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Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC)): I'd like to bring this meeting to order.

This is the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, meeting number ten. We are going to have a briefing today on the latest report of the federal ombudsman for victims of crime.

We'd like to welcome Mr. Steve Sullivan, the federal ombudsman for victims of crime, to our committee.

The usual practice of this committee is to allow you an opening statement of about ten minutes and then we'll go to questions and comments. Whenever you're ready, sir, you may begin.

Mr. Steve Sullivan (Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting me to appear before the committee to brief you on our most recent special report and to discuss, more generally, important issues impacting victims of crime in Canada. The Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime was created to give a stronger voice to victims. By inviting me here today, you are taking an active role in engaging the government on victims' issues, and I thank you for that.

As some of you may know, our office has a mandate that enables us to help victims on both an individual and a national scale. Directly, we talk with victims every day, helping them resolve their complaints and answering their questions. Indirectly, we recommend change that will ultimately help all victims get better support, fairer treatment and a stronger place in the justice system.

[*English*]

My goal here today is to share with you a new perspective on some issues you are no doubt familiar with. I do so knowing that real change can start in this room. It was a number of years ago that the committee on justice that looked at the Corrections and Conditional Release Act recommended the creation of an office like ours, so I understand how real change can begin. I remember sitting in a small courtroom in 1995 in Prince George, British Columbia, with the mother of a murdered child and his sister. He was murdered by an individual on federal parole. When the inquest looked at the circumstances of his death, and also at how Mrs. Fichtenberg was treated by the system, one of the recommendations that came from that process was the creation of this office.

I can remember working with members of Parliament from various parties, including who was then a fairly rookie member of Parliament, the Honourable Peter MacKay, when he put the motion in the House of Commons. I worked with Liberal MP Ray Bonin as he presented a bill in the House of Commons that had wide support from all members of the House of Commons, and I remember the day that the Minister of Justice and Minister of Public Safety appointed me Canada's first ombudsman.

It is the power of committees like this one that can take serious issues and help make things better for victims and all Canadians. This is my last week as ombudsman, and I can say unequivocally that I am proud of the work we have done so far. We have resolved some very difficult complaints efficiently and compassionately, and I have to give credit to the National Parole Board and Correctional Services of Canada for working with us to resolve those issues. I have worked in this area for 15 years, and I can say without a doubt that the way we handled those cases and the way we resolved them probably wouldn't have happened without the creation of this kind of office.

We made recommendations to the government on Internet child sexual exploitation, the sex offender registry, victim fine surcharge, more training for judges, and restitution. I am proud to say the government has taken issue on many of these points. We played an instrumental role in helping the RCMP resolve a decade-old problem with privacy issues in making referrals to victims about services, and we are working with them to help finalize a national policy that reflects our recommendations. But there is more to do. The report that you have in front of you makes 13 recommendations to the government on how we can feasibly and effectively achieve meaningful change for victims of crime in Canada by dealing with the federal corrections and parole system.

Some of these recommendations are a more formal presentation of points that I made to the government in the past, and I was pleased to see that Bill C-43 incorporated amendments to address some of these issues. While that bill would have significantly reformed the current corrections and parole system and enhanced the role of victims within that system, there are a number of important issues that remain unaddressed. And though the bill died with the prorogation of Parliament, I would suggest that we now have an opportunity to get that bill right. By incorporating a few changes, we can strengthen the bill before it is re-introduced so that we can be more effective for all Canadians.

While I am certainly happy to answer any questions you may have about that report, this will be my last opportunity to address the committee as ombudsman, and there are a couple of broader issues to touch on in the time remaining in my opening remarks.

I think it is important to understand that we talk about victims of crime. Their needs and concerns are complex, and there are no one-size-fits-all solutions and there are no easy solutions. They are long-term, they are difficult, and sometimes we have to challenge our own notions of what they look like.

This is national victims of crime awareness week, so it's a very fitting week for me to be here. Yesterday at the event and today at a different event, I listened to victims of crime talk about their needs and their concerns and heard victim service providers talk about the challenges they face in trying to meet those needs on behalf of victims. They talked about lack of services, or not being aware of services, lack of information. They talked about treatment by the system; in court, not being respected in their opinions. And yesterday the Prime Minister spoke at the opening of the symposium for national victims of crime awareness week and he talked as well about the imbalance we have in our system that focuses so much on offenders and not so much on victims.

I was a little disappointed, however, that he proceeded in his speech focusing almost exclusively on how we treat offenders. On the day we were supposed to remember and recognize victims of crime, he talked about Karla Homolka, Clifford Olson, and Graham James. And I can tell you that when he left and a discussion began among those victim service providers and within those workshops, the issues we talked about were very different. They were very basic about trying to meet the needs of victims of hate crime, trying to meet the needs of male victims of sexual abuse, trying to raise awareness and prevent crime.

You'll know that roughly 2.5 million crimes were reported in Canada in 2008. That is reported crime, different from what the actual crime rate is. Of that 2.5 million crimes, fewer than 5,000 offenders went to federal prisons. If all we talk about is who's going to our federal prisons, then we ignore a large number of victims of crime. We asked the government to commit funding in different areas.

● (1540)

We had asked them in this most recent budget to commit $5 million—a relatively small amount of money when we are talking about federal budgets—to a model called child advocacy centres. Now, if you are from Edmonton or Montreal or Niagara, you will know what those centres are. They are centres that meet the needs of child victims who are going through the system. They bring together everybody who provides services to that child and they provide it in a child-friendly environment. It is an American model. They have over 900 centres in that country; we have three or four in this country. We had asked the government to provide a small fund that would help communities establish those. I have been to Victoria, Toronto, Winnipeg.... I know Halifax is working. There are communities across this country trying to get a centre for their children. There were no discussions and we have not talked a lot.

One of the things I had hoped we would do in our office is look at the area of sexually trafficked young people. We know that disproportionately young aboriginal girls are being lured away from reserves, and they are being trafficked across this country. There are young boys who are selling themselves on the street for shelter and for food. We need to have services, programs, and shelters to help those kids get off the street. They are not the kinds of victims we like to think about. I know we have some officers in the room. They can often be very difficult individuals. They are belligerent, they don't want help, they won't ask for help, they don't think they need help. But these kids are being sexually assaulted every single day. We often don't think of them as victims of crime, but they are perhaps among the most vulnerable.

We don't have any programs that will help prevent the repeat victimization, multiple victimization of people. We know in a recent StatsCan report that 2% of the Canadian population experiences 60% of all violence offences. If we could target our efforts to those individuals who we know are victims, who we know are more at risk of being victims again, and try to help focus our efforts on prevention, we can actually prevent individuals from being assaulted or sexually assaulted, or having their homes broken into again.

The research tells us, and in my experience in working with victims for over 15 years, what matters most to victims is the process. They expect information from those involved in the process and the system. They expect to be respected, they expect information, and they expect to have a voice and for people to listen to that voice. If we do all those things well, what the research tells us is that victims are actually less focused on the outcome, which means the sentence. So if we do better by victims throughout the process, they are less concerned about what the sentence is. They certainly expect people to be held accountable, and they expect appropriate sentences, but they will no longer judge the value of the harm done to them by the time we put somebody in prison.

Governing is about making very difficult choices—and I have a lot of respect for those of you who go into politics, because it is about making difficult choices—and in this current fiscal environment those choices are more difficult than ever. I think the Prime Minister said before this budget that it was the most difficult because he had to say no so many times.

As my final recommendation to the Prime Minister and to the government, we have asked that the government refocus its efforts and its priorities on trying to meet the real needs of victims of crime. Sentencing and the "get tougher on crime" agenda will not meet the real needs of victims of crime, who are suffering every day, who call our office every day, who have trouble making their mortgage payments because they have lost their job, whose kids are acting up in school because they can't get counselling. These are real challenges that victims of crime face every single day. Obviously we need to have prisons, and we need to have programs for offenders who are in prison. I think we need to spend, as the Prime Minister talked about yesterday, an equal amount of effort and time on the needs of victims as we do on the needs of offenders.

I'll cut it short there, Mr. Chair, and hopefully try to answer some questions the committee might have.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We appreciate your comments.

We are going to move immediately into question and comments.

Mr. Holland, please.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Sullivan.

Let me start by thanking you for your work over your career as an advocate for victims. I also want to thank you for the work you have done as ombudsman, because I know it was no small task to set up the office. It was starting from scratch and zero, building this office and getting it up and running. I think you've done an excellent job in an extremely short period of time to shed light on where government needs to be focusing and what we need to be looking at.

Maybe I'll start there. It was confounding to me that your term wasn't extended. I wonder if you have any insight into that decision, and particularly in the context—maybe you would concur with me—that right now, more than anything, the office needs stability. Now that it has finally got up and running and you got the wheels on the bus, as it were, now is an opportunity to really get through the heavy lifting and do the work, and when you put somebody new in, you will have to start at zero again.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Thank you for your kind comments.

I won't make any allusions. I asked the minister in December for consideration for reappointment. It has been an absolute honour to serve Canadians in this way, and it's an amazing opportunity to further the work that many of us have done over the years.

I had expected to be judged on what we'd accomplished, and I think we've accomplished a fair bit. As you mentioned, setting the office up was.... I'll be honest: I learned a lot about government and how to work in that environment, so setting the office up took a lot longer than I thought.

When I look back over this past year at what we've actually accomplished, in addition to resolving complaints from victims—which began day one—we provided a report to the government on the Internet on how to improve services for victims and how to help police find more victims. We've haven't got a response from the minister yet to that report, which was submitted almost a year ago, but some of our recommendations have actually been put into legislation.

We put forward recommendations on a sex offender registry that are in the bill. I testified last week on that subject at the Senate committee. There were a number of different things. There was the throne speech; we recommended amendments to the victim fine surcharge in the Criminal Code, and that was done.

I don't know why I wasn't reappointed, but having said that, I'll say that this office is far bigger than I am, and I hope that it reaches far greater heights after I leave it.

Mr. Mark Holland: On that point, the Department of Justice's 2009-10 report on plans and priorities contains some numbers that I found very concerning, and I'd appreciate your comment on them.

For 2009-10, the number of full-time equivalents is eight for your office, the office of the ombudsman, and planned spending is $1.3 million. In 2010-11 it's the same, but for 2011-12 it shows zero: zero full-time equivalent positions and zero dollars. Are you aware that potentially they might close your office? Why do you think their projections show it going down to zero?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I've had no indication that the government intends to close the office. In fact, my understanding is that the government plans to continue the office—

Mr. Mark Holland: Have you seen this report?

● (1550)

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I haven't seen those numbers, so I can't really speak to the main estimates.

Mr. Mark Holland: Maybe we'll leave it at that for the moment, but obviously that's a source of very serious concern, because the office is extremely important.

I want to talk for a moment about the cuts that have been made. According to the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, in the recent budget the government cut 41% of the budget for grants for the victims of crime initiative and 34%, or $2.7 million, to contributions for the victims of crime initiative.

How do you think these cuts are going to affect victims' groups in Canada? Do you think that those on the front lines of helping victims and helping to break the cycles of victimization out there are getting the resources they need to help victims?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Those numbers were brought to our attention as well. They're in the 2010-11 main estimates for the Department of Justice.

I used to work in the non-government world of victim advocacy. At that time the centre was funded by the Canadian Police Association, which I understand is here today on Parliament Hill. They have withdrawn their funding for their own reasons, and right now the centre—and, I think, many other victims' organizations—fully depend on that kind of grant project money from the department, not only to further their knowledge and do research, but also to help them deliver services to victims. Those are victims who just aren't being served anywhere else. They're almost a last resort, so if there are cuts to those kinds of programs, the cuts can have a real impact on the ability of those organizations to serve victims.

You may be aware that under the public safety department there is, I think, $1.5 million in sustainable funding that goes to different community groups that are almost exclusively offender-based groups. They do really important work, and I don't want to take away from that, but of that $1.5 million, I think the Resource Centre for Victims of Crime gets less than $20,000. That's the only group that gets any kind of sustainable funding from the federal government.

Mr. Mark Holland: We know that in two years' time the Correctional Service's budget will be up 96% since 2005 and we know that capital spending on prisons will be up 236%. We know, as you mentioned, that to start off national victims of crime awareness week, the Prime Minister talked about making victims more important, but then spent 95% of the time talking about offenders. I'm wondering how we reconcile that.

The increase in correctional spending is just the tip of the iceberg, obviously. Is that the best approach, or should we be trying to look at ways of dividing that money so that we don't see cuts to these victims' groups and those who are supporting victims, but augmentation, and so that we don't see cuts to crime prevention, but augmentation, and so that we increase community capacity to break cycles of victimization, as well as provide some money for prisons?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I think we've asked the government to balance it out a little better. Taking the Prime Minister's point, the more we spend on how we treat offenders means we can't spend it on how we treat victims. I think everybody has to be really careful.

Yes, sentencing is important to families. They look at that as a measurement of the harm committed against them, and they expect appropriate sentences. But it can't be seen or sold as something that will meet their needs, because their needs are much more basic than that. Realistically, their needs won't be met by whether the offender gets five years or ten years.

I've travelled to many different conferences in the U.S. over the years, where the sentences are far stiffer than we'll ever see in Canada, and talked to victims about their cases. They say, “He got this and that's just not long enough”. The problem is that if all we give victims to measure the harm is a number of years in prison, that number is never going to equal the harm that was done to these people.

We need to focus on their needs on a daily basis. If we can address those, they might have less interest in what the numbers are. They obviously still want offenders to be held accountable. I think most of the victims I talk to want offenders to come out of prison different from when they went in—they have an interest in that—but it can't be seen as a means of meeting their needs.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to the Bloc Québécois now. Ms. Mourani.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Mr. Sullivan, for being here.

I will continue along the same lines as my colleague, Mr. Holland. If I understand correctly, it does not matter if we build more prisons or give criminals stiffer sentences because that does not address the needs of victims. Victims need our assistance on a daily basis, they need help dealing with their pain and the financial difficulties that result from being a victim of crime.

You may be familiar with Bill C-343, introduced by my colleague, France Bonsant. It calls for rules. It seeks to amend the Canada Labour Code, namely to make Employment Insurance benefits accessible to victims of crime and families where a spouse or a son or daughter has been the victim of crime, to allow these individuals to keep their job for at least two years and to collect benefits for at least one year.

What do you think of France Bonsant's bill?

● (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I am familiar with the bill. I think those are the kinds of initiatives that address some of the stuff we hear every day.

We talk of the families whose kids were murdered who just can't go back to work; they can't get past what happened. So some of them lose their jobs, and when they lose their jobs they lose their houses, and their kids are in school and university. Those are some real challenges that victims face on a daily basis.

With victims of sexual assault, we looked at some studies in the U. S. that talked about lost productivity. These things have a real impact on people's ability to perform. We know that for people who were victimized as children, their productivity later in life is affected. So that's a burden on all of us.

Those are the kinds of practical things that could really help address some of the needs of victims. We also suggest to the government, in that same vein, that sometimes when there's a crime such as a homicide, the trial might take place two to five years later. It's difficult sometimes for families to get time off work to involve themselves in that process and take advantage of the rights they have under the system. So some flexibility within that system as well would really help.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Are you saying it would be a good bill for victims? Do I understand correctly? Right then.

In the throne speech, the government announced a desire to help victims of crime. It earmarked approximately $3 million annually to implement measures for families of murder victims, in particular, and for the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

Bill C-343 is not estimated to cost $3 million, that is impossible. If you are trying to help as many families of victims as possible, be they missing children or even suicide victims, there is no way that $3 million is enough to meet the needs of those families and to help fund the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

Do you think $3 million is a realistic amount for a bill amending Canada's Labour Code? Is it enough to compensate victims in terms of employment insurance and to help fund the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime? Is it enough to do all of that at the same time?

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I think it depends on what the specifics of the commitment the government made were. My understanding is that right now, anyone can go, and if they have a medical certificate, they can get up to 15 weeks of leave. My understanding of the government's proposal is that for families of homicide victims, they could get the first six weeks of that time off without a medical certificate. If you look at what is being proposed, it's certainly a modest step forward. I don't want to take anything away. I think anything we do for victims is a positive thing, but it certainly doesn't go as far as the bill you're talking about would go.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Indeed.

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sullivan: You know, we have an average of 600 murders in Canada every year. It doesn't help victims of sexual assault. It doesn't help parents whose kids were abused. There's a whole range of victims who are left out.

Again, I hate to criticize a positive step forward, but it's a relatively modest step forward.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: From what I understand, you think Bill C-343 is far more generous, that it helps the largest number of victims' families possible. It does not call for 15 weeks or 15 weeks plus 6 weeks, but one year. Do you think that 15 or 21 weeks is enough time to recover from the psychological pain caused by the death of a child?

● (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sullivan: It largely depends on the individual. I know families and I've worked with families who go back to work immediately. That's what they need to do. It helps them if they keep busy, and that's what they do. Other families need far longer than that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Very well.

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I think flexibility in the system is really important.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I read your report entitled Every Child, Every Image, and I have to tell you that it really struck me. I have done a lot of work in the area of child abuse. I have long been criticizing the fact that IP addresses are not automatically available to the police. They should be. Bills C-46 and C-47, which we supported, should have been referred to the committee for study, but they died because Parliament was prorogued, and they did not come up again. Law enforcement has been waiting on them for 10 years.

What do you make of this government's willingness to implement these bills in order to give police access to IP addresses?

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I can tell you that this issue was a priority for us almost immediately: making sure that law enforcement had access to the information they needed to not just find the offenders but to sometimes actually find children, find victims, in those homes and stop abuse.

I remember in 2007, then Minister of Public Safety, the Honourable Stockwell Day, said that the government was not going to move in that way. They wouldn't allow warrantless access to information about name and address. We began a dialogue with the government. We said that this was the wrong way to go. You have a report.

I was actually pleased to see the government change its position and actually move in that direction. I think it was a really important thing. It's not a new idea. It was around when the former government was here. There was a similar bill introduced.

We were really pleased to see it. I had hoped that it would come back. I think it's a priority issue. I think there's a lot of talk about justice reform. I think those are among the priority issues, giving law enforcement the tools they need to find offenders, because when they go into an offender's home, they find kids, and those kids are being abused. I've talked to officers who have done this. They've actually walked in and found children they never knew were in those homes. They save a child's life, and that is tremendous. That bill will help law enforcement do that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go over to Mr. Davies next, please.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Sullivan.

First, I want to congratulate you for having the courage of your convictions and for having integrity, because you're speaking out on some things that don't please the government. They don't please the opposition. That tells me that you're talking about things that you think are important, and I think we all, as parliamentarians, should thank you for that.

You've been quoted as saying that millions have been cut in grants for services groups and projects that support victims. Mr. Holland went over the numbers. The grants for the victims of crime initiative has had $350,000 cut. The contribution to the victims of crime initiative, by my math, is $2.7 million, so that's about $3 million. Is that the $3 million of cuts you see happening to the victims file?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes; the money is in the 2010-11 main estimates.

Mr. Don Davies: Often what we hear in debates is that one thing is cut but there's more money going elsewhere. You're an expert on victims policy in this country. Do you know if that represents an overall cut to victims services in this country, or has it been made up by the federal government in some other area that we're not aware of?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: It may be. I haven't looked at other departments, but I know there is $6.6 million in the new budget over two years. It might be taking money out of one area and then putting money back in, but I haven't reviewed the other budgets.

Mr. Don Davies: Well, it's with the budget you're familiar with, because you said millions had been cut in grants for services, groups, and projects supporting victims.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes, and we're referring to the Department of Justice budget.

Mr. Don Davies: So in the Department of Justice there's a cut overall.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: That's according to the main estimates.

Mr. Don Davies: Second, I'm going to read another couple of quotes back to Mr. Sullivan, because I think they will be of interest to our committee, which has been studying at great length the federal corrections system.

You said:

> By focusing solely on sending guys to prison longer, we're not serving the majority of victims of crime out there.

Another quote:

> We have to broaden our perspective of meeting victims' needs, and sentencing might be part of that, but it's a very small part for most victims.

Now the government tells us they're doing that because it's what victims want, or it's what Canadians want. I think you've identified that victims' needs are much more complicated than that. I'm wondering if you can elaborate a little more on that and tell us if you think we're going down the wrong path by focusing on locking more people up for longer and perhaps in harsher conditions, at least vis-à-vis victims.

● (1605)

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I'm sure the committee has had debates about the value of the government's bills and their approach. I'm not here to speak about that. There's evidence that suggests it's the wrong way, and there are other people who think it prevents crime. That's a debate you'll have in Parliament.

It should not be considered as a way to meet the needs of victims. I spent the entire day today with victims groups and with victim service providers yesterday, and that didn't come up at all as a way to meet the real needs. Every day we hear from victims, asking how we get those issues solved. That's just not part of the equation in most cases.

Mr. Don Davies: So to paraphrase, it may be good for some other purpose, arguably, but from what you know, it's certainly not going to help victims in this country.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: That's right.

I should mention briefly that I appreciate your comments from the start. I've actually always been encouraged by any minister we've had to speak freely. I respect that the government has given us this opportunity to do that.

Mr. Don Davies: I think we all do. I think all parliamentarians respect that.

You talked about the child advocacy centre and you said that even a small portion of the money going to prisons could fund a child advocacy centre in every major urban centre—and you've elaborated on that a bit today—to help sexually exploited young people and finance programs designed to prevent re-victimization. Did you ever bring the suggestion for a child advocacy centre directly to this government and recommend that they do that?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: We recommended a national strategy in our Internet report last June. We haven't gotten a response to that report yet. We also recommended this budget and last budget that there be a small pot of $5 million. We knew it was a small amount of money, but we also knew the fiscal times we were in and we wanted to be realistic. So we had asked the government to set aside a $5 million fund to help communities develop these centres.

Mr. Don Davies: So you did, for those centres.

Did you ever receive any answer from the government as to why they chose not to...?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Other than the acknowledgement of the letter, we didn't actually receive a response yes or no.

Mr. Don Davies: Okay, thanks.

I don't know how much time I have left, but I'm interested in another part of the equation, which is prevention.

I've read your report and your recommendations. I think they're very thoughtful and helpful. I'm wondering, from victims' points of view, do you hear any ideas from them, or in the course of your work, that would help us figure out how we could prevent crime? A lot of times we're dealing with victims, which is after the fact, and we're dealing with the carnage and pain of that. Are there any suggestions that you might give us as to how we might prevent crime from happening in the first place?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes, I think there are many different ways. I think a lot of it depends on, to be blunt, with scarce resources, what crimes do you want to prevent?

I think we could focus our efforts in an area of importance, which has always been children, with advocacy centres. We know there's a segment of children who are abused who will go on to abuse others or themselves. With young people who are being trafficked on the street, if we get one child off the street we've prevented that child from being victimized thousands of times. That's crime prevention.

We often know who is most likely to be victimized because they've already been victimized once. If we can help those people understand what the risks are, we could actually prevent those people from being re-victimized. In those kinds of areas, there are actually some very specific things we could do to prevent some very specific horrific crimes.

Mr. Don Davies: The literature I'm familiar with tells me that a very high percentage of people who are sex offenders as adults were themselves sexually abused as children. Is that correct?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes, but it depends on what study you have. Certainly some studies suggest that sex offenders might exaggerate how much they were victims to minimize what they've done, but there is a segment of those who abuse children who themselves were abused. I mean, our prisons are full of people who have been abused. That's a reality.

Mr. Don Davies: So if we wanted to crack down on sex offenders, I take it you'd agree with me that funding things like your child advocacy centre dealing with youth who are sexually exploited would be a significant way we could deal with that.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I believe it would be. And with regard to the exploited youth on the streets, if we could change the public discussion from being that these are just hookers on the streets and we don't need to care about them to being that these are our children on the street who are being sexually assaulted every day, that would awaken the minds of those who are actually engaging in those activities as well.

Mr. Don Davies: Although you've twice recommended that to this government, all you've ever received is an acknowledgement from them saying that they received your recommendation.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: With regard to the advocacy centres, that's true.

Mr. Don Davies: Finally, in your report, “Toward a Greater Respect for Victims in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act”, you talk about the importance of giving victims timely access to information about offenders' progress and their prospects for rehabilitation, and ensuring that victims' voices are heard. The inference, I think, is that the successful rehabilitation of an offender is a critical part of the healing process for victims, or can be an important part of that.

Can you talk to us about the importance of victims having robust, successful rehabilitation programs in our prisons, so that when offenders are reintroduced in the community, victims are not re-victimized by seeing them come out without rehabilitation or frustrated that these people might be there to prey on them or someone else?

● (1610)

Mr. Steve Sullivan: One of the things that I've consistently heard from victims is that they really don't want to see the offender do this to somebody else. Sometimes that means keeping that individual in prison for a long time. Realistically, that's what needs to happen, but victims have a real interest in seeing offenders come out of prison different from when they went in. We know most guys are going to come out.

I've been to parole hearings with families whose loved ones were killed, or with victims themselves, and they walk into a parole hearing absolutely terrified at the prospect of this individual getting paroled. After they sit and listen to, in some situations, how the offender has taken years of programming, they might not agree with whether or not he should be released, but you can almost see, in some cases, the weight off their shoulders. They're not scared any more about being reoffended against, because they see that this individual's taken steps. Maybe he hasn't taken enough, or maybe not as many as they would like, but he's begun the process. So I think it's really important for victims to understand that rehabilitation is actually happening.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go over to the government's side. Mr. MacKenzie, go ahead, please.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Sullivan, for being here. And more importantly, thank you for all of your hard work in setting up this office. Certainly the government respects the work you've done and appreciates it very much.

I have a few questions.

First, in 2006, who would the victims have turned to?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Sorry...?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: In 2006, who would the victims have turned to?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I worked in a non-government world, so they probably would have turned to victims' advocacy groups and—

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: The government had no programs set up prior to 2006, so everything that's been accomplished has been accomplished through your good work, and the work of others with you, since 2007.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: The government's taken a lot of positive steps and built on some of the successes of other governments. They've enhanced the funding for parole hearings. The new funding for Canadians who are victimized abroad is an extremely important proposal. There's been a lot of really important progress in the victims' world since 2007.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: That's my point. We owe you a great deal of thanks for what you've accomplished in that timeframe. We have moved a long way. I suppose in hindsight we would say that these are the beginning steps or the baby steps, and there's always something to be done. I was looking at your list of recommendations. I find them worthy, and I don't see anything in there that I would think people with common sense would take exception to.

We've been hearing some of these things, and I think they might lay into what the Prime Minister was talking about. We've heard a great deal from the public, from victims who feel as though they've been re-victimized and re-victimized. Recommendation 11 deals with one of those small steps towards what we've been talking about, so that victims aren't re-victimized through hearings. We're hearing about some of these things happening right now, certainly in my area. A serial murderer gets to go back and go back and go back every year, and that re-victimizes the families. I'm not sure if the timeline is long enough here, but I think it's a good start.

In all of the things I went through here, I didn't see any particular money issues. I know we've heard the discussions about the main estimates, but there are always supplementaries, and who's to know? I think it would be premature to simply say that's it, no more, it's cut off. I don't know that, but there are always supplementary estimates that show up later.

In this big picture, as we move forward, there's been a great deal accomplished to look at how we best help victims. I think we have looked at this. With regard to your recommendation 13, some of the costs for some of this should come from the people who have created the problem. I'm just wondering if you could expand on anything there—what you've seen and what you're aware of—and how that would help victims in these circumstances.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: We identified early on from the calls we were getting and the research that exists that of the total costs of crime, corrections, police, all those things, it's really victims who bear almost 70% of the costs of crime in Canada. We know that's a real issue, and we heard from people about the challenges they have. Restitution has been around for decades. We actually see today fewer restitution orders in our courts than we saw a decade ago. That's a concerning trend. The numbers aren't that much down, but it's not going up, which concerns me. We actually asked the minister and recommended that he examine some models in the U.S. and others on restitution. He set up a working group that I understand is still looking at different models.

I know the Minister of Public Safety, in Bill C-43, included in there, for the first time, in the CCRA, a reference to restitution, as making it part of an offender's work plan. That's really important, I think, because some judges look at restitution and say, "Well, this guy is going to jail. He doesn't have any money." We know that offenders make some money when they're in prison. We also know that victims actually appreciate, even if the total restitution isn't paid, that efforts are made by the offender. I think it actually has a benefit for the offender as well. It makes the crime real. It makes it matter. As opposed to their being responsible to all of us, they're responsible to a mother who can no longer get in her car to take her kid to school. That means something. I think it would actually mean something to some offenders.

● (1615)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Are you aware of the amendments that were made to the Employment Insurance Act to allow victims of crime to utilize—

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I'm aware of the commitment in the budget. My understanding was that it will make it easier for families of homicide victims to access the first six weeks of those sickness benefits. It's a positive step. I'm the victims ombudsman, so I'm always going to push the envelope as far as we can, and I hope the next ombudsman does that as well. So we're going to push and say that's a great step, but it's not good enough. That's our job.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I would hope as a victims ombudsman and their advocate that no one would ever truly be totally satisfied that everything is being done that should be done or could be done. We do appreciate your comments. I think it's equally fair to say that here's an organization that got set up less than three years ago, has moved light-years from where we were, and has accomplished good things. Certainly the government appreciates it. I know my friends can always point to something that's wrong, but I think there are a lot of good things.

You've made mention about former police officers here. We're all aware of victim impact statements. Certainly some of the things in those victim impact statements would indicate a very strong desire to see a punitive penalty, either incarceration or whatever, for a lot of people. That's a bit of a catharsis for a victim. I'm just wondering if you haven't seen some of that. Being part of what a victim feels vindicated in is that somebody has now received a penalty appropriate for the crime.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Absolutely. Victims have an interest in the ultimate sentence. In our current use of victim impact statements, we don't actually allow victims to speak to a sentence. Judges have decided that's not appropriate for victims to speak to a sentence. That's actually a frustrating aspect for many families.

I think one of the problems that we have in our system, though, is we don't engage victims very well throughout the process. We don't give them the information they need. We don't explain decisions, or plea bargains. Often there are really good reasons for a plea bargain. We don't take the time to do that very well. So victims will ultimately look at that sentence as this is the measurement that the system puts on the harm done. It's often not what they expect because the harm is so great. My concern is that by just focusing on that and not addressing the process issues, we're never going to meet their expectations. I see that in the U.S. all the time. We're just not going to meet that expectation. If we did a better job here, then they'd understand why. They still might not agree, and some will still ask for different sentences. And why shouldn't they? They've been harmed incredibly.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move over to the Liberal Party next. Mr. Kania, please.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sullivan, I've read your report. I think it's a good report.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Thank you.

Mr. Andrew Kania: From questions from Mr. MacKenzie, who just stepped out, I think he would agree with me that you've done a good job. So I wish to state personally that I'm disappointed that you've not been reappointed.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Thank you.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Now, you've not always agreed with the Conservative government on issues. I'll give you two examples. First, I understand that in your role on behalf of victims you've been an advocate in favour of keeping the long-gun registry. Is that accurate?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: That's right.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Could you please explain in your formal role as federal ombudsman for victims of crime why you have that position that the long-gun registry should be kept?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: It hasn't been an issue that I've addressed since being appointed ombudsman, but I can tell you that in my previous victim advocacy work I would take a lot of direction on these issues from what the police say. I was funded by an organization, the police association, the resource centre. I was there for many debates that this organization had about the gun registry. They had many fiery debates. The nice thing about it was they all went for a beer after and were still friends, but the debates were pretty strong. Every time they had a vote, they came down on the side of maintaining the registry.

I look at the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. There are some incredibly dedicated, long-serving police officers, and they support the registry. When the overall law enforcement community is telling us this is an important tool for us—and they're certainly, I think, a vocal minority from my experience with those organizations—then I'm going to trust that they know what they're talking about.

● (1620)

Mr. Andrew Kania: And based on your understanding, they're speaking specifically of protecting victims in saying that the long-gun registry is something that should be maintained. Is that accurate?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes, to protect their officers, and I think they see the value in protecting the community at large as well.

The example an officer gave me once was that they get an order from the court that says Joe Blow, who just beat up his wife, can't have any guns. When they go to his house, if they don't know how many guns Joe Blow has and which guns they are, how do they know they got them all?

So I think that's an example of how law enforcement would see that as a community protection program.

Mr. Andrew Kania: In theory, then, you would agree with me that if the long-gun registry were eliminated, victims would suffer and would be less protected in Canada.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes. I believe it provides protection to the public and victims.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Okay. Thank you.

The second example in terms of how you've criticized the government is that you say they have too much of a disproportionate focus on prison, as opposed to victims.

You were on radio today, I understand, in relation to the Prime Minister's speech. You already gave your own example about how he was focused on criminals as opposed to victims during that speech. You already commented and criticized upon that today. Can you tell us what the Prime Minister should have said today instead, rather than what he did say?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Well, just as a follow-up, I was at an event today in Ottawa on how to get victim services in Ottawa working better together. Somebody said they looked at a newspaper today and saw Karla Homolka's picture, on national victims of crime awareness week. That's the focus of what's being talked about, and that's a concern.

I would have liked to have heard the Prime Minister absolutely talk about the positive things that he and his government have done. To give them credit, I think this office is an important part of that, and funding for Canadians victimized abroad, a number of different areas. However, I would have also liked him to have set forward a vision or at least some ideas about how he's going to do more to serve those victims and meet the needs that the people in that room actually know exist and that they talked about throughout the day: victims of hate crime, male sexual abuse survivors, other victims of crime who aren't being served, many who don't even report the crimes in the first place.

So if I were writing the Prime Minister's speech, which is probably presumptuous of me, I would have talked about victims and probably wouldn't even have mentioned offenders at all.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Okay.

As you may know, there are other persons in your situation who did not have their positions renewed, such as Paul Kennedy, who had critiqued the government on issues. Were you given any reason whatsoever as to why your term was not renewed?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: No. I don't know why the government made the decision it did.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Thank you.

Finally, on page five of your report you talk about, on June 17, 2009, the introduction of Bill C-43, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. Based on your comments here, you believe it would have helped victims in some measure. Is that correct?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes. There were many positive initiatives. I think we pointed out where they could even go a little further, but certainly the steps taken in that bill would have been very positive.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Right. So based on your comment here, you'll agree with me that the Conservatives' decision to prorogue Parliament and thus kill this legislation actually hurt victims.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes, I would agree. The bill would have enhanced services for victims, which is only a good thing, and that has been delayed by however long. I guess we'll have to wait to see.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rathgeber.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Sullivan, for your attendance here this afternoon and for the good work you've done in your time as ombudsman for victims of crime.

Following up on my friend Mr. Kania's questions about the long-gun registry, I know there's significant debate around this table about the effectiveness of the long-gun registry, but I think there's less debate about the efficiency and the costliness of the registry.

So my specific question is, as an advocate for victims of crime, would you agree with my suggestion that the billions of dollars that have been spent on the gun registry might otherwise have been spent more beneficially on victims of crime?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: What I can agree to is that I wish the program had been better managed so we wouldn't have spent all that money. We did waste some. It was mismanaged and there were mistakes made. So would I have liked to have seen that money go to victims of crime? Absolutely.

● (1625)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Specifically on money to fund victims' programs, you're probably aware that the government, in the throne speech, announced its intention that the victim fine surcharge would become mandatory.

A long time ago, when I was practising criminal law, I frequently saw judges not impose the victim fine surcharge for a plethora of reasons, some as simple as the ability of the accused, or at that point the convicted person, to pay it. So I was hoping you might be able to comment on the government's intention to make the victim fine surcharge mandatory.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I think that's a good move. We had actually recommended to the minister to move in that direction.

There was some research that the department released—I'm going to say it was in the summer of 2008—that looked at how the surcharge was being implemented. I don't want to go into a lot of detail, but basically it is mandatory now unless the defence makes an application and can show the judge why the accused can't pay. What's happening, though, is that judges are routinely waiving the victim fine surcharge without any application from the defence, without any information about whether the offender can pay. So they were just not applying the law correctly, and our proposal was that the minister should consider making that mandatory by just taking away the option.

I'm going to guess that he was getting different opinions from the department, but I was pleased to see in the throne speech that the government accepted our proposal as well.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: As am I.

One of your other recommendations is that the Correctional Service be allowed to deduct amounts from an offender's earnings to satisfy restitution or victim fine surcharge orders.

I am well aware, and I'm sure you are, that federal prisoners make pretty meagre earnings. I think $6 a day working in the kitchen is not an uncommon amount. But we recently learned that some prisoners also receive significant amounts through CPP and GIC.

I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on what a victim's entitlement might be with respect to some of those stipends.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: From our perspective, restitutions are court orders. They're part of an offender's sentence that a judge has given them. From our perspective, they're obligated to pay that money, whether they're in prison or not.

That doesn't mean you're going to take every cent that the offender makes while in prison, but for someone who's in there for a long period of time, $6 a day adds up. Restitution orders, depending on the type of crime—certainly financial crime can be quite high—in many cases involve a relatively modest amount of money.

So we think the government should do that. They took some steps, I think, in Bill C-43 to make it part of the correctional plan. For those offenders who have other sources of money and have restitution orders, then that money should be used to satisfy those restitution orders.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I'm not sure if you're aware, but today legislation was tabled to put an end to the faint hope clause, the ending early parole act. I'm assuming you'll agree that it's a positive piece of legislation that will be welcomed by both victims and victim advocates?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes. I've been to judicial review hearings with many families. It's a difficult and painful process. I know there were steps taken a number of years ago to limit the number, but it's a really painful process for families to go through. I would definitely applaud the government for taking those steps.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you.

My last question—this is for you in your role as the advocate, not so much the ombudsman—is with regard to something I'm curious about. The media gets involved in scrums with victims' families outside the courtroom, and I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on whether that is a cathartic or, if you agree with me, a very damaging thing to put the families through.

My specific question is this: do victims services organizations in the communities provide, or ought they provide, media support or training to victims' families in high-profile criminal cases?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Probably not; certainly no court-based service or police-based service that I know of would provide media assistance. Certainly non-government groups would probably help families.

I mean, it can be cathartic for some individuals. Some people have the need to speak out, if it's a loved one who was murdered, to represent their loved one in the press; maybe they weren't portrayed very well in the court. For other families, they just feel overwhelmed. When you shove a camera in front of them, they feel obligated to answer, even though they may not want to.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: I find it very exploitive.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: It is, absolutely. The challenge—this is the next point I was going to make—is that there are some families who would like to have attention on their loved ones, but those victims may not be the ones who make the news very well.

For instance, a family might want to talk about their case—maybe they feel there's an injustice, or their loved one is missing—but if their case is just not very "sexy", they're not going to get a lot of media attention the way a lot of the serial killer cases might.

That can be damaging to families as well, because we're actually choosing which victims are more important.

● (1630)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Before we go over to the Bloc Québécois, I have taken somewhat of an interest in the long-gun registry myself.

I met today with the police association representatives, and I asked them a question. You may find it interesting, and you may want to comment. I asked them, "What does the registration of firearms accomplish that the licensing doesn't?" They told me, "Nothing." In fact, using your very example is what they said to me: if they went to a home, saw that there were two guns registered there, and stopped looking after two guns were found, that would be absolutely absurd.

I mean, that's a bit of a concern. They just had their meetings, and their sole source of information yesterday, at their presentations, was the Canada Firearms Centre, which has a vested interest in maintaining their jobs.

I don't know if you have a response to that, but it is a concern to me that they're not talking to maybe university professors who have investigated this.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: All I will say, Mr. Chair, is that I probably know some of the individuals you met with today. They're good people. This is an issue they've debated almost every single year—at least when I was connected to them—at their annual general meeting or executive board meeting.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I know they brought in advocates on both sides. It's obviously an issue they continue to discuss. There's isn't unanimity. I mean, that's the reality.

The Chair: Mr. Desnoyers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to correct something that Mr. Rathgeber said about maintaining the firearms registry. A few weeks ago, Minister Toews appeared before the committee. In response to a question about the cost of the firearms registry, he gave the same answer as Mr. Rathgeber, in others words, that it cost billions of dollars. He knows full well that the cost of the registry today is no more than a few million dollars. Now that everything is in place, it no longer costs what it once did to save the lives that can be saved. So when that government argument is trotted out, it does not do the registry justice in the end.

You mentioned a number of tools that the government does not take into account, tools that could be used to help victims. You mentioned centres that victims could go to on a regular basis. These centres are seriously lacking. You said there were several hundred in the U.S. That is part of your tool kit, just like the firearms registry, of course. Punishment is another one of those tools, as you said, as well as police access to IP addresses.

You also said that, according to what you had been told by victims, offender rehabilitation and prevention were important in terms of helping victims. Could you elaborate a little more on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Sure. On the question about the registry, my understanding was that we were talking about costs from a long time ago. Whether you agree with it or not, there was some mismanagement of how it was set up. But you're right that the costs today are certainly much lower.

One of the things we hear consistently from victims is they don't want anybody else to go through what they've gone through. Rehabilitation for offenders who can be rehabilitated and want to be rehabilitated is extremely important. I think that matters to victims.

We can prevent people from being victims of crime in the first place; that's prima productive. I've met some families and victims who've gone through restorative justice programs. The Correctional Service of Canada has an amazing program where victims can ask to meet with their offenders. For some crimes that none of us would ever expect victims would want to meet their offenders, they've done that. It can be very cathartic for both the victim and the offender, because the victim gets a chance to hear information they didn't have before, and they get a chance to express to the offender how the crime impacted them. I think that's an important part of rehabilitation.

For offenders who really want to change, knowing what they did and how it impacted somebody is really important. That's why impact statements are important. In the States they have victim impact panels—different methods. But victims have incredible interest in making sure that when offenders leave prisons they're different people.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You made 13 recommendations to help victims, each more worthwhile than the next, in my view. If you could make one recommendation with respect to offender rehabilitation and the Correctional Service of Canada, what would it be?

We heard from many people in correctional services who said that basically we may no longer have the same type of rehabilitation as we did before. They want to cut programs such as using farms for correctional centres, which are worthwhile rehabilitation programs. They want to do away with them. So what would you recommend to corrections officials on this issue, if you could?

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I'll be honest, I don't know a lot about what's currently being done in prisons for offender programs. I guess in an overall recommendation I would encourage Corrections Canada to build effective, evidence-based programs that will change the behaviour of offenders in prison.

I say that as a victim advocate. I know people come to support offenders, and I support that kind of work. But for me it's not about the individual offender; it's about the public. I don't really care so much about whether he's a nicer guy; I care that he's not going to hurt somebody else. So effective, evidence-based programs that can actually help change someone's behaviour are incredibly important.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go over to Mr. Norlock, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Sullivan, for all you've done over the past few years, going from zero to some very positive things, which have been mentioned throughout today.

You do realize that when you answer some of the questions the headline is not going to be about all the positive things you've done; it's about what you've said. The newspaper headline won't mention all the good things, it will just mention the things that are negative. I think I'd like to concentrate on some positive things.

Since I've been here, no one who represents a government agency or even private agencies who get federal funding ever came and said, “We get enough, you don't need to give us any more, thank you.” It's never enough, no matter what is done. It doesn't matter whose government it is, it's never enough. But it's their job to poke at the holes. But at poking at holes, we have to be careful not to, you know the old saying, throw out the baby with the bath water. So we don't want any....

Please correct me if I've misinterpreted this. When you were referring to legislation, that it doesn't help victims, would you not agree there needs to be a balanced approach from the government's perspective? You're dealing specifically with victims, but when you're dealing with the whole justice and public safety envelope, would you not agree that we need a balanced approach through programs and services for victims—in which, I think you said, we've invested quite substantially since the creation of your office—and legislation that will put the offenders behind bars? The reason this government looks at sentencing has to do very much with what you've just said: it has to do with victimization. What we leave out of the whole spectrum, and I think you could address this best, is the continued victimization from the time the offence occurs. And most of the time, with thirty years in policing, I can tell you....

Let me give you one example, and I want you to comment on this: something as simple as mailbox baseball. You know what that is. A bunch of young yahoos, either with or without alcohol, think it's a lot of fun to go down a rural road and bash mailboxes. I investigated one where someone's aunt who had just died had done some tole painting on the mailbox and that was the only thing they had from their aunt. The yahoos came and bashed the mailbox. When it gets reported to the police, it's not a big deal. When it gets reported in the newspaper, it's not a big deal. But that person had something that meant so much to them and now it's nothing. They desecrated the memory.

I wonder if you could comment on some of the things that you've experienced.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Just to pick up on your example, we tend to look at property crimes as less serious. There are people out there whose homes are broken into, who are tremendously impacted by that crime. If somebody broke into my house, maybe I wouldn't be as upset, but if you're a single mother with a couple of kids, the fact that someone came into your home, where you and your children sleep at night, and took stuff, or did whatever, that could have a tremendous impact on people. We tend to minimize that. And unfortunately, we don't have enough victim services to give them services, but you're right.

Let me just say, you're absolutely right that the media loves the bad-news stuff. I learned that in my career prior to being ombudsman. It's been an incredible honour for me to lead this office. I got an e-mail today from an individual whose daughter was murdered, who just said this office was a light of hope for him. That's just tremendous that we could have that impact on people's lives. This opportunity has allowed me to do that, and the office will continue to do that far beyond my days here. My job is to give the government advice on victims. And like you said, we're all going to come and say it's not enough, because it never is when you're advocating for someone. I would never take away from the positive things this government or any government has done. We might disagree on how you continue down that road to improve on those things.

● (1640)

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

I'd like to talk about the financial aspect, because that's been mentioned several times.

Under the main estimates for 2009-10, your office, the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, was allocated $1.295 million; and in 2010-11, $1.309 million. So you have just about a 2% increase. But from 2001 to 2006, under the heading “Grants for the Victims of Crime Initiative”, there was a five-year program by the previous government of $2 million per year.

Would you not agree there was a change in some of the nomenclature of where we put the money? The “Grants for Victims of Crime Initiative”, the way it's expressed in the estimates in 2006-07, went from $2 million to $2.6 million—which is included in the envelope of victims funds—and in 2007-08 to $2.75 million, and in 2008-09 to $8.6 million. So there were some significant increases in that budgetary envelope—granted, this year the estimates are $5.25 million, still far in excess of the $2 million in 2005-06.

The problem with numbers and different budgets in different places is that we can swing them all around. I want you to comment quickly on whether the above is accurate or not.

Of course I come from the provincial side, and I can tell you that in 30 years, up to 2000, the Province of Ontario provided tremendous funding for victims' organizations. I think of one that covers at least half my riding; it used to be called VCARS. Policemen now actually call people to the scene who are volunteers funded by the province.

We can't just take what the federal government does separately. Have there not been increases in funding for victims? Could you comment on that?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: My focus is on the federal government, because that's our mandate. But regarding the programs you talk about, there's a similar program here in Ottawa. Those services are actually funded through victim fine surcharges. So we hope to see more resources go to those services.

I don't have the numbers you're referring to here. I just have the 2010-11 main estimates with me. My understanding is that $52 million was committed to the victims initiative in 2007. That's a significant amount of money. But as the ombudsman, when I see an indication that money is going to be taken out going forward, then I'm going to have to raise that concern. That's not to take away from the positive things that have been done, but if we want to build on those and if it looks like money is being taken out, it makes it more difficult, I think, for us to do those things.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Holland, please.

Mr. Mark Holland: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think this sometimes lies at the heart of the problem with the government, which is that there seems to be a sense that independent officers of Parliament, whether the public complaints commissioner for the RCMP or, in your case, the ombudsman for victims, should be cheerleaders-in-chief and not dare criticize the government. I think it's entirely appropriate that an ombudsman both lauds what he agrees with and criticizes what he disagrees with. It strikes me as bizarre that this would be criticized.

As we're delving a little bit into the debate on Bill C-391, the long-gun registry bill, I can't resist asking the question, because the question was initially about setting up the cost of that registry. The Auditor General told us in 2006 that the cost of the long-gun registry would be $3 million a year, and that the RCMP said they would save $2.9 million by cutting it. We also know that we had the deputy commissioner of the RCMP in front of this committee saying that it was essential to doing his job.

So would you think that $2.9 million that would be saved would be an intelligent cut for the government to make?

● (1645)

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I didn't come to talk about the program, but I think the registry is an important public safety tool, an important law enforcement tool. So I would not agree with cutting that program.

You're right, we talked earlier about the amounts that were spent setting it up, but I think it's become a relatively cost-efficient program, if you're looking at government programs.

Mr. Mark Holland: Thank you for that digression. I realize it is a bit of a digression and we're jumping into a debate that we're going to have.

I want to talk about community capacity. One of the concerns I have is that when there's talk about victims, the discussion about victims really centres on the most sensational cases. Obviously, those are serious cases, but the majority of victims are people at the margins, people who themselves are at risk and often lack basic services and access to things that can break cycles of victimization.

I'm wondering if you can talk about who is a victim and how important that community capacity is in breaking cycles of victimization and whether or not there's been enough focus on that particular area.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I think this gets down to the media and popular culture and what people think crime is. The statistics tell us that the people who are most likely to be fearful of being victims of violent crime are the elderly people. The truth is, they're the least likely people to actually be victims of violent crime. The least likely to be fearful are kids aged 15 to 24. They're actually the most likely to be victims of violent crime. Why is that? It's because they're out at night. And our parents or grandparents are at home and they're watching TV and watching the crime shows. So people have a misperception of what is actually happening in our communities.

Who's the most likely to be a victim? It's someone aged 15 to 24, unemployed or a student, who goes out in the evenings. That also tends to be who is most likely to be an offender as well, so there are some interesting discussions that can take place around that. It's a difficult discussion to have with people, to really talk honestly about what crime is and what it looks like. To do that, I think if we're going to talk about solutions and what does the public think, they actually have to have reasonable information about what crime is.

We can look at, for example, multiple victimization. A third of sexual assault victims are at risk of being sexually assaulted again in that same year. We have evidence that people who have had their homes broken into are more likely to have their homes broken into again within that first year. Some numbers from the States actually talk about people having their homes broken into within weeks. That's one specific area we could look at and say this person was a victim of this, so let's give them some information that might help prevent them from being a victim of this crime again.

Mr. Mark Holland: Often I don't think we think of this, but victims and offenders are oftentimes coming out of these same cycles and into the same problems with addictions and being on the margins and being vulnerable. So we have to think of those issues as sometimes being interrelated. If we don't properly deal with the victims, they can well turn into offenders as an expression of dealing with all of the issues that they've had to deal with as victims.

We've talked about the cuts that have been made to front-line support for victims, but there have also been significant cuts to crime prevention. The amount of spending on crime prevention is way down, down more than half since 2005. When I talk to groups like Boys and Girls Clubs and the Salvation Army, and others who have stopped getting funding, what they're saying is they're losing the capacity to stop crimes before they begin. What we've heard from Dr. Irvin Waller and others is that a dollar spent in crime prevention is going to save eleven dollars in terms of both incarceration and also release and having to deal with the fallout of it. So I'm wondering if you see the role of the office of the ombudsman as also having a role in advocating for things like crime prevention to stop there being victimization in the first place.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I know Dr. Waller quite well. He's not only a crime prevention advocate but a very strong victims' advocate as well. I had arranged for a meeting between our office and the National Crime Prevention Council some weeks ago. I had hoped that we could really examine what kinds of programs they have that might address some of the things we talked about today, multiple victimization, young people on the street. There's a shelter in Winnipeg run by women who actually have experience on the street, who try to get young aboriginal women off the street and give them a home and shelter, for those kids who are trying to find a way out. It's those kinds of prevention programs.

I hope that the office continues to build that relationship with the National Crime Prevention Council to see how we can actually help educate them about some areas where a real difference can be made. There's a connection. Obviously, preventing crime is the best victim protection you can have. There's a connection there. When we can look at the evidence and say “These people are particularly vulnerable of being victims of crime; let's target some programs towards them”, we could actually prevent them from suffering sometimes pretty tremendous things.

● (1650)

The Chair: We'll have to leave it there. We can come back if you wish.

Ms. Glover, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to express my congratulations to you for doing this wonderful work. I also want to thank you for the work that you've done, because I know it's not easy to be a victims' advocate. I too have been a victims' advocate for many years, and continue to be, in my role as a parliamentarian.

I want to correct a couple of things.

As my learned friend Mr. Norlock pointed out, the newspapers will publish the bad news. If it bleeds, it leads. I would hate it if anyone left here talking about Homolka. It was not a story that was put out by government, the opposition, or any of the parliamentarians here, sir. It's a story made by media. It is a picture taken by media. It's the impression they have left on the national victims of crime week.

I certainly agree with you that it's not the message we want to leave during this very important week. If I had the power to erase it, I certainly would, but I would not want anyone to think it came about as a result of anything that anyone here did. I think all of my friends would agree that isn't what we think of when we think about victims.

However, in response to Mr. Davies, you said something about victims not really having any sense that the sentence or the punishment helps them in any way. I want to offer you an opportunity to amend or correct that. When you answered Mr. Davies, did I hear correctly when you said victims really don't care about the sentences?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: No. In fact, a couple of times I think I said that victims obviously have a vested interest in an appropriate sentence that holds offenders accountable. Victims want to see that. My point was that whether the sentence is longer or not, it doesn't really address the real needs they have on a daily basis in trying to heal their wounds, provide food for their families, or get counselling for their kids. But yes, they have an interest in an appropriate sentence.

I know your time is short. I'll be brief. The Prime Minister is a lot smarter than I am. He knows that if he mentions Karla Homolka, it's a story the media's going to talk about. My point was that she wasn't someone who should have been talked about during the national victims of crime awareness week.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I appreciate your clarification on that point.

I too want to suggest to you, sir, that as a victims' advocate, I speak with families often. I can tell you that Paul Cherewick's family is very concerned about the sentence. Paul Cherewick was murdered. His family is concerned about the accused's sentence. Of course, he was out on bail. They knew he was a fairly dangerous person. Their son was murdered as a result of an interaction with him. They were worried another offence would occur, and, sure enough, he almost killed another person while waiting for bail.

I take slight issue with your position. Again, I've done this for a very long time. I believe that at times, case by case, victims care about the sentence, how long the sentence is, when the sentence is imposed, and when the person is to be removed from society, because they care about public safety. It's why I believe we have so much support from victims when we talk about making public safety a priority, for example, when providing pardons.

In that case, do you not agree that that statement is important and that victims get some kind of satisfaction out of that statement? Can you give me that?

● (1655)

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I'll agree with you on this: I think sentencing is important to victims. I guess we might disagree on how important it is to victims and whether it really addresses their needs. I too have been with families who were concerned about the ultimate sentence and didn't think it was appropriate for the harm committed.

I don't know that we disagree. Maybe we disagree to a certain degree, but sentencing is a part of the process.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I hate to interrupt, but I only have a little time.

That's what I wanted to hear. It's a part of many things. I don't think we give credit to some of the victims, and I don't want to take that away from them. They clearly say this is an important part.

Ricky Acheson is someone who committed some severe crimes. His own family begged that he not be released, because they felt he was at risk to reoffend. The risk assessment reports that we rely on so heavily and put so much money toward, because we want to see the right thing done, would mean nothing if we didn't acknowledge the value to public safety that they actually provide.

I know I'm running out of time, but I want to ask you a quick question. There's a national victims' services program. I want to give you an opportunity to explain this to us. I know additional funding was given to Correctional Service of Canada for the national victims' services program. Can you tell us what CSC did with the additional funding?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I think I mentioned it, but if I didn't then I apologize. It was part of the announcement in 2007 for the victims initiative. Previous to that, Correctional Services provided information to victims, but it was often done through individuals working in prisons who had a bunch of other duties, and they also had to call the victims at times. So they took the money and created a stand-alone service for victims, and my understanding of a recent assessment of the program is that the victims are very satisfied with it.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: And that helped them know when there was a release, right?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Absolutely.

It's a better service, and it has better interaction with victims.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Right, because some of them were afraid. This is why I come back to saying there are so many tools that we have to help victims. I don't want to take away from any victim's desire or need to know about that part of this. I do believe we are doing a job to address rehabilitation. I believe we are doing a job to address corrections needs and offenders' needs, and we are doing what we can for victims as well.

I have to concur with what was said earlier about the money. You would have no funding and had no funding even though for decades victims had been asking for help. You would have nothing if it weren't for the fact that in the year the Conservative government took power, money was dedicated so that your office could be created.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I worked with families for 15 years to see the office created, so absolutely.

Regarding the Correctional Services program, I'll say that we've worked incredibly well with them to address some really challenging cases that victims brought to us. The dedication of those people there, and at the National Parole Board as well, to really resolve those issues actually made our success possible.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Very good. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Glover.

We have gone through our entire lineup, but it has been indicated to me, Ms. Mourani, that you have one brief question you still want to ask.

Mr. Kania, you have a brief question, and then Ms. Mourani.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Thank you.

Briefly, Mr. Sullivan, in the 2009-10 budget there was $1.3 million. In 2010-11 there was $1.3 million. For 2011-12, it's empty for now, but I assume that's going to change. In any event, my question is whether you have enough money to do your job at the $1.3 million, assuming that it was frozen again. Do you think it should be something else? And if so, why?

I'm just looking to make sure that you're able to do your job based on your mandate.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Setting the office up, we actually, in the first two years, weren't fully staffed, so we didn't use all the money. It's just been in the last year or so that we've been fully staffed, and I think the results we've had prove that. Our calls are up. Our Internet visits are up, I think, 100%. Our office is a relatively new office, and it's challenging to get the word out to victims that we exist, but I think we're doing a better job with that.

Moving forward, I have visions of what we might have done and it might have required more funding. The next ombudsperson might have different views.

● (1700)

Mr. Andrew Kania: If you were putting a request in now for the next fiscal year, what would it be, and why?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: To be honest, I haven't thought about it, because I know I'm not going to be here for the next year. But look, the more people in that office who know how to help victims, the more resources we have, the more help we're going to give victims and the more work we're going to do with other departments.

In the coming years, I think you'll see the office grow in its effectiveness, and I think it will require more funding as it's more established.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Mourani, you had a brief question.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sullivan, your Every Image, Every Child report is key. Right now, children are being sexually assaulted, and at a younger and younger age. The violence they suffer is increasingly brutal, and the images are being shown on the Internet. The report says that 750,000 pedophiles are online at any given time, and that 37% are family members and 36% are acquaintances. So they are people who can be caught easily. They are not in Thailand or other countries where they cannot be located.

Correct me if I am wrong. In the 1990s, almost 5,000 images were said to be on the Internet, and today there are millions of images and videos. Currently, police officers have to make a request to obtain an IP address. IP addresses are essential. Let's talk about Bills C-46 and C-47. Bill C-46 sought to require Internet service providers to have the technology to keep information, and Bill C-47 made it possible to obtain IP addresses. Both bills died on the order paper, Mr. Sullivan.

As we speak, children are being assaulted. Police have been waiting for 10 years, and nothing has happened. Are you angry? I am, because these two bills did not come back up. Do you think that is normal?

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I was really encouraged when the government took the step to introduce the bill, because in 2007 there had been an indication that this wasn't going to be the case.

Right now, depending on where you are in the country and what ISP company you're working with.... Some ISPs will actually cooperate with law enforcement, and some won't. A lot of the bigger companies will.

We've heard about cases from law enforcement. They have an IP address. They actually are able to trace the guy to where he lives, and they go, because he's trading in child pornography. There was a case, I think, that the Ottawa police worked on with law enforcement on the other side of the river, in Aylmer. They actually found and arrested the person. He had with him his 11-month-old son, who he was sexually abusing. Now, law enforcement had no information that this was taking place. They had no idea that this child was in that situation. Had they not tracked him down, that child today, four years later, would still be undergoing sexual abuse.

The longer we delay these initiatives to give law enforcement the tools, the more kids are going to be abused. I think that makes everybody angry. We have the tools. We have agreement, frankly, from what I hear, in Parliament, to move forward to give law enforcement the tools, yes, to catch the bad guys but also to save kids' lives. That's tremendous.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: In closing, you have been the federal ombudsman for victims of crime ever since the position was created in 2007. If you looked at everything that this government has done, be it in terms of legislation, funding, repression, prevention or rehabilitation, what percentage of the government's efforts would you say went to fighting crime and what percentage went to helping victims? From 2007 to today, how would you rate the government's actions in terms of percentages? Did it spend 90% of its efforts on fighting crime and 10% on helping victims? Give me a percentage.

● (1705)

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Sullivan: That's a difficult question. I would say that a number of our recommendations the government has acted on in legislation. Most of the legislation hasn't been passed yet, but steps have been taken. Honestly, I'm not sure I can give you a number.

I'll tell you what concerns me, though:if I were the Prime Minister today the Internet bill would be my absolute priority; it would be number one in the justice reform areas.

There are a couple of other areas that I think in corrections.... As far as my time as ombudsman is concerned, that report you're referring to is I think one of the most important things we ever did. That absolutely has to be a priority. The child access centres have to be a priority. Those are children who we know we could save and rescue, and make a difference in their lives.

And I agree, Ms. Glover, that sentencing is important and that victims have an interest in it, but we can't over-emphasize that in the importance of victims, because it's not going to save that child. Whether or not we put the guy at the end of day in prison for ten years or fifty years, if we don't get that child out of the home it doesn't matter. That 12-year-old girl on the streets, her pimp and her customer aren't going to jail for a very long time, if they go to jail at all, but we can get her off the streets. That's really what I'm talking about, the balance to say let's hold offenders accountable, but let's save victims' lives when we can. Let's put money into those programs to get those kids and give them a start in life.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Davies, please.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you.

I just have a couple of quick questions, Mr. Sullivan. When we're talking about negative media and there are negative things and positive things, your quote was that you learned about the media picking up the negative over the positive, and you said, "I learned that in my career prior to being ombudsman." Yesterday you were quoted as saying that the federal government is shortchanging victims and that victims of crime are "on the short end of the stick". Those are pretty strong words, in light of the fact, I take it, that you were very aware that those words would be picked up. What I want to ask you is you must have done that deliberately, and I'm just wondering what message you were trying to send.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I think the message was exactly what I said. Again, I come at this as the ombudsman for victims of crime. My sole mandate is to advocate to the government for victims of crime. If I see what appears to be money cut or areas that I think aren't being addressed where we could help rescue children, then I've been around the media long enough to know that they're going to report what you tell them, and if you tell them really strong things they're going to report that. So I didn't mince words. I was completely honest and forthright. I believe more needs to be done for victims in this country. I believe that right now, with this imbalance, they're being shortchanged.

Mr. Don Davies: Secondly, you talked about misperception in the public and you felt that it's important as part of the whole equation that reasonable information of what crime is gets out. Just about every credible source will tell us that crime rates are falling in just about every area. I think there are some exceptions, but generally as a trend it's going down. Have you seen those figures?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes, certainly the official crime rates indicate that. I've also reviewed the victimization surveys that we do every five years. I think the next one is actually coming out later this year. I know in 1999 to 2004 there was a 2% increase in crime, but it was focused on property areas, and violent crime remained pretty stable.

Mr. Don Davies: I've looked at those victimization rates as well from 1999 to 2004, and they went up in some and they went down in others. Overall, it seems statistically insignificant. Would you agree with me that unreported crime, at least in that period of time, wasn't marginally different?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: Yes, there's no indication that I've seen really that there's a huge increase in crime.

Mr. Don Davies: Would you agree with me that given that crime rates are going down, and there doesn't seem to be any real difference in unreported crimes, this would be another reason to suggest that we should be putting our focus more on things like helping victims and perhaps rehabilitating offenders and prevention, rather than locking people up for longer, if we want to help in that?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I think you see the trends across western countries. In the U.S. the crime rates appear to be dropping. Someone suggested that's because they use prisons a lot more than we do. But you can look at other international countries that are comparable, and they haven't raised their prison populations and their numbers are also going.... It's a trend. As the population ages, that number of 15- to 24-year-olds who commit the most crime is going to get smaller. So there are going to be fewer people committing crime. I think that's point number one.

The other point is with respect to sentencing. We need to have the measures in place to make sure that those people we know—we talked about Mr. Acheson, and I'm somewhat familiar with the case—through our best estimates are a high risk to reoffend don't come out of prison and re-victimize someone. I believe we need measures—and this might be somewhat off topic—at the end of their sentence. Right now, despite how high of a risk they are, we let them go because we have to. I think that's an area. There are people who need to stay in prison for a very long time, sometimes the rest of their lives. I just don't think it's a solution, at least in the name of victims, as a general approach to this problem.

● (1710)

Mr. Don Davies: My last question, so I can get it in here, is do you have any words of advice to your successor?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I would tell him or her they have an incredible staff to work with, and I would just tell him or her to be true to your mandate. Your mandate is to advocate for victims of crime, and that may or may not put you in agreement with your minister of the day, whatever party he or she may be from, whatever government's in power. Just stay true to the mandate that you have to promote victims' issues and continue building on what the staff in that office has been able to achieve.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Sullivan.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacKenzie, please.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Norlock's comment or prophecy turned out to be absolutely true. Some of the national press are now asking, because there are no budget dollars going way out in the future, if the office is going to close.

I just want to make the statement very clearly that main estimates do not contain all government funding for the year, and that's why we have supplementary estimate processes. This government remains committed to ensuring that victims have a stronger voice in the criminal justice system. I'm quite certain that Mr. Sullivan has done such a great job that in fact the position has been advertised, as per standard procedure for such appointments.

So in the event that somebody in the press took one part of it and thought that was the end of the office, this is just the beginning of the office, and for that we truly thank you.

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I'll just say on that, we've been telling victims who have called, who have heard, that the office will remain. Certainly I hope I haven't given any indication, and there is no indication that the office is going to close. The office is bigger than me; it's going to continue to grow and be more effective and serve more victims. My advice to my successor is that I just encourage them to more success than we had.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: And we appreciate what you've done. Thank you very much.

The Chair: There are two more people on my list here for brief questions.

Mr. Kania.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. MacKenzie.

My question is simple. Are you speaking for the minister and is the government committing to keeping the office running—

The Chair: I don't know if that's in order, because we have a witness here and you have to direct your questions to the witness.

A voice: Ask tomorrow in the House.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Mr. MacKenzie brought this up. I don't want the national press to be confused, so I'm just wondering if that was a commitment.

The Chair: That question is out of order.

Are there any other questions?

Mr. Don Davies: A point of order here, Mr. Chairman. The thing is Mr. MacKenzie essentially gave evidence. That didn't come through the witness. Mr. MacKenzie just made a statement, so I think it's appropriate. I think it's appropriate to do that.

Mr. Rick Norlock: So now we start asking each other questions?

The Chair: I don't want to start this.

Mr. Don Davies: That wasn't really a question for the witness.

The Chair: This is not going to go anywhere.

Mr. McColeman, wrap it up, please.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): I too want to add my voice to our thanks to you for the work you've done, the great work that got started.

You can see the to and fro of adversarial politics. There's a lot of innuendo, a lot of “what if this had happened or that had happened”. I guess I'll just have to continue down along that line.

When you had mentioned earlier in your testimony that you had advocated for years and years and years for an office of the ombudsman, how many years actually did you advocate to the previous government?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: First, let me say this has been the most fun I've had in the three years I've been here.

Second, really, I sat with Marjean Fichtenberg in Prince George, British Columbia, almost exactly 15 years ago today, and there was a coroner's inquest because her son was murdered by a federal parolee. That jury recommended, because of the treatment she received, an office of this kind—I don't know if they called it an ombudsman—and I worked with Minister McKay. Other members of Parliament came before the justice committee when they did their CCRA report and talked about the need, and they actually recommended that kind of thing.

So it was probably at least ten years, twelve years.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Just so it's on the record that I've asked this question, this actual ombudsman—because I've only been here just a little longer than 18 months—wasn't set up until the Conservative government came into existence?

● (1715)

Mr. Steve Sullivan: It was announced in 2007 by Minister Day and Minister Nicholson.

Mr. Phil McColeman: By the way, I must digress for a second and say that all this insinuation I think was a little disrespectful, and I apologize to you, sir, for the innuendo of the comments that led to your not being renewed in your position. I thought it was actually disrespectful to you in terms of how it was presented, and I apologize on behalf of this committee for that, because there was innuendo, definitely, attached to those comments, and it wasn't appropriate, in my mind.

Having said that, the other thing that was brought up was by colleagues across the way in terms of their outrage at this legislation having died because of prorogation. I just wonder, in the case of the human trafficking bill that we put forward, what your thoughts were in terms of the agreement. Was it a good bill, in your mind? Should it have been supported by all members of Parliament?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: I'm familiar with Mrs. Smith's work. I've appeared at different conferences with her. I think that's an area of targeted, specific reform for a group of individuals who commit horrific crimes, and the response of the system isn't adequate right now. I've been before committees for a lot of years, and have never been accused of not wanting to hold offenders accountable. That to me is an example of a targeted area on individuals who commit horrific crimes and aren't being held accountable, as we should.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Specifically, the outrage is a little disingenuous when one party in the House of Commons didn't vote for that—and I'd like to say that on the record. The Bloc members did not support that.

The last one I'll finish up with was introduced in the Senate today—the faint hope clause. Do you think it might go the same way as the mandatory minimums for human trafficking when it comes to actual debate? Should Parliament be unanimous on that one as well?

Mr. Steve Sullivan: It's an initiative I support. I have been to the hearings with the families, and they're tremendously difficult for them. If we can relieve them of that burden it will be a good thing, and I encourage all members to give the bill serious consideration.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I'll finish with that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sullivan.

This meeting stands adjourned.

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