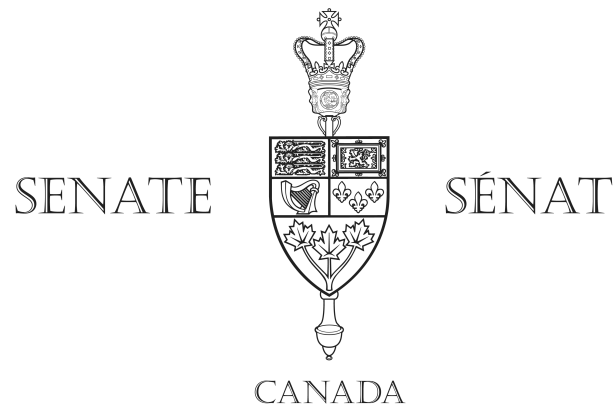




DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION



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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, March 30, 2022

The Honourable GEORGE J. FUREY,
Speaker

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(Daily index of proceedings appears at back of this issue).

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THE SENATE

Wednesday, March 30, 2022

The Senate met at 2 p.m., the Speaker in the chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

EXPRESSION OF APOLOGY

Hon. Victor Oh: Honourable senators, I would like to apologize to former MP Kenny Chiu, Senator Leo Housakos and to all my colleagues here in the chamber for making an unsupported claim during my questioning of Senator Housakos yesterday.

I disagree with Mr. Chiu and Senator Housakos about the issue of disinformation during the last general election but should not have said that Mr. Chiu lied. I recognized my error as soon as I made it. I am taking the earliest opportunity to offer this retraction. Thank you, colleagues.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

GRAIN GROWERS OF CANADA

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable senators, I rise today to highlight the Grain Growers of Canada's newly announced Road to 2050 initiative.

On Monday, the Grain Growers of Canada released their Road to 2050 initiative, which proposes the development of a path forward that focuses on innovation, research and beneficial management practices.

I met with representatives of the Grain Growers of Canada, or GGC, in my office in East Block yesterday, and they shared their hopes that the initiative will help boost productivity while continuing to enhance soil quality and reducing emissions. GGC also shared their hope that the government will collaborate with them on this initiative. I am hopeful that we will see the government continue to engage with the agricultural industry, just as they have in the recently released discussion paper on reducing emissions arising from the application of fertilizer.

As stewards of the land, the Grain Growers of Canada — along with all farmers, producers, and processors across the country — are heavily invested in the fight against climate change. Their announcement earlier this week represents a practical and proactive approach to tackling climate change.

I am pleased to share that while this initiative is part of the Grain Growers' long-term plan, their work begins now. In addition to identifying opportunities for the sector to continue its contributions to greenhouse gas, or GHG, emission reductions, the Road to 2050 is intended to guide government policies and programming directed at Canada's grains sector.

Although many farmers have already introduced innovative ways to reduce their emissions and practices that can help fight the effects of climate change, they still need our support. As Grain Growers of Canada's Chair, Andre Harpe, said:

The farmer-driven path to net zero must reflect what farmers have done and can sustainably do in the future . . .

We know that one of the main challenges for the agriculture and agri-food sector will be to mitigate greenhouse gases without jeopardizing food security. And to do so, Canadian agriculture producers and food processors will need government, private sector and the Canadian public's support in transitioning their operations to be more sustainable.

Honourable colleagues, Canada is a leader in the agricultural and agri-food sectors. We must work collaboratively to address the effects of climate change to ensure that our farmers, producers and processors, as well as our grocery stores, can continue putting food on Canadians' plates. Thanks to the Grain Growers of Canada for taking another step forward in agriculture's fight against climate change. I look forward to further supporting this initiative as it progresses in the future.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF GENDRINGEN, THE NETHERLANDS

Hon. Bev Busson: Honourable senators, I rise today to mark this date of March 30, the anniversary of the liberation of a small town in the Dutch province of Gelderland called Gendringen. The liberation of the Netherlands is one of the best-known chapters in Canadian military history, and the Canadians' fight to free the Dutch played an integral role in winning the Second World War.

In March 1945, the allies advanced towards Germany through the Netherlands. The 16th Canadian Infantry Brigade was ordered to establish a footing in an advance through Netterden, Wieken, and Gendringen in the Netherlands. These towns were liberated on March 30, 1945, by a number of regiments including the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada. It was a logistically complex and fierce battle that claimed the lives of many innocent Dutch civilians and 25 brave, young Canadians. And as the Canadians proved victorious, the appreciation shown by the townspeople was overwhelming.

The joyful townfolk in the area strung their national flags from balconies, in the streets and on public buildings. They wore the Dutch symbol of freedom — the colour orange. There were

orange-coloured rosettes on their lapels and in their hair. They clapped and cheered as the Canadian troops passed by. A major who was a part of the liberation commented:

The civilian population were my worst opposition. They're opposing my advance, stopping my men to kiss them and offer them all kind of souvenirs.

One soldier who was not at this victory parade was Einar Victor Isfeld from Langruth, Manitoba. This 30-year-old soldier, recently married with a very young son, was gravely wounded in action during this battle and passed away on April 6. The war in Europe ended a month later. The Netherlands was under Nazi occupation for five years. On May 6 of this year, in coordination with the National Remembrance Day in the Netherlands, his son, Dennis Victor Isfeld, his grandson Derek and his great-grandson Tyler, along with their families, will be present at a ceremony to unveil a monument to honour the sacrifice of these brave young men on behalf of Canada.

The Canadians and the Dutch have formed an inseparable bond, born by blood, compelled by duty and honour and cemented by boundless appreciation.

As we witness the war in Ukraine, it is now even more important to remember not to take our freedom for granted and to take the time to recognize and celebrate what it means to live in a free society.

March 30, today, is that day for the family of Einar Victor Isfeld, who now lives in British Columbia, and for the families from Gendringen. Together, we will remember; together, we will never forget.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

• (1410)

CONFLICT IN ARTSAKH

Hon. Leo Housakos (Acting Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise today to bring attention to the unsettling reports we have seen over the last few days regarding the most recent escalation in the ongoing conflict in the Republic of Artsakh.

On March 24, Azerbaijani forces made various incursions into Artsakh's territory, representing a gross violation of the trilateral ceasefire arrangement of November 2020, which was intended to bring an end to hostilities.

The attack of March 24 came just days after the disruption of a gas pipeline that runs through Azerbaijani-controlled territory in a deliberate attempt to deprive hundreds of thousands of civilians of vital gas supply. Additionally, there are reports that Azerbaijani forces have been threatening residents of front-line villages with violence if they refuse to flee.

Peaceful civilians are being forced to abandon their homes and their Indigenous lands. Women and children are being evacuated. Drones and artillery are being used to claim innocent lives and to

engage in intimidation tactics meant to displace thousands of civilians, representing the worst escalation in the region since the November 2020 ceasefire arrangement.

Colleagues, there is absolutely no doubt who the aggressor is here. While Armenia has adhered to the terms of various ceasefire agreements, Azerbaijan has violated each and every one of them, making it abundantly clear that it is not interested in putting an end to hostilities through peaceful resolution. Rather, this attack represents its most recent attempt to fulfill its ultimate goal: the depopulation and ethnic cleansing of the Armenian people.

These continuous attacks by Azerbaijan must be called out for what they truly are: blatant war crimes and a clear violation of international law. It is our responsibility as Canadians, as defenders of democracy and as upholders of the rule of law to be unequivocal in our condemnation of these aggressions and to denounce the abhorrent crimes against humanity we are witnessing right before our eyes.

That is why, today, in the strongest possible terms, I stand to condemn Azerbaijan's unprovoked aggression in Artsakh and to call upon the Azerbaijani government to abide by the November 2020 ceasefire agreement and refrain from escalating the situation. It is my hope, honourable colleagues, that the Canadian government will do the same. We must stand firmly with the people of Artsakh as they continue to live and fight in their historical homeland, and as they work to develop and strengthen their independent statehood.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH—NOVA SCOTIA

Hon. Wanda Elaine Thomas Bernard: Honourable senators, I join you today from East Preston, Nova Scotia, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.

April 2 is World Autism Awareness Day, and in Nova Scotia April is Autism Acceptance Month. I would like to acknowledge the strides we have made toward equity, diversity and inclusion, while noting that there is still much more work to be done.

As we move from awareness to acceptance and now action, it is time to use employment equity more effectively. CASDA's upcoming *Canadian Journal of Autism Equity* issue on employment highlights the necessity of ongoing supports for people with disabilities, particularly people with autism.

Colleagues, accommodation is not a burden.

Over the past two years, we have seen the devastating impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities. We have also seen an increase in racism and hate crimes, and employment is one of the places where racism and discrimination flourish. People living at the intersection of marginalized identities, such as Indigenous peoples, African Canadians and other racialized people, have been disproportionately affected by those dual pandemics.

Business closures, restrictions due to COVID-19 and social-distancing requirements have all contributed to a labour market that, more than ever, presents significant barriers for persons with disabilities to remain in, enter or re-enter.

Currently, one in four persons on the autism spectrum or with an intellectual disability is employed, representing the lowest labour-force participation rate of all disability groups in Canada. We must take action to include those with intersecting marginalized identities into Canada's economic recovery plan as we build back better.

Honourable senators, in honour of Autism Acceptance Month, please commit to actions that will lead to meaningful changes in employment for those caught at the intersection of autism and racism. *Asante*, thank you.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

RENÉE BLANCHAR

Hon. René Cormier: Colleagues, I wish to extend my deepest condolences to the family and friends of the Honourable Claudette Bradshaw, an Acadian and Canadian politician who inspired us all.

Honourable senators, as Francophonie Month wraps up, and knowing that artists play a more important role than ever in our uncertain world, I would like to pay tribute to an Acadian filmmaker and screenwriter who is using her formidable talent to do good work.

Renée Blanchar was the first Canadian woman to attend the famous Fémis school in France, and in 1989, she was the youngest-ever jury member at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival.

She could have pursued her career in the big city, but after completing her studies, Renée Blanchar returned to her hometown of Caraquet in Acadia, founded a production company and began to produce numerous documentaries and fiction films. Her two latest projects are particularly important to Canadian cinematography.

Driven by her search for truth, Renée Blanchar made *The Silence*, a National Film Board of Canada production that sheds light on the abuse perpetrated by Catholic priests against young boys in many francophone towns in New Brunswick from the 1950s to the 1980s. In this shattering documentary, men who are now in their fifties offer emotional accounts of the harms done to them by Catholic priests over decades of abuse.

The NFB describes it as follows:

With *The Silence*, she takes us as close as she can to the humanity of these broken men, revealing the forces that, today as in the past, have the power to unite or divide Acadian communities.

This film lifts the veil of secrecy on unspeakable abuse and suggests that only a national inquiry could truly break the silence surrounding these events that continue to mark our communities.

This remarkable director's second recent project work is a television series on the life of the fascinating and prolific Franco-Manitoban author Gabrielle Roy. Inspired by and adapted from the author's writings, *Le monde de Gabrielle Roy* unfolds in eight episodes that tell, and I quote:

The coming-of-age story of celebrated novelist Gabrielle Roy, growing up in the family home on Deschambault Street in Saint-Boniface.

This series was shot entirely in Manitoba with a talented cast and crew from Acadia, Quebec and Manitoba.

Gabrielle Roy's literary output, consisting of roughly 30 novels, collections, short stories and novellas that are at once imaginative, intimate and autobiographical, is now a cornerstone of Canadian literature. To our delight, the talented director Renée Blanchar has brought Gabrielle Roy back to life right before our eyes.

With these two works, Renée Blanchar has offered us something to think about and celebrate during these difficult times. She has given us two invaluable gifts that do us good and help us better understand the country we call home.

Thank you, Renée Blanchar, for contributing so much passion and talent to Canadian film. Keep making films that provoke and move us.

Thank you.

THE LATE HONOURABLE CLAUDETTE BRADSHAW, P.C., O.N.B.

Hon. Percy Mockler: Honourable senators, it is with great sadness that I rise today to pay tribute to an extraordinary woman, a friend, a proud Acadian, New Brunswicker and Canadian, for her leadership and for always being there to help the most vulnerable. Claudette Bradshaw passed away on Saturday after a long and courageous battle against cancer. New Brunswick has lost a great champion, an unprecedented icon of the Canadian Parliament.

Minister Bradshaw and I had the same social portfolios in the early 2000s, she for the federal government and I for New Brunswick, under the direction of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Premier Bernard Lord respectively.

[English]

Madam Bradshaw was a great ally, and we also had another common denominator with our files: Both of us had personal experience with welfare and its challenges. Claudette Bradshaw was remarkable.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, her desire to help her community began nearly 50 years ago with the founding of Headstart in Moncton. This initiative was aimed at meeting the urgent needs of the region's most vulnerable residents.

• (1420)

Like me, Claudette Bradshaw always strove to make our region, our province and our country a better place to live, work, and raise our children and, above all, to help the most vulnerable. Claudette Bradshaw was a woman of principle, a woman of strong values. She always demonstrated great loyalty to her community.

[English]

Former prime minister Jean Chrétien described Claudette as a shining example of someone who dedicated her life to the service of others. For my part, I would also add that many people, many families, have benefited from her hard work and dedication. She found it an honour to serve the community. She was a tireless advocate for early intervention services.

Honourable senators, there's no doubt in my mind that she changed the lives of many New Brunswickers and Canadians. Her lifelong dedication to assisting those in need had an immense impact on countless Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Claudette was very proud of her family: Christopher, Nicholas and her spouse, Doug.

[Translation]

I offer my deepest condolences to her family.

[English]

Honourable senators, as I conclude, Winston Churchill once said:

. . . it is better to be both right and consistent. But if you have to choose—you must choose to be right.

Honourable senators, I have personally witnessed that Minister Bradshaw was always right, and she was always consistent in defending the most vulnerable.

[Translation]

Claudette, I tip my hat to you. Rest in peace.

Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[Senator Mockler]

[English]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

THE ESTIMATES, 2021-22

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (C)—THIRD REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE TABLED

Hon. Percy Mockler: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, which deals with Supplementary Estimates (C) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, and I move that the report be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.

I would like to acknowledge, on behalf of the steering committee of National Finance, all members of the National Finance Committee for their dedication and hard work.

[Translation]

Furthermore, all members of the committee join me in thanking the clerk, Mireille Aubé, and the entire support team for their dedication to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance.

(On motion of Senator Mockler, report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

STUDY ON ISSUES RELATING TO HUMAN RIGHTS GENERALLY— NOTICE OF MOTION TO REFER PAPERS AND EVIDENCE FROM THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT AND THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan: Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

That the papers and evidence received and taken and work accomplished by the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights during the First Session of the Forty-second Parliament and the Second Session of the Forty-third Parliament as part of its study of issues related to human rights be referred to the committee.

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on December 7, 2021, Question Period will begin at the later of the end of Routine Proceedings or 2:30 p.m.

Senator Gagné, I apologize in advance, but I will have to interrupt you when the minister arrives, which will be in approximately five minutes.

[Translation]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 5, 2021-22

THIRD READING—DEBATE

Hon. Raymonde Gagné (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) moved third reading of Bill C-15, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022.

She said: Honourable senators, I am pleased to rise today to introduce the appropriation bill for the 2021-22 Supplementary Estimates (C).

Through this appropriation bill, the government requests Parliament's approval of the planned spending proposals that are detailed in the Supplementary Estimates (C).

[English]

As my esteemed colleagues well know, the appropriation bill is a vehicle through which payments from the Consolidated Revenue Fund are authorized for government programs and services.

The voted amounts in these supplementary estimates represent maximum "up to" ceilings or estimates. It is, therefore, not out of the ordinary if these amounts are not fully spent over the course of the year. The actual expenditures are listed in the Public Accounts of Canada, which are tabled after the end of the fiscal year.

The estimates family of documents, which consists of the Main Estimates, supplementary estimates, departmental plans and departmental results reports, in conjunction with the public accounts, help parliamentarians scrutinize government spending. This scrutiny is a key element of our parliamentary system. This scrutiny, we must acknowledge, is not always a straightforward matter.

A number of our colleagues on the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance did express some difficulty in ascertaining information in a timely fashion. I want to assure my colleagues that the Government Representative Office in the Senate has taken note, and continues to consistently deploy its best efforts to bring this to the attention of the government.

[Translation]

That said, I will talk about the Supplementary Estimates (C), 2021-22, which form the basis of this appropriation bill.

As my colleagues know, supplementary estimates present information on additional spending requirements that were either not sufficiently developed in time for inclusion in the Main Estimates or that were subsequently refined to account for recent developments.

The Supplementary Estimates (C), 2021-22, were tabled in the Senate on February 21, 2022. These are the third and final supplementary estimates for the current fiscal year.

• (1430)

In general, they provide information on \$13.2 billion in new voted spending for 70 federal organizations. They also present information on an additional amount of \$3.9 billion in planned statutory budgetary expenditures.

It is important to note that these statutory expenditures were authorized either under existing laws or in the proposed—

The Hon. the Speaker: I'm sorry to interrupt you, senator, but the minister has arrived, so we will now proceed to Question Period.

[English]

QUESTION PERIOD

(Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on December 7, 2021, to receive a Minister of the Crown, the Honourable Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety, appeared before honourable senators during Question Period.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, we welcome today the Honourable Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety, to answer questions relating to his ministerial responsibilities. Pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on December 7, 2021, senators do not need to stand. Questions are limited to one minute and responses to one and a half minutes. The reading clerk will stand 10 seconds before the expiry of these times. Question Period will last one hour.

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SAFETY

HUAWEI—5G TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Leo Housakos (Acting Leader of the Opposition): Minister, you are now the third minister for public safety to hold this portfolio since the Trudeau government began its 5G security review in September 2018. Multiple times since, your government has promised Canadians that a decision was coming in regard to banning Huawei from our 5G. We were told that we would get a decision before the 2019 election, and we were told again that we would get a decision after the 2019 election. Of course, we're still waiting.

The endless delay and indecision from your government has gotten to the point that, earlier this month, Huawei actually trolled your government on Twitter asking, “What’s the opposite of being banned?” The Government of Canada is being openly mocked by Huawei, minister, and still we have heard nothing from the government. Minister, when will the NDP-Liberal government come to a decision, yes or no? Will we ban Huawei once and for all?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Thank you very much, senator. Before I get to the substance of my response, I want to thank you and all of the senators for welcoming me to my maiden voyage here in this Question Period. It is truly an honour and a privilege to be joining you in this chamber. It is an impressive body of work that you contribute to our democracy, and I want to begin by expressing my gratitude for all of the work, the studies and the interventions that you bring on behalf of Canadians.

Senator, you raise an important question around 5G, and you are quite right that the government is committed to rendering a decision and issuing a statement as soon as we possibly can. I will say that it is also important that we get this decision right, and that we look at the principles and the values that underscore the decision but, equally, that we understand the threats to our national security as they have evolved as it relates to any potential challenges that may be presented in the context of 5G and of our cyber infrastructure. I assure you that we appreciate the urgency that you have expressed in your question. As soon as we can communicate a decision, we will do so.

Senator Housakos: Thank you, minister. Clearly, you do not appreciate the urgency because it has been three years and we’re still waiting for a clear and unequivocal answer on whether we will ban them or we won’t.

In December, *The Washington Post* reported 100 confidential PowerPoint presentations that lay out Huawei’s participation in mass surveillance of Chinese people by their communist regime, including the local tracking of political persons of interest. The document also shows how Huawei is involved in human rights violations against the Uighurs in Xinjiang province through surveillance, cameras and facial recognition. One document appears to show that Huawei did technology design work on their prisons. Is this not enough reason to ban Huawei, minister? If this is not reason enough, what will it take for your government to ban them? And, please, it should not take three or four more years until we get a final decision.

Mr. Mendicino: Well, I would begin by agreeing with the last sentence in your question, senator. We certainly don’t anticipate that it will take anything close to that period of time.

I want to assure you that as we undertake a careful review of all of the factors that go into this important decision that we are not sitting idle, that we are deploying a number of strategies and countermeasures to ensure that any hostile actors, be they state or non-state, are being mitigated and addressed in real time. We’ve made significant investments into our national security apparatus with the various agencies that report to my portfolio, as well as others within government, so that as we leverage the new technologies and innovations that are important to keep Canadians and others connected through the internet and

cyberspace we are doing so in a way that recognizes that there have been evolutions to the threat landscape, including those which may be perpetrated by hostile state actors. We’re very mindful of the concerns that you have expressed. We do recognize that there is an expectation and an urgency to communicate the decision and we will do so as quickly as we can.

RELEASE OF SUSPENDED ACCOUNTS

Hon. David M. Wells (Acting Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Thank you and welcome, minister. This is my third time rising in this chamber to ask this question for which the Government Representative in the Senate was not able to provide an answer. You are the Minister of Public Safety, so I would hope that you would have this answer.

In February, more than 200 bank accounts, worth nearly \$8 million, were frozen through the authority of the Emergencies Act. Those are 200 accounts of ordinary Canadians — not truckers, just ordinary Canadians. Given that the authority under the act was revoked on February 23, a full five weeks ago, will you tell this chamber — and indeed all Canadians — if any of the accounts remain frozen and, if so, under what authority given the revocation of the Emergencies Act?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Thank you very much for the question, senator. I would begin by underlining that the illegal occupation that took place here in Ottawa, as well as the blockades that occurred at a number of our ports of entry in British Columbia, Manitoba and various ports of entry here in Ontario, presented a grave and serious threat to our security. It had a significant impact on our economy. Many Canadians were idled in their employment as a result of it. That is why we had to invoke the Emergencies Act, which included among its targeted powers the —

Senator Wells: Excuse me. Your Honour, I asked a simple question and he is answering a question that I certainly didn’t ask. It was a very simple question, minister, it’s under your portfolio.

The Hon. the Speaker: Order, please. Senator Wells, you asked your question. The minister is answering. If you do not like your answer, you can take it up with the minister afterwards.

Mr. Mendicino: Thank you, senator, I just wanted to provide some context before coming to your precise question.

One of those powers allowed the RCMP, in conjunction with financial institutions, to seize assets, but it was for the purposes of restoring public safety, which we were able to do with the least amount of force, the least amount of injuries and certainly no fatalities. I think that is something we should be grateful for given the challenge of the situation.

I know that since we’ve revoked the Emergencies Act that the RCMP and financial institutions have been taking steps to appropriately render those accounts that were frozen and —

The Hon. the Speaker: I’m sorry, minister, but your time as expired.

[Translation]

CYBERSECURITY

Hon. Raymonde Saint-Germain: Minister, I want to get back to the topic of cybersecurity. You said that the government has deployed a number of measures, and that was affirmed in the unanimous report that the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians issued in February. However, the committee also noted that such threats to democracy are intrusive and pervasive, and that the most sophisticated threats come from state actors. There is the potential that Russia could take retaliatory action in response to the sanctions that Canada implemented because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In light of that information, are you looking at taking further action to detect attacks and enhance security to better protect the sensitive information the Government of Canada has on Canadians, businesses, and energy and environmental development strategies?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Thank you for the question, senator.

The short answer is yes. We will continue to invest in national security to ensure that the government has all the tools it needs.

• (1440)

At the same time, I must point out that new national security threats have emerged. You're right to say that one such risk is that Putin and Russia could respond to the sanctions we've imposed in support of the Ukrainian people. It is a real threat. We must remain vigilant and use all of the resources and investments at our disposal to protect Canada's interests.

[English]

CONDITIONAL RELEASE OF PRISONERS

Hon. Kim Pate: Welcome, Minister Mendicino. While we recognize that Correctional Service Canada does not have control over who is sentenced to prison, correctional policies and decision making, as you know, have the power to either reinforce or help redress the current mass incarceration of those who are most marginalized.

What are your specific plans with the department to first build upon existing exchange of service agreements between provinces and territories to ensure and expand the use of transfers of prisoners with disabling mental health issues to provincial health care facilities, as authorized by section 29 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act — so that they can receive the appropriate health care and treatment they need — and second, to eradicate current policy and practical limits imposed by Corrections on sections 81 and 84 of the CCRA that legislate the transfer and conditional release of Indigenous prisoners and other marginalized prisoners to the care and custody of communities?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Thank you, senator, not only for the question but for your ongoing advocacy in this space. You know that I am passionate about these issues, having worked in the criminal justice system myself.

I will say that I think it is imperative that we work with provincial reformatory and governments in the correctional space to ensure that there are appropriate transfers according to the principles that are laid out in the statute, but I also want to take a moment to underline what the core of the problem is.

The core of the problem is the long and historic overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, particularly in our jail systems, as a result of the systemic challenges and racism that we have seen within our criminal justice system. That is something that we have to change.

Among the many things that we are doing in Correctional Service Canada is allowing for the transfer flexibility and supports required are given to those who are serving out their sentences in our inmate facilities. We have to address the upstream challenges as well. That means making sure that we can divert Indigenous peoples away from the criminal justice system before they get there. That means investing in mental health, housing, education and continuing to make the progress that is needed around safe water. Those are root causes of the problems that you identified in your question, but certainly when it comes to transfers and other supports that we can provide, we will do that in a way that is consistent with rights under the Charter.

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Marty Klyne: Minister, as the former CEO of the RCMP Heritage Centre in Regina, I'm proud that the force is an iconic Canadian symbol around the world. At their best, Mounties serve us with the core values of honesty, integrity, professionalism, compassion, accountability and respect. It is a credit to Canada on the world stage that the RCMP will be supporting war crime investigations of Russia's actions in Ukraine. However, Canadians are aware that deep cultural changes are required within the RCMP to consistently uphold core values, both internally and for all Canadians the force serves.

Minister, what cultural change is afoot within the force, and could you also update us on your support for First Nations policing?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Senator, thank you very much for the question. I will start by answering the last component of your question.

We are introducing transformative, new investments to both stabilize Indigenous policing for those communities that have access to it, but equally to expand Indigenous police services to those who are still in need of it. It is my sincere hope that we're going to be able to move forward with legislation that will ensure that Indigenous policing is seen as an essential service, which it is, because Indigenous peoples, like all Canadians, have a right to be safe in their communities.

I will say that my mandate lays out very clearly a number of ways in which we hope to move forward, in conjunction with the RCMP, when it comes to transforming the police service. I am very encouraged by the conversations that I have had with the commissioner around making changes to our Management Advisory Board, which is an adjunct body that provides independent advice to the commissioner, by making additional changes around the way in which grievances are brought forward, particularly as it relates to those claims involving sexual harassment and violence within the service, to make sure that that process is independent and, lastly, to be sure that the RCMP is reflective of the diversity of our country.

In conclusion, I would say that I am very proud that the RCMP has deployed to the International Criminal Court to advance the investigation into war crimes in Ukraine.

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Hon. Vernon White: Minister, thank you very much for being here. Since 2006 and just prior, the federal government made a decision to shift the three separate legacy agencies working at our borders to become a new agency: the Canada Border Services Agency. With the change came new training, equipment, firearms, use of force and new peace officer powers, but the officers are not police officers and cannot carry out the duties of police officers. I have asked ministers for the past decade why we do not shift the CBSA's role at our inland and border crossings to provide them with the police officer designation, with immediate responsibility and accountability.

As we saw from the recent challenges at our border crossings — and there were many other incidents across Canada over the past years — it could have been helpful. Arguably, it would be helpful every day, as the access to police officers at the more than 100 Canada-U.S. border crossings is not always available. Canada is one of the very few countries, if not the only one, not to have that in place.

Why can we not action such a move from the current half measure to a more fulsome model of border security and law enforcement?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Senator, thank you very much for the question. It allows me to underline the significant contributions of the CBSA, day in and day out, in moving people across international borders. No doubt there have been very unique challenges in the context of the pandemic and then, more recently, in the context of the illegal blockades.

You raised a question about what their specific designation is according to the law. I know that we have provided all of the tools that the CBSA needs, including additional financial investments, training and other capacity-enhancing utilities that allow them to discharge their responsibilities.

I will say, going forward, senator, that I agree with you that we do need to have a reflection about whether the CBSA and, indeed, all law enforcement and national security partners, have the tools they need to meet the evolving threat landscape to our national security. As we've heard already in the various

questions from senators, there are emerging threats with regard to foreign interference, cyberattacks and ideological extremism. We need to be sure that the front lines of our law enforcement have all of the tools necessary to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

[Translation]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Welcome, minister. As I'm sure you know, in 2015, the federal government unanimously passed an act to create the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. This is a supra-constitutional statute, which means that it takes precedence over all federal statutes. Consequently, all federal departments and agencies must ensure that their enabling legislation, their regulations and their interactions with victims of crime respect the basic principles of this bill of rights, including the right to information and the right to participation.

Do you think the RCMP is required to respect the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights? Is it required to respect acts of Parliament?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Thank you for the question, senator. As I've mentioned before, I spent a decade as a prosecutor on the front lines of the criminal justice system. Victims' testimony is essential to ensuring that justice —

Senator Boisvenu: Is the RCMP required to respect Canadian laws, yes or no?

Mr. Mendicino: As I am trying to say, yes, victims' rights must be respected. At the same time, we must respect victims' rights by allocating money and resources to the justice system. It is important to work with the victim community to ensure justice is served.

FIREARMS TRAFFICKING

Hon. Claude Carignan: Minister, I had several questions for you. Things don't seem to be going very well in your department. I had to stick to one question, out of all the areas that concern me. This question is very important for the Montreal region, and it concerns firearms trafficking.

• (1450)

Huge numbers of illegal firearms are coming across the border, especially across the St. Lawrence River through the Akwesasne reserve, and they end up on the streets of Montreal. There is a big problem with illegal guns in Montreal.

In a radio interview with Paul Arcand on September 16, 2021, Prime Minister Trudeau said, "We are working on tougher penalties for those who resell their weapons illegally."

The host asked if that meant he was prepared to increase prison sentences, and Mr. Trudeau replied, “Absolutely.”

Mr. Trudeau was campaigning at the time, under the banner of the Liberal Party in those days. Once they came to power, however, not only did the Liberals not increase penalties, they actually reduced them by eliminating some mandatory minimum penalties in a bill.

What do you have to say to the listeners of Mr. Arcand, the most listened-to host in Canada, the ones who voted for the Liberals at that time?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: First, we would say to them that the government is very aware that there have been far too many tragedies caused by gun violence. You’re right, senator, it’s a serious threat not just in Quebec, but across Canada.

Roughly two weeks ago, I had a productive meeting with my Quebec counterpart, Minister Guilbault, and we agreed to do more work on this issue, which is having a major impact on the province of Quebec.

We have a very effective strategy, but we must invest more in our police forces, as we have already done, to help them prevent illegal gun trafficking at the border.

Last week, I also had a meeting with my U.S. counterpart. In the past week, there has been a record number of arrests. Progress has been made, but we must make more investments to help prevent gun violence.

Finally, this government promised to introduce stricter controls to ensure public safety in communities. There is a three-pronged strategy in place, and the work will be done in collaboration with the provinces.

Senator Carignan: For sentencing, you are doing the opposite.

Mr. Mendicino: Yes, yes —

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR FIRST NATIONS POLICING

Hon. Renée Dupuis: Welcome to the Senate, minister.

Your mandate letter says that you are responsible for co-developing a bill on First Nations policing. On March 22, your department and the two other ministers responsible for these issues launched an engagement process to consult with First Nations.

Funds have been allocated. You said earlier that you want to stabilize existing police services and also expand them to communities still in need of such services. Can you tell me how the funds are being allocated, since the situation in First Nations communities varies a lot from province to province?

Also, can you tell me what steps you plan to take following these initial consultations in order to be ready to introduce a bill, and what the deadline is for completing this process?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: The short answer is as soon as possible. We are in the midst of discussions with leaders of Indigenous communities and the organizations that represent them at the national level. We are making a lot of progress in that regard, but we also need to start working with local communities.

The first practical step involves using federal investments to co-develop a bill to advance reconciliation in a way that respects the report and recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. That is the first step.

Also, to finish my last answer to Senator Carignan, yes, a bill is planned to increase mandatory minimum sentences.

[English]

CYBERSECURITY

Hon. Tony Loffreda: Thank you, Minister Mendicino, for joining us today. My question is on cybersecurity. This is an issue that touches all aspects of our lives. We live in an increasingly complex digital world, and we cannot afford to take cyberthreats lightly. You tabled your departmental plan for 2022-23 earlier this month. In it you’ve made commitments related to cybersecurity, including continuing your work on a critical cybersystems framework to protect our cybersystems in the finance, telecommunications, energy and transportation sectors.

In this rapidly evolving ecosystem, can you elaborate further on what potential initiatives or approaches have been identified to strengthen Canada’s resilience to new threats, hazards and risks? What is the level of concern?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Thank you very much, senator, for the question. I would begin by stating that we are on an appropriately high alert for potential attacks against our cyberinfrastructure. We are living in a very unique moment right now where there are geopolitical events, including in Ukraine but also elsewhere — even here on Canadian soil with the events over the past number of weeks and months — that require that we put in place the necessary investments, tools and supports to ensure that we can protect our cyberspace.

It’s important that — as you pointed out — we move forward with the legislation that gives the appropriate supports for our national security apparatus but, equally, that we work closely with the private sector. Essential work is being done by the Communications Security Establishment, or CSE, and the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security to ensure there is education and support in the way of smart cyberhygiene around two-factor password authentication — as well as good, smart practices when it comes to using our mobile devices and other sensible approaches — so that we can ensure that our national interests, security and economy are protected and we can continue to grow and advance with all of the opportunities that lie before us.

RECORD SUSPENSIONS

Hon. Brian Francis: Minister Mendicino, in 2019 we passed legislation to expedite and reduce barriers for the suspension of records for simple possession of cannabis. Not long ago, the CBC reported that, of the 10,000 people the government initially estimated would be eligible, only 484 suspensions have been granted so far. Minister, given the low uptake of the program after three years, is there any thought of revisiting the program to make criminal record relief more accessible, especially for Indigenous people as well as racialized and marginalized communities?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Thank you, senator. I would begin by saying that I am very open to that concept, and I have had conversations with a number of your colleagues in this chamber as well as with parliamentarians in the other place. As I said earlier, I feel very strongly that we have to look at ways to continue to reform our criminal justice system in a way that gives access to justice and ensures that inmates have every opportunity to rehabilitate themselves.

I think one element of that is by looking at the pardon system that we currently have. In fact, I recently spoke with the Chairperson of the Parole Board of Canada, or PBC — just today, as a matter of fact — and this issue came up.

I assure you it is very much on my radar, but I don't want to leave you or others in this chamber with the impression that we're sitting idly by while we contemplate that. We've reduced barriers already.

For example, we reduced fees from what they used to be at \$650 to \$50. This will, we think, enhance access so that those who have fulfilled their sentence and obligations within our correctional services system have every opportunity to reintegrate into their communities, seek gainful employment and be positive contributors back in society. That has to be a pillar that underscores our criminal justice system.

[Translation]

FIREARMS TRAFFICKING

Hon. Jean-Guy Dagenais: Minister, a few weeks ago in Quebec City, you acknowledged yet again that your government must do more with respect to gun control.

I have to tell you that I am somewhat frustrated by this political rhetoric that does not translate into action, even though action is urgently needed. This is not the time to be holding summits on violence; it is time to take concrete action on the ground.

As a former police officer, I know — just as you surely do, unless you have poor advisers — that the guns are arriving from the United States through the Akwesasne reserve, where your government has no right to intervene.

• (1500)

Why not use the information you have to carry out targeted operations around the reserve, in Quebec and Ontario? Are traffickers still free to cross through the Akwesasne reserve because the government has no courage, or is it because the government is afraid of how Indigenous people will react?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: We need to work together with Indigenous communities, even in Quebec, where I know the Canada Border Services Agency, the RCMP and the Sûreté du Québec continue to work with this community to prevent illegal firearms trafficking.

You are right. The work isn't easy, and there are complications. That's one of the reasons I travelled to the United States last week to accelerate and strengthen our collaboration with our American counterparts. I believe that there is an opportunity to make further progress on this issue by making investments, and that is one of the things our government promised.

We have to focus on efforts on the ground and invest the necessary resources. We have to be able to provide all the tools to those on the front lines so they can stop firearms at the border.

[English]

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan: Minister, the 2019 Final Report of the National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls noted that while Indigenous women represented only 4% of Canada's population in 2016, they comprised nearly 50% of victims of human trafficking. In September 2019, just before the federal election that year, the Trudeau government reinstated the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking after cancelling the previous Conservative government's strategy in 2016.

Minister, how much of the \$75 million under your government's strategy has been allocated to directly help and protect Indigenous women and girls against human trafficking? How has this funding been allocated?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Thank you very much for the question, senator, and thank you for underlining the scourge of human trafficking, which disproportionately impacts Indigenous women and young girls, as we saw painfully laid out in the MMIWG report, which is one of the reasons why we're committed to implementing the recommendations that are in it.

I was just in British Columbia a little less than two weeks ago to make an announcement of approximately — and I don't want to mislead you — but I think it was \$3 million to \$5 million that was going directly to The Salvation Army and a partnering organization to combat human trafficking on the ground. This is part of a broader investment which we have allocated specifically to reduce human trafficking; I don't know if you know the statistics, but 90% of all of the victims of human trafficking in Canada are women or young girls, which is truly a shocking number.

I assure you that this is a top priority. I assure you that we are allocating funds to meet that challenge and to provide support to those victims of human trafficking so that they can find their way back into communities safely and securely. I assure you that we are continuing to provide law enforcement with all the tools that they need to fight this scourge.

[Translation]

REDUCTION OF GHG EMISSIONS FROM NATIONAL SAFETY AND SECURITY OPERATIONS

Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie: Minister, the Government of Canada's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory states that the RCMP reported 98 kilotonnes of GHG emissions in fiscal year 2020-21 from national safety and security operations. This is a 56% increase over fiscal year 2005-06. How do you plan to ensure compliance with Canada's 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan, taking into account existing green technologies and the financial and operational capabilities of the RCMP?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Thank you for your question, senator, because it's a very important one these days. As you know, yesterday, Minister Guilbeault made an important announcement about what we need to do to accelerate progress on climate change. We must invest \$8.1 billion to make more progress on green infrastructure. I hope that this funding will help transform government services, including within my own department, the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency, along with all of the other agencies in my portfolio. For example, vehicles and the transportation industry account for a lot of emissions. I think there is a huge opportunity to use federal investments to accelerate our efforts to reduce GHG emissions and work harder on climate change.

[English]

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Hon. Jane Cordy: Welcome to the Senate of Canada. Minister, your government has committed to create an independent review body for the Canada Border Services Agency. This change will help to uphold people's rights at our federal borders and should be a priority for Parliament.

This change has been in development for a long time. In 2016, the Senate passed former senator Wilfred Moore's Bill S-205 to legislate CBSA oversight. The government introduced bills on this subject in 2019 and in 2020.

Minister, can you update us on the plans to establish CBSA oversight? Are you confident that this Parliament will finally achieve what I think is an extremely important policy?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Senator, you and I both. I often go back to the many items in my mandate letter just to fully embrace the ambitious agenda which I have the honour and privilege of advancing. I believe very firmly that we need to address this lacuna around the absence of an oversight mechanism specifically for the CBSA.

I know that in the past there has been an effort to try and put forward legislation. My commitment to you is to try to bring something back as quickly as we possibly can. You've heard me speak earlier in this chamber about the progress that we're making in the context of the RCMP and strengthening oversight and other transformations which are necessary to ensure that there is transparency and accountability within that branch of law enforcement, but I totally agree with you that work has to be done in companionship with CBSA reform.

Having spoken with President Ossowski, who leads that agency, I know that he and his officials are fully on board and we hope to have something very soon.

EMERGENCIES ACT

Hon. Pamela Wallin: Minister, when testifying last night before the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency. The Honourable Perrin Beatty, the architect of the act said:

Emergencies legislation is designed to be legislation of last resort. It's explicit on that. It is designed to be used when there is no other legal authority available.

Now that it has been used, it has become easier to invoke. You must not define down the threshold at which extraordinary powers are used to curtail civil liberties.

He continued:

That it made law enforcement easier is clear. However, the issue is whether the deliberately high threshold was met, not whether the powers given were useful.

Of course, the police have said that it was a useful deterrent. The Prime Minister said that he didn't like or agree with the people. You have said the security of the nation was at stake. Many others have said it was unnecessary as the police had existing powers.

Minister, what then was your government's actual rationale for invoking the act? It's a precedent. Please state it as simply and clearly as possible. Thank you.

• (1510)

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Thank you, senator, for the question. Our rationale for invoking the act, in short, was that it was necessary, and the necessity of invoking the act manifested in the challenges posed by the efforts of those participating in the illegal blockades, which created significant interruptions to not only our economy but also public safety across the country. In Coutts, for example, there were very serious charges laid under the Criminal Code, and here in Ottawa, the illegal occupation laid siege to public safety for a number of weeks. While I agree that there were laws that were on the books, what's important, senator, is that those laws, at the time of the illegal blockades and occupation, were not effective at restoring public safety.

It was only after careful deliberation and after the advice that had been offered by all levels of the police service — including the commissioner of the RCMP, the commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police and the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police — that we invoked the act. We invoked it because existing authorities were not effective. Yes, we reached deep into the tool box to use the Emergencies Act for the first time, but it was used responsibly and with restraint, and it helped to restore public safety.

FIREARMS BUYBACK PROGRAM

Hon. Rose-May Poirier: Minister, my question for you concerns your government's firearm buyback program. Almost a year ago the Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO, reported this program will cost up to \$756 million to buy back close to 518,000 firearms, three times the amount your government had estimated. In addition, the PBO figure did not include the cost to administer the program due to a lack of details about this program from your government.

Minister, do you dispute the PBO's figure? And could you also tell us how much the firearm buyback secretariat has spent to date on its operations and salaries?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Senator, I look forward to introducing a buyback program, which is the back-end brace to a prohibition of AR-15 and other assault-style firearms that have just had devastating impacts on our communities. Whether it's the Quebec City mosque shooting, where I just visited the mosque, or, in my own hometown, the 2018 Toronto Danforth shooting, the examples are far too often and replete. These particular firearms have no place in our society.

We have, therefore, put in place an amnesty period, because in fairness to those who purchased them, we wanted to be able to put forward a system that will allow for fair compensation. I can assure you that my department is working on that, and the introduction of the buyback program will happen as quickly as it possibly can so we get that particular firearm out of our community.

It is only one of a number of strategies that we are deploying. As I mentioned earlier, we also have to make sure that we are investing in law enforcement so that we can stop illegal guns from getting into our country at the border, which we are doing. Last year, we had a record year of arrests and seizures, which shows progress. It also means we've got to introduce more resources to prevent gun crimes from occurring. We announced a \$250 million Building Safer Communities Fund less than two

weeks ago. We need to do all three things, and of course, I look forward to working with the PBO so that we can be transparent about the costs of those investments.

[Translation]

SEIZURE OF GOODS PRODUCED BY FORCED LABOUR

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne: Minister, the Canada Border Services Agency is responsible for seizing goods produced by forced labour at the border.

Such seizures are very rare, partly because the standard of proof is almost impossible to meet. In addition, Canada releases hardly any information about the seized goods or the company involved, because it says this information is protected under the Privacy Act.

In the United States, however, the authorities are much more transparent. They have carried out 31 seizures in three years. They publish the date, the type of goods and the name of the supplier. Obviously, this information can then be used by American businesses to avoid sketchy suppliers.

By hiding information about seizures of goods produced by forced labour, isn't Canada putting businesses' commercial interests ahead of workers' human rights?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Senator, I agree. We must protect workers' rights. I know there is a bill to that effect. We will keep working with all members in the other place to study that bill.

At the same time, I must also assure you that there is a lot of cooperation between Canada and the United States. We share information pertaining to many cases, but we always respect privacy rights and Charter rights. There is a high degree of collaboration between our two countries. I know this because, in recent weeks, I have had productive meetings with my counterpart, Secretary Mayorkas of the Department of Homeland Security. Our collaboration is very important to protecting border integrity and Canada's interests.

[English]

FIREARMS CONTROL

Hon. Pierre J. Dalphond: Welcome, minister. My question is about handguns, the tools that are designed to kill or harm people, and how they limit people and are of limited social value.

In the previous Parliament, the government introduced Bill C-21, An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms), which included measures to support local prohibitions on handguns. Much criticism has been expressed regarding the implementation of local prohibitions instead of a national one.

Minister, do you see merit in a national ban on handguns? When are we going to see action on this issue? Thank you.

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Senator, thank you for that question and for highlighting advocacy that I am sensitive to.

I represent a community in Toronto where there's a shooting more often than I'm comfortable even mentioning in this chamber. It can happen as often as every week at certain points of the year. In many of those cases, I know the people and the families who have been impacted by gun crime. I'm moved by their resilience to persevere, but we have to meet them at the moment that we find ourselves in, which means taking more action to reduce gun violence, including gun violence that is generated by handguns. For the benefit of this chamber, handguns are the number one type of killer in this country. It's unacceptable.

That having been said, while we're committed and while my mandate instructs me to work with provinces and territories to take more action on that front, it's not the only thing that we need to be doing. We also need to be investing in law enforcement at our borders to stop illegal trafficking of guns into this country. Equally, we need to be investing in preventive strategies so that we can create safer spaces so that these tragedies don't occur in the first place. My commitment to you is that we will do that work in cooperation with all of the communities across this country, so we can finally rid ourselves of this scourge.

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Vernon White: Thank you, minister. Hopefully, we see you here more often. As you can see, there are lots of people with concerns.

I understand there's been a promise to review the contract policing role of the RCMP and their dozens of contracts across this country. Can you walk us through the process that will be followed, who will be involved and what type of reporting might be offered to parliamentarians as that process takes place?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Senator, first, I'll assure you that there will be transparency about the ways in which we are enhancing and modernizing contract policing services across this country. As you will know and others in this chamber may know, the RCMP has recently become unionized, which is to say there's representation of rank and file in the collective bargaining process that sets out, among other things, how we provide the RCMP with the resources and the tools they need in the communities where the RCMP has been contracted to provide policing services. I'll just tell you a little bit about how that process is unfolding.

• (1520)

My officials, along with other branches within the government, are engaged directly with those provinces that have contracted through police service agreements with the RCMP. They are also engaged at the municipal level to ensure there is a way forward so that those communities and provinces that contracted the RCMP can recruit and retain the labour force that is necessary to

ensure that we are providing public safety right across this country. We will be very transparent about how that process unfolds going forward.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu: Minister, the lack of a response to my first question is very troubling and leads me to believe that the RCMP thinks it's above the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights.

As the person responsible for enforcing laws in Canada, what would you say to the Savoie family in New Brunswick, who have been waiting 15 years for the RCMP to inform them of the circumstances surrounding the death of their 17-year-old daughter, who was killed by an impaired driver?

What would you say to the families in Portapique who are being denied the right to participate in the public inquiry into the killing of 22 people?

Is the RCMP not accountable to victims of crime and their families?

Mr. Mendicino: Thank you for your question, senator. I want to emphasize that the RCMP is not above the law. The RCMP is not above the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. Everyone in Canada must respect the principles and values expressed in that bill of rights. It is one of the most important principles of our democracy.

Regarding your question specifically, there is a process for victims, and there are principles enshrined in several laws to protect their rights. They have access to information on the justice system, and it is our government's duty to defend the rights of victims so they can obtain justice.

[English]

MANDATORY MINIMUM PENALTIES

Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer: Minister, thank you for being with us in the Senate of Canada. I also want to tell you that I miss you, and want to thank you for helping me with so many files on vulnerable women and children. Thank you, minister.

My question follows upon Senator Pate's questions. The rates of incarceration of Indigenous women have skyrocketed over the past decades. Nearly half of the women in federal prisons are now Indigenous, and almost 10% are Black. Your mandate letter includes commitments to reconciliation and addressing systemic racism in the criminal legal system.

Minister, you have spoken so eloquently today on the legal system and the challenges within it. We know that one of the challenges is mandatory minimum sentences. Your government has brought forward Bill C-5 that looks at only 14 offences subject to mandatory minimum sentences. Will you give us a commitment to looking at how we can increase the number of offences exempt from mandatory minimum sentencing?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Senator, thank you very much for the question and for your advocacy.

As I have stated on a number of occasions during this Question Period, I believe we need to continue to move forward with an ambitious agenda to reform our criminal justice system. That also means looking at the overuse of mandatory minimum penalties, or MMPs, which the Supreme Court has repeatedly either struck down or noted as not being an effective tool for ensuring justice.

Where we are overly reliant on MMPs, all we're doing is simply contributing to the revolving door of crime. It seems to me that we have to be smart about this. Part of taking a smart and effective approach is, first and foremost, recognizing that our courts and the judiciary are best situated to dispense justice according to the circumstances of the offence, the background of the offender and the best way to ensure that justice is delivered to victims but also, equally, to promote the rehabilitation of those individuals.

I assure you that the government, through the leadership of the Minister of Justice, is looking at and has identified a list of offences where we can repeal MMPs. We look forward to advancing that work in the chamber. We also look forward to your contributions here in the Senate as we move forward with that agenda.

TRAFFICKING IN CULTURAL PROPERTY

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Thank you for being here today, minister.

International concerns regarding illegal trafficking of cultural property are serious and increasing with the alarming pillaging and looting of antiquities in many war-torn parts of the world, which now, alas, includes Ukraine. Works of art, the world's third most trafficked commodities, have the fastest growing rate and fund the arms and drug trades.

It is clear that stronger international cooperation with UNESCO, with high, uniform operational standards that reinforce bilateral and regional cooperation frameworks of law enforcement and investigative agencies, are essential. I also believe stronger awareness and training of Canada's border officials need to be addressed as well.

What is Canada doing to tighten and update our legal protections and regulations to meet the new challenges between source, transit and destination countries?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: To begin with, senator, I would point out that we were in Washington, D.C., just last week when this priority was specifically discussed. We talked about how we could prevent the kind of illegal trafficking of intellectual property, other counterfeits and other properties that have been stolen across our borders so they are interdicted.

Coming out of that meeting, there were concrete assurances from both sides to share information and intelligence so that our law enforcement branches, including the Canada Border Services Agency and the RCMP, and, on the other side of the border,

Customs and Border Protection and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, known as ATF, are working at the highest level of collaboration so that we can stop that crime from occurring in the first place.

Your question is very timely. It comes on the heels of a very productive meeting last week to battle transnational crime on this front, and we're committed to continuing to work on it together.

FOREIGN INFLUENCE IN CANADIAN ELECTIONS

Hon. Leo Housakos (Acting Leader of the Opposition): Minister, last week, your colleague the Minister of Foreign Affairs was asked during a House of Commons committee meeting if she believed that Canada experienced foreign interference by state or state-backed actors in last year's federal election. Minister Joly declined to answer, saying the matter was under the purview of the Minister of Public Safety.

So I will ask this of you, minister: Do you believe Canada experienced foreign interference by state or state-backed actors in the last federal election? If you agree that it took place, where will you lay the blame for this interference, and what will your government do to take action and prevent this in the future?

Hon. Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety: Senator, first, thank you for asking that question because it allows me to emphasize to you and to all members of this chamber that we are operating in an environment of heightened threats to our national security, including when it comes to foreign interference.

I would urge you, all of your colleagues in this chamber and indeed all Canadians, to be very much "eyes wide open" about what those threats are and how they have created a more complicated environment. We need to be sure that we are providing all of the tools and resources necessary to our national security apparatus so that we can mitigate those threats.

I also want to provide you with my assurance that all of the agencies that operate within my portfolio, as well as other portfolios, are on it. We're very alive to these concerns. We need to be sure that we're vigilant about mitigating those threats, and we need to do this work together.

Our commitment is to work with you and all parliamentarians to make sure we protect our national security.

Senator Housakos: Minister, that's very reassuring, actually. I appreciate that answer. It's a good first step to recognize foreign interference and influence in various institutions in this country by various nefarious states around the world.

Would your government be supportive of a foreign influence registry, as proposed in Bill S-237 tabled in this chamber, that would force agents acting on behalf of foreign states and trying to influence our institutions and our democracies to register in the proposed registry so they are transparent and accountable?

• (1530)

Mr. Mendicino: I certainly think that's an idea that merits study. I would say to you, senator, that, look, for a variety of reasons, including Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, we should be on high alert and expect that Mr. Putin, his regime or other hostile state actors could very well take the steps of retaliating by attacking our national security interests, be they here or abroad, including through the use of foreign interference.

I agree that this is a pressing and urgent issue and that we have to be vigilant and that we should be open to considering all of the tools so that our national security apparatus can protect our national security both here and abroad.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, time for Question Period has expired. I'm sure that all senators would like to join me in thanking Minister Mendicino for being here with us today. We look forward to seeing you again here in the near future.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mendicino: May I say, Your Honour, that I was told I would have to sing the national anthem when I came in, but it occurs to me now someone may have been pulling my leg. It was an honour to appear before you, and I look forward to doing it again. Thank you very much.

DELAYED ANSWERS TO ORAL QUESTIONS

(For text of Delayed Answers, see Appendix.)

[Translation]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 5, 2021-22

THIRD READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Gagné, seconded by the Honourable Senator Gold, P.C., for the third reading of Bill C-15, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022.

Hon. Raymonde Gagné (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate): The supplementary estimates provide information on \$13.2 billion in new voted spending for 70 organizations. They also present information on a \$3.9-billion increase in forecast statutory expenditures.

The \$3.9-billion increase in statutory expenditures is due to expenditures proposed in the Main Estimates. This amount includes the following increases, and note that figures have been rounded: \$2.4 billion for the Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit; a \$1.6-billion increase in interest on unmatured debt; \$300 million in proposed payments to provinces and territories for proof-of-vaccination initiatives; \$100 million for ventilation improvement projects in schools; a \$209.1-million increase to Canada Student Grants.

[English]

For context and awareness, I think it may be helpful to break down spending found in the estimates for the current fiscal year. In these Supplementary Estimates (C), the proposed budgetary authorities for 2021-22 amount to \$415 billion, including \$188.8 billion in planned voted expenditures and \$226.2 billion in forecast statutory expenditures.

The 2021-22 Main Estimates presented \$342.2 billion in planned budgetary spending for 123 organizations to deliver programs and services to Canadians. This consisted of \$141.9 billion in voted expenditures and \$200.3 billion in statutory spending, authorized or proposed through other legislation.

The Supplementary Estimates (A), which were tabled last spring, included an additional \$24 billion in voted budgetary spending and \$17.2 billion in forecast budgetary statutory expenditures across 45 federal organizations.

The Supplementary Estimates (B), tabled last November, proposed additional authorities of \$13.4 billion in forecast statutory expenditures. Voted expenditures require annual approval from Parliament through appropriation bills, like the one before us today, whereas statutory spending is approved by Parliament through legislation other than an appropriation bill.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, I would also like to point out that nearly \$2.2 billion of the budgetary expenditures presented in Supplementary Estimates (C) relates to announcements made in Budget 2021, including \$148.4 million for the Small Craft Harbours program, \$126.9 million to promote our official languages, and \$91 million to advance clean fuel markets and carbon capture, utilization and storage technologies.

Allow me to present a breakdown of the proposed spending in these supplementary estimates. The government is focusing its efforts on important priorities for Canadians, including climate change, housing, education, water treatment, health services and emergency response activities for Indigenous Canadians and their communities, as well as housing and infrastructure projects.

Approximately 81% of the voted spending sought through these supplementary estimates is being requested by 10 organizations. Of those 10 organizations, 6 are each seeking more than \$500 million to support their priorities.

Today, I will be providing a breakdown of the major expenditures. The largest expenditures are attributable to the Department of Health, which is seeking \$3.7 billion, and to the Public Health Agency of Canada, which is seeking \$3 billion. Next, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development is seeking \$828.2 million. A sum of \$766.4 million is set aside for the Department of Indigenous Services. A sum of \$638.3 million is earmarked for the Department of National Defence, and \$521.8 million is proposed for the Office of Infrastructure of Canada.

[English]

As with recent supplementary estimates, the top priority remains the health and safety of Canadians. Honourable senators, I'm pleased to say that we have come a long way in our battle with COVID-19. Hospitalizations are decreasing, the rate of infection is decreasing and many provinces have either removed or have begun to remove various public health restrictions.

But let us be clear: The reason we can begin to ease certain restrictions with confidence is because of vaccines. COVID-19 vaccines save lives and greatly reduce the risk of severe illness and hospitalization. When paired with other public health measures and tools at our disposal, we are better able to manage the virus and mitigate its impact.

These supplementary estimates propose \$6.9 billion for the government's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The government has committed to support provinces and territories through the pandemic, with procurement and distribution of COVID-19 rapid tests being an important tool.

With the spread of the Omicron variant, demand for rapid tests has grown, causing existing inventories to deplete at a faster rate than predicted. Funding was requested in Bills C-8, C-10 and Supplementary Estimates (C) to support the procurement of rapid tests.

Requesting both statutory and voted spending authorities means that Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada have maximum flexibility to address this urgent need.

• (1540)

The tabling of Supplementary Estimates (C) in Parliament allowed the immediate signing of new or increased contracts for test kits with payment upon Royal Assent. The estimates also allow for repayment of funds that were temporarily reallocated to make some purchases earlier.

Bills C-8 and C-10 are complimentary, funding purchases during the current or subsequent fiscal year. The expense for each shipment will ultimately be charged to either the stand-alone statutory authority of Bills C-8 and C-10 or their voted appropriations.

The reality is that several potential treatments for COVID-19, including oral antivirals, are in various stages of development and study, and global demand is competitive. Supplementary

Estimates (C) include new funding of \$1 billion, specifically for therapeutics, treatments for infected individuals that can reduce the severity of COVID-19 for individuals and reducing the strain on the health care system. Another \$1 billion has been earmarked for a wide range of possible needs, including contracting, staffing or acquisition of assets needed to respond to the pandemic. This funding may also be used to exercise options under advanced purchase agreements, as well as funding for secondary costs associated with storage distribution and deployment logistics.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, we all know how important COVID-19 vaccines are for saving lives. That is why the government is requesting \$687 million to procure additional COVID-19 vaccines for future variants of concern. To ensure COVID-19 vaccines continue to be available, the Government of Canada has signed an advance purchase agreement with Pfizer Canada.

I will now talk about the proposed spending for combatting climate change. Honourable senators, it is no exaggeration to say that climate change is one of the greatest threats that we face, and it is up to the international community to find solutions to this global challenge. Canada recognizes this, which is why the government allocated \$2.65 billion from 2016 to 2021 to combat climate change in developing countries, as part of the commitment we made under the 2015 Paris Agreement.

In June 2021, the Prime Minister announced that Canada would allocate an additional \$5.3 billion over the next five years to continue supporting initiatives to fight climate change and biodiversity loss in developing countries.

In November, the government announced it will provide up to \$1 billion to the Climate Investment Funds Accelerated Coal Transition initiative. This program is an initiative led by multiple donors that will provide funding for public sector investments to help developing countries transition from coal-fired electricity to clean power as quickly as possible. The Philippines, Indonesia, South Africa and India have already been selected for the first phase of the program.

In these supplementary estimates, the government is seeking \$653.7 million for Global Affairs Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada to help developing countries address the impact of climate change. This funding will help developing countries transition towards low-carbon, climate-resilient, nature-positive economies, in support of the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Those departments will also receive operating funds to build their capacity to implement Canada's new commitment to funding the fight against climate change.

[English]

Honourable senators, the government is committed to tackling this unprecedented global challenge.

Another major area of proposed funding is targeted at infrastructure needs. Honourable senators, the government is committed to developing infrastructure while ensuring sound stewardship of taxpayer dollars. Infrastructure Canada is requesting \$349.3 million for the P3 Canada Fund in these supplementary estimates. This funding will support the delivery of the remaining, approved and ongoing projects that Canada has legally committed to under the P3 Canada Fund. The projects include the *Agence métropolitaine de transport* Pointe-Sainte-Charles Maintenance Project in Montreal; the Edmonton Light Rail Transit System; and the Tlicho All-Season Road Project in the Northwest Territories. These are important investments that will help us to make our way out of the pandemic.

The government remains committed to transparency. It continues to prioritize the way these estimates are presented with extensive explanatory documentation readily accessible online to parliamentarians and Canadians alike. I would encourage my colleagues who have not already done so to consult the GC InfoBase, an interactive online tool that presents a wealth of federal data in a visual way.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, the bill I have the honour of introducing today is important for implementing the government's commitment to the health and well-being of Canadians, as well as other key priorities.

If there's one thing we have learned from current world events, it's that we are all in this together. Quality of life improvements and an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic are equally important. The estimates show that the government continues to address immediate needs while also making long-term investments that will benefit all Canadians.

As a final point, I would like to thank all the members of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, especially its chair, Senator Mockler, and its vice-chair, Senator Forest, for their comprehensive study of the supplementary estimates. I really appreciate the work you do. Your thoughtful questions allow us to explore topics in greater depth than our speeches here allow us to do.

I now invite you, colleagues, to vote in favour of this bill without delay. Thank you for your attention.

(On motion of Senator Wells, debate adjourned.)

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 1, 2022-23

THIRD READING—DEBATE

Hon. Raymonde Gagné (Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate) moved third reading of Bill C-16, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

She said: Honourable senators, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today to Appropriation Bill No. 1, 2022-23, the government's interim supply bill.

As you know, interim supply bills are an integral part of the normal supply cycle. In order for federal government agencies to operate, they must obtain parliamentary authority to spend public funds.

• (1550)

[English]

This authority is provided in two ways: through annual appropriation acts that specify the amounts and broad purposes for which funds can be spent, and through other specific statutes that authorize payments and set out the amounts and time periods for those payments.

The amounts approved through appropriation acts are referred to as voted amounts, and the expenditure authorities provided through other statutes are called statutory authorities.

[Translation]

Estimates documents are prepared to support supply bills and provide additional information on voted amounts included in those bills.

Estimates documents also include, for information only, the expenditure authorities provided to Parliament through other statutes, in other words, statutory authorities. While the Main Estimates provide an overview of spending needs for the upcoming fiscal year, the supplementary estimates present information on additional spending requirements.

These are requirements that were either not sufficiently developed in time for inclusion in the Main Estimates or that were subsequently refined to account for developments in particular programs and services.

[English]

Through the Main Estimates, the government sets out the amounts it needs to fund its operations for the fiscal year ahead, which begins on April 1. The government then tables an interim supply bill to authorize funding for the first three months of the fiscal year until parliamentarians can adequately study and give final approval to the Main Estimates in June.

The spending requested through this interim supply bill is, therefore, already included in the Main Estimates. It does not represent new spending.

Another detail about interim supply is that the amounts requested are typically based on twelfths of the amounts in the Main Estimates, notionally corresponding to monthly cash requirements. For most departmental votes, the requested interim supply represents three twelfths of the total voted authorities in the Main Estimates for the fiscal year.

In addition, for business reasons, departments may ask for more interim supply than the standard three twelfths.

This requires providing a justification to Treasury Board Secretariat, which identifies the programs, projects or payments that require additional appropriation in the first three months of the fiscal year.

Once the justification is reviewed and accepted, additional twelfths are included in the interim supply bill for parliamentary approval.

[Translation]

Colleagues, this year, the normal supply cycle is being followed. The President of the Treasury Board tabled the Main Estimates in the House of Commons on March 1, and the interim supply bill was tabled in the House of Commons on March 24. In the coming months, parliamentarians will have the opportunity to carefully examine all of the government's spending plans before being invited to approve the remaining voted items presented in the Main Estimates through Appropriation Act No. 1, 2022-23, which is expected in June.

[English]

Through this interim supply bill, which is Appropriation Act No. 1, the government is seeking Parliament's approval of \$75.5 billion in budgetary expenditures.

Honourable senators, the Main Estimates for the fiscal year 2022-23, of which this interim supply is a portion, present the government's ongoing commitment to meeting Canadians' priorities. They continue to provide economic support to individuals and businesses for a post-pandemic recovery.

As you will recall, the Main Estimates provided information on \$397.6 billion in proposed spending for 126 organizations, including \$190.3 billion in voted expenditures and \$207.3 billion in statutory expenditures.

[Translation]

As a reminder, statutory expenditures are presented in the Main Estimates for information purposes only, as they are authorized through other legislation and are not voted.

[Senator Gagné]

Thanks to the interim supply bill, the government will be able to do the following: implement projects started in the spring, such as Canada Summer Jobs, through Employment and Social Development Canada; make payments to the provinces and territories for home and community care, mental health and addiction services, and virtual and long-term care through Health Canada; purchase supplies of COVID-19 therapeutics, protective equipment or medical supplies through Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada; and fulfill its legal obligations towards Indigenous communities, such as the McLean agreement-in-principle on Indian day schools or self-government agreements, through Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada.

[English]

Honourable senators, it's also worth noting that COVID-19 measures represent roughly \$9.2 billion, or 4.8%, of total voted budgetary expenditures in the Main Estimates. In addition, for the 2022-23 fiscal year, major economic response programs are enacted or amended by an act to provide further support in response to COVID-19 — Bill C-2.

The act extended wage and rent subsidies, increased the maximum number of weeks and extended the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit and the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit, and enacted the Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit Act to authorize the payment of the Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit in regions where a lockdown is imposed for reasons related to COVID-19. This reflects the government's continuing commitment to invest in Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic from economic support for citizens and businesses to health care.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, the government has acted quickly over the past two years to provide financial support to individuals, businesses and the health care system.

The government created programs, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, the Canada Emergency Student Benefit and the Canada Wage Subsidy, and it also provided targeted support to the regions, the economic sector, and the non-profits that help Canadians.

We must ensure that all federal organizations can continue to operate this spring and summer and deliver the programs and services that Canadians rely on every day and that address any needs related to COVID-19.

These organizations need the financial capacity to do so. The interim funding set out in this bill will give them the financial capacity they need until the Main Estimates are studied, debated and passed later this spring.

Allow me to digress before I speak about transparency. The federal government moved swiftly to implement new programs to support and serve the public. These programs made a difference for millions of people in Canada, on top of the existing programs and services. To do that, the government relied on an engaged public service that demonstrated bold, unprecedented leadership during this crisis. I want to take this opportunity to salute their dedication and thank them publicly.

[English]

Honourable senators, I would also like to emphasize the continuing importance the government puts on providing clear and easy-to-access information. The government recognizes that

Canadians and parliamentarians have the right to know, scrutinize and question how all public funds are spent.

Therefore, I invite my honourable colleagues to refer to all the additional information about the government's spending plans in recent estimates. For each of these estimates, the government has published a detailed listing of the expenditure authorities approved by Parliament through other legislation.

(At 4 p.m., pursuant to the order adopted by the Senate on November 25, 2021, the Senate adjourned until 2 p.m., tomorrow.)

APPENDIX

PAROLE BOARD OF CANADA

RIGHTS OF VICTIMS OF CRIMINAL ACTS

DELAYED ANSWERS TO ORAL QUESTIONS

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu on November 25, 2021)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Correctional Service of Canada (CSC)

AFGHAN REFUGEES

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Ratna Omidvar on November 24, 2021)

Insofar as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is concerned:

IRCC recognizes that many at-risk Afghans remain in Afghanistan, and are unable to leave. Our officials are working tirelessly to secure new partnerships and address constraints that limit the mobility of vulnerable groups. Due to the precarious security situation in Afghanistan, Canada does not have a presence in Afghanistan and is unable to collect biometric information in-country at this time. This has impacted our ability to complete a full admissibility screening of individuals prior to departure from Afghanistan. However, innovative screening approaches are being considered to address this issue.

Crossing Afghanistan's border is also dangerous. IRCC has established partnerships to find avenues for the resettlement of individuals from within Afghanistan. IRCC is working closely with our referral partners, Front Line Defenders and Protect Defenders, who have been able to facilitate the movement of some human rights defenders to neighbouring countries. IRCC is also in contact with the Veteran's Transition Network (VTN) regarding their operations on the ground in Afghanistan.

The government continues to benefit from lessons learned from Operation Syria relating to large-scale refugee initiatives in order to effectively leverage support from partner organizations.

The Government of Canada remains committed to bringing as many vulnerable Afghans as possible to safety.

CSC, as part of its mandate, strives to ensure that victims of crime are treated with compassion and respect. The death of Marylène Lévesque was a terrible tragedy. CSC has offered its condolences to the Lévesque family, and has reached out to the family to inform them of the conclusion of the joint board of investigation. Out of respect for the family, it would be inappropriate to comment further.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

AFGHAN REFUGEES

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Marilou McPhedran on November 30, 2021)

Insofar as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is concerned:

Afghan refugees, both government assisted and privately sponsored, have been arriving in Canada on regular commercial and charter flights since September 2021. In December 2021, two incoming flights of privately sponsored refugees (PSR) arrived in Toronto, carrying approximately 535 persons. IRCC is expecting a significant number of arrivals throughout 2022 as conditions allow.

IRCC, with the support of Global Affairs Canada, aims to facilitate the safe passage and resettlement of at least 40,000 vulnerable Afghan nationals. Emphasis continues to be placed on persons and their families who supported Canada and our allies over the past two decades, as well as women, LGBTQI people, human rights defenders, journalists and members of religious and ethnic minorities.

The Government of Canada does not ask a person's occupation as part of this humanitarian initiative, and therefore is unable to provide data on the number of female athletes resettled, but remains firm in its commitment to welcome refugees and vulnerable Afghans to Canada.

As of January 18, 2021, approximately 7,140 Afghan nationals arrived in Canada: approximately 4,292 under the Special Immigration Measures, and approximately

2,850 under the humanitarian program. All key statistics, updated regularly, may be found on IRCC's website at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/afghanistan/key-figures.html>

PUBLIC SAFETY

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA—EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Jane Cordy on December 2, 2021)

Correctional Service of Canada (CSC)

CSC has zero tolerance for harassment, violence or racism of any kind. All allegations of misconduct are thoroughly investigated regardless of the source and disciplinary actions are taken when appropriate.

CSC takes very seriously the results of the 2021 National Employment Equity Survey of Women Employees. As stated in the minister's mandate letter, we will ensure that federal correctional institutions are safe and humane environments free from violence and sexual harassment for offenders and employees.

As part of its efforts, CSC created its first National Working Group for Women Employees to identify the barriers faced by women in CSC, and to develop an action plan to address the challenges identified. Additionally, CSC continues to offer a number of support services to employees and has launched a Respectful Workplace Campaign to promote awareness and educate employees on the different ways to disclose inappropriate behaviour.

Commissioner Kelly also held six virtual town hall discussions on the results of the survey earlier this year. The National Working Group will review the issues, ideas, and suggestions raised at the town halls to identify issues and initiatives for further action. An action plan, based on the input heard, will be forthcoming as well.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

AFGHAN REFUGEES

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Salma Ataullahjan on December 2, 2021)

Insofar as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is concerned:

In anticipation of new Afghan arrivals, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is working to ensure that the capacity and resources are in place to address the immediate needs of Afghan newcomers, as well as the longer term supports required.

Upon arrival to Canada, government-assisted refugees are housed in hotels for the two-week quarantine period. During this stay, they benefit from many on-site social services made possible by both government and service provider organizations, including the provision of essentials, meals, toiletries, clothing and sundries. A variety of orientation and information sessions in their dominant language (Dari and Pashto) and medical services, including COVID-19 monitoring and vaccinations are available.

Post-quarantine, clients are settled in permanent accommodations, in some cases they may continue their stay in designated hotels until permanent accommodations that meet the needs of the family (e.g. large family size) become available. While in temporary accommodation (including hotels), they continue to receive services, such as building on those received during the quarantine period, including basic orientation to Canada, life skills training, language training, employment-related services, financial orientation and help finding permanent housing. Dozens of organizations and individuals have provided an array of help to new Afghan nationals arriving in Canada.

SIKH REFUGEES

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Paula Simons on December 7, 2021)

Insofar as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is concerned:

IRCC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation (MSBF) in August 2021 to support the resettlement of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus currently in India.

The last of the applications under this MOU were received in November 2021 and it is anticipated that a significant proportion of the referred cases will arrive in Canada in early 2022.

IRCC continues to update MSBF on a regular basis to provide the latest information on the status of cases under this MOU.

We have also expanded our partnership with MSBF to resettle hundreds of additional Afghan Sikhs and Hindus within and outside of Afghanistan. IRCC is working hard to put the required measures in place for this increased effort.

We must also strike a balance in how we process applications from all of our clients while we contend with the demands that the situation in Afghanistan as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have placed on IRCC. These situations have also caused varying country conditions. As such, departures may be delayed or may not be possible from all locations. However, IRCC will continue to take quick action to ensure that Canada can uphold its humanitarian tradition and commitment to resettlement.

AFGHAN REFUGEES

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Ratna Omidvar on December 8, 2021)

Insofar as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is concerned:

Afghan refugees, both government assisted and privately sponsored, have been arriving in Canada on regular commercial and charter flights since September 2021. In December 2021, four incoming flights of privately sponsored refugees arrived in Toronto, carrying approximately 1,015 Afghans, and approximately 265 government-assisted refugees arrived in Halifax.

On January 11, 2022, 252 Afghans arrived in Calgary, on a charter flight from Pakistan. Of these, 170 clients were Human Rights Defenders. IRCC continues to plan for charter flights in the near future.

Parliament approves the annual immigration levels plan, which allocates targets and associated funding to each immigration program line of business. The department establishes application caps for some streams in the privately sponsored refugees program as a way of managing application intake, resulting inventories and processing times. At the same time, we welcome the support of many Canadians who want to lend a hand.

IRCC is continuing, with the support of the whole of the Government of Canada, to facilitate resettlement of at least 40,000 vulnerable Afghan nationals, emphasizing individuals who supported Canada and our allies over the past two decades, women, LGBTQI people, human rights defenders, journalists and members of religious and ethnic minorities.

PUBLIC SAFETY

CANADA EMERGENCY RESPONSE BENEFIT

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu on December 9, 2021)

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY (CRA)

The CRA is committed to ensuring that individuals receive only the benefits to which they are entitled, while protecting the integrity of the COVID-19 support program. Safeguards are embedded within the CERB application process to verify an applicant's eligibility and the CRA has implemented additional controls requiring closer scrutiny of certain applications before they are processed. In terms of suspicious and ineligible benefit claims, as the analysis work

is still ongoing, the CRA is not able to provide the number of suspicious claims related to CERB or the amounts associated with them.

Dealing with complex suspected cases may require several months of review and verification. In some cases, the CRA will ask taxpayers to provide documents and information that will need to be authenticated before they can continue with audits. In other cases, the CRA will identify suspicious transactions and take other preventive measures.

To ensure effective coordination of identity theft prevention, detection and response activities, the CRA works with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canadian Anti-Fraud Center and local police to investigate suspicious incidents.

CANADA EMERGENCY RESPONSE BENEFIT

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu on December 9, 2021)

Correctional Service of Canada (CSC)

CSC remains diligent in the prevention of fraudulent financial transactions by inmates.

In addition to the protocol established with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), CSC has a Deposit Validation Protocol that prescribes comprehensive procedures for the authentication and verification of funds that originate from outside sources and are sent to inmates.

In order to confirm inmates' eligibility to receive such funds, CSC has signed an information sharing protocol with ESDC.

If it is determined that an inmate is not eligible to receive such benefits, the cheque is returned to the issuing department or agency.

As of January 4, 2022, there have not been any reported cases of federal inmates who have been recently released from a federal institution and who have engaged in such criminal activities. Regardless, CSC has zero tolerance for such behaviour and should any cases be brought to the Service's attention, it will take appropriate action.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA—
ACCESSIBILITY IN PENITENTIARIES

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Chantal Petitclerc on December 17, 2021)

Correctional Service of Canada (CSC)

CSC works to provide equality of access so that incarcerated individuals of all abilities, to the extent possible, have access to programs and services deemed necessary to their rehabilitation and wellbeing.

In all of its institutions, CSC works to accommodate the mobility and health care needs of its inmates. Local health care providers assess incarcerated individuals who require health and mobility assistance on an ongoing basis, while the services and devices that are provided to them meet community standards.

At Grand Valley Institution (GVI), accessible options for bathing exist in all levels of security, which include the use of ramps, access to roll-in showers or tubs with grab bars and bathing stools. Additionally, GVI offers the option of bathing with assistance from a registered nurse (RN) or personal support worker (PSW).

GVI currently has wheelchair-accessible cells that are available and offered to those with accessibility needs. Incarcerated individuals may be offered an alternative cell if the conditions of their current arrangement do not meet their accessibility needs.

CSC's accessibility teams are currently developing an accessibility strategy and the Service will undertake an accessibility audit of its portfolio.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

AGREEMENT WITH DAVIE SHIPYARD

(Response to question raised by the Honourable Claude Carignan on February 10, 2022)

Public Services and Procurement Canada:

The Government of Canada remains committed to delivering on the Canadian Coast Guard's fleet renewal plan. This includes selecting a third shipyard as a strategic partner under the National Shipbuilding Strategy to support this work.

The evaluation team continues to rigorously assess the proposal Chantier Davie submitted against the request for proposal. This is a complex, multi-step qualification process and it is imperative that we get it right. We are making every effort to finalize this process as soon as possible, while ensuring best value for the Government of Canada and all Canadians. Contracts and delivery dates for the icebreakers will be negotiated with the shipyard should it be successful in the qualification process.

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