



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 003

Thursday, December 16, 2021

Chair: The Honourable Jim Carr



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone, from a very frosty Winnipeg. I threw on the parka this morning, and the gloves and everything.

Welcome to meeting number three of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain two-metre physical distancing; wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room, and it is highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when seated; and maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the room entrance. As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank members in advance for their cooperation.

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

Members and witnesses participating virtually may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately, and we will ensure interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols.

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

As a reminder, all comments by members should be addressed through the chair.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk will advise the chair on whose hands are up, to the best of his ability. We will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to the order adopted by the House of Commons on Tuesday, December 7, 2021, the committee is commencing its study of gun control, illegal arms trafficking and the increase in gun crimes committed by members of street gangs.

With us today by video conference, we have the Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Public Safety; from Canada Border Services Agency, John Ossowski, president; from the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Rob Stewart, deputy minister; and from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Brenda Lucki, commissioner.

We will start with opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Welcome, Minister. It is very good to see you, however virtually. I now invite you to make an opening statement.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, committee members.

As we begin, I'd like to acknowledge that I'm joining you virtually from the traditional territory of the Algonquin.

It's an honour to make this first appearance before you in my new capacity as Minister of Public Safety. I look forward to collaborating with you.

• (1110)

[Translation]

I want to thank Ms. Michaud for presenting the motion to study gun violence to the House. We have seen too many tragedies in Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Toronto and across the country. There have been too many lives lost.

[English]

École Polytechnique in Montreal, Quebec City mosque, Toronto on the Danforth, and Portapique in Nova Scotia, each of these tragedies was marked by senseless acts of violence with one common denominator—guns.

We can say we grieve for the victims and survivors, and surely our hearts go out to them, but words are not enough. Thoughts and prayers are not enough. Words have to be put into action, and that is what we are doing. Our government has taken decisive action by introducing stronger gun controls, investing in more policing resources and border enforcement, and by allocating funds for prevention strategies and community infrastructure.

We passed Bill C-71, which requires enhanced background checks to prevent those who have a history of violence from owning a firearm. Regulations under Bill C-71 have been referred to this committee. Once in force, they will help police trace illegal guns and ensure that firearms licences are verified. At a time when we have seen rates of gun-related gender-based violence and femicide increase, we owe it to survivors to do more. I urge members to deal with these regulations at the first available opportunity.

Canadians will also recall that our government introduced a ban of over 1,500 assault-style rifles, including the weapons used at École Polytechnique, at the Quebec City mosque and at Dawson College. For decades, grieving families and survivors had asked successive governments to prohibit these types of firearms. As my predecessor Minister Blair said at the time, “Enough is enough.”

In addition to stronger gun controls, we've backed up law enforcement in our communities and at the border. We've invested over \$300 million over five years, beginning this year, including \$40 million to combat smuggling, \$15 million for tracing, and over \$21 million for CBSA equipment and intelligence sharing. We've allocated \$250 million to fight guns and gangs violence on our streets. The results of these investments are clear: They are working. We've seen record gun seizures and arrests thanks to the hard-working members of the RCMP and the CBSA.

[Translation]

In Quebec, our investments have resulted in the hiring of 71 new police officers over the past year. This is in addition to the 19 prosecutors and 5 data specialists hired across the country in the past year.

[English]

At the border, we are continuing to work very closely with our provincial and American partners. Domestically, we have the integrated border enforcement team, which coordinates the RCMP and provincial police services through joint operations. When I was in Washington, D.C., about a month ago, I met with my counterpart, Secretary Mayorkas. We committed to attending the cross-border crime forum, as well as the joint firearms task force to stem the flow of illegal guns across our international borders.

Despite this progress, we have more to do. Now that we have banned assault rifles, we have to take the next steps and implement a buyback program. To all the survivors and advocacy groups, in-

cluding PolySeSouvient and the Danforth Families, we are listening to you. We are going to make the buyback program mandatory.

[Translation]

When it comes to handguns, I hear what my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois are saying. I am aware of the motion passed by the National Assembly, and I will work with my counterparts in the province according to their needs.

[English]

It is a fact that the majority of gun-related homicides involve a handgun, and that's why our government is committed to investing one billion dollars to support those provinces and territories that want to ban handguns. We are going to increase criminal penalties for gun smuggling and trafficking, and enhance the capacity of police and border officials to keep illegal firearms and ammunition out of the country.

We cannot simply rely on the hammer of criminal law. Arresting, charging, prosecuting and sentencing are all after the fact. We need to prevent gun crimes from occurring in the first place, and that's why we're investing \$250 million in a safe communities fund to create safer and more inclusive spaces.

Speaking of safety, I say this to our law-abiding gun owners: We know that you are responsible, prudent and respectful of the law. I want to assure hunters, farmers and target shooters that nothing we are doing is intended to diminish their lawful recreational activities. At the same time, we have a responsibility to work together to reduce gun violence. We cannot risk another shooting at a school, a place of worship, or at a police officer, or on women, or on any innocent life. Public safety is our top priority. Protecting human life must come above all else.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I am committed to working with all of you to achieve that goal.

● (1115)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

I will now open the floor to questions.

Let me begin by inviting Ms. Dancho. You have six minutes. The floor is yours.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the minister for being with us today on relatively short notice.

Minister, I've lived in Montreal for a number of years. It's deeply important to me that we see the issue of gun violence solved in that country, but we also see violent crime across Canada. I represent a riding in Winnipeg, and we're seeing increased violence there as well. In fact, across Canada, in five of the last six years, violent crime has gone up. Firearms-related offences have increased for six years in a row now. Homicides are at a 30-year high, and we know that at least one-third of homicides are committed with firearms. As long as I've been alive, homicides haven't been this bad. I think that's pretty serious, and we're hoping for serious action from your government.

Winnipeg itself is on track to surpass its 2019 homicide record, and it was also ranked the violent crime capital of Canada in 2020. Conservative members are taking the violent crime we're seeing surging across the country over the last six years very seriously.

However, we are also disappointed following one of the shootings this fall in Montreal. I think it was even the day after your government introduced Bill C-5, which removes mandatory prison time, as you know, for robberies with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking, discharging a firearm with intent to injure, and using a firearm in the commission of a crime. We're quite concerned that, on one hand, we're seeing criminals using often illegally smuggled guns to harm our communities, and on the other hand, your government is taking away the ability to ensure mandatory prison time.

I'd like to know if you believe Bill C-5 will keep criminals responsible for the shootings in Montreal, and others across the country, off our streets.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Dancho, I do. Before I tell you why, I want to thank you for your advocacy and for bringing your experiences, both in Winnipeg and Montreal, to this committee.

I will say that Bill C-5 does ensure that a number of mandatory minimum penalties with regard to firearms offences, serious firearms offences, remain in place. Not only that, but as I have said, there are a number of serious firearms offences to which we propose to increase maximum penalties, which of course we trust our independent judiciary to dispense where appropriate.

I will also say, as I outlined in my remarks, that our government takes this issue very seriously, which is why we have introduced additional gun controls, particularly the banning of assault rifles. We are now going to take the next steps to do whatever it takes to reduce gun violence, because I believe we are all joined in that cause.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Minister.

We don't share your belief that allowing criminals who use firearms in robberies, for extortion and serious gun crimes like that... We believe they should go to jail and that would help clean up our streets. We are concerned that Bill C-5 is allowing these criminals to return to our streets and ensure violence continues.

Another issue that we know is deeply tied to gun violence in Montreal and Toronto is, of course, drug trafficking, pushing of opioids, fentanyl and heroin. We know opioids kill 7,000 Canadians a year, yet Bill C-5 also eliminates the mandatory prison time for drug traffickers, so we're quite concerned. We know gang violence

and gun violence are deeply interrelated with drug trafficking, yet you're taking away the ability for mandatory prison time for those who commit dangerous, violent gun crime and those who are pushing drugs on people, which is killing 7,000 Canadians a year.

Again, we see Bill C-5 as completely opposite of what needs to be done to address gun violence and the gang and drug-trafficking activity that is fuelling that in our cities. In Manitoba alone, we had 372 drug-related deaths in 2020, so we find this to be very serious.

Does the minister believe leaving criminal drug traffickers on our streets, rather than putting them in prison where they rightfully belong for killing thousands of Canadians, will stop gang violence in Montreal?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Dancho, of course not.

Having served over a decade on the front lines of our criminal justice system and as a federal prosecutor responsible for prosecuting drug traffickers, and not those who are suffering from mental health and other issues, I agree that, where appropriate, there do need to be jail sentences, and we must trust our courts and our judges to dispense, with justice, where appropriate.

I will also say, with regard to the opioid crisis, that our government has put in place measures to stop organized crime and to stop criminals from trafficking in opioids, including at our border. As I mentioned, I met with my counterpart, Secretary Mayorkas of DHS in Washington, where we agreed to meet, to use the cross-border crime forum to interdict the trafficking of illegal drugs, including opioids. We're seeing CBSA and the RCMP make record arrests, which is a sign of the concrete progress that we are making.

• (1120)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Minister. You mentioned that in your opening remarks.

We just have about a minute left, so I'll go to my last question.

The minister mentioned a gun buyback program as a primary measure to stop gun violence, although we know gang violence using guns and drug trafficking are the primary reasons we are seeing rising gun crime in our cities.

How many guns does the minister believe will be handed over to the federal government from criminals in Montreal using a gun buyback or a provincial ban? How many criminals does he anticipate will hand over their illegally possessed guns to the federal government?

The Chair: Minister, you have about 20 seconds left in this slot.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Very briefly, Mr. Chair, I would simply say that the buyback program that we are going to—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Minister, the answer is zero. Criminals will not be handing their guns back to you. They are the ones who are hurting people in our cities. The number is zero, Minister.

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. McKinnon, go ahead.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you.

The witness was asked a question. He was given a very short time to answer and has been interrupted. I request that the minister be given time to properly answer the question without interruption.

The Chair: Take 10 seconds, Minister, and then we'll—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Please correct me if I'm wrong, but the time is my time and it can be used how I deem correct. I was not satisfied with the answer.

We can move forward since my time and his time are up.

The Chair: You're right. The six minutes are up. We will move to the next questioner.

Ms. Bendayan, you have six minutes. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I also thank the minister for attending the committee today.

I would like to address the issue of Bill C-71, which was passed in 2019 and was mentioned by the minister. This is really an important step forward for better gun control. I was pleased to see the first set of regulations introduced recently. However, in my riding, PolySeSouvient—PolyRemembers—and many other stakeholders would like to see these regulations strengthened to require the systematic verification of licences and other documents of all firearm purchasers, as well as an extension of the mandatory 90-day retention of purchasers' licence information.

Could the minister comment on these potential changes and provide an update on the remaining Bill C-71 regulations?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Ms. Bendayan, for your leadership on this issue, but also for mentioning PolySeSouvient. I just spoke with its representatives almost two weeks ago.

The government considers Bill C-71 essential. It is a mechanism to introduce more measures and controls to combat gun violence. For example, there are background checks to ensure that people

who buy guns do not have a history of violence and even to prevent those with a history of gender-based violence from buying them.

There are also mechanisms in Bill C-71 to check the sales history of all firearms dealers. Now, we are asking this committee to study the regulations stemming from Bill C-71, which has become law, and to take the next steps to protect everyone. This is such an important bill for our gun violence strategy.

• (1125)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you, Minister.

In your statement you also mentioned the introduction of a mandatory buyback program for assault weapons prohibited by our 2020 order in council. This is extremely important. That order provides for a two-year amnesty for those who own prohibited weapons; the amnesty will end in May 2022, which is fast approaching.

Can you update us on the progress of this all-important promise to implement a mandatory buyback program?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Absolutely, Ms. Bendayan. We have delivered on the promise we made during the election campaign. We have introduced a mandatory buyback of banned assault weapons. This is the result of the hard work of PolySeSouvient and all MPs who have concerns about gun violence. Our next step is to put this initiative in place to address gun violence.

With respect to the amnesty, we will address this important element of our strategy in the future.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you.

As a Montreal MP, I am very concerned about the wave of gun violence, Minister. This year, there have been about 200 shootings in Montreal. We have taken firm action to combat gun violence on our streets, including banning the 1,500 line of assault weapons. But we also know that the majority of deaths right now are caused by handguns. My constituents are clear on this. They are calling for a national ban on handguns, and polls show that nearly three quarters of Canadians also support a national ban on handguns.

Could you give us your views on a national handgun ban today?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I agree with you, Ms. Bendayan.

This is a very difficult time for Montreal, Quebec. In fact, everywhere else in the country, there is an increase in handgun violence. That's why we promised during the election campaign that we would work with all provinces and territories to seek concrete solutions to reduce the incidence of handgun violence. We will invest...

[English]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: ...\$1 million, together with the provinces. I just spoke with my Quebec counterpart, Minister Guilbault. We committed to discussing this important issue in the future.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Your six minutes are exactly up.

Madame Michaud, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Chair.

First I want to thank the minister for being here with us today.

I thank the various witnesses who are here as well, the members of the committee and all parties represented in the House who voted in favour of my motion so that we can deal with this important issue quickly.

Minister, I have several questions for you.

Today, we know that in Canada generally, the rate of gun-related crime has doubled since 2014. In Quebec and Montreal, gun-related crime has increased quite significantly in recent years as well. As for criminal gangs, in Montreal, some 90% of the weapons they use are said to be illegal and most of them come over the U.S. border. It is quite worrying to note that the Montreal police department has seized almost more weapons than the RCMP in all of Canada in recent years.

I would like to know how the agencies under federal jurisdiction explain the fact that they are not able to seize more weapons. Do they explain it by a lack of resources or simply by a lack of political courage to tackle this issue?

Minister, can you hear me?

• (1130)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I apologize. It's a technical issue.

[English]

The Chair: We can hear you.

[Translation]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

I share your concerns, but it is not true that there are fewer gun arrests and seizures across the country. On the contrary, the RCMP, in co-operation with other police services, has mounted joint operations to make record numbers of arrests and seizures of firearms.

We must work together with the Sûreté du Québec. This is ongoing. These operations in collaboration with the Montreal police must continue.

Our government remains committed to taking action to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and those with criminal intent. We have made federal investments that have been transferred to the Government of Quebec, which has allowed it to hire 71 officers in the last year, and even more prosecutors. So the federal government is there to make the necessary investments, in close collaboration with the Government of Quebec.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Minister.

You often talk about the investments that have been made in the past, and I understand that a lot of money has been put on the table, but the results don't seem to follow. There are also bans, regulations and laws that have been put in place to ban certain types of weapons.

You mentioned some shootings in your opening remarks. Now, some of these weapons had been obtained quite legally. This proves that the regulations in place are not enough and that more needs to be done on gun control.

In March 2021, TVA Nouvelles presented a rather interesting report on the gun route in Quebec, on the Akwesasne territory, which straddles Ontario and the United States. This is a subject that is not sufficiently addressed. There seem to be hundreds of guns a week coming across the border, and we don't appear to have the resources to stop it.

The Bloc Québécois proposed better collaboration between the various police services, a sort of joint squad involving the Akwesasne Police Service, the Sûreté du Québec, the RCMP, the New York City Police Department, or NYPD, and the Ontario Provincial Police, or OPP, so that information flows better and we have people working together on the ground to put an end to the illegal trafficking in weapons.

What do you think of this proposal? Don't you think more needs to be done to stop the trafficking of weapons, especially at the US border?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes, I agree that more needs to be done at the border, but we have already created several joint cross-border forums with our partners in the provinces and other countries, such as the United States.

Here are the facts regarding the progress that has been made. Last year, Canada Border Services Agency drug and firearms detection dog teams seized 74 firearms, 42 magazines and 22 prohibited weapons. This year, despite the decrease in passengers due to COVID-19, the CBSA seized 59 firearms, 21 magazines and 12 prohibited weapons. Just a few weeks ago in Cornwall, the RCMP seized 53 pistols, 104 matching magazines and 6 Griffin Armament AR-15s. So, there is progress, and several examples of arrests and seizures...

• (1135)

[English]

The Chair: Please wrap up your answer, Minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That said, however, I agree that we have to continue.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I will ask Mr. MacGregor to take his six-minute slot.

Mr. MacGregor, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you so much, Chair.

Welcome, Minister Mendicino, to our committee.

You just referenced the operation that happened in Cornwall, which involved the participation of the Ontario Provincial Police, the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service, Montreal Police, and Sûreté du Québec.

In the previous Parliament, the public safety committee released a report on systemic racism in policing in Canada. Recommendation 13 of that report called on the Government of Canada to make sure that we have an indigenous police services framework, that indigenous police services are designated as essential, that there is a requirement that they are adequately resourced, and that there is a commitment for the provision of sufficient funding to make sure that all interested indigenous communities can develop these police services.

We know that many indigenous communities straddle the Canada-U.S. border where smuggling takes place. We know that many indigenous communities within Canada suffer from gang violence and from firearms crimes.

Minister, I know you are just getting into the role of public safety, but how are you directing your department to take advantage of this recommendation and to make sure that indigenous communities have the policing resources they need to effectively keep their own communities safe from firearms trafficking and gang recruitment?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, Mr. MacGregor, I want to thank you and other members of the committee who participated in that study. It is one of the reasons why the work we are doing collectively at SECU is so important.

Our government is committed to working with indigenous leaders and communities across the country to ensure that we are collaborating with them in a way that allows indigenous leadership to ensure public safety across communities.

I have already had a number of very constructive discussions with Commissioner Lucki, who is on this call, and you will have an opportunity as well to pose questions to her.

We are going to make sure we are investing additional financial resources to co-develop the policies and the regulatory and administrative frameworks, which begins with indigenous perspectives in our communities. That is work that I know is extremely importantly to the RCMP, which works in close tandem with indigenous leadership.

Why is it important? It is precisely for the reason you pointed out at the outset of your question. When we are working together with indigenous peoples across provincial and territorial governments, we are better able to interdict illegal trafficking of guns and drugs, and we are able to ensure we are creating safe communities. That is something we are committed to doing.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Minister. I want to get through a few more questions.

We know that a lot of the gun violence in Canada is the result of drug trafficking. We know that a lot of gangs are competing for the same turf. We know that the drugs being imported into Canada are far more deadly with fentanyl and carfentanyl, and they are far more addictive. As long as we have that demand problem, because of the increased toxicity of drugs but also their addiction qualities, we are going to have the resultant problems.

In my community in British Columbia we have been suffering through the opioids epidemic for six years now. It has left a trail of carnage in its wake. We now have the Province of British Columbia, the City of Vancouver, the City of Toronto, and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police calling on the Government of Canada to be bold and to implement decriminalization, because we know that as long as there's a stigma of ongoing criminality, people are not going to be comfortable getting the help they need.

If we're not treating that root cause of the problem, Minister, we're going to keep seeing symptoms such as gun violence and gang activity.

Minister, why is your government implementing only half measures? Why are you not going the full way, meeting the requests of these important jurisdictions and actually implementing decriminalization for small possession amounts?

• (1140)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would begin by sharing the concern that you have in your community with regard to the opioids crisis. We are going to continue to listen very carefully to our public health experts and equally work within the law enforcement community to take an approach that is based on reducing harm for those with substance issues and for those with mental health issues. That's why we have made significant investments. We will listen to the evidence.

With regard to those who would illegally traffic opioids and other drugs to take advantage of and victimize people, we have put in place concrete resources, including at the border—and I highlighted those investments very specifically at the outset of my remarks—so that we can interdict and stop the flow of illegal drug trafficking at our borders.

Equally, we will continue to invest in our provincial and municipal frontline law enforcement, so that we can stop domestic illegal drug trafficking—which is there to simply take advantage of those who are vulnerable—because it is the right thing to do. That is how we are going to engender more public safety across the country.

I'm happy to continue to work with you and other members of this committee to achieve that goal.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I think that's my time, Chair. I'm going to play by the rules here.

The Chair: We had a full six minutes. We now move into the second round of questions. The first questioner will be Ms. Dancho.

You have five minutes. The floor is yours.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make it clear, Minister, that your government has been in power for six years. For six years, we've seen violent crime go up. We've seen violent crime with guns go up. We've seen deaths from drug traffickers go up to extraordinary rates. Again, 7,000 Canadians a year are dying from opioids. We're seeing this problem raging in Winnipeg, Toronto and especially Vancouver, where the NDP member is from. This is a serious issue, yet with Bill C-5, we're seeing a reduction of or no mandatory minimum prison time for the people responsible for those deaths.

For my question, I'd like to now focus on the issue of gun smuggling. You talked a little bit about it, but what frustrates me in particular is where your government is investing its resources. We see the buyback program, in which we know no criminals will be providing their guns back to the federal government. That's not going to impact criminal gun behaviour, yet we know the buyback program will cost.... I've seen estimates from \$1 billion to even \$3 billion. It's going to cost the taxpayer maybe \$3 billion. We know that RCMP resources, which are already stretched far too thin, are going to have to put thousands of hours towards this buyback program.

We do feel that the resources your government is focusing on the buyback program are misplaced. If you would invest \$1 billion to \$3 billion at our borders, I think we would see a lot fewer illegal guns from the United States smuggled in by gangs, used in drug trafficking and used to kill innocent Canadians.

I do want to ask you something specific about the smuggling across the border. We know that border communities are being used to smuggle guns and dangerous drugs through. We know that there are some first nations communities in Quebec, for example, that border the American and Quebec border. I'd like to know what discussions you've had with those first nations communities about providing them with resources to keep their people safe and to stop the smuggling of any illegal substances or firearms that may be coming through the border in those areas of our country.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for the question, Ms. Dancho.

I will say that the RCMP and others are continuing to engage with first nations and indigenous peoples in a collaborative joint effort to ensure that we are co-operating and working together to interdict illegal gun trafficking as much as possible. We have set aside additional investments to—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Minister, I'm sorry to cut you off.

Have you had any discussion with first nations communities on our borders about assisting them with this?

• (1145)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes, and we will continue to have those discussions to partner with them.

I also want to address a couple of other points that you made about our government's priorities, because I do think they are important. First, the mandatory buyback is an extension of our banning assault rifles. I know, Ms. Dancho, that the Conservative Party objected to that policy, but we believe it's the right thing to do—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Minister, I'm sorry to cut you off. My question was specifically about what you're doing to speak to border communities, but now that you've answered that, I'm going to cede the rest of my time to my colleague Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Minister.

A message from my constituents.... In your opening remarks, you said that there is one common denominator for all of these crimes and that's a firearm. Well, you're missing the obvious thing, Minister. The other obvious common denominator is the criminals themselves, and it's time to focus on the criminals in this matter.

You also claimed in your statement that you want to increase penalties on gun smugglers, yet Bill C-5, your government's policy, is seeking to reduce mandatory minimum sentences. In fact, in the last Parliament, when our Conservative colleague Bob Saroya brought up Bill C-238 to increase penalties for the possession of smuggled firearms, you and your party voted against that policy.

Why do your actions not match your words, Minister?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: In fact, as I have said, Bill C-5 ensures that we would be raising maximum penalties for serious gun crimes, because we believe that is the right thing to do. I would simply point out that, in addition to taking that position on Bill C-5, we have put in place additional gun control that does focus on illegal gun crime. That is how we are going to ensure that we create safer communities, Mr. Lloyd.

I know that the Conservative Party sometimes takes a fundamentally different view—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: A better view.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —with regard to how to create safer communities. The Conservative Party opposed the assault rifle ban, Mr. Lloyd. We disagree. We think that, by banning assault rifles, we're going to create safer communities.

The Conservative Party objected to Bill C-71, which would ensure stronger background checks and verification to ensure that we are not allowing criminals to get their hands on guns. We think those steps are smart and prudent. They are informed by many experts, including frontline and executive members from—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Chair, that's been over time by about 30 seconds.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now move to Mr. Zuberi, who will have five minutes.

The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for being here.

As a Quebecker and a Montrealer, I find this study extremely important.

I would like to talk about the source of the illegal diversion of firearms for criminal purposes. In your opening remarks, you mentioned some statistics on the number of firearms that are diverted nationally.

Can you tell us more about that? What are you going to do to address this problem?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you very much for the question.

You are right. We have invested in our police services to increase our gun violence operations. In terms of arrests and seizures of firearms by the RCMP, the numbers are very high. The RCMP could explain the numbers in detail, but the most important point is that our government believes in continuing to put resources where we need them, which is on the front lines of law enforcement by our police services, and at the borders, to stop the flow of illegal firearms.

Initiatives to prevent gun violence must also be encouraged. That's why our government is investing \$250 million to create safe spaces for communities across Canada. We are making investments in collaboration with police services, but we must also study and implement concrete solutions to prevent gun violence.

• (1150)

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

[*English*]

I will be splitting my time with a colleague of mine, Paul Chiang, but I also very briefly want to ask you about the priorities that you hope to accomplish in this mandate. Do you want to add anything before I pass the time that remains to my colleague?

The Chair: There are only two minutes left in this session, so let's talk fast.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Briefly, I would say it's to work with all members of this committee, all members in the House and all Canadians to reduce gun violence. We believe we have more steps to take around gun controls. As we have seen, there is an increase in gun violence, particularly related to violence that is caused by handguns.

We need to work closely with our provincial and territorial partners to find new solutions and ways to get handguns off our streets. They're causing the loss of too many innocent lives.

We also need to ensure that we are preventing gun violence from occurring in the first place. Quite often I think we can put a lot of emphasis on law enforcement, on using the criminal law as a way to deter and to bring those who committed gun crimes to justice, but we also need to be focused on preventing future loss of life. I think about our kids. I think about our communities. I think about women, who have been disproportionately impacted by gun violence. The agenda that our government has aims at working to reduce gun violence.

I want to do that work with all of you, and we have to be committed to doing that work.

The Chair: Mr. Chiang, unfortunately you have only 20 seconds to ask what they would say would be a short snapper.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, while in office, the Conservatives slashed the RCMP and CBSA budgets by over \$900 million, which resulted in the loss of 3,000 employees. What is your ministry doing to accomplish building back these jobs at the RCMP and the CBSA?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Minister, but that slot has run out of time. Maybe it would be possible for you to offer a written response to that question.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'd be happy to do it.

The Chair: I'm sorry, I'm just constrained by the rules.

Now we move to a two-and-a-half-minute segment.

Madame Michaud, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.
[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will pick up where I left off earlier. The minister said that some 74 weapons had been seized by the RCMP. That is good, but it is not enough. Some 700 weapons were seized by Montreal police last year. And, again according to TVA Nouvelles, there are almost as many guns coming across the border per week as police across Canada seize in a year.

What we understand from the minister's comments is that current gun control measures are adequate, but more are needed. However, according to journalistic investigations, these measures are clearly not sufficient and are therefore not adequate. We need a change of direction. In Montreal right now, an American-style gun culture is taking hold. People are thinking of getting a gun to protect themselves and their children and they are obviously getting their guns illegally. In Montreal, young people are dying in libraries or on the street, in broad daylight or when it's not very late at night. Yet, the only measure adopted so far by the government has been to introduce Bill C-5, which provides for the elimination of mandatory minimum sentences for firearms-related crimes. We're calling for something a little more serious to control guns and stop their illegal trafficking.

Does the minister have a plan? In the coming months, what does his government intend to do concretely to fight against firearms trafficking?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I thank the member for her question.

I share my colleague Ms. Michaud's sentiment. There are indeed too many tragedies happening on the streets of Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and other major cities across the country. That's why our action plan builds on the progress we've made through our investments, working with the Government of Quebec, as well as with our international partners, like the Americans, on the joint issue of banning and seizing guns.

We had made a lot of progress, but I agree that more needs to be done. We also need to study and take action on a prevention strategy and I hope to work with the Bloc...

• (1155)

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: ...to seek your support for the investments that we will make to prevent further innocent victims from losing their lives.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We now have a two-and-a-half-minute slot for Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. MacGregor, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I agree with you. I think in your opening statement you made a comment about the fact that the Criminal Code is an important part of our justice system, but it is a reactive part of it, in that it comes into effect after a crime has been committed. I'm very interested in policy that seeks to prevent crimes from happening in the first place.

We know that gangs in major urban centres across Canada often recruit their members from vulnerable communities. These can include communities that are made up of racialized Canadians, Black and indigenous Canadians. At the same time, many of these communities also have a very deep sense of distrust of our police services. This has been written about, most recently with the report in the last Parliament about systemic racism in policing in Canada.

If we are to try to prevent gang recruitment, if we are to try to regain the trust of these communities so that they can have that positive and healthy relationship with our police services, I'd like to know from you, Minister, what steps you are taking as minister to direct Public Safety Canada to help police services across Canada so that we can start to re-establish a relationship of trust, effectively combat gang recruitment, and try to nip this problem in the bud rather than always treating the symptoms.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think looking at some of the root causes of gun violence and violence writ large across the country does mean confronting systemic challenges within our institutions, including within the criminal justice system. We see far too much overrepresentation of indigenous and racialized people in our jails. That is a problem that we need to address.

I know that in my discussions, not only with colleagues in government but equally with the commissioner... I want to commend her leadership and the leadership of the RCMP to take the steps that are necessary to ensure that we transform and modernize the way we do criminal justice. It is very much a downstream aspect to our strategy. I think the root causes have to do with ensuring access—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —to affordable housing, access to health care and access to education, and creating safe spaces within our communities so that we are reducing gun and gang violence.

I agree with that sentiment. Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, for your testimony and for appearing for this study.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: We still have time left, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: This concludes this portion of the meeting—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Chair, we still have time left.

The Chair: I believe the minister is obliged to leave the meeting now. Have I got that right?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: We still have two minutes left.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to stay for another two minutes. That's totally fine.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thanks.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It's that time of year. We should all be in a giving mood.

The Chair: Yes.

Okay, we'll take the two minutes, Minister.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The National Police Federation, which represents 20,000 front-line police officers, issued a policy paper on firearms. Their position states that the Liberal order in council banning various firearms and the gun buyback program are “costly” and don't address “current and emerging...threats to public safety.” It is the position of nearly 20,000 frontline police officers that your policies do not address illegal firearms proliferation, gang crime and smuggling, and that, finally, your policies are diverting important personnel and resources from the immediate threat of criminals and illegal firearms.

Minister, do you disagree with the assessment of 20,000 frontline police officers?

• (1200)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Here's what I will tell you, Mr. Lloyd. The past president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police called Bill C-71, which strengthened background checks for prospective buyers, essential. The Conservative Party opposed it. You vowed to repeal it.

The current president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police supported our prohibition of military-style assault rifles, saying, “it ensures the safety of our members when they respond to calls for service.”

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Minister, that's not what 20,000 frontline police officers said.

What I would say, Minister, is that under your watch, it is easier for an illegal handgun to cross the border than it is for a fully vaccinated Canadian coming home from vacation.

Minister, my final question is this. You use the term “military-style assault weapon” on a regular basis. There is no legal definition. Can you define for this committee what a military-style assault weapon is?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, this type of weapon was designed with one purpose in mind, and that is to kill people. It has no place in our communities, which is why we banned it. The Conservative Party has vowed to repeal that ban—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: What's the definition, Minister?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —and we will always protect—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: What about it?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —Canadians by taking the steps that are necessary.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you both very much. We're out of time.

Minister, thank you very much for spending the last hour with us.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: That concludes this portion of the meeting.

Mr. Clerk, is it necessary to suspend? We're not adding any new witnesses. Can we just proceed, or do you want a few minutes to change the panel?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Wassim Bouanani): Mr. Chair, we do need just a few minutes.

The Chair: Okay, we'll suspend the meeting. There will be a few minutes to change the panel, and then we will resume.

Everybody stretch for about three or four minutes.

A voice: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Merry Christmas and happy holidays.

The Chair: Thank you, everybody.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1210)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

With us for the second hour, by video conference from the Canada Border Services Agency, we have John Ossowski, president; and Scott Harris, vice-president of the intelligence and enforcement branch.

From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we have Mr. Rob Stewart, deputy minister; and Talal Dakalbab, assistant deputy minister, crime prevention branch.

From the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we have Brenda Lucchi, commissioner; Michael Duheme, deputy commissioner, federal policing; Stephen White, deputy commissioner, specialized policing services; Kellie Paquette, director general; and Mathieu Bertrand, director of federal policing criminal operations.

I will now open the floor to questions. This is a six-minute round, beginning with Mr. Van Popta.

The floor is yours, sir.

• (1215)

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for coming to this meeting.

We called this meeting to investigate gun control, illegal arms trafficking and gang-related violence in relation to recent shootings in Montreal, but sadly, Montreal is not unique in this. There is gun violence right across this country. It is also in metro Vancouver, where my riding of Langley—Aldergrove is.

Earlier this year, there was a whole rash of gangland-style shootings in metro Vancouver, including in Langley, where a person was shot and killed right in broad daylight in front of the Langley Sportplex, where my grandkids play hockey. It was really quite shocking.

In the process, I started to look into gang violence more closely, and I was surprised to learn that we do not have nationwide systems for tracking the source of guns and firearms used in violent crime. We hear that most of the guns used in crime are smuggled in from the United States, but apparently those statistics are not necessarily reliable as there isn't a consistent requirement across the country that all police forces report that.

I wonder if any of the witnesses could comment on that, maybe starting with the RCMP.

Commissioner Brenda Lucki (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What I can tell you is that, when we actually trace the firearms, we can know if they have been diverted, lost or stolen, and we can usually get to the source. In a year, we would trace approximately 2,500 firearms. When we do, of those 2,500, 58% of the firearms traced in Canada were domestically sourced. In the tracing centre, of the known source, 73% were deemed to be sourced within Canada and 27% were smuggled or possibly smuggled within the country from the U.S.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: That's fair enough.

Is there consistency across the country in how these statistics are kept? I understand that Statistics Canada wants to start a study into this, but that, of course, is going to require consistent data keeping and sharing across all police forces. How consistent is it?

Commr Brenda Lucki: When we do the proper tracing, the statistics are reliable, but it's only for the guns that we do trace.

I would ask Deputy Commissioner White to expand on that.

Deputy Commissioner Stephen White (Deputy Commissioner, Specialized Policing Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you very much, Commissioner.

Just to add to that, there is a requirement for police services across the country to report to the Canadian firearms centre all the firearms they seize. That is a requirement. In 2020, police services across the country seized over 30,000 firearms that were reported to the Canadian firearms program. One of the key pieces in terms of what we do with this data, as the commissioner just mentioned, is tracing. Unfortunately, right now we're just tracing a small number of the overall firearms that are reported to the tracing centre.

We are hoping to increase that, and the ultimate goal of what we are trying to do with that is to create a much better, more comprehensive intelligence picture. Tactical intelligence is going to be critical to effectively implement any strategy we're going to use against those who possess, use and traffic in illegal firearms.

We need a national, comprehensive picture. That's why we are in the process of developing a brand new, modern national criminal intelligence service system that will be used by all police services across the country for organized crime intelligence, gang intelligence, and included in there will be firearms intelligence.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you for that.

I'm sure the statistics you keep are accurate; I didn't mean to suggest otherwise. I'm just concerned about how many guns that are used in crime are sourced. Do we understand where they come from, and how many of those were smuggled in?

We're parliamentarians who look to implement laws and regulations that are going to keep Canadians safe, but that's going to require us, first of all, to have good scientific data that we can rely on.

• (1220)

Commr Brenda Lucki: I guess what I would reply to that question is that, with our Canadian Security Intelligence Service, we do a lot. Obviously, we all work together and we use a national database, as Deputy Commissioner White spoke about.

In that, we calculate the number of gangs. We calculate the crimes. We share the intelligence across organizations. I would say that the ones we do trace.... Obviously, we've expanded our capabilities. Until we can trace every firearm, we would not have a full picture, but we do have a good picture so far with the statistics, as Deputy Commissioner White shared and as I shared, with the domestically sourced versus those sourced outside of Canada.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: We understand from Toronto Police Service that the vast majority of firearms used in crimes in that city were sourced from the United States. I suspect that Toronto Police Service probably does have the ability—

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Van Popta, time is up. We'll have to wait for subsequent rounds.

Now I would like to call on Mr. Noormohamed.

You have six minutes, sir. The floor is yours.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here with us today.

Throughout the day, we've heard this sort of U.S.-style, NRA-style rhetoric that guns don't kill people and that the problem is not the guns but really the border.

I'm wondering, Commissioner Lucki and Mr. Ossowski, if you could share with us a couple of things. Number one, how should we be thinking about the whole question of why the average Canadian would need a handgun and/or a firearm in their home in metro Vancouver or in Montreal? Perhaps you could give us some of your thoughts on that.

Perhaps you could share a little bit more, Commissioner. You talked about domestically diverted arms. Perhaps you could take a minute to share with us your views on what's happening there. Perhaps, Mr. Ossowski, you could also weigh in on the issue of domestically diverted weapons so that we might have a better perspective on this.

Commr Brenda Lucki: There are several reasons why people purchase firearms. Many are for sport, as well as for target shooting. They are not all directed at violence. There are a lot of responsible gun owners out there who take guns for such things as sport and target shooting competitions. That's why the firearms program is so very important. With our firearms program, we continue to work with Public Safety, CBSA and other policing partners to combat illegal firearms activity.

As I mentioned before, part of our goal is to enhance the capacity to trace firearms and to produce actionable intelligence that we need. We use that actionable intelligence so that we can look at the trafficking of firearms and target the firearms straw purchase activities as well. As organizations, we need to enhance that intelligence so that we can work with an organization like CBSA and other police of jurisdiction to target firearms smuggling into Canada.

I'll pass it over to John to add to that.

Mr. John Ossowski (President, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As the Commissioner alluded to, we're obviously responsible for the smuggling aspect at the port of entry. We look at it as a continuum: before the border, at the border, and after the border. Before the border, obviously, if we get intel about the arrival of something, we can stop that conveyance from crossing the border. At the border, obviously, is where we would see most of our seizures. I think you have data on that in terms of the seizure rate and the investments that have been made. We've had to up our game.

I think the real focus now for us is looking at the criminal networks and the trafficking routes and really trying to prevent those illicit firearms from crossing the border in the first place by disrupting these criminal routes. That's where the cross-border task force that we are leading, supported by the RCMP, is going to be critical in bringing together the insights of local police of jurisdiction as well as partners in the United States. In addition, we're working on an MOU to share information directly with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to really develop that intelligence picture.

Yes, we have investments in dogs and technologies that have proven to be extremely useful, but what we really want to do is swim upstream and disrupt those networks so they don't get across the border in the first place.

Thank you.

• (1225)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you very much.

I'm going to share the rest of my time with Mr. McKinnon, who I believe also has a number of questions he'd like to ask.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed, and thank you all for being here today.

I know that gun violence, as Mr. Van Popta mentioned, is also a problem in British Columbia, the Lower Mainland in particular. A number of us on this committee are from British Columbia, and I'm interested in what could be done.

Commissioner Lucki, you said that 73% of firearms are sourced domestically within Canada. Of that 73%, are those illegal diversions? What percentage of that would be people who have stolen guns, purchased guns, and so forth? How many are legitimately owned by the people who are using them?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thanks for that question. I'm going to direct it to our director of the firearms program, who has many of those statistics.

Ms. Kellie Paquette, go ahead.

Ms. Kellie Paquette (Director General, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): The tracing of firearms actually happens in two major centres. There's one in Ontario, and there's one, the national centre, which is managed through the Canadian firearms program. In the national one, we had approximately 2,000 traces this year, and 73% were deemed to be imported legally, or manufactured in Canada. It's a very small percentage, but what we do is actually trace back to the multiple sources of that, or the owners of those firearms, so it's just not the last—

The Chair: Thank you. Time is up for that segment.

I would now like to invite Madame Michaud, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Commissioner Lucki. It's a pleasure to have you back.

I think we're here to find solutions, of course, but, first of all, it's important to focus and understand the problem.

In your opinion, why are there so many guns coming into Canada across the U.S. border?

Do you feel that you have all the necessary and sufficient resources to intercept these weapons, both at the border, in co-operation with other agencies, particularly the Canada Border Services Agency, but also once they are in the hands of criminals?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: The RCMP's federal policing program uses all the tools and resources it has at its disposal to secure the border between the ports of entry and in line with its mandate. We're not designed to actually provide a patrol function along the border in its entirety. We have to deploy our limited resources in line with the threat environment. This flexible approach, though, actually allows us to face a wide range of current and emerging public safe priorities, including things like the smuggling of guns, illicit drugs, and organized crime.

We would welcome, obviously, investments in additional investigative capacity and especially technology, which would further strengthen our capabilities to counter these threats.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

My next comments are for Mr. Ossowski.

I have in front of me an excerpt from an article in the newspaper *24 heures* published on December 2 last year, in which Mark Weber, national president of the Customs and Immigration Union, proposes expanding the mandate of customs officers. In his view, this could be a solution to controlling firearms at the borders and it is a pity that officers cannot patrol with the RCMP between border crossings, as they have the expertise to do so. They could assist the RCMP, for example, with detector dogs, intelligence officers, and methods to combat concealed weapons. All these forms of expertise are available, but they could be better used.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

Do you think it would be possible to broaden the customs officers' mandate? Should we ask the government to do so?

• (1230)

[English]

Mr. John Ossowski: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

The issue of illicit guns at the border is a responsibility we share with the RCMP. While we have the mandate at ports of entry for the enforcement, and the RCMP has the mandate in between ports of entry, our teams really work hand in hand. I would just emphasize your point about sharing the intelligence and understanding of how these networks work. That's where I really believe we're going to get the most benefit and the results from our collective efforts.

We got investments in budget 2021 for new analysts and investigative intelligence officers, and we're going to be using those officers to work with the RCMP to better disrupt the flow across the border.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Ossowski.

I'll turn to Ms. Lucki again.

As I was saying earlier, the Akwesasne reserve straddles multiple jurisdictions, and it would be a really good place to smuggle weapons. There are members of the community who are terrorized

by criminal gangs and who are afraid of retribution if they speak out or intervene.

I would like to know if the RCMP is having any discussions with the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service and how much leeway they might have to intervene in this case, and if they are aware of the situation. I would imagine so, because there have been seizures nearby. However, do they have the leeway to act and intervene in this situation?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: That's a great question.

I would refer to what President Ossowski said. We need to, first of all, gather the intelligence together, and that's where we would rely on police of jurisdiction, whether it be Akwesasne police or Toronto police or any other police agency.

The second thing we have to continue to be good at is integration, so integrating with those police of jurisdiction and forming those partnerships. When they do have that information, we like to work together with them to tackle the issue. With their intelligence and our support, we can work together to combat the smuggling.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: You talk about sharing information; I get the sense that that is the case between the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency, but is it the case with other police forces in the territory?

For example, I was talking to the minister earlier about the Bloc Québécois proposal to create a joint squad of OPP, NYPD, SQ and RCMP officers, together with border services officers.

Beyond information sharing, would it be beneficial to have teams, directly on the ground, that could better control illegal trafficking?

[English]

The Chair: Commissioner, we have 30 seconds in this slot, so make it a short answer, please.

Commr Brenda Lucki: What I will say is that we have, from the Government of Quebec, the announcement regarding Operation Centaur, for example, which is aimed at deploying specialized investigative teams to disrupt that illegal firearms trafficking. Along with a number of other police forces, we are participating with the Quebec task force on that to gather the information.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

Now we have Mr. MacGregor for six minutes.

The floor is yours, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to clarify the statistics with the RCMP. I think it was mentioned that 73% of those traced were sourced legally and domestically, and then 27% were possibly smuggled. Did I have that correct, or can you just correct me if I am wrong?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I believe that is what I said.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Commissioner.

Commissioner, of the 27% that were possibly smuggled, I'm curious as to what our police agencies are learning when they trace these weapons. What point of origin can we trace the weapons to, and are we learning lessons about how criminal elements are getting their hands on these firearms? Are they generally being stolen from manufacturers or from gun shops? Are a lot coming from private firearms owners themselves?

I just want to know what kind of picture is being painted from your tracing efforts, what kind of lessons are being learned, and then how those are being applied, maybe in conjunction with our American allies.

• (1235)

Commr Brenda Lucki: The firearms tracing, obviously, is the key tool in determining the sources of and the diversion routes for the illegal firearms, as well as the link between the criminal use of firearms and specific vendors, and to identify the tracking routes and patterns. However, it isn't a mandatory program.

I will pass this over to my colleague, Deputy Commissioner White, who is more of an expert than I am in this area.

D/Commr Stephen White: Thank you, Commissioner.

I would add that tracing a firearm is complex. It involves tracking from the point of manufacture through importation and delivery to distributors, to retailers, out to licence and to restricted and prohibited firearms dealers. Ultimately, we're hoping to trace it to an owner, especially here in Canada, if it is a restricted or prohibited weapon that's registered.

In terms of being able to identify the final person who's in possession of it at the time of a crime, we're hoping that by going through all of these, all the way back, we can identify everybody who's had a hand on that firearm. It's a complex process. It can be a long process, but, as the commissioner said, it's a key tool in determining the sources of and diversion routes for illegal firearms.

As was mentioned, one of the challenges for us right now is that we're only tracing a small amount. Last year, we had requests to trace just over 2,000 firearms and we were successful in tracing 1,472 of them. Based on the number of firearms that are seized nationally, we still have a long way to go in terms of enhancing our tracing capabilities.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that.

For my next question, I'd like to turn it over to Mr. Stewart, the deputy minister for the Department of Public Safety.

Deputy Minister, when Minister Mendicino was before our committee in the first hour, he mentioned in his opening statement the federal funding that has gone into place for anti-gang strategies and so on. When I asked him about the sometimes troubled relationship that some vulnerable communities—including racialized, Black and indigenous communities—have with police....

I would just like to know, from your department's perspective, what kind of metrics are you using to measure success? Obviously, a drop in the numbers is one, but do you have any sense of what the interim reporting is like for those downstream policing services?

Are the federal dollars that have been spent so far having a success in the interim period?

Mr. Rob Stewart (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): We are in the process of preparing a midterm report on our first \$250-million program countering gun and gang violence, so those statistics are being assembled as we speak. That will be critical to ensuring support and approval for the extension of that program, which was originally funded for \$250 million and also has available \$100 million ongoing after 2024.

We can come back to you with details on that, but we do have, as is required by the Treasury Board, a performance measurement framework attached to those programs when they are established, which will look at incidence of crime and various other measures of that type. I'm not able to tell you the specific performance indicators here, but I could certainly get that information for you.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: That would be appreciated. Thank you for that.

Finally, Mr. Chair, in the minute that I have, I'll turn to the CB-SA.

We enjoy the longest undefended border in the world with our United States neighbours. Many parts of that border are uninhabited and wilderness. Are we noticing any patterns in terms of smuggling activity with firearms where criminal elements may be trying to make use of areas where there is not so much surveillance at play? What steps is the Canadian government taking to address those possible gaps in our surveillance?

• (1240)

Mr. John Ossowski: Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned in my previous response, the RCMP is responsible for patrolling the border in between ports of entry. However, we do work with them in terms of anything that they might see, working on the intelligence and understanding those routes and patterns and whatever organized crime activities might be part of that.

Brenda might be in a better position to answer.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: The RCMP can answer quickly.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I can add that there is a range of vulnerabilities, including the marine environment—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Commissioner. We're out of time for this segment. I'm constrained. I'd love to hear you talk all day, but I can't.

We will move to the second round. In the first slot, we have Mr. Van Popta.

The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I believe that Ms. Dancho is going first.

The Chair: It's up to you.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a few questions for the RCMP and the CBSA. First of all, thank you all for being here today. Thank you for your hard work and dedication to keeping Canadians safe.

To the RCMP, what we're hearing from smaller detachments across the country is that you're very strapped for resources, particularly as violent crime and gang activity are spreading from our large urban centres to smaller communities outside of our major cities. This is of grave concern to me, as I'm sure it is to all Canadians. We're also seeing issues with rising opioid deaths. We know that hard drug trafficking is increasing as well, and it seems that there are fewer and fewer police resources and police individuals to tackle these issues.

I'm wondering if you can just comment in a broader sense. If the Liberal government, or a federal government, were to provide your department an additional billion dollars to combat gang violence, illegally smuggled firearms and illegally possessed firearms, would that help? How would you apply that billion dollars?

Commr Brenda Lucki: As I said earlier, we can always use more resources. This is a huge border. We are working toward advancing our technology. For example, we're doing a study to identify the gaps across the border, so we can see if there are some technological solutions that would close those gaps. This is one part.

Also, because gang activity is mostly in the bigger centres—of course we look at the Lower Mainland—we do invest a lot in reducing gang activity through gang suppression teams. They are successful when we concentrate our efforts. Obviously, we don't have the benefit of having that in all of our detachments, as they are more of a general duty environment, but we do spread those teams out. We have provincially funded teams through crime reduction and enforcement that try to deal with the 5% of the population who cause 90% of the grief. We try to use those crime reduction teams that are provincially and federally funded on a contractual basis. That's where they can deal with those problems directly.

It would be great to have more resources in those areas as well.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I assume you can hire many more police officers as well to keep our communities safe and to keep violent gun crime down with a billion dollars.

Commr Brenda Lucki: We can always do a lot with a billion dollars. That's for sure.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Commissioner Lucki.

I'd also like to ask a similar question of the CBSA. We know that COVID protocols at the border are very important. They are, from what we understand, putting a tremendous strain on our already limited border agents and budgets at the border.

Could you comment on what an additional billion dollars would do if it was targeted towards gun smuggling and drug trafficking?

Mr. John Ossowski: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

Look, we've had significant investments over the past couple of years, and my immediate focus right now is on implementing those

investments. I really do believe, as I said earlier, that the work we're doing on the intelligence with our colleagues to the south—whether it's Customs and Border Protection, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, or local police of jurisdiction—is where the real benefit is going to lie.

We will continue to pursue those relationships and build that picture and do our best to stop these networks in their ability to smuggle.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

Are you saying you wouldn't take another billion dollars to stop gun smuggling and drug trafficking?

Mr. John Ossowski: I would.

It takes time to implement these things. I think we'd want to make sure we put it in the right place.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Absolutely.

You're right. It does take time. It's unfortunate, but a lot of this funding has only come recently in a six-year mandate from the current government.

Moving on, I would like to ask the RCMP and the CBSA—I think it may be more in the RCMP jurisdiction—about outreach to border communities, particularly communities that straddle the border. We know that there are some indigenous communities that straddle the border. We're hearing that there may be some elements of criminal activity that are taking advantage of that, using those territories to smuggle hard drugs and guns.

I'm wondering what you have done and what more can be done to support these communities, to keep them safe and to stop criminals from taking advantage of any issues we may see at the border where there is porous activity and illegal activity streaming in. Could you just enlighten the committee on some of the issues there and how we can better serve those communities on the border?

• (1245)

The Chair: An enlightenment will be given 10 seconds. I'm sorry.

Commr Brenda Lucki: It gives me the opportunity to say that we have joined forces with the Akwesasne, the Kanewake and the Kahnawake police. Working with them and our international partners, of course, on the U.S. side, is the way we're going to tackle it together, as President Ossowski said.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner.

The next five-minute slot goes to Mr. Chiang.

Mr. Chiang, the floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everybody.

My question is directed to Commissioner Lucki.

As a former police officer, I would like to know your perspective on what are the most efficient ways to tackle gun violence.

Commr Brenda Lucki: That's a great question. First of all, I'd say that good intelligence-gathering is a good foundational piece—using technology to our advantage; making sure that we are working with all police agencies and partner agencies, such as CBSA; making sure that we are able to share that information and turn the intelligence into evidence; and following the chain of where things are seized. For example, when we do seizures at postal services, it's being able to follow those chains and action it into arrests and charges.

We're working with the United States. We do have a great task force that's recently been formed, which the CBSA co-chairs. We do have what's called a “best” approach, where we are allowed to work with our American counterparts on the other side of the border. Again, we're liaising with the various police agencies. We do that through the Canadian intelligence service, where we are working towards upgrading, for example, our technology in our information-sharing and our intelligence-gathering software, because it's quite antiquated. We do meet on a regular basis. So sharing information and translating it into enforcement would be the best way.

Obviously, on getting to the root issues, I would like to speak to gang intervention and getting people out of the gang lifestyle. Working with other social agencies is important as well, in social services, education, health—

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much for those remarks, Commissioner. I'm glad our agencies are working in collaboration across the border to tackle this violence and apprehend these criminals.

Mr. Chair, I would like to cede the remainder of my time to MP Damoff.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you so much.

Thank you to the officials who are here today.

I'd like to quickly use the rest of the time we have. I had distributed a notice of motion on Bill C-71. I know that the Conservative Party had made some amendments.

I'll just read an amended motion into the record, if I can. I move—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, if we're going to be talking about a motion and there's no intent to question the witnesses, then maybe we shouldn't waste their time. We should let them go.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. McKinnon.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: On a point of order, Ms. Damoff has the floor. She has been recognized. She is entitled to move a motion that is in order.

The Chair: Ms. Damoff, would you proceed, please?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to move this motion:

That, on June 21, 2021, the Government of Canada tabled proposed Regulations Amending Certain Regulations Made Under the Firearms Act, in both Houses of Parliament, as required by Section 118 of the Firearms Act, which were referred to this committee on the same day for a period of up to 30 sitting days; and that the committee instruct the Chair to report the firearms regulations referred by the Minister of Public Safety on Monday, June 21, 2021 to the House unamended at the earliest opportunity.

I think all parties will agree on the importance of getting these regulations back. In the spirit of the season, I have combined the Conservative portion of the amendment with a paragraph that I think is important to give context.

I hope we can just deal with this quickly, Chair.

Thank you.

• (1250)

The Chair: We can move to committee business at this point.

We have a motion on the floor.

Do we have commentary?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Just to be courteous, I would ask that we let the witnesses go. I know that the head of the RCMP is a very busy person.

The Chair: That's fair enough. We have reached the allotted time, so I think that's a reasonable suggestion. We know that we will be spending more time with these representatives when the committee resumes its work in the new year.

Thank you very much for your time this morning. We look forward to when we will resume.

I think it's reasonable to allow the witnesses to leave now, at their leisure.

Thank you.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you.

Happy holidays, everyone.

The Chair: Happy holidays to all of you.

We have a motion on the floor.

The Clerk: Madame Michaud raised her hand, sir.

The Chair: Madame Michaud, go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Do we have a written copy of the amended motion?

I only had the first version and I have another version that may be proposed by the Conservatives. I just want to make sure that I understand what was mentioned, what has been removed and perhaps added.

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Can I respond, Chair?

The Chair: Ms. Damoff, go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madame Michaud, the third paragraph in my original motion, which begins with “That on June 21”, is how the motion begins. Then there’s the wording that the Conservative Party proposed, where it said “so the amended motion would read”, and the remainder of the motion I proposed is that sentence exactly as it was proposed by the Conservative Party, so “that the committee instruct the chair”.

It’s one paragraph from the original motion to give some context, and then the wording would be, “that the committee instruct the Chair to report the firearms regulations referred by the Minister of Public Safety on Monday, June 21, 2021 to the House unamended at the earliest opportunity.”

The Chair: Is everybody clear about the motion that’s before the committee?

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Chair, I have a another question, if I may.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, please, Madame Michaud, go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you for the clarification, Ms. Damoff.

I only have one question, on the term “unamended”, or *non modifiée*. What does it mean? I was under the impression that you can’t amend a regulation, so I wonder what that means in the motion.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Damoff, go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thanks, Chair.

I think the word may be redundant, but in essence it’s saying that the committee is taking those regulations as they were referred to us—important regulations around having a licence to purchase a firearm and also businesses recording the firearms that they’re selling. The word “unamended” is probably redundant, but I don’t think it hurts to have it in there.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

[English]

The Chair: Members of the committee are clear. There has been notice given for this motion.

Is there any other commentary?

Ms. Dancho, go ahead.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

I just want to extend my thanks to Ms. Damoff for neutralizing the language in this motion. We are happy to work together and to avoid personal attacks and charged language. We know that all members of this committee certainly value public safety, but we ap-

proach this issue of violence and firearms and how to solve it from very different perspectives.

I look forward to a very robust debate with my colleagues on that, but I appreciate that we are setting a tone and working together to amend this to have more neutral language so that we can move forward with that tone and ensure our discussions remain policy-oriented and professional in that regard. I will endeavour to uphold that, and committee members can hold me to that as well.

I just want to say thank you to members of the committee for agreeing to amend this so the language is more neutral.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you.

That spirit of collaboration and co-operation is very much appreciated by all of us.

We have a motion. Due notice was given for that motion.

Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: We will proceed with a recorded division.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is there other committee business? Mr. Clerk, is there a hand up?

The Clerk: Yes. We have Mr. MacGregor, Mr. McKinnon and Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Chair, I just had a very quick question for you. I just wanted to have your confirmation that you’re going to be re-tabling the report on systemic racism in policing tomorrow during routine proceedings.

The Chair: Yes, that’s my intention.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. McKinnon, go ahead.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thank you, Chair.

I just wasn’t sure I heard the results of the vote. I assume the motion passed.

The Chair: I believe it passed seven to four: seven in favour and four opposed.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to verify that.

Given that we’ve reached one o’clock, I’d like to note that I appreciate all the work done by committee members and I move that we do now adjourn.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Well, if that is where we're headed, I think this is when I give my merry Christmas and happy new year speech. I hope everybody has a restful break. We have a very full agenda starting in the new year. I'm looking forward to it. I think we have established some important relationships of trust. I intend to reach out to all members of the committee during this break period, be-

lieving that just getting to know each other better is the recipe for collegiality. That's what I intend to do.

If there is no further discussion, we are ready to go.

Merry Christmas and a happy new year, everybody. See you in a few weeks.

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