did, to go to Lydd—well, some of you did—and see the work of our armed forces members: privates and corporals and sergeants training Ukrainian recruits. You could see the way in which they did that. It would take your breath away. It made me so proud of the work they were doing. Watching those Ukrainian soldiers get on the bus and head off to the front was also cause for you to just choke.... You couldn't care about people if you weren't really moved by that.

What I have heard... I've spoken to the defence minister in Latvia, for example. They are so proud of and pleased with the Canadian commitment in their country in that enhanced forward presence. They've said... Actually, the defence minister told me that the Canadian flag is the most popular flag in his country right now. That's directly because of the Canadian Armed Forces. That's the men and women of the forces that are causing that pride in our country.

Let me be very clear. We have to do more, and we are going to do more. CAF has already made a commitment to increase the brigade strength in Latvia. We're also much in demand in a number of other regions. You talked about Poland, Estonia, the U.K. and other places. We are going to do more, but the men and women we've already deployed are making it a lot easier and, frankly, they're increasing the demand for our service there.

• (1635)

**Mr. Bryan May:** I'm pretty sure that I'm getting close on time, but I'll use the rest of my time to simply say thank you to all of my colleagues here on the committee. Regardless of political stripe, this was an amazing group to be working with.

Thank you to Minister Anand and thank you to you, Minister Blair, but also, thank you to the people behind us. The staff team with National Defence were just top notch and amazing to work with.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

It gives me great pleasure to cut you off one last time, Mr. May.

Colleagues, that brings us to the end of the minister's hour with us.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for your time here, Minister Blair. You've made several offers to the committee to co-operate and to review various priorities and, possibly, legislation. It would be my intention and, I'm sure, the committee's intention to take you up on that, and we'd probably like to do it sooner rather than later. We will, by some means or another, schedule some sort of working group so that we can work toward the goal we all have, which is to have the best military services that this nation is entitled to.

Again, thank you, and we look forward to your next appearance.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the members for their warm welcome. Very sincerely, I am looking forward to working with you all. I think we share the same purpose—

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** We'll see you next week.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Scheduling permitting, I'll come back as quickly as possible.

**The Chair:** The meeting is suspended.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1640)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

Welcome. We'll start with our questions.

Mr. Kelly, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC):** Thank you.

I'm going to start. I don't know if this question is for Mr. Matthews or General Eyre, but how many 155-millimetre shells are being produced in Canada right now per month?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** Mr. Chair, first of all, it's not enough. Secondly, it's 3,000.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** The monthly number is 3,000.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** That is my understanding.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Is that out of GD-OTS?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** It's GD-OTS. Yes.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** All right. They are now producing shells.

What is the production capability of that facility? What can we realistically get up to quickly?

**Mr. Bill Matthews (Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence):** I'll start, Mr. Chair, and the chief will chime in.

The conversation about upgrading production of ammunition—155-millimetre or other—is a long process that requires investment. There are discussions under way about potentially investing to upgrade production, but it is not a quick fix.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Why not? This is perhaps the hottest military commodity in the world right now. Every allied military that fires 155 shells needs 155 shells.

Why is there no urgency in getting the production ramped up?

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** There are two things, Mr. Chair.

Number one—and the chief may have to help me here—is that there are variants of the 155, and the production of 155s in Canada is not, I'll call it, the most desirable variant. When you talk about upgrading production, we're also talking about new machinery, etc., to make a different type of 155. Discussions are under way, but it's a pretty big investment.

The chief can help me out with variants here.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** You've identified an issue that I am extremely concerned about, because it underpins our own lack of readiness in this area. We need more of a sense of urgency in this area, but with increasing industrial capacity, we need the contracts that go along with that to be able to produce the ammunition, to get the additional production lines open, etc.

We have not produced one additional round of ammunition since February 2022, so yes, this is something that greatly concerns me.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** To be clear for the record, the 3,000 per month is the same production as before the beginning of the war in Ukraine.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** Yes, and I'll add that those are the M107 variants. What we need are the M795 variants, which we do not yet have the production capability for in Canada.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** I can't even....

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** I can geek out on the details with you if you want, but....

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Given that previous witnesses last week gave us almost no meaningful information, take half a minute for some of those details.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** The M107 variant is a shorter distance, so the range is shorter. The kill radius is less and the accuracy is less. The M795 variant, which we consider the operational round and which we prefer to use in operations, has about a five-kilometre longer range, it's more precise and it has a wider kill radius, if you will. That being said, the M107 will still work, but not as well as the M795, which we hope to retool to.

• (1645)

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Is it not fair to say that literally every allied country is searching for this class of ammunition? How on earth could there not be contracts given that decades of production are being expended very quickly in the war in Ukraine?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** You are right. At every NATO chiefs of defence meeting I go to, this is an issue of discussion. Our allies are rightly very concerned about this.

We're all looking at ways of ramping up production. It is of increasing concern, because when we take a look at the Russian reconstitution ability, they're actually reconstituting at a faster rate than we anticipated. In order to continue to, first, ensure we have our own proper stock and, second, ensure we can continue to support Ukraine in the long term, the accelerated production of artillery ammunition is extremely important.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Is there any possibility for Ukraine to win the war without some type of parity or some type of ability to compete with Russian production and expenditure of artillery?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** There are many pathways to victory, but as we take a look at the reliance of modern warfare—in fact, warfare for the past 150 years—artillery has been pretty key.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Thank you.

On tanks, once our battle tanks have fully deployed with the battle group commitment in Latvia and also with the tanks that have already been sent to Ukraine, how many operational tanks are left for either further deployment or training?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** Mr. Chair, I'm going to have to do some math here.

We started with 82 tanks. We donated eight to Ukraine. We're deploying 22 to Latvia. On the math, just very quickly, doing it in my head—there's an accountant sitting beside me here—it's 52.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Are those 52 tanks all operational and fit to deploy, either for use or for training?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** No. I don't know the rate off the top of my head. I do know what the overall serviceability rate of army vehicles is, and it's not good. It goes down to a shortage of spare parts, national procurement funds and technicians.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** Okay, so the 82—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kelly. This is a five-minute round, not a six-minute round.

**Mr. Pat Kelly:** All right.

**The Chair:** Mr. Collins, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

My questions will be for whoever chooses to answer.

First, I want to talk about Operation Lentus. The minister talked about that, and Christine had a question about that earlier. We've witnessed some incredible natural disasters spurred by climate change over the last number of years. They're happening more often, and I think that by extension they're probably draining your resources and your ability to serve in different respects.

There's a question I have on the minister's point about providing appropriate supports and ensuring those who are serving in CAF have the appropriate resources. Do you have any idea or do you have a plan, understanding that you're going to be called on more often on an annual basis, as to how you continue to provide supports to provinces and territories from a personnel perspective, an equipment perspective and a resource perspective?

How do you continue to provide supports to provinces and territories, knowing that you've been stretched thin in other areas?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** You have hit on another issue of great concern. With these increasingly frequent deployments and callouts, it's affecting our readiness to do our primary function. What is required is additional capacity at the provincial and municipal levels to respond to natural disasters. Make no mistake about it: The Canadian Armed Forces needs to remain that force of last resort, but more frequently we're being called upon as the force of first choice. Natural disasters, with the intensity and the frequency, mean that the calls upon us are not going away, but more capacity is required.

This also speaks to some of the force design and force development challenges we are facing. There's an inherent tension between high-tech precision on one hand and mass on the other. Responding to natural disasters and things like the war in Ukraine require a certain degree of mass. On the other hand, many of the advanced technologies, the advanced capabilities that are out there, require that precision, that high-tech piece. Finding the balance between those two is a challenge that we are struggling with.

• (1650)

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Sir, can I ask, from a budget perspective, what that means to you? You're now being forced to provide more resources, and by extension, you're spending monies that you have in your budget. What kind of allocation have you had to provide now with the number of events that you've had to respond to versus three to five years ago?

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** I'll start, Mr. Chair.

The way our funding model works is that the organization absorbs the first \$100 million in operation costs every year. For everything beyond that, we are reimbursed by the centre. There is no direct flow of additional resources.



Am I allowed to ask the chief of the defence staff a question? It might be worth it for him to explain the regular pattern of deploy, recover and prepare, and the impact of these deployments on the regular cycle of CAF preparations.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** The deputy minister hit it right, Mr. Chair.

Generally, there are train, deploy and recover phases. In the train phase, you're preparing for deployment. In the deploy phase, you're on expeditionary operations. When you're in the recover phase, you are reconstituting yourself, reconstituting your unit and getting back with your family.

As these domestic deployments increase, that cycle becomes increasingly more challenging. It increases the personnel tempo for deployment, which has a knock-on effect on issues like recruiting and retention.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Then, from an equipment perspective, are there any special needs in that regard? You're responding more often and being stretched across the entire country. This is no longer a regional issue on the west coast or east coast. This is all across the country. Do you have special capital requirements related to the number of responses?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** It puts increasing stresses on our airframes, for example, that we use for evacuation. Those are our transport aircraft and helicopters. The wheeled vehicle fleet numbers are low, so they get used more than what would regularly be the case. Yes, it increases the overall stress, mostly on land and air fleets.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** I have about 30 seconds left.

In terms of housing, could you just give us a brief snapshot of the challenges you're facing in providing housing to those who serve?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** This is probably the number one issue that comes up as we travel around the country.

As for every Canadian, housing is an issue, but it's more acute for our people. We expect them to move across the country—and they have to—based on where our operational bases are. Housing—getting assistance with housing and building more housing—needs to be right at the top of the list of our personnel care issues.

We're somewhere in the neighbourhood of 5,000 to 7,000 housing units short across our footprint, given our current size.

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

My first question is for Mr. Matthews.

The minister mentioned that one area where budget cuts could be made was in the use of external professional services. When we started the McKinsey study, we realized that the Department of National Defence was the second-largest user of use this type of firm, after the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

Is that the kind of consulting firm we're referring to when we say that we want to cut back on the use of outside firms and go back to relying more on in-house public servants?

If so, what was the total of the contracts awarded to external consulting firms by the Department of National Defence last year?

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** Thank you for your question.

Yes, we can send those figures to the committee to better explain the number of external contracts.

[*English*]

One thing I would like to emphasize is that we've gone through the examination of contracts. I think there is an assumption by many people that the external contracts are all of the management and consulting firm types that we've talked about at previous committees. The vast majority of our contracts are for maintenance and repair and for health services.

We will get you the split in terms of the consulting types of contracts, but the vast majority of our spending on contracts is on those value-added things that the chief and the minister mentioned earlier.

The other point I would make is.... I know the increase in the services and contract spending has gotten people's attention, but we are also growing on the civilian side. That growth in external contracts has not come at the expense of civilian growth. We are growing on both fronts. It relates to the implementation of the existing defence policy, "Strong, Secure, Engaged".

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

My next question is for General Eyre, and it has to do with transfers. I'd like to come back to it and get a little more detail.

The minister mentioned that, when a military member enlists, it's as if their family has enlisted too. We know there's a lot of pressure on the family, and many divorces result from that. The member still has to leave service.

Despite everything, shouldn't we be working to offer greater flexibility on the one hand? On the other hand, shouldn't we improve the ability to easily transfer a member from the regular forces to the reserve forces, just as the opposite is true? For example, a member could withdraw to the reserves while managing a family situation, a birth, an illness or some other event, confident that they could return to the regular forces without having been released. It would also allow the forces to avoid losing that member.

Wouldn't there be more flexibility in that context?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** Thank you very much for that question.

Transfer between components is one way of keeping talented people in our ranks, and I'd like to improve the process of transfers between the regular and reserve forces.

We've recently increased our ability to process transfers between the two forces. I think it's a way of retaining talent, and we need to continue to encourage transfers between the two.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

I'd like to follow up on Mr. Kelly's question about transfers. As I understand it, one of the problems with the insufficient supply of ammunition is that the military doesn't have enough opportunities to train using real ammunition.

Is the fact that the military may not be sufficiently trained for something as silly as a lack of ammunition a national security issue? Shouldn't this be a reason to secure long-term contracts to increase domestic production capacity?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** Mr. Chair, yes. Absolutely.

This is a very important issue for us.

[*English*]

I am very concerned about our ammunition stocks.

As we take a look at our ammunition holdings, we look at what we call battle decisive munitions, and there are 20 or 20 plus of those. Our NATO high readiness forces asked us to have what's called 30 days of supply. If we were to consume munitions at the same rate that we're seeing them consumed in Ukraine, we would be out in days in some cases, and it would take years to restock.

[*Translation*]

Increasing the size of our ammunition stocks is therefore one of my major concerns.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You have five minutes, Ms. Mathysen.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Getting back to what was being said about the contracting out of maintenance facility services, of course, I am very concerned about that privatization piece and ensuring, when we can, that good-paying unionized public service jobs are kept within the public service.

In 2018, the assistant deputy minister of review services published a report titled, "Audit of Contracted Facilities Maintenance Services", which found that there was no evidence that facilities maintenance services had the ability to complete a value-for-money analysis on outsourcing.

The department is the single largest landowner in Canada, and its facilities management services are outsourced, but there's no idea of how that's happening and the best move for that.

Can you give us an update from that report on what changes you have made in reaction to that report, ensuring that those department cuts aren't just blind outsourcing because, ultimately, this report says that it is.

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** There are a couple of points there.

When I have engaged with union leadership, this is usually the first issue we talk about. The most significant change that's been put in place since the report is that, when there is a proposal to

change the service model from public servants to an outsourcing, it needs to be supported by a business case. That change was made, I'm going to say, three years ago. We have seen very few business cases come forward in that time, so there's really been no change in the status quo.

Where we get some tension is that, when there are public servant jobs that remain empty that are critical on base, you will see contracts put in place as a temporary stopgap. I think that in some cases, that stopgap continues longer than it was initially intended for, because it fills the immediate need, when the real work should be to actually staff the position.

We have some locations in Canada where we are struggling to find public servants to occupy those jobs—not just on base facilities but in other trades as well—so you have seen contracts used to temporarily fill a gap. However, I've seen no change in terms of structure or moves to permanently outsource facilities maintenance, etc., since I've been here at the defence department.

• (1700)

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Ultimately, what would be the reasoning for a company that could fill it at a lower pay rate—because ultimately a private corporation would take a part of that contract—versus somebody who is provided with full-time work, ideally at specific pay levels, unless those pay rates are not sufficient, and with the benefits that would go along with it? What are the reasons?

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** I think it depends on the geographic location. There are flexibilities and different models that private sectors have used to fill the gap, but it does beg the question of whether they can find people if in some cases they're paying less. In some cases, they're paying more hourly, but the benefits are not the same.

At the end of the day, employees vote with their feet. If they would prefer to be working for the private provider, that's their choice.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Okay. I'll move on.

In April the Prime Minister announced that Canada was providing arms and 2.4 million rounds of ammunition to Ukraine, manufactured at Colt Canada. Defence officials then walked that back, saying that, in fact, they were not fulfilling that Canadian-made commitment and that Colt's parent company would not guarantee that they were being made in Canada.

There was a story additionally published by David Pugliese about a memo that you sent to Minister Anand in August of 2022, where you stated, "For a variety of reasons, Canadian munitions suppliers have been unable to provide the types or quantity of operational munitions required in response to the invasion of Ukraine". You recommended to the national defence minister and the PSPC that they use non-disclosure agreements when talking to industry about domestic manufacturing capabilities.

Can you talk about that and the impact that has on transparency in terms of your department?

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** Certainly. When you're in negotiations or potential negotiations or discussions with industry about what it would take to change production, an NDA is very standard practice, because you may be having different conversations with different companies. That was the genesis for that—

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Where was the confusion in terms of announcing that it was Canadian-made but in fact it was not?

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** Sometimes plans change. I can dig into the details in this one, but you often talk to industry or talk to employees, think something is possible and find out there's a delay. In the case of Ukraine, urgency is job one in terms of finding the quickest way to ship available ammunition. If that means we have our stocks replenished later, that's fine too.

Urgency is job one. That's what was driving that conversation.

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

I think we have time, colleagues, to get in a full round.

You have five minutes, Mrs. Kramp-Neuman.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Thank you.

Earlier Minister Blair mentioned that he's building on the work of his predecessor, Minister Anand. Her suggestion was that we needed to continue to build resources, especially in the area of personnel.

My concern is the discrepancy between the numbers in the Order Paper question we received back in April. If we're talking numbers, based on the Order Paper question, we're about 8,000 personnel short for the regular force and 1,000 for the reserve force. However, there's a discrepancy, because other numbers suggest that we're 16,000 personnel short, with another 8,000 personnel short on the reserve side.

Just looking through the numbers, are you able to clarify with us what the numbers are for the Canadian Army, the Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command and the Canadian Forces Intelligence Command? The numbers aren't adding up.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** It's important to state that a guiding principle is that truth has a date timestamp. What was true on one day will not necessarily be true the next day, especially regarding numbers and personnel strengths.

I can give you our numbers effective as of August 31 for the Canadian Armed Forces. The difference between our authorized strength and our total strength of the regular force is 7,862.

• (1705)

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Okay.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** For the reserve force, it is 7,605. If you add that up, it's just shy of 16,000 short in the total force.

The important figure on the regular force side is the difference between our trained effective establishment and our trained effective strength, or those we can put out the door to do the job. Right now that number is 10,489 as of the end of last month. Those peo-

ple are in the training system but they're not ready for operations yet.

This is something that we watch very closely. It speaks to the need to continue to bring people in. I can talk about some other successes we've had and how we're cautiously optimistic, at this point—

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Fair enough.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** —if you wish.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Perhaps I'll lead right into the next question.

Back in February, earlier this year, I posed a question outlining the need for the retention of CAF from highly technical domains such as cyberspace, including the addition of 120 new military intelligence positions and 180 new civilian intelligence positions.

I asked if this goal had been effectively achieved and what the numbers are in this particular domain, if you're familiar with them. We were hoping to get some of those numbers circled back. I'm just wondering if you have those.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** I don't have the exact numbers for those occupations, but those technical occupations are ones that we're very concerned about. They have highly marketable skills. There's a shortage across our country, and we just see the general labour shortage writ large in the country, especially skilled labour in those fields. It's hard to hold on to people.

I am happy to report that I got good news today. Our attrition rate overall is down to 7.1% and back within historical norms. For a while over the pandemic, we were up to 9.1% or 9.2%, which was of concern. This again feeds into my narrative of being cautiously optimistic.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** The question I'd like to pose next is this: How much of that was relevant to letting people go with regard to COVID?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** That is for this fiscal year, so it's zero.

**Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Okay. That's fair enough.

I'll go to my next question. Changing gears here, the government has recently announced budget cuts to DND. Given the discussion here today—we're talking about how personnel shortages are apparent and equipment shortages are more than clear and abundant—how are the additional funding cuts going to impact the armed forces' ability to serve and protect Canadians?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** There's no way that you can take almost a billion dollars out of the defence budget and not have an impact, so this is something that we're wrestling with now. I had a very difficult session this afternoon with the commanders of the various services as we attempt to explain this to our people. Our people see the degrading, declining security situation around the world, so trying to explain this to them is very difficult.

**The Chair:** Madam Lambropoulos, you have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I also have a couple of questions with regard to retention and recruitment.

First, are there exit interviews when people leave and choose to leave the forces? I believe we've asked this before. I can't remember what the answer was.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** Yes, there are. We are doing that more and more systematically. We have had exit surveys as well to determine the reasons.

I will say the reasons are multi-faceted, ranging from family to... There are push-and-pull factors. The pull factors are with the economy for sure, with the very tight labour market. The push factors are family, career paths and unwillingness to move—the desire for geographic stability. Every story is somewhat different, but there are a number of themes that are out there.

One of the things that we are working to get better at is to have that conversation before the individual makes the decision to release, to see what we can do, bringing in a philosophy of a much more individualized career path so that we don't have to have the cookie-cutter, post-Korean War, 1950s industrial age personnel management system, but have something that's more fit for the 21st century. The challenge we have is geography. The vast majority of our population comes from urban locations. The vast majority of our operational bases are rural or, as the commander of the navy recently reminded me, in high-priced areas on the coast.

• (1710)

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you for seeing that my next question would have been on what the main reasons are why people leave.

You mentioned family. This is somewhat where I wanted to head with this question. Canadians across the country are increasingly facing affordability issues. The general population is having a hard time finding a place to live, finding health care, finding a family doctor and finding child care nearby. I'm assuming that the population and the members of the Canadian Armed Forces also have similar requests, situations and needs that they need to have met in order to make sure their families are well taken care of.

I was wondering if there have been any improvements in the last couple of years as to what social services are accessible to families, and what you're doing on health care as well in terms of the families of CAF members.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** Mr. Chair—

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** I was going to ask about housing, but that was already answered, so I'll stick to these.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** Mr. Chair, I was going to say that housing continues to be a challenge. In fact, it's been an increasing challenge over the last number of years.

On health care, finding family doctors is something that every Canadian is challenged with, but more so our people as they move more frequently and go to the bottom of waiting lists. This is something we're trying to address.

Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services has brought in a number of initiatives for some virtual family care with doctors who are experimenting with that. We are working with provinces through the Seamless Canada initiative to try to protect places on those waiting lists so that our people, as they move, are not automatically at the bottom of the list.

There are a number of initiatives ongoing, but it is still a challenge. Any help that you could provide would be greatly welcomed.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** You're saying there are efforts being made with provincial counterparts in order to make sure that they have some kind of priority when they're serving in a particular area.

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** We're trying.

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** To make that more real, when I go and visit bases and wings, I hear “housing” and I hear “medical care”.

Your average stint might be two or three years in a location before you have to move. If you picture a world where you have a child who needs a specialist, it takes some time to line that up. You hear a lot of cases of someone just finding a specialist and then they are moving to the province next door and have to start over.

That is one of the big drivers on retention.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you very much.

Another factor that was raised earlier was the fact that just this summer, with all of the natural disasters that have been taking place and the need for personnel to be going toward these issues and helping out Canadians, is that this is going to be something we're facing more and more as time goes on. At the same time, the geopolitical climate is only getting worse as well. Clearly, there are going to be very big demands in both of these realms.

We mentioned making sure that we're aware of the profound impact these demands have on the members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Are there mental health supports that are increasing in terms of the fact that, more and more, we're requiring their services and, more and more, stressful situations are arising? Have we tried to maintain what they are receiving in services for mental health?

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, we're way past the time. We'll have to leave it there. I'm sure you'll be able to work it back into another question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

General Eyre, I'd like to come back to peacekeeping missions.

If I'm not mistaken, in the spring, the number of Canadians deployed on peacekeeping missions was about 58. Could you give me the current or approximate figure? Is it still the same number?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** Mr. Chair, I think the number is about the same.

As I've said before, the truth changes over time, but I think the number of people is almost the same.

• (1715)

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** In the spring, given the number of resources available and the pressure on operations such as Unifier and Reassurance, it was impossible for Canada to intervene in Haiti.

Is that still the case?

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** We continue to work with our federal government partners on the situation in Haiti and with our allies to find a solution and support the efforts of other agencies. However, it's very difficult to have a response force.

We need to find a long-term solution for this country that includes policies, political and economic systems, and security.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

As far as the long term is concerned, Canada has reiterated its promise to have a rapid response force of 200 people, but is giving itself until 2026 to get there.

Is that realistic?

[*English*]

**Gen Wayne D. Eyre:** I think the force you refer to is the quick-reaction force. I think it's important to note that a quick-reaction force.... If you want put 200 troops on the ground, you have to have everything that goes with that to ensure that the force is set up for success, whether it's for intelligence, medical evacuation, sustainment or fires, or to be able to extract. A quick-reaction force is only used when a situation goes downhill, so it has to be prepared to fight.

It's a much larger force total than just 200, so we have to be very judicious about where we would put that type of force and understanding the risks that go along with it.

**The Chair:** Madam Mathysen, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** I have so many questions.

In terms of that hit on transparency and ensuring that the department is doing the best it can, it was recently reported that the number of "no records exist" responses to access to information requests for the Department of National Defence has doubled in the last eight years. There are a lot of historical cases of mismanagement of the ATIP requests at National Defence, including, of course, the trial of Mark Norman in 2018, where there were intentional circumventions of ATIP.

I'd like to know if we're going to see, or why we haven't seen, more reforms within the ATIP regulations of the department in terms of transparency.

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** I have a couple of points here.

I expect that people picture an access to information function where it's one person or one team who has access to all the infor-

mation. However, the reality is that, when the request comes in, it goes to the ATIP office and it gets dispersed for the people who are relevant to search their own records. The people who work in our ATIP office are effectively just the transmitters of what comes back.

The key for us is to remind people of the obligations to safeguard and protect relevant emails and documentation. I think that it's particularly challenging on the military side because people move around. That hygiene becomes more challenging when people change jobs. It's part of cleaning up, but it takes time and effort. It's a matter of reminding people of the obligation.

At the end of the day, when the search happens, we are reporting what the search found. I acknowledge that there are cases where the records were incomplete.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Ultimately, the defence department has always had a higher level of security. That's always been the case. Therefore, why has that increased—more than doubled—in the last eight years? Are you saying that it's because people move around more?

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** No, it may be for a number of factors. I can't give you a really good answer without speculating. ATIP volumes have increased exponentially, so the pressure on the people who do this type of function has certainly gone up. It may be a matter of less time to spend on these things and of feeling rushed.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Should there be more people doing that job? Would that be helpful?

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** Life would be easier if there were more people doing that job, but like we've already discussed here today, it becomes a question of where you put your priorities. It's military readiness versus ATIP versus support for families. Those are some very tough discussions that we are having.

• (1720)

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

Mr. Bezan, you have five minutes.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I don't think we need a lot of excuses on ATIP. Part of a democracy is transparency, so access to that information and sharing it with Canadians is critically important. I'm hoping that the department and the CAF are addressing this in the most serious manner because the external monitor and others have really been critical of National Defence's getting back on ATIPs, including getting Order Paper questions back to us as parliamentarians. If we're going to have a fully functional democracy, that information is critical.

I'm going to go back to the CANFORGENS memo that both you, Mr. Matthews, and you, General Eyre, put out about expenditure reductions in the department. You're saying that it's a billion dollars. We already know that \$2.5 billion lapsed in the budget last year. We know that the government allowed \$1.2 billion to lapse in the budget the year before that. Now we're going to cut it back by another billion dollars. The PBO just came out with his report and said that there is too much tail and not enough teeth in the Canadian Armed Forces, and that only 31% of every dollar actually goes into military effect.

What are we going to do to make sure that we have more teeth and less tail and that we keep the sharp end of the stick? You know, when you talk about where our troop numbers are at, you're saying that there are 10,500 in the queue getting trained. We're short just shy of 16,000 members. I'm hearing from reservists that they aren't getting their skills in their trades, that they're not getting trained up fast enough. They're years behind, not months behind.

What's going to give here on a billion dollars this year, and how are we going to deal with the threat environment that we're in if we're going to continue to cut rather than invest in our Canadian Armed Forces?

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** I'll start, Mr. Chair. I suspect General Eyre will jump in as well.

The process to identify proposals for spending reductions will lead to, as the chief said, \$900 million and change, and ramp up over four years. We have to prioritize those decisions so that they have the smallest impact possible, acknowledging there will be impacts.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Is it going to come out of the bureaucracy, or is it going to be coming out of the forces?

**Mr. Bill Matthews:** The decisions have not yet been taken, but minimizing the impact on military readiness has to be a driving force behind the decision. That process is still under way, so I can't offer you more there.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I sure hope we're not going to hear stories of how we can't afford to put the fuel in the tanks to train our guys in armour, how we're not going to be able to put diesel in the ships that have the navy out there and training, or how we can't afford to do maintenance on our tanks so they're going to continue to sit in the depot with nobody taking a look at them.

I say we have to make sure that we continue to move forward in training and operations and get everybody up to skill.

Talking about cybersecurity and the world that's there...and this is for both Madam Xavier and the CDS, and also DND. When you look at what's happening with the Five Eyes and with AUKUS and that second tier in their development, we know they're looking at AWS for cloud computing and storage, and we know we're looking at more quantum computing. The cybersecurity aspect is critical. Interoperability with our allies—particularly with the Americans but also within Five Eyes—is key.

What are we doing and how are we moving more quickly so that our allies are taking us seriously?

**Ms. Caroline Xavier (Chief, Communications Security Establishment):** Thank you for the questions.

I would say the alliance we have with the Five Eyes, especially from the Communications Security Establishment, is rock solid.

Interoperability, from that perspective, is a big part of the foundation of how we work with the Five Eyes. Because we share signals intelligence, for example, it is really important that, when we do that work together, that delay in being able to share data or share intelligence is not the rationale. Interoperability is a very foundational element that we discuss on a regular basis and that we invest in as a Five Eyes member, including in the cloud-based space that you're talking about.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I have only about 30 seconds left. I just want to touch on housing, because it has come up a number of times that this is an issue we have to deal with, and I want this committee to deal with it.

I've tabled this motion in the past, so I want to move it right now. I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the lack of housing availability on or near bases for Canadian Armed Forces members and the challenges facing members required to move across the country.

That the committee shall hold a minimum of 4 meetings for the duration of the study; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Your time is up.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I have a motion on the floor.

**The Chair:** You have a motion on the floor.

I'm assuming you don't want to debate it now.

• (1725)

**Mr. James Bezan:** No. I moved it. It's moved. The notice was given last week.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I'll just say this. I know from comments made by witnesses today, including Minister Blair, that housing is an issue they want to address. This is an open-ended, non-prescriptive way to look at housing so that we can actually dive in and have the Canadian Forces housing authority and other potential housing partners talk about how we move forward to address this issue.

I don't see this as being a partisan issue. I see this as one that can help inform the department, as well as us, as parliamentarians, on the best way forward.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. May.

**Mr. Bryan May:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** It looks like we're going to put you to work again.

**Mr. Bryan May:** I know I'm not a permanent member anymore, but I, too, agree that this is an important study. We travelled all over Canada and went to MFRCs all over Canada at all of the bases, and housing was key.

I would like to potentially add a friendly amendment, if that's at all possible, and I hope it's accepted, because—

**The Chair:** Friendly or otherwise, you're entitled to move it.

**Mr. Bryan May:** Sure.

I think it's important to talk about housing, but in addition to housing, one of the absolutely critical issues that we have to deal with is child care. As the former chair of Seamless Canada, of the two biggest issues that were identified and we dealt with back in the spring—and we're going to be coming back in December with potential solutions—one of them was, of course, child care. It is a massive problem. When folks are posted, they can't find a home and they cannot find proper child care. They go to the bottom of the list if they're posted in a different community.

I wonder if the member would be willing to expand on this study slightly to try to tackle both of those issues, given how connected they are in terms of when this is an issue for members of the armed forces.

**The Chair:** Do you have the amendment in writing?

**Mr. Bryan May:** I just simply would like to add, like I said, a study on housing and child care issues around the Canadian Armed Forces. I don't have the language of Mr. Bezan's motion in front of me, but—

**The Chair:** Before I go to Mr. Bezan, Mr. Fisher, do you have something?

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** I have an amended text here for James's motion if you want me to read it into the record to see how it changes.

**The Chair:** Yes, please.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** It states, "That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the lack of housing availability on or near bases for Canadian Armed Forces members and their families and the challenges facing members and their families when they are required to move across the country, including access to child care, spousal employment, education and health care."

**The Chair:** There is an amendment on the floor. Do you want to respond to the—

**Mr. James Bezan:** I know there's some connectivity here. There are some things that the military has direct access to and control of, such as the Canadian Forces housing authority. I think that makes it so that we need to first look at the housing issue.

Then I think the issues around opportunities for families—including child care, access to family doctors, spousal employment opportunities—and other issues around those frequent moves and how they impact military families should be a separate study.

I think that this one has to be very focused on the current state of the Canadian Armed Forces' housing stock. We have heard the horror stories of the PMQs, the barracks and on-base housing being in very dilapidated conditions and even rodent-infested in cases.

There are issues like frozen water pipes, a lack of insulation, one-pane windows and things of that nature. We also know that often they are moved into hot and cold housing markets, depending on where they're stationed across the country, and there are impacts to those moves.

We also have the post living differential changes that have also impacted how people decide to live together and how they afford their housing. Then you also go into the markets where it is just way too expensive to live, places like Victoria, Toronto and elsewhere. People are actually living in their vehicles or campers all year, because they can't afford an apartment, never mind buy a home.

Knowing that's impacting those who are currently serving, I think that is a study in itself. I have no problem with taking on a secondary study, following the housing study, to look at things like child care, family doctors, and spousal opportunities in employment and career advancement as a separate issue, but I don't think we should cross the wires on the housing study.

● (1730)

**The Chair:** Ms. Mathysen is up next, and then it'll be Mr. Fisher.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** I appreciate that this is being brought forward again. Certainly, we spoke before about working together and about potential changes, so I thought we would have an opportunity to work those changes in together.

However, I would like very much to ensure that there is a conversation about post living differential changes and how those have benefited some and negatively impacted others. I would like for us to also take into consideration the fact that military housing repairs are such a big question within that as well.

I don't have the exact language, but I would really like to ensure some language on inviting the leadership of the CF real property operations group, as well as the Canadian Forces housing authority, so that we can ensure that we hear from them as part of that.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Out of respect, that's absolutely who we would want to invite.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fisher.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** Whenever I think of military serving members, I always want to include their families. I think it's important to include families as it pertains to child care, spousal employment, education and health care. It's a good amendment to James's motion. We see the importance in the study, and I think we can talk about these things all at the same time.

**The Chair:** Mr. May.

**Mr. Bryan May:** Thank you.

I don't fundamentally disagree at all with what Mr. Bezan has said, but we've all had experience on bases. I think, in our experience, all of these issues are coming from the same root cause. I think this is why we need to look at this. If we're going to start to do this piecemeal, we're not going to solve the real problem.

The real problem comes from the challenges that CAF members are facing when they are posted. That should be the title of the study. Housing, of course, is a big chunk of that, but so are these other things. I recognize that housing is front of mind for all Canadians and not just CAF members, but it's the root cause that we should be focusing on—namely, the posting itself and the issues that it causes.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fisher, did you want to say something?

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** I just want to know if we can let our amazing witnesses go. They've been sitting here for a couple of hours.

I've sat on this committee for a long time. James is very famous for putting a motion on the floor four minutes before the meeting ends, and he smiles as he—

**Mr. James Bezan:** It's because I don't want to take time away from the witnesses. I'm being considerate.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** Anyway, I would request, respectfully, that if we could ask our folks to—

**Mr. Bryan May:** I also move that we adjourn.

**The Chair:** If we move to adjourn, there's no debate.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Did we move to adjourn?

**The Chair:** He just did.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Okay, then, I'd like a recorded vote.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Who moved it?

**The Chair:** Mr. May.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Was that to adjourn the meeting or adjourn debate?

**Mr. Bryan May:** It was a proper dilatory motion to adjourn the debate on the meeting. We are past 5:30 p.m. I'm not sure if a dilatory motion is necessary, but I'm wondering if maybe unanimous consent is required to move forward.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I'd like a recorded vote.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Wilson):** I'm sorry. Are you moving to adjourn debate on the motion, or are you moving to adjourn the meeting?

**Mr. Bryan May:** I'm looking for guidance from the clerk in terms of seeing the clock at 5:30. Do we need unanimous consent to continue?

**Mr. James Bezan:** Not if they're both dilatory motions.

**The Clerk:** They're both dilatory motions. I'm just not sure which one you're moving.

**Mr. Bryan May:** I'm moving that we adjourn the meeting today.

• (1735)

**The Chair:** We'll have a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned in this strange fashion.

I want to thank you all for appearing. Interestingly, I think in some respects you did move the debate by your appearance and your comments over the last two hours. Thank you for appearing.

It is the democratic fashion. Here we are. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.









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