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—
Chair

The Honourable John McKay

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1530)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC)): Good afternoon members.

I am pleased to be filling in for Mr. McKay and chairing today's meeting. We will be examining supplementary estimates (A).

I'd like to thank Mr. Goodale, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, as well as the other officials for being here today.

Minister, you have 10 minutes for your presentation. You may go ahead.

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon to members of the committee. It's a pleasure to be with you again to discuss the estimates today.

I have a familiar cast of characters with me. Malcolm Brown is the Deputy Minister of Public Safety. John Ossowski is the President of the Canada Border Services Agency. Anne Kelly is the Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada. Jeff Yaworski is the Acting Director for CSIS. Gilles Michaud is Deputy Commissioner for the RCMP.

I would point out that as of last week, Deputy Commissioner Michaud has been elected Delegate for the Americas to serve on the executive committee of INTERPOL, representing our continent in that important organization.

Again, I want to thank members of the committee for the diligent work that you do on matters related to public safety. The volume and gravity of the key pieces of legislation, the policy changes, and the major investments that we have been making are very substantial. Your scrutiny and advice have helped to inform that work, which includes, for example, the new regime that Canada now has in place with respect to cannabis, a modernized national security framework that was developed in the context of Bill C-59 and new strong actions in relation to gun and gang violence. That's just to name a few.

We are in the midst of extraordinary changes to Canada's public safety environment, and Canadians are seeing some direct benefits. This month alone, we have announced millions of dollars in new funding for public safety projects from coast to coast. Those projects help our communities plan and prepare for natural disasters like

floods. They improve our collective ability to effectively counter radicalization to violence in new and innovative ways. They help communities steer youth away from criminal and risky behaviour, such as guns, gangs and drugs.

Of course, there is also the \$86 million that we announced earlier this month to support both the RCMP and the CBSA in their efforts to combat gun and gang violence. Keeping Canadians safe clearly requires efforts at every level, from communities to NGOs to governments to law enforcement and security agencies and beyond.

Today, in these estimates that are the subject matter for this meeting, we're looking at the spending authorities the portfolio needs to accomplish those objectives. Through these supplementary estimates (A), the Public Safety portfolio is requesting adjustments resulting in a net increase of \$262 million. That represents a change of 2.6% over existing authorities. It's largely because several portfolio organizations have now received Treasury Board approval to increase appropriations and have received or are making transfers to and from other organizations.

All told, the approval of these estimates, including in-year adjustments, would result in total portfolio authorities increasing to \$10.5 billion for the current fiscal year.

For my part today, I'll try to break down the key highlights of these changes across the portfolio, and I'll speak to just a few current priorities.

First, I note that these estimates provide a great snapshot of just how closely this portfolio must work together. Thirteen of the spending initiatives, with a total value of over \$144 million, are horizontal in nature, requiring close collaboration among the organizations within this portfolio. I'll single out three in particular.

One of the most prominent is the \$29.9 million requested in these estimates for the initiative to take action against guns and gangs, to which I alluded earlier. The evidence is clear: Gun and gang violence is a growing problem for Canadians.

Last year, I announced a total of new funding of \$327.6 million over five years to help address this issue. A portion of that total—over \$200 million over five years—will help provinces and territories address gun and gang issues through initiatives specific to the needs of their local communities.

•(1535)

The nearly \$30 million that is requested in these estimates will help the CBSA, the RCMP and Public Safety Canada to carry out this collaborative new guns and gangs initiative.

On the theme of collaboration, I would also highlight the \$50.3 million requested by my department to be transferred to the RCMP in support of the first nations policing program in various communities across Canada. Indigenous communities, like all other communities in Canada, should be safe places where families can thrive and economies can flourish. Public safety is essential for social and economic development. That's why I announced last year that the government is investing an incremental \$291.2 million over five years in policing in first nations and Inuit communities currently served under the first nations policing program. That is the single largest investment in the program since it was first created back in 1991. For the first time, the funding will be both ongoing and indexed so that first nations communities can have the confidence that their police forces will have the resources they need into the future.

A third horizontal initiative is reflected in the \$7.1 million requested for CSIS and CBSA to support the 2018 to 2020 immigration plan. As you know, Minister Hussen announced a multi-year plan that would welcome some 980,000 new permanent residents to our country by 2020. Public Safety portfolio organizations are very important partners in the immigration and refugee system, helping determine admissibility to Canada and providing security screening. Again, this funding will support their efforts.

Mr. Chair, that's just a quick snapshot of some of the collaborative work the portfolio is undertaking.

I'll briefly outline some of the other more prominent dollar amounts requested by some of our portfolio partners.

These estimates would provide the CBSA with a net increase in budgetary expenditures of \$94.1 million. Along with supporting action against gun and gang violence, as well as immigration activities, that funding will also enhance the passenger protect program and other priorities.

The RCMP is seeking a net increase of \$163.3 million in these estimates for the first nations policing program that I mentioned, and the guns and gangs initiative, as well as for G7 security, efforts related to the new cannabis regime, and much more.

Finally, I'll also highlight a requested net increase of \$16 million to the spending authorities for CSIS, and an increase of \$2.3 million to the Correctional Service of Canada. Minister Blair will have more details to share on today's estimates during the next hour of your meeting.

With respect to immediate priorities, it's safe to say that we won't be slowing down in the near future. For example, you can expect to see new measures responding to the mandate that we have given to the new commissioner of the RCMP. With the new cannabis regime in place, we'll be presenting legislation soon to make things fairer for Canadians who have been previously convicted of the offence of simple possession.

In closing, I understand that this committee will begin clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-83 later this week. I have been following the testimony and your lines of questioning very closely. Even though we are eliminating the practice of administrative segregation through this bill and introducing the new concept of structural intervention units, it is clear that some form of independent review mechanism for individuals who do not take part in programming within the structured intervention units would make stakeholders more comfortable with this very ambitious legislation. As indicated previously, I would be amenable to such a change, and I look forward to your work on clause-by-clause study.

As members likely know, creating a review mechanism would be a new and distinct function that would require a royal recommendation. That includes changing the terms and conditions of the original royal recommendation that was included at the beginning with Bill C-83, which of course would make such an amendment inadmissible at the committee stage.

•(1540)

If members are interested in such an amendment, my office would be more than willing to work with you in preparing such a report stage amendment. I would seek the appropriate royal recommendation from my cabinet colleagues.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear, Mr. Chair. Welcome to you in your role as chair today. I'm glad to be here and to have the opportunity to answer any questions.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Minister.

We will now move into the question and answer portion.

Ms. Damoff, you may go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you, Minister, for being here with us. As always, we welcome your testimony before us.

I want to start with your last comment, if I could, on Bill C-83. Ms. Dabrusin and I have both been quite interested in introducing an amendment on the oversight issue. I certainly will take you up on your offer to work with your staff to include that in report stage when it comes back to the House.

On Bill C-83, we had Stan Stapleton from the Union of Safety and Justice Employees here last week. He talked about there being evidence showing that strong rehabilitative programs make communities safer and create a safer environment for both employees and offenders inside institutions. He also stated that Bill C-83 would require additional funding in order to complete the mandate we're hoping to complete with Bill C-83.

I think many of us were quite pleased to see, in the fall economic statement, \$448 million allocated to corrections. I'm just wondering if you could tell the committee how that significant investment will be spent.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: The funding is largely dedicated, Ms. Damoff, to the purpose you have indicated. Clearly, for Bill C-83 to be successful and effective in eliminating the old practice of administrative segregation and in instituting the totally new concept of structured intervention units, two things have to happen: The law needs to be changed—that's what Bill C-83 accomplishes—and then you have to back it up with the necessary resources. You have to make sure that the Correctional Service of Canada has people with the right skill sets in the right places at the right times to provide the kinds of intervention that will be effective with the offender population, interventions that will be entirely new and that will not—I say this very deliberately—simply be administrative segregation with a different coat of paint.

I know there has been concern expressed around this table and among some of the stakeholders about the effectiveness of the reform. That's why the funding is critical. It's to make sure that this is real and meaningful change. The old procedures will be gone. There will be a new system in place. That will require money, and that's largely what the commitment in the economic statement was for.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Minister.

I was going to ask Minister Blair this question, but I think I'll ask you. We passed Bill C-71 here at committee. One of the provisions in the bill was that when someone has a prohibition order and they're prohibited from owning firearms, those firearms are now forfeited to the Crown. That's new. In the past, if someone was prohibited from owning firearms, those weapons could go to another person—a gang member, a friend, a family member—as long as that other person had a firearms licence.

In my particular instance, I knew of a domestic violence situation where that would have been very helpful. That's something really important that was put in by our government.

The opposition leader has come out with a guns and gangs policy. One of the things he has talked about is repealing Bill C-71. In terms of that provision, then, the firearms would no longer be forfeited to the Crown, but he has included a lifetime firearms ban. Well, you can ban gang members from owning guns, but they just pass them off to their brothers.

I'm wondering what your thoughts are on that aspect of repealing Bill C-71.

• (1545)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: In my view, that would be very much a regressive step. It would, for example, eliminate all the work that has been done very conscientiously on all sides of the table with respect to background checks.

Very often, legislation with respect to firearms can be controversial. It can be divisive, but I note in the debate, both in the House and at this committee, the issue of background checks. There was near unanimity on the value of the provisions that were put into Bill C-71, and indeed the committee worked very hard to strengthen those provisions to make sure that the background checks were effective.

The same, I think, can be said with respect to many of the other provisions in Bill C-71, and I note that the committee took the perhaps unusual step—but I think the important step—of inserting

into Bill C-71 a clarifying amendment that made it abundantly clear that nothing in that legislation could ever be interpreted as a backdoor long-gun firearm registry, which has been a concern for some people.

With that clarification now in the law, that nothing in Bill C-71 could ever be interpreted in such a way as to create a long-gun registry, the other provisions in Bill C-71 are, I think, very valid. They make legitimate contributions to public safety, and again I recall the words of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, which said that this is very important legislation that will assist them in fighting crime and in keeping Canadians safe.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Minister.

I only have 30 seconds left.

I'll go back to the investments that we're making of over \$400 million. In your estimation, will investing in our Correctional Service make Canadians safer?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Yes. In a word, it will. Our whole objective in the corrections system is to achieve effective corrections and rehabilitation, so when a person's sentence is completed and they are, in due course, released back into society—which applies to the vast majority of offenders, since at some point they are released—they will come out of the system as prepared as possible to live law-abiding lives. If that mission of rehabilitation is accomplished successfully—and that's what this money would be directed toward—we'll have fewer future offenders, fewer victims, and safer communities.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you.

It is now Mr. Motz's turn.

[*English*]

You have seven minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I'm glad you started speaking on Bill C-71. It's interesting that you talk about the investment in gang and gun legislation and all the money that you're going to put into law enforcement to deal with gangs and guns, yet the announcement was \$500 million initially, and then it was reduced to \$327 million. The numbers keep changing. It's tough to find out which number is going to get paid.

Right now, the last I heard, Minister Blair has a document that he signed that says that not a dime has been spent yet of the \$327 million that you have promised. It's interesting that it's not having any impact. Your legislation, Bill C-71, has zero reference to gangs or gun violence, and quite honestly, the Canadian Police Association spokesman may have said that they agree with it, but the individuals I have spoken to across the country have a different view.

We know that the whole gang violence issue in this country occurs in municipalities policed predominantly by municipal departments. Most Canadians are policed by municipal police services in this country. I see that money is going to the RCMP for gang violence, and I see you just indicated that \$200 million over five years is going to the provinces. I'm just kind of curious to know when you anticipate this money rolling out to municipal agencies so that they can start dealing with the gang and gun issues that their communities are faced with.

• (1550)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I'm very glad to have the question, Mr. Motz, and to clarify any uncertainty you might see.

In the original announcement of the funding for the guns and gangs initiative, which was coupled with Bill C-71, there were two parallel initiatives. One was the legislation; the other was the funding. The legislation has proceeded forward, and we're now moving forward on the funding. The original announcement was for \$327 million over five years beginning in this fiscal year. At the end of that fiscal year, the amount would be \$100 million per year every year ongoing into the future. As we ramp up the initiative, it will be \$327 million over five years, and then \$100 million a year ongoing indefinitely into the future.

Now, of the \$327 million, approximately \$214 million will be transferred through intergovernmental agreements from the Government of Canada to the provinces. We have—

Mr. Glen Motz: If that's the announcement you made last fall, Minister, then none of that money has been spent here.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: We've been negotiating the agreements with the provinces.

Mr. Glen Motz: Okay, so we're 14 months into that announcement, entering a by-election in Surrey—

Hon. Ralph Goodale: The announcement was that it would flow in this fiscal year—

Mr. Glen Motz: —and it still hasn't happened.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: —and it will flow in this fiscal year.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you. The money hasn't flowed yet. That's my point.

Number two, you talk about—

Hon. Ralph Goodale: It's flowing exactly against the schedule that we gave in the first place, Mr. Motz.

Mr. Glen Motz: It's going against the schedule you....

Hon. Ralph Goodale: It's flowing exactly consistently—

Mr. Glen Motz: Oh, it's consistent.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: —with what we originally announced.

Mr. Glen Motz: Okay, very good.

You talk about Bill C-59. You mentioned that, I believe, in your opening remarks. Now, from what I see in the estimates—and I've heard conversations and seen documents—\$100 million will be added to the administrative costs for CSIS and CSE and other national security agencies. If we're taking money and we're going to be spending it on administrative issues, then the actual operational end of national security is not going to be dealt with. There's going

to be a pullback from there. Is that what I'm seeing and hearing and understanding in these documents?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: No. I'd be curious as to where you see that particular point, Mr. Motz.

If you could just identify what point you're referring to specifically in the estimates.... One critical point, of course, is that this committee has to do its work, and Parliament has to vote on the estimates before the government can invest the money. We're in the process now of supply. Once the committee has finished its work, the estimates will go to the House of Commons. There's a date in December. I forget exactly the day, but our House leaders will jointly determine a day upon which we will vote on the estimates, and then the government will be authorized to spend the money.

Mr. Glen Motz: I'm just going to move to Bill C-83, Minister. You spoke to it briefly, and your estimates say that \$448 million will be flowing to CSC over the coming years to deal with this legislation.

Now, I don't know if you've been following the testimony at committee, but pretty much everybody except your own officials, on both sides of the political spectrum, has spoken against this bill. They've said it's a bad bill. I'm just curious to know whether you're going to be withdrawing it. If you don't withdraw it, will you at least take it back to the drawing board and redo it so that it actually will receive public support?

There's been no consultation. Everybody who came said they were never consulted. I'm just kind of curious to know.... If you're spending that kind of money and we're supposed to trust you that the regulations are going to lay out how this money is going to be spent, the bill certainly doesn't. I'm at a loss, and everybody who came in as witnesses from, as I said, all sides of the issue was very concerned and confused as to how it will actually play out and whether it will make a difference.

Most of them said it would not make a difference on offender rehabilitation. It would not make a difference on safety within the institution. It wasn't going to meet the objectives that, as you had indicated, Bill C-83 was intended to meet. I'm just curious to know how the regulations are going to identify what \$448 million is actually going to do to improve our correctional system.

• (1555)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Motz, I'd be anxious to give Commissioner Kelly an opportunity to respond to the question in detail, but let me just make this point. Over the last number of years, as we've read the reports of the Office of the Correctional Investigator and as we've listened to the representations that have been made by a variety of stakeholders, such as the Elizabeth Fry organization and the John Howard organization—

Mr. Glen Motz: They are against it.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: —they have all raised issues about the level of support within correctional institutions for mental health. They have raised issues with respect to the ability of the system to address the unique needs of indigenous people and other minorities. They've raised issues about the treatment within facilities—appropriate or not—with respect to women offenders, and this legislation and the funding that we have announced are intended to be directly focused on those initiatives.

The criticism that has been made has been heard. We've received the representations that these various groups and organizations, and individuals and watchdogs, have made—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, sir.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: —and we have come forward with both legislation and funding to address the specific problems that they mention.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Minister, Mr. Motz, thank you.

Mr. Dubé, you may go ahead for seven minutes.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I hope I make it to the end of my seven minutes without my voice conking out here.

Minister and officials, thank you all for being here.

I just want to continue on the Bill C-83 piece there, and what you talked about with respect to royal recommendations. I want to delve into that a little bit, since you did bring it up.

It seems to me that you aren't imagining a specific solution, because there are some solutions that would not require a royal recommendation, one of them being, for example, judicial oversight, which dates back to a recommendation from Justice Arbour. There's currently a regulatory framework that has been used as an example of something that could be used for independent oversight, which is the independent chairperson, which exists in the disciplinary context.

Given that you've mentioned the need for a royal recommendation, that precludes there being a specific remedy in mind for this particular criticism, and to Mr. Motz's point, he did steal some of my thunder, because I have never seen a bill get panned so unanimously by committee witnesses the way this one has.

I'm wondering if you're envisaging something in particular and if you've already discounted the possibility, for example, of judicial oversight, which would not require a royal recommendation.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: The ability for judicial review is something that is always accessible, Mr. Dubé, and we certainly would not have any thought of precluding that or limiting that, but in addition to that, which may not be accessible to everybody within the system because they simply may not have the means or the resources or the ability to gain access to the court system—

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Minister, if I may, I'm sorry for interrupting, but I just want to make sure we're clear here, because I'm talking about the Arbour recommendation that has been brought up by a number of witnesses who've appeared on this bill before committee. This is to say that in the event that—and choose the threshold you will; let's say the Mandela rules, which would be the acceptable threshold for us—you've surpassed that 15 days, then you're requiring judicial review.

If I'm hearing what you're saying, you're saying we would look into it at report stage because we need royal recommendation. It seems to me that that option has already been put off the table.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I'm prepared to hear your argument, Mr. Dubé, but that option may not be actually the most accessible and efficient to deal with the issues that offenders may wish to raise.

Plus, it's not cost-free. It would still carry a price tag associated with it, because it would obviously, potentially significantly, add to the administrative burden that would have to be carried by the court system, so you would still need to pay for that in some way.

● (1600)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: We can continue to debate that particular piece, but I do want to get to some of my other points with the limited time that I have.

In keeping with that spirit, the last correctional investigator report talked about the lack, for example, of psychiatric services in corrections, and when I look at the numbers that are here, it seems very backloaded.

One of the concerns that has been raised about Bill C-83 is that notwithstanding this debate that we may have over whether it's essentially the same thing under a new name or not, putting that debate aside, the fact remains that there is concern on whether the lack of psychiatric services and other mental health services would mean that some individuals would still find themselves being put into these units because of a lack of resources. When you see such back-ended funding, is there not a concern that more needs to be done to address that issue, something that was raised in the correctional investigator's report just a few weeks ago or a week or so ago?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Funding for improved mental health services has been included in the last two federal budgets. We have already taken some steps to begin to address those issues, which went unaddressed for so very long.

In addition to that, we are proposing the very strongly enhanced mental health care services that are envisaged in this new concept of a structured intervention unit. There's some funding that was put in the system in the last two budgets. This new funding, to go along with the implementation of Bill C-83, will add further resources still.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I still have about a minute left. I just want to ask you about the Auditor General's report and the community supervision program. There seems to be an issue with not having the resources to deal with the caseload. For my final question, can you just say what your department is going to do to respond to that need? Clearly it's undermining rehabilitative objectives when folks who are on parole are not able to access that service.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: The Correctional Service has accepted all of the Auditor General's recommendations and has already begun to take steps to implement that advice. For example, the need for a long-term accommodations plan that tries to forecast the need some years into the future and prepare in advance to have those facilities available is one of the things that the Auditor General specifically referred to. The Correctional Service is beginning to respond to that specific recommendation, together with all of the others in the Auditor General's report.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: As it turns out, I didn't count my time right. I do have another minute left, so I'll ask you one last question.

I've asked former commissioner Paulson this question before about resources and the priorities that have been set. There was a time when he would often mention that with a focus on counter-terrorism efforts, other forms of crime were being neglected, if I can paraphrase in that way. I don't want to put words in his mouth. There was a CBC piece about a higher number of crimes being authorized to be committed by RCMP officers, whether in an undercover context or whatnot. Someone in the article alluded to the fact that this may be because resources are being shifted elsewhere.

Do you believe that there's more that can be done to make sure that the RCMP has enough resources to deal with a multitude of crimes instead of just having to focus on one specific issue?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Please keep your answer brief, Minister.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: From the very beginning of my tenure as minister, I've been concerned about adequate financing for the RCMP. As you know, there have been program review initiatives under way for the last couple of years. That process I hope will be coming to its final conclusion in the period immediately ahead so that we can put in place a long-term plan with appropriate resources for the RCMP to accomplish all of the objectives that they need to accomplish, and so that they won't be in the position of having to sacrifice one in order to do the other. That work is under way right now.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): I appreciate your short answers, Minister.

Ms. Sahota, the floor is yours for seven minutes.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today. Your file is a very important file to me and of course to this committee. Recently, in my city of Brampton, we've seen a big uptick in the use of firearms in the commission of criminal activity, and it has become a real concern in the community. My question goes a little bit to what Mr. Motz was referring to.

When it comes to local regions, they want to know how this money is affecting their region in particular. In terms of the \$86 million going to the RCMP, going to CBSA, the region I live in is very close to the largest airport in the country, and I have heard and read that many guns that are obtained are obtained illegally and oftentimes come from south of the border.

I would like your opinion on where the guns are coming from and how the funding that you're giving—the \$86 million—can help alleviate some of the problems that we're seeing in the city of Brampton.

• (1605)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I got through part of the answer with Mr. Motz.

There are four components to this funding—the \$327 million that's spread over five years, and then what will become \$100 million per year every year thereafter.

The largest chunk of the \$327 million will be \$214 million. That will be transferred from the Government of Canada to provinces through federal-provincial transfer agreements, and then the provinces will determine, within their jurisdiction, how to allocate that funding to local municipalities or local groups and organizations.

Some of it undoubtedly will go into policing services to provide greater coordination and to enhance the delivery of policing services on the streets dealing directly with gang- and gun-related issues. Some of it may well go to community organizations that work on crime prevention initiatives and the disruption of gangs, or services that get young people out of gangs once they've been entrapped in that negative lifestyle. The provinces with municipalities and with local law enforcement will determine the allocation of that \$214 million to local community-based activities.

There's another \$51 million that's going to CBSA to deal with border interdiction. How do you stop smuggled guns from getting into the country? That may involve new technology. It may involve additional staff or better training. It may involve sniffer dogs in the right locations who sometimes are even better than the technology. CBSA will allocate that \$51 million to upgrade their ability at the border to stop smuggled guns from coming here in the first place.

There's another \$35 million that goes to the RCMP to break up the firearms trafficking networks and to enhance their services right across the country in dealing with the illegal use of firearms.

If you add all of those things together, you'll find that there's another \$25 million or so in the process. That will be used for things like data collection, and this has been one of the frustrations for policy-makers in this field.

The argument goes on. Are most of the illegal crime guns smuggled into the country from the U.S., or are they from straw purchases, domestically sourced within Canada? We'll be able to get better data by working with police forces, working with Statistics Canada to be more precise about the origination of illegal firearms.

The reality for a local community, though, is that whether the firearm is smuggled or whether it's the result of a straw purchase or a break-in at a legitimate gun shop, it's still a crime gun, and we want to stop it from doing damage on the street.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Recently Andrew Scheer came into my riding, and he was talking a lot about how to solve this problem. He referred to automatic bails, but when I looked into it, I couldn't find any process that gives criminals automatic bail necessarily. Actually, when you use a firearm in the commission of a crime, there's a reverse onus. There were also other things listed, such as listing gangs in the Criminal Code and a reference to mandatory lifetime firearm bans. What are your opinions on those methods?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I'm prepared to look at any reasonable and enlightened idea to deal with the illegal use of firearms. I think we've made a very good start in Bill C-71, and a very good start with the guns and gangs initiative, which will invest in local communities and local law enforcement as well as the RCMP and CBSA. If others have other ideas to suggest, we'll take a look at the suggestions. Our objective here is to keep Canadians safe.

• (1610)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Are gangs already in the Criminal Code? Is this something that you think needs to be done?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I don't know the detail of that particular proposal. I think you may have to ask Mr. Scheer that question.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Criminal organizations are already listed under the Criminal Code.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Yes, they are.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I believe that's the word that he's using in referencing gangs. There's a lot of tough talk that I think I've been hearing. I appreciate your explanation, because people want to know how they are going to see all these investments on the ground.

If I have any time, can I share it with—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): You have 30 seconds left.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): I have 30 seconds here.

I represent Mississauga—Streetsville; I'm not too far from Ruby. I grew up in the community. It's a quaint community, a sleepy town, a bedroom community, yet since I've been elected, we've had multiple shootings, deaths, stabbings. Four or five days ago, a young girl, 23 years old, was shot and is in critical condition. We hope the best for her.

In 20 seconds, I'd welcome some more comments on that concern of ours.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Well, far too many communities have felt the sting and the pain of gun and gang violence. The whole purpose of changing the law through Bill C-71 and making the investments we have made—\$327 million—available to provinces, local communities, municipalities and law enforcement is to try to put the communities in a better position to be safe and to make sure that people in your community know that they live in a safe and secure society and that we're all working together to make it even safer.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Minister.

We are now starting another round, and everyone will have five minutes each.

Mr. Eglinski, please go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I want to start off with Bill C-83 again. I've listened to most of the witnesses—the John Howard Society, the Elizabeth Fry Society, the correctional investigator, the union, etc. They weren't all Conservative witnesses; they were Liberal witnesses as well as our witnesses, but no matter where they came from, I cannot recall even one of them, throughout the evidence that they gave us, who said that they were consulted prior to the implementation and the drawing up of Bill C-83.

Now, I did go back and talk to some union people I know. I asked them if they had anything to do with that, and they said they'd been told about it, but they'd had no input as to the laying out of the framework.

Your government talks a lot about transparency and working together. How did Bill C-83 come about? Who drafted this legislation that seems to be opposed by everyone who comes to see us?

We're going to have a very interesting time discussing it in the near future.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: The bill was drafted, as all bills are, by the lawyers who are in the drafting section of the Department of Justice, based on the instructions that were given by the Correctional Service and my department. The policy decisions were approved through the normal cabinet process.

The whole initiative, Mr. Eglinski, is directed to be a response to the criticism about the Correctional Service of Canada that we have heard over the last number of years. There has been very strong criticism about administrative segregation. We considered, as you know, amending that process, making some reforms to administrative segregation, and concluded that the better thing to do was to abolish it altogether and adopt an entirely different approach.

Most of the criticism that has been directed through the committee has, I think, been operating on the assumption that some form of administrative segregation will continue. The point is that it won't. That administrative segregation will be abolished, and it will be replaced with the structured intervention units, which will provide the correctional system with a way to keep people separate when that is necessary.

• (1615)

Mr. Jim Eglinski: I think, Mr. Minister, that the group is aware of that, and there are differences of opinion from a number of different people who gave us evidence.

I'd like to step away from Bill C-83 now.

You were talking about different finances. Last year you talked about \$327.5 million over five years going for guns and gangs, and \$291.2 million over five years going to the RCMP to support first nations policing.

Has any of that \$291.2 million been spent to date?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: The funding for the first nations policing program requires specific contribution agreements to be negotiated with individual communities. That process is ongoing. It's virtually complete now, I believe.

These estimates include some funding to be transferred to the RCMP in those communities where the RCMP is the policing agency. There are different arrangements in different communities. In some it is a locally controlled community police force; in other communities the service is provided by the RCMP. Different communities are at different stages of development at any given moment.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: So no money has gone out yet. It's being negotiated, I take it—yes or no?

Mr. Malcolm Brown (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): I'll have to get back to you. I actually think that we have agreements in place. Some communities have asked for the funding to flow in the next fiscal year, but we can get the committee the specific flow of funds. It's quite transparent.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Yes. Thank you.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: We'll provide that for you, Mr. Eglinski.

Bear in mind that there are 450 of these communities, and they are all in different categories, but—

Mr. Jim Eglinski: They all need help.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: — we'll provide you with the breakdown.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Mr. Eglinski, Minister.

Ms. Dabrusin, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Thank you, Minister.

When I was going through the supplementary estimates, one of the things that caught my attention was funding going towards “criminal record checks related to record suspension applications”. Our committee is looking at record suspension applications.

We've just started a study because member of Parliament Wayne Long brought forward a motion asking us to look at some of the changes that had been brought in under the previous government and at what we could do to improve record suspensions. He spoke quite eloquently about the impact that he has seen in his community for people who are unable to afford the cost. It almost quadrupled under the previous government. As well, there is the impact of the lengthened amount of time that it takes to actually qualify to be eligible for record suspension.

With all of that as background, my question with respect to this is that if we're going to be looking at the cost of record suspensions as part of that study, is there any analysis of the administrative cost for an individual record suspension? Is there a range of costs related to that? I only ask because I see that there is this money allocated specifically for the criminal record checks portion.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I would have to get back to you, Ms. Dabrusin, on the issue of the direct cost analysis. I know that when the previous government raised the fee, first of all to \$150 and then to \$631, their argument was cost recovery, that the fee increase was necessary to pay for the cost of the service. As to whether it covers the cost of the service on a dollar-for-dollar basis, I will have

to check to see exactly what the cost is compared to the revenues that are raised, but as a result of Mr. Long's representation and others, we are looking at the broader question of record suspension.

The previous government changed the name from “pardon” to “record suspension”. They changed the eligibility rules, they changed the waiting periods, and they increased the fee. A number of people have made the argument that those previous decisions should be revisited. We are examining those questions in terms of broad reform with respect to pardons.

In the meantime, we have two specific sets of issues. We've dealt with one in Bill C-66 with respect to the LGBTQ2 community, and now we are seized of the issue of dealing with pardons or record suspensions in relation to the simple possession of cannabis offences. As I indicated in my opening remarks, we'll be coming forward with a very specific proposal on that latter point in the very near future.

● (1620)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I know that we'll be looking forward to that.

The other thing—and I don't have a whole lot of time left to me—is that I also saw that there was money put towards enhancing the passenger protect program. There have been people in my community and people whom I have met who form part of the “no-fly kids”. The last time you were here, I believe, or one of the times you were here, we talked about the timelines based on the changes that were brought about in Bill C-59 to improve the passenger protect system. Do you have a sense of where we're at on timing at this stage?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: We continue to make progress. Bill C-59 is further through the process now. It's in front of the Senate, and I'm hopeful that the Senate will be able to deal with Bill C-59 in the weeks and months immediately ahead.

Bill C-21 is also in the Senate. It's also making progress. We need those two pieces of legislation passed to give us the legal authority to make the changes. Once they're passed, there will be certain regulations that will need to be developed and promulgated under the two pieces of legislation.

The good news is that from Mr. Morneau's budget, we have the money in place that will allow us to build the new information system that will be required to correct this long-standing problem. It's a problem that's 10 years old. I want to fix it as fast as I can, but I do have to go through the necessary legal steps in the right order to get the legal authority and to get the regulations adopted.

We have the money now, and CBSA will be building the new system, which will be a government-controlled system and an interactive system. Once a person who has been red-flagged as a security issue has been cleared, they'll get a clearance number, and on all their subsequent encounters with the system they'll be able to enter that clearance number and automatically be cleared without going through the difficulty they're experiencing now.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you for that.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

Minister, before I turn the floor over to Mr. Blaney, I'd like to ask you a question.

We didn't see anything in the estimates related to the RCMP and CSIS warnings we received about interference in our systems by Russian and Chinese companies like Huawei.

Has any money been earmarked to ensure we are able to deal with potential threats to critical infrastructure from Huawei?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Paul-Hus, the issues with respect to the security of supply chains—and this is basically an information technology supply chain issue—are very squarely before the government. The agencies in my department and many other departments and agencies of the Government of Canada, including Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, are very much seized of this issue.

We are working now to accomplish two objectives to be able to deal with this new 5G technology that is just around the corner but coming very quickly. We want Canadians to be able to fully enjoy all the benefits that come from that amazing new technology, but we also want them to be able to enjoy those benefits in a safe and secure fashion so that their privacy, their safety and the national security of the country are properly protected.

We are at work right at this very moment to ensure we accomplish those two objectives. The funding provided in the estimates will support the work of CSIS, the RCMP, the Communications Security Establishment and all the other agencies of government—including ISED—to make sure we answer those two questions properly: getting the best of innovation for Canadians, and at the same time making sure their security is absolutely protected. We need the two of them together.

• (1625)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Blaney, you may go ahead for five minutes.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): It's a pleasure, Minister, to have you appear before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. In another time, under a different government, I was fortunate enough to be sitting where you are now. I must say the difference between where things stand today and where they stood then is significant. When I was minister, the Prime Minister never put me in impossible or unmanageable situations. One situation, in particular, that comes to mind is the porous Canadian border created by Prime Minister Trudeau. I never had to deal with problems like that, problems that cause chaos and seriously compromise the safety of Canadians.

I have a number of questions for you. In your opening statement, you mentioned natural disasters. As you know, the government operations centre, or GOC, provides an integrated emergency response. I'd like to know whether the supplementary estimates you're presenting today include measures to modernize the GOC.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: You're talking about the Government Operations Centre.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Absolutely.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: It was referred to in the last budget or the second-to-last budget.

Mr. Malcolm Brown: It was the second-to-last budget.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Blaney, I guess not many people will know about the downtown office building in Ottawa where that very important agency is located—the Government Operations Centre. It's an old building, and the facilities are not very good. We made the decision to find new facilities to make sure that the GOC can provide the absolutely indispensable services that it does.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: That's great. Thank you.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: That process is under way, and budget 2017 provided the resources to do it.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: I see.

I have another question along the same lines. It's about emergency preparedness but as it relates to bandwidth. In the event of a natural disaster, our security agencies have to be able to communicate with one another without being hamstrung by the network. Have you set aside any funding to manage bandwidth during emergency response?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Yes, this is a subject of federal and provincial discussion, because we need to make all of our communications systems—federal, provincial, municipal—communicate effectively together in dealing with an emergency.

We have been working with the provinces to develop a plan to find the right part of the spectrum that will be reserved for that purpose. It may be used for other purposes when it's not needed for an emergency, but that consultation with the service providers, with the provinces, with the emergency and first responder community is well advanced, and I hope to be in a position to bring that forward.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Minister.

The process is under way, then.

Here's a very simple question. Can you tell us how many ISIS terrorists have come back to Canada from countries where terrorist activities were being conducted? Can you tell us that number today, Minister?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: The number is published on an annual basis, Mr. Blaney, as you know, in the public threat report. That report will be made public sometime during the course of the month of December. The most up-to-date numbers will be provided at that time, but I can tell you that the arithmetic has hardly changed at all from 2015.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Very well.

Minister, today, we heard my fellow members voice some concerns. In your opening statement, you said that protecting Canadians was a priority.

Your prison bill met with unanimous criticism. Inmates and correctional officers alike spoke out against it. Under the bill, you intend to provide clean syringes to inmates. I was told that correctional officers asked for gloves to protect them against needlestick accidents, but what worries me is that you denied their request for gloves. Is that true?

Here is the easiest question I can ask. I believe you brought it up in your opening statement. Why not just withdraw the bill and go back to the drawing board to rework the measures that were criticized? As you know, the president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers said the system would cause significant problems, creating chaos. First, will you consider withdrawing the bill? Second, what are you doing to protect the health and safety of our correctional officers?

• (1630)

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale: I had the opportunity for a very good discussion just last week with the president and other representatives of the UCCO, the union representing the correctional services officers. We discussed a number of these issues, and I have taken a number of their representations under advisement.

To make sure that they have absolute confidence that they are respected in the work they do—it is critically important and tough work—I want to make sure that we respond to the legitimate concerns of the representatives of the UCCO as much as humanly possible.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Minister, thank you for being here. I'd also like to thank the officials joining you today.

We will now suspend momentarily to bring in the next panel of witnesses.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Minister, welcome to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. We will now continue our examination of supplementary estimates (A).

We will now begin the first round of questions. Everyone will have seven minutes each. Ms. Dabrusin, you may go ahead.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: The minister won't be making a presentation?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): My apologies. This is my first time chairing the meeting.

Minister, you have 10 minutes for your presentation. Please go ahead.

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I was quite interested in participating in a new approach to these committee meetings whereby you would ask the questions first and then I would deliver my remarks. I want to thank Ms. Dabrusin for sharing her time with me.

Good afternoon, everyone.

I'm very pleased and honoured to have the opportunity to attend before this committee today to speak about the supplementary estimates (A) for the Public Safety portfolio as it pertains to my responsibilities.

I know you have just spent an hour with Minister Goodale, who noted earlier that the portfolio as a whole is requesting adjustments for the fiscal year resulting in a net increase of \$262 million in authorities.

The minister, I believe, has given this committee a broad overview of the estimate items and why they are important for Canadians. My remarks today will focus on those items that fall strictly within my purview and my mandate and its priorities. Specifically, I hope to focus my attention on two issues that are top of mind for Canadians, the cannabis implementation and guns and gangs.

The country is currently seeing a surge in gun violence. Much of that violence is related to gang activities involving reprisals or rival gangs battling over turf. Mr. Chair and committee members, this is not simply happening in large urban centres in our country; smaller cities are plagued by this problem, as well as rural and indigenous communities. People are concerned.

I have had the opportunity over the past several months to travel across the country to communities large and small. We're listening to their concerns and then working hard to take concrete action to reduce violent gun crime and to keep communities safe.

Just over one year ago, the government announced the launch of an initiative to take action against gun and gang violence. This initiative reflects the need to take a broad and all-encompassing approach to reducing violence in our communities. For example, we recognize that while this is a nationwide concern, the problem is not the same everywhere: Different regions and communities are facing distinct and unique challenges, and those challenges require distinct and unique solutions. It's very important to hear perspectives from all parts of the country and from every perspective on the issue. We're making sure we do precisely that.

The Prime Minister has asked me to engage Canadians in a dialogue on handguns and assault-style weapons. I've been talking to experts, front-line police officers and members of the public across the country to seek their views, to listen to the evidence and to examine the data. I look forward to making recommendations based on those findings upon the completion of my examination.

We have also committed to investing \$327.6 million over five years as part of a gun and gang violence action fund. This fund will help support a variety of initiatives that will help reduce gun crime related to gun and gang activities. A portion of that funding is aimed at reducing the supply of illegal guns that show up on our streets and get in the hands of people who would commit violent criminal acts with them. An important first step in eradicating gun and gang violence is investigating and stopping the smuggling of firearms, especially handguns, into our country. Our front-line law enforcement officers with the CBSA and the RCMP are already doing extraordinary work in that regard, and we have many examples to share of the successes they have achieved.

• (1640)

As Minister Goodale and I announced earlier this month, the government is making major investments to strengthen the enforcement capacity of the RCMP and the CBSA. Significant funding, for example, will be provided to the CBSA to increase its operational capacity to screen passengers and examine commercial shipments at the border.

Funding is also being provided to the RCMP for a new integrated criminal firearms initiative. These are important first steps to restore the force's ability to support law enforcement across the country to ensure that front-line officers have access to an integrated suite of resources to support firearm investigations.

At the same time, Mr. Chair, there's a clear consensus that gun and gang violence cannot be tackled through enforcement alone. I know from experience as a police officer and a police chief in a large urban centre that outreach and awareness are also essential. In other words, we need not only to interdict the supply of guns that get into the hands of criminals but to reduce the demand for those guns as well.

That's one reason the largest portion of the \$327.6 million in new funding that has been announced, over \$200 million over a five-year period, will be going to the provinces and territories to respond to specific needs in their communities.

We are aiming to start signing some of those funding agreements before the end of this calendar year. A major purpose of this funding is to support the efforts of local organizations that offer prevention and intervention programs. These types of programs help divert young people from gang culture that can almost inevitably draw them into a life of violence and criminality.

• (1645)

The response of any government must be to protect the health and safety of our citizens. There is no greater responsibility that all of us share, and that's why we are taking action on multiple fronts to reduce violent gun crime. Public Safety Canada, CBSA and the RCMP are seeking a combined total of \$29.9 million in these supplementary estimates to support this important work.

Protecting Canadians is also why we have legalized, strictly regulated and restricted access to cannabis in Canada. Prior to October 17, all non-medical cannabis in this country was produced and sold, 100%, by criminal organizations. They were responsible for the illegal production and distribution of cannabis, and they made billions of dollars in illicit profit. What they were selling, Mr. Chair, to both adults and our kids, was unregulated, untested and often

unsafe. It put the health and safety of Canadians at risk, and the system was failing our children. We had the highest rates of cannabis use of any country in the world. Our children were being criminalized for the simple possession of cannabis, and criminals were becoming enriched by that activity in the amount of billions of dollars each year.

We now have a far better, far more comprehensive and effective system in place. The new regulations offer Canadian adults a choice. It's a choice of a legal, regulated and reliable product of known potency and purity. We expect this will help to take a big bite out of the criminal black market.

However, our work has only begun; it is not yet complete. As I have said many times, the implementation of the Cannabis Act is a process, not an event. It's one reason that the RCMP is seeking \$3.3 million in these supplementary estimates to support the delivery of Canada's new, legal cannabis framework.

The government also continues to take action to crack down on impaired driving. It's not a new problem, Mr. Chair. Since 1925, drug-impaired driving has been a crime in this country, but up until fairly recently, the police had neither the training, the legal authorities nor the access to the technologies they needed to be effective in keeping our country and our roadways safe.

The problem with drug-impaired driving did not suddenly come into existence simply because cannabis was now legally available from a legitimate, licensed source. Those who get behind the wheel after consuming drugs or alcohol represent a significant danger to the public, and this has always been the case, but I am pleased to tell you that today, with Bill C-46 now in effect, our police services have the tools that they have long asked for to keep the public and our roadways safe. The bill also strengthens our impaired driving laws with tough new penalties and new, important provisions to control alcohol-impaired driving as well.

All of this is to be complemented by important investments in public education and awareness. We want to ensure that Canadians know the dangers and consequences of driving while impaired by drugs, including cannabis. That's why we have been running an ad campaign on social media, online, on TV and elsewhere in the country to counter the persistent myths and misconceptions that Canadians unfortunately held with respect to cannabis-impaired driving. These ads are aimed at youth and young adults, and they have a simple message, Mr. Chair: don't drive high.

Public Safety Canada is seeking \$2 million under the supplementary estimates to support this evolving campaign. Mr. Chair, the campaign is achieving a high level of success. We have heard from law enforcement agencies across the country that with the implementation of the new regulations, they have not seen a significant increase in drug-impaired driving, but what they have now available to them are the tools, the technology and the training they need to respond appropriately.

Mr. Chair, these are just a few examples of the important work that is happening across the Public Safety portfolio. I'd like to thank the hard-working men and women throughout the portfolio for all that they do, and acknowledge and thank the senior officials who have joined me here today. We are grateful for the work they do to protect Canadians from all manner of threats and dangers.

I'd like to thank the members of the committee for your efforts on the many public safety matters that come before you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to appear before you and answer the questions of your members.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Dabrusin, it is now your turn for seven minutes.

[English]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Now it's my time. Excellent.

Minister, thank you for coming here today.

In my community, we're nearing the anniversary, in the next few weeks, of the loss of someone who was a youth leader and a mentor, someone who worked with the Boys and Girls Club. His loss was important for the Eastview community, the Blake-Boulton community. The person I'm talking about is Kempton Howard. In a few weeks, it will be 15 years since we lost him.

I raise this because I have worked with his mother. She's been a fearless advocate on gun violence issues and someone who has become a strong leader in our community. I have helped her to work on some petitions that she has put forward on these issues. I was hoping that with you here, I might be able to ask about what our government is doing with respect to some of the things that she has put forward in these petitions.

First, she's concerned about where the guns come from and how to prevent the flow of guns coming over the border from the United States. One of the requests that she has put forward in her petitions has been to see more support for the Canada Border Services Agency to prevent these guns from coming illegally across our borders.

I was wondering if you could let us know what our government is doing to address that.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Julie. I'll try to be brief, because I want to be respectful of everyone's limited time.

First of all, I know Joan Howard and her son. I was involved in that investigation. You're right that she's a compelling advocate, as are so many mothers who have lost their children. I think they're a voice that we cannot ignore.

With respect to where the guns are coming from, one of the things that we did very carefully in Toronto when I worked there was examine the origin of every crime gun that came into our possession. We were able to identify the origin in most cases. They came, essentially, from two sources.

We live next to one of the largest handgun arsenals in the world, and guns are smuggled across the border from the United States. There are individuals who do it, but quite often criminal organizations are responsible for that. I will tell you that....

Perhaps I'll even refer to the RCMP and the CBSA, who are here. There are integrated border enforcement teams. There are very important comprehensive investigations, complex investigations, taking place into the organizations responsible for that. However, we also recognize that you can't just do that work at the border. It requires work on both sides of the border, and that's why we have integrated border enforcement teams. We saw some success recently with the CBSA working in partnership with the Toronto Police Service. They seized about 22 firearms, I believe.

Is that correct, John?

Mr. John Ossowski (President, Canada Border Services Agency): No, it was 21.

Hon. Bill Blair: They seized 21 firearms that were secreted in a gas tank coming across the border. That's an important source of guns coming into Canada for criminal purposes.

The other source of guns that was identified was illegal diversion from the domestic market. That can happen at a number of different points.

It can happen at point of sale. For example, there were investigations that I was involved in with regard to an individual who went out and bought 77 handguns. He purchased them, having the appropriate licences and authorities required to acquire those guns, but he almost immediately ground the serial numbers off and sold them at a significant profit into the criminal realm. Very quickly, they were used in criminal acts. We recovered them at violent criminal offences and traced them back to him. He went to jail for about eight years. That's one of the ways.

We've also seen a number of instances of firearms being stolen, either from break and enters or from cars. There was a case just in the past week in southeast Saskatchewan in which someone broke into a home and stole 77 restricted and prohibited firearms, 73 of which were handguns. All of those guns are now in the hands of criminals and are available.

Quite frankly, there's no one simple thing to be done. Everything needs to be done. We need to ensure that we invest significantly in the investigative bodies, in access to the technologies and new tools and new methodologies, and in the techniques that CBSA has been investing in. I've been monitoring it very carefully. John is here with me and can tell you, perhaps, about some of the things that they're doing. They're significantly enhancing their capacity to detect.

I think what is equally important is that they're working very collaboratively with law enforcement through the integrated border enforcement teams and other types of joint-force initiatives. As we saw recently in Toronto, those are really effective in identifying some of those individuals. We are looking at a number of different measures to make it more difficult for guns to get into the hands of criminals by any method, whether smuggled across the border or illegally diverted from the domestic market.

I also want to say—because I think it's something that Ms. Howard has often raised with me as well—that we have a lot of work to do to make sure that we reduce the demand for guns within that community of young men, who so often use them to commit violent acts. It's just not a matter of interdicting the supply.

• (1650)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Actually, you're leading to where I was going to go with my next question, because that's also part of the petition she put forward.

I was reading a quote of what the person who was found guilty for the shooting had said. In his statement, he said, "If I hadn't been involved in guns or if I hadn't had a gun on me, this would never have happened. I thought before that having a gun made me safe. Now I realize no one is safe when so many have a gun." That's a quote from the person who shot her son.

Joan Howard has also focused very much on how we make sure that youth don't turn to guns and to violence as their options.

I only have a minute left, but could you let me know a bit more about what we're doing to make sure that youth do not make those choices?

Hon. Bill Blair: As I said in my opening remarks, about \$327.6 million in new funding, over \$200 million over a five-year period, is available through the provinces and territories to work with community organizations and community groups. I think those types of investments are important, and they are specifically focused on people who might perhaps be at risk of getting involved in violent criminal activity.

There are other investments as well.

If we look at the social determinants of violence in our communities, it's often lack of access to opportunity and jobs, poor housing, and lack of access to mental health services, so it's a whole-of-government response. If we're going to deal with it effectively—and that is our intention—we have to look at all of those things. We have to make significant investments in community and in young people and support those organizations that are doing exceptional work, as well as law enforcement, which has the important job of upholding our laws and keeping our people safe.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Motz, you have the floor for seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Minister, I'm curious. In the last five months or so since you've been appointed, can you point to anything that you or your ministry have achieved? People are still crossing the border illegally into this country. CBSA is asked to do more, and they have no funding to do it. Rural crime is continuing to increase. Gangs and gang gun crime and violence are still a problem, with no apparent solutions.

I'm curious, and people in my constituency are curious, and Canadians are asking me, so I'm going to ask you: How have you made life better for Canadians and safer for Canadians?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much for the question, Glen.

Frankly, I would talk about the agencies and departments, from whom I'm receiving exceptional support in some of the work that they're doing.

You asked what kind of a difference we've made on the issue of irregular migration. We've seen a significant improvement in that situation. Immediately upon my appointment, I had the opportunity to go to Lacolle at the end of Roxham Road. I saw the exceptional work that was being done by the CBSA, RCMP, and IRCC in managing that situation, in upholding Canadian laws and ensuring the safety and security of our country and making sure that there was no threat of criminality or national security threat.

We have also seen some outstanding work in reaching out through communications to the communities to make sure that people clearly understand that coming into this country in an irregular way, seeking migration, is no free ticket to permanent residency.

Those communications that we've been engaged in have worked really effectively. I won't take credit for that, but we have seen a significant reduction in the last couple of months.

• (1655)

Mr. Glen Motz: Minister Blair, you said that your work on the border has had enormous impacts—

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Motz, I was not taking credit for myself, but I was giving credit to those who are doing the work.

Mr. Glen Motz: Yes, it's your organization and the people in your ministries.

In the last five months, how many people have crossed illegally into Canada?

Hon. Bill Blair: About 70% fewer than came across in the same five-month period—

Mr. Glen Motz: How many?

Hon. Bill Blair: Approximately 8,000.

Mr. Glen Motz: It was approximately 8,000.

Hon. Bill Blair: Compared to about 18,000 in the—

Mr. Glen Motz: Do you have a plan to improve border security?

Hon. Bill Blair: Actually, Mr. Motz, there is all sorts of work being done. There are plans being formulated and initiatives being brought forward and investments being made. We are determining what capacity is required.

We're working very closely, as well.... There are others in this relationship. It's a shared responsibility on how this is managed. We're working with provinces and territories, with municipalities. There have been some very effective steps taken by our officials who are working to manage this, and we are seeing significant improvements.

We've also gone to the United States, because there's a bilateral relationship and an agreement that exists between us. That's part of an ongoing dialogue at my level and at the senior official with our counterparts in the United States.

I'd like to assure you that we've all been working very diligently to ensure that we encourage people to use—

Mr. Glen Motz: I'll take your word for that. Not everybody in Canada thinks that's happening, but I'll take your word for it.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

Mr. Glen Motz: You said in your opening remarks that you have been working diligently on the consultation process for the handgun ban, for lack of a better way to describe it. Where in the estimates do I find the costings for this consultation process on the handgun ban?

Mr. Malcolm Brown: You won't find them in the estimates because we're funding them out of existing resources within the department.

Mr. Glen Motz: Minister, you have said that they're important and that you've travelled across the country, yet I've spoken to a number of individuals who have been at your invitation-only handgun ban consultations, and you weren't there. If they're so important, I'm wondering why you weren't at those meetings that you are supposed to be leading.

Hon. Bill Blair: We have been conducting consultations. There are many groups and areas to be consulted, so either I or my parliamentary secretary have been in attendance at each one of these consultations. The only exception was a particular event I was attending in Moncton. I had to leave early, unfortunately, but we left senior officials in place. There were a number of reasons I had to leave.

Mr. Glen Motz: As part of this consultation process, you have an online survey. How many online surveys have been completed for this consultation process? Do you know offhand?

Hon. Bill Blair: I've been advised that approximately 130,000 submissions were made by Canadians in response to the—

Mr. Glen Motz: There have been 130,000 from Canadians. You are aware that you can access that consultation from anywhere in the world?

Hon. Bill Blair: I had been advised by the officials who were overseeing its implementation that there were ways to determine the areas from which people are participating. I believe—

Mr. Glen Motz: It was from the IP address.

Hon. Bill Blair: No, there were questions that were posed to individuals on where they were. I'm also aware, Mr. Motz, that we had advocates on both sides of the issue who were encouraging people to respond, and perhaps respond multiple times. Those things happen in every consultation.

Mr. Glen Motz: You had no mechanism in place to ensure IP addresses couldn't be used over and over again.

Hon. Bill Blair: It's not a plebiscite, Mr. Motz; it was an opportunity for Canadians to provide input. Even if they wanted to provide input over and over again, at least we would hear from them.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Blair, if you're using that for input and you have a consultation process, you would think that you would want that process to have a reliable base to it. If you're not using IP addresses to track and if you have limited ability to know who is completing your survey from around the world, then any results that you might be able to gather from that would be suspect, in my opinion.

Now, has the Privacy Commissioner—

• (1700)

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Motz, I want to clarify that we did not require people to identify themselves for the purposes of completing this survey.

Mr. Glen Motz: But you asked for gender, you asked for ethnicity, you asked for—

Hon. Bill Blair: We asked for identifiers because they were useful in the data collection, but we did not ask people to identify themselves. Quite frankly, we wanted to make sure that Canadians who wished to make a point had the opportunity to do so and that their voices could be heard. We didn't want to put any restrictions or limitations on Canadians' ability to have their opinions heard.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Mr. Motz.

Mr. Dubé, you have seven minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here today, Minister.

I'd like to come back to the cannabis issue. Two things, in particular, interest me. First, I'd like to ask about pardon applications, criminal record suspensions. As you well know, Minister, the NDP maintains that those records should be expunged. My NDP colleague Murray Rankin, whom you know well, introduced a bill to that end.

Beyond the issue of whether expungement or suspensions—in other words, pardons—are the right way to go, I'd like to know where the process stands? We heard a lot about it before cannabis was legalized, but hardly anything since. In the meantime, those with criminal records still have to deal with the consequences.

Can you give us an update on where the process stands?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Goodale is the minister responsible for the records system, and he has made a commitment to bring forward the legislation that would be required to bring in the new regime. Without debating it further, it is a system of pardon for simple possession of cannabis that would make pardons more accessible and affordable so those individuals could have them.

By the way, I'd like to take the opportunity to briefly acknowledge the important work and advocacy of Murray Rankin on this thing. I've had many discussions with him. We have a fundamental disagreement on the best way forward, but we both agree that it's necessary to go forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I appreciate that. I guess the expression “let's agree to disagree” sums it up best. We will nevertheless continue to advocate the expungement of records, because we fundamentally believe that is the best approach. I'm taking notes, and I'll be sure to put my questions to Minister Goodale. I'm not always 100% clear on who is in charge of what when it comes to the cannabis file. You'll have to forgive me.

My next question may relate to more than one level of government, since the provinces do share some of the responsibility. This issue may be tied to how cannabis legalization was implemented. I don't know whether this information is anecdotal or fact-based, but the media has reported that some people are still turning to the black market for marijuana because of the short supply in a number of places. Other challenges are emerging as well. Ontario, for instance, is dealing with its own circumstances.

What are you doing about that? Are you working with the provinces to fix the problem? As far as I can tell, it conflicts with the government's stated goal of eliminating, or at least significantly reducing, the black market.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dubé.

As I have said many times about this, it's a process, not an event.

On the process of the implementation, I've certainly acknowledged that some of the provinces—not all, but some—have experienced difficulties in their supply chain. In response to that, Health Canada has been working diligently when organizations and private entities qualify for a licence for the production of cannabis. On those licences, we've been moving through that process quite efficiently. A number of additional new licences have been granted. There's been about a 600% increase in the last 18 months in the growing capacity of those licensed producers. I remain confident that the system is capable of keeping pace.

We have seen a significant uptake. It appears that when you give Canadians a legal choice—a licensed, regulated, safe and socially responsible choice—they'll make it. They're demonstrating their willingness to embrace this new regulated system. I think that's why we're seeing perhaps higher than anticipated demand.

I don't have a precise estimate, but, quite frankly, every dollar spent for a legitimate source is one less dollar organized crime makes. On the very first day, several million dollars was spent in provincially licensed distribution centres, either online or in retail stores. That was several million dollars that organized crime didn't make that day. I think we're making significant progress. I'm confident that those supply chain problems will be worked out. I think the provinces that have had a good experience with us will be able to share their experience with those who are still in the process of implementation.

We know, for example, that in British Columbia and in Ontario they have not yet moved.... Well, in British Columbia there's only one retail outlet, and in Ontario there are none yet, but when those begin to open up, I remain very confident that those supply chain issues will be resolved and that Canadians will be given a better choice.

● (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since I don't have a lot of time, I'm going to stop you there. Thank you, though, for your answer. The other question I wanted to ask you was about the border. I won't be coming at the issue from the same angle as my colleague. I'd like to discuss the safe third country agreement between Canada and the U.S. Of course, you know the NDP's position on the matter: the agreement should be suspended so that people can file refugee claims at recognized border crossings in the proper way.

Figures and other factors are a frequent topic of conversation, but I would like to know whether you are still discussing the safe third party agreement with our American counterparts. Are you able to give us an update on that?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: The answer is yes, they have. I've reached out to the Secretary of Homeland Security. I have gone to Washington and met with their senior officials. We've made our position clear; our position is that we believe there are opportunities to enhance and improve the safe third country agreement that will be mutually of benefit to both countries.

It's an ongoing discussion. It's a complex one, but it's an ongoing discussion.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: What do you mean by enhance and improve? How do you plan to change or improve the agreement?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: We have seen in its application that it has had the effect of encouraging people not to attend at regular border crossings, the point of entry, but rather to cross irregularly. That has been a factor for both us and our reciprocal partner, the United States. We believe that there are discussions and ways in which that agreement might be enhanced to encourage more regular use of our border.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Very good. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

Ms. Sahota, you may go ahead for seven minutes.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Minister, first I'll address some of the irregular border crossings and our asylum system.

I want you to walk us through a little about why you're seeing the numbers decrease, what methods you think have been working, and whether we are unique in this situation of having irregular asylum seekers or migrants, or whatever they'll be determined to be through the IRB. Could you walk me through that a bit?

Hon. Bill Blair: It's quite complex, obviously, as to why those numbers have increased, not just in Canada but all around the world in virtually every country. We've had a number of meetings with UNHCR, for example, to get an understanding of the entire global context of those who are fleeing persecution and seeking asylum.

In terms of some of the things that I believe have been quite effective, after last summer's surge when we saw a very significant increase through June, July and August of last year in the number of people who were presenting themselves irregularly at our border, there was a significant outreach that took place. We had ministers, senior officials, and even MPs who went down into those communities where many of these people were coming from to clearly explain Canadian law and how the system would work and to make it very clear that this wasn't a free ticket into the country. I think that has had a fairly profound effect.

We've also done some very effective work in online communications. We're communicating in the languages spoken in those communities. If, for example, they go out seeking information on a search engine or whatever, there is accurate, lawful information that clearly explains what the law is in Canada and how it will be applied, so people don't have misinformation that might induce them to come irregularly to our borders.

As well, and I think this has been very positive, we've been working very closely with other international authorities, particularly in the United States. It's important to acknowledge that. Some things they were doing with respect to their visa applications and authorizations and other things were having an impact on the number of people coming to us. As a result of the dialogue that has gone on between us, some very effective steps have been taken.

There's still a great deal more work to do, but we see a path of clear improvement in the number of people who are coming.

It's also important to remember that people conflate the issue of asylum seekers. Less than half—about 40%—of those who come to our country seeking asylum actually cross irregularly; 60% are crossing at a point of entry or making inland claims through the airports and so on. It's a smaller portion, and in fact, because of some very effective steps that our officials have taken, the number coming across irregularly is becoming less among the total number of asylum seekers.

Therefore, we are seeing improvements. There still is work to do.

● (1710)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm glad to see that some action has been taken on the file.

I've said previously that it's definitely my perception that the Conservatives often prefer tough talk over action. Even though down south we've been seeing President Trump talk a lot of tough talk, they're still facing the same problem with migration issues and asylum seekers at their borders as well. Tough talk may not be all that's needed, so thank you for clarifying some of that.

Regarding the other issue I'd like to hit on, you've spent three decades serving in the police department and 10 years, another decade, as the chief of police, so you have a lot of experience in the area of gangs and guns. Is there anything you can highlight for us

that you're looking to do in this area to help improve areas such as my hometown, which has been seeing an uptake in violent crimes using firearms?

Hon. Bill Blair: I have actually had the opportunity. I've been involved in most of the large, complex gang investigations that have been conducted in this country. I was previously chief of detectives before I was the chief of police. We did most of the big gang investigations in Toronto.

I will tell you that one of the things we've learned, which I think is appropriate and really informs a lot of the work we're doing now, is that it's important to do those investigations—because some of those individuals are very dangerous and society needs to be protected from them—but if that's all you do, the problem doesn't get better. One of the things we learned is that not only did you have to go in and deal with those individuals who were committing serious violent crimes and supplying guns and drugs into the community, but you also then had to go in and change the circumstances in the community to make it less vulnerable to gang violence.

For example, after we used to go and do these big arrests and take out the gang members, we'd flood the area with uniformed cops whose job it was to go in and restore people's sense of safety and security. We worked really closely with and supported the social services agencies, the schools and the youth workers who were working in that community to build up its own resilience and its ability to protect public space. They encouraged people to come back out and use their neighbourhoods. When we did that, we saw significant and sustained reduction in violence in those communities.

I will tell you from experience that it's a lot of work. It's a great deal of work, but it's effective. If all you're going to do is kick down all the doors and drag everybody out and have very big expensive trials, the problem comes back and it comes back very quickly, but if you make that significant investment in the community and sustain support for those communities, it makes a difference and it actually has the effect.

Frankly, during my tenure we saw about a 45% reduction in gun violence, and it was a direct result of not just the interventions and investigations of the police, but stronger supports for community and for kids. That's why we advocate for those investments as well.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I would like to give my remaining time to Mr. Sikand.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Minister Blair, the community I represent wouldn't normally be seen as a community that would suffer from gun violence or any violence, to be honest, but we had a shooting four days ago. A young girl got shot. I want to get your comments on ammunition, because a gun is just a paperweight unless it has ammunition. I can only assume that ammunition is either coming in illegally from other jurisdictions or coming from a legal source and then into the black market. Can I have your comments on that, please?

Hon. Bill Blair: We're looking at a number of different measures that might be effective in reducing access to the tools that people have who are intent on committing violent crimes. We're prepared to look at every measure that can be effective in reducing the violence in our communities and the access that people have to guns. That includes things like better and more effective enforcement at the border, but it also includes reducing the way in which things leak out of the legitimate domestic market, out of the hands of law-abiding people and into the hands of people who would commit crimes. That would include looking at access to ammunition.

It's a difficult issue because, first of all, it's easily smuggled and easily obtained on a forged instrument, but there are a number of effective steps that can be taken, and we are examining them as part of our ongoing review that I'm conducting now.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Mr. Blair.

Mr. Blaney, it's your turn. Go ahead.

• (1715)

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, it's a privilege to welcome you to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

I was telling Mr. Goodale earlier that I used to be the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. Back then, we didn't need a special minister to deal with border security. The main border security issues were drug smuggling, illegal weapons and human trafficking. However, since Justin Trudeau's #WelcomeToCanada tweet, a new issue has emerged. Then, finally, five months ago, a position was created for a new minister because Canada's border had become a sieve.

You talked about people crossing the border irregularly. We believe that those who enter the country irregularly are doing so illegally. I think it's important to use the right terminology. Minister, do you share my view that entering Canada from the U.S. between border checkpoints is an illegal act?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: You raised two important points that I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to address. First of all—

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: My apologies, Minister, but I'd like a short answer, please.

If an individual—be they Canadian, American or a prospective refugee claimant once in Canada—crosses into Canada between border checkpoints, are they entering the country illegally? I'd like a clear answer because it's important that we agree on the facts, even if we don't necessarily agree on how to fix the problem.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Let me be brief and quick.

First of all, your suggestion that the global migration of people fleeing persecution was caused by a tweet is laughable.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: No, I don't think there's anything funny about it.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Second, anyone entering this country across the border at any place other than a regular point is unlawful.

However, once the individual—

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: It's illegal. That's what I wanted to hear.

Thank you. We agree on that.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Blaney—

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: The word “unlawful” is important.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: You know that the whole answer is important when you're talking about the law.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: It's important to call a spade a spade.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: The moment they claim asylum—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Minister—

Hon. Bill Blair: —their presence in the country ceases to be illegal. Under international convention and Canadian law, the moment they seek the protection of Canada, their presence in this country ceases to be unlawful.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: We agree. Thank you, Minister, for answering my question. It's illegal, or unlawful, to enter Canada illegally. It took a bit of time, but I finally got us to agree on the facts.

Once these people have entered the country illegally, the provinces are on the hook for the bill, all because of Justin Trudeau's monumental mistake. We are talking about \$600 million, Minister. Today's discussion is about supplementary estimates (A). Have you earmarked enough funds to reimburse the \$600 million in costs incurred by Quebec and Ontario?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, the discussions on the costs experienced by other jurisdictions for temporary housing are not contained in these estimates.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: That means the provinces still need the \$600 million they have been calling for for months, if not years. In other words, the federal government has made a mistake, leaving the provinces to pick up the pieces, and you haven't set aside any money to pay them back. In your opening statement, however, you said that the government was making an investment. It's rather disappointing that those who have to pick up the pieces aren't being paid back.

Minister, when are you going to pay the provinces back? They are left holding the bag because of Justin Trudeau and the Liberals.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: I can advise this committee that the federal government has offered money for temporary housing to both the Province of Quebec and the Province of Ontario. So far, both of those entities have declined to accept the money that was offered. We have also made money directly available to the City of Toronto, \$11 million to address some of the costs incurred for temporary housing.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Nearly 40,000 people have crossed into Canada illegally, even though we have an immigration system in place. We proudly welcome people in need from all over the world who follow the proper procedures.

You said that some people enter the country in an irregular way, which is unlawful. That means people are entering Canada illegally. Afterwards, other procedures follow.

You mentioned earlier that the number of seasonal illegal immigrants had dropped, but you also talked about the flow of migrants. As everyone knows, a caravan of illegal migrants is currently heading for the U.S.

Have you taken any preventative measures so that it doesn't impact our border and so that Canadians are not once again left holding the bag because of a decision Justin Trudeau made? After all, he did invite everyone to come on in, opting not to enforce border rules.

• (1720)

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, perhaps it's the translation, but I made no mention of a caravan.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Well, I'm asking, Minister....

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Mr. Blaney, you're out of time.

Mr. Blair, Mr. Blaney was the one who brought up the caravan.

Ms. Damoff, please go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I want to go back to firearms. As you know, the opposition leader recently released his firearms policy. I was reading that the former RCMP commissioner, Bob Paulson, who was appointed under the previous government, has referred to the platform as, and I'm going to quote, "nonsense, nonsense and a little bit more nonsense."

Recently Ms. Harder hosted a fundraiser in her riding that featured firearms, alcohol, and, in addition to two MPs, a young man who was under age.

I'd like to ask you, while the opposition is running Guns and Guinness fundraisers on firearms, if you could talk about the hard work you're doing around guns and gangs.

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm not going to comment on the fundraisers. I understand the importance of firearms fundraising to certain parties. Having said that, I would only ask that it be done in a way that is sensitive to people who have been traumatized, who have lost loved ones, and to communities that live in fear. I'd ask that a certain sensitivity be shown to that.

I can also tell you that we're working very hard as a government. One of my responsibilities is to look at all the measures that the government can take, working with our partners and supporting those who are already engaged in this important work to make our communities safe. We know that we've seen a significant increase in the use of firearms in violent criminal offences. Some of that is gang-related. Some of it is family violence and intimate partner violence.

Ms. Pam Damoff: What percentage of firearm deaths are by suicide?

Hon. Bill Blair: It's about three-quarters. Seventy-five per cent of the people who die by a firearm die in a suicide.

Ms. Pam Damoff: It's an issue that Dr. Alan Drummond has brought up with us: that we focus only on guns and gangs. That's a very important issue—don't get me wrong—but we ignore the 75% of firearm deaths that are actually people who die by suicide. I think that's an important number for all of us to remember.

Because I only have five minutes, I'm going to switch to cannabis. You did yeoman's work on that file prior to being a minister. I recently held an information session in my riding with Halton Regional Police Service and the Halton Region Health Department. The officer who did the information session on behalf of the police is a former drug enforcement officer who actually applauded the way the government has handled it and what we're doing.

I also went into a number of schools, where two grade 5 classes and one in high school were asking me about cannabis. I think that's a really good thing, because it's getting children at a younger age talking about cannabis use, and we can have those conversations to ensure they're not using it when they're young.

Something that came up in both the information session and at the schools was around the education we're doing, which you mentioned in your opening remarks. I wonder if you can elaborate a bit more on how important the education component is to the cannabis legislation we've introduced.

Hon. Bill Blair: One of the things we found is that a criminal prohibition was not deterring our kids. We think information will be far more effective. It has to be information that's credible and comes from a credible source, and that's usually their peers, their teachers, their parents and their doctors.

We have been working really diligently to get information out so that young people know the risks that cannabis can present to them. There are significant health risks, but there were also very significant social risks.

I want to clarify this, because I often hear people questioning how this would work. Previous to October 17, if the police encountered a young person on the street using cannabis, they had two choices: they could do nothing or they could charge them criminally. The criminal charge has an enormous impact on that kid's whole life, so a lot of the police were choosing to do nothing.

Today, as a result of the implementation of the new regulations, in every part of this country the police can seize the drug, issue a ticket and administer a fine to take effective enforcement action. That's exactly what the police begged the government of the day in 2013 to make available to them; unfortunately, there was no will at the time. We've now given the police the tools to deal with those kids in a far more proportional way. It's going to create better outcomes for our kids, both to protect their health and to protect their social outcomes.

• (1725)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

It is now over to Ms. Harder for five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

[English]

Minister, you and your PS recently attacked a fundraiser that was hosted in my event, which Pam Damoff just referred to. It was called "Guns and Guinness". It was a group of responsible individuals who got together, did a clay shootout, and then drove 20 minutes away, after responsibly putting away their firearms, and had a barbecue. At this barbecue, there was alcohol.

Minister, my question is this. You commented in the House just recently and said this with regard to respecting individual autonomy and decision-making:

Before I was 25, I was married. I was the father of two kids by then. I owned a house. I had a mortgage. I was a cop. I carried a gun. I was entrusted with all the powers of a police officer, including the authority to restrict a person's liberty and to use force, perhaps even deadly force. I could buy a drink, and I could smoke a cigarette. That was how I was trusted...

Minister, in this statement, in one breath you associate maturity and therefore the ability to make autonomous decisions with drinking, using a gun and applying deadly force. Minister, to use your words, is it not irresponsible to associate those three things in one statement in the House of Commons on Parliament Hill?

Hon. Bill Blair: Ms. Harder, congratulations. That's a remarkable stretch of credibility and logic in your thinking.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Did you not state this?

Hon. Bill Blair: What I was talking about—

Ms. Rachael Harder: Is this statement yours, Minister?

Hon. Bill Blair: What I was talking about, frankly, was in response to a question—

Ms. Rachael Harder: You're associating these three things with being mature, to make an autonomous decision.

Hon. Bill Blair: What I was explaining was the authorities and responsibilities we give to adults and acknowledging that adults have

these authorities. In fact, those were some of the authorities. It was quite frankly in response to a suggestion that was coming from someone else, who was suggesting that people at the age of 25—

Ms. Rachael Harder: So it's not irresponsible—

Hon. Bill Blair: —weren't able to make an adult decision for themselves.

Ms. Rachael Harder: —to legally use a firearm, then.

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm sorry? I was a police officer, madam. The only time I've ever carried a firearm was as a police officer.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I think, Minister, you would agree with me, then, that if an individual lawfully owns a firearm and lawfully uses a firearm, they have the right to do so, correct? That would be a responsible thing to do, would it not?

Hon. Bill Blair: I think it's important for everyone who lawfully possesses a firearm, first of all, to acquire it legally and have all the licences, permits and training that are required—

Ms. Rachael Harder: Absolutely.

Hon. Bill Blair: —and to store it securely so that it doesn't end up in the hands of someone who might commit a violent crime with it—

Ms. Rachael Harder: Absolutely.

Hon. Bill Blair: —and to use it responsibly. For example, for handguns, that would easily involve target shooting at a range. When it comes time to dispose of it, they would do so according to the law and regulations to ensure that this firearm does not end up in the hands of someone it shouldn't. That's how I would define responsible firearm ownership.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I have no problem agreeing with you on that, Minister.

Only 9% of guns used in crimes were traced back to legal owners. However, Minister, you're under this instruction from the Prime Minister to basically seize all handguns from Canadians.

Now, here's the thing. If only 9% of those handguns belong to people who have properly registered, I'm just wondering how you're planning to get that other 89%. Will you just go knocking on every single Canadian door and search and seize in every single house across this country in order to get those handguns that are not registered? How do you plan on taking those handguns off the streets?

Minister, my point is this. The large majority of people in this country responsibly own their handguns and responsibly use their handguns. Only 9% of firearms that are used in a crime are traced back to someone who has a registered firearm. Minister, it is going to be relatively impossible to get those illegal firearms off the street by legislating them. Don't you agree?

Hon. Bill Blair: First of all, let me disagree with some of the things you've said. I have not been tasked with seizing people's handguns. I was tasked with conducting an examination.

Ms. Harder, we're not afraid of examining the facts and listening to all points of view. The evidence and the—

Ms. Rachael Harder: You are when you host consultations that are by invite only.

Hon. Bill Blair: —and so we're doing that.

Ms. Rachael Harder: That's not exactly public, is it?

Hon. Bill Blair: Ms. Harder, I would also tell you that I appreciate that the data is incomplete. However, I can tell you about a complete sample of data, which is the data collected during my tenure as the chief of detectives and then the chief of police in Toronto. During that period of time, we traced the origins of all crime guns in that jurisdiction. During my tenure, 30% of the guns we seized that were crime guns used in a criminal offence came from domestic sources, and 70% were determined to have been smuggled across the border.

Now there is additional data—

• (1730)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Minister, I think you've proven my point.

Hon. Bill Blair: I've spoken to chiefs of police in other jurisdictions—

Ms. Rachael Harder: I think you've proven my point. You're going after law-abiding gun owners, Minister—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Ms. Harder.

[English]

Ms. Rachael Harder: You're going after law-abiding gun owners. Go after criminals.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you, Minister.

I'd like to thank everyone for exercising such discipline during the meeting.

We will suspend briefly so the minister can take his leave, after which, we will have some votes on the supplementary estimates.

• (1730)

(Pause)

• (1730)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), we have some votes on Supplementary Estimates (A), 2018-19.

Do I have the committee's unanimous consent to lump all the votes in the supplementary estimates together?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Vote 1a—Operating expenditures..... \$85,051,922

Vote 5a—Capital expenditures..... \$2,185,714

(Vote 1a and 5a agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL INVESTIGATOR OF CANADA

Vote 1a—Program expenditures..... \$99,196

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

SECURITY INTELLIGENCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Vote 1a—Program expenditures..... \$99,196

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE EXTERNAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

Vote 1a—Program expenditures..... \$236,162

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

CIVILIAN REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS COMMISSION FOR THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Vote 1a—Program expenditures..... \$99,196

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

PAROLE BOARD OF CANADA

Vote 1a—Program expenditures..... \$99,196

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Vote 1a—Operating expenditures..... \$70,086,955

Vote 5a—Capital expenditures..... \$23,130,497

Vote 10a—Grants and contributions..... \$19,500,000

(Votes 1a, 5a and 10a agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Vote 1a—Operating expenditures..... \$7,370,883

Vote 5a—Grants and contributions..... \$28,312,659

(Votes 1a and 5a agreed to on division)

SECRETARIAT OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

Vote 1a—Program expenditures..... \$3,278,218

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Vote 1a—Program expenditures..... \$13,893,055

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Vote 1a—Operating expenditures..... \$2,339,766

(Vote 1a agreed to on division)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus): Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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