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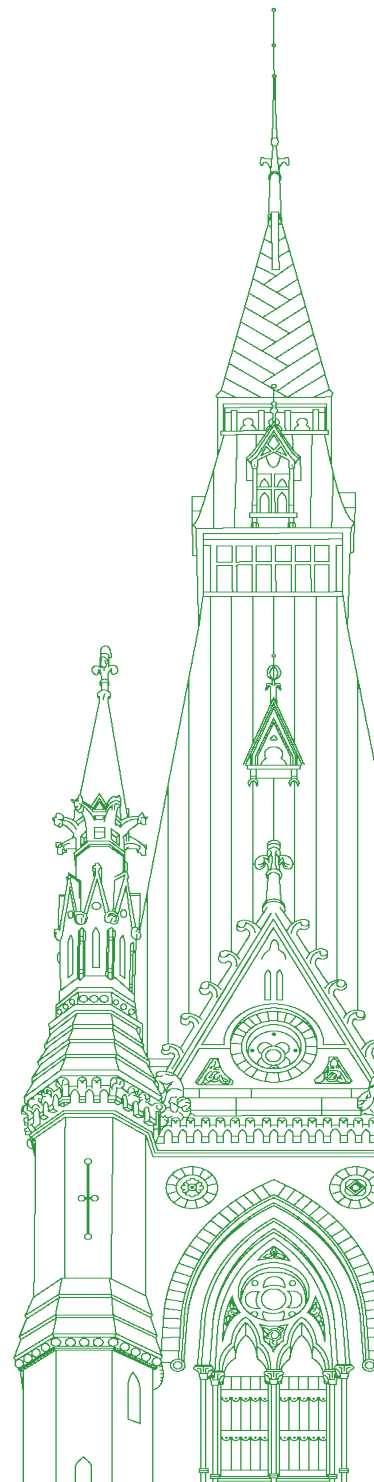
Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 100

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 100 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members and witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those in the room, your mic will be controlled by the proceedings and verification officer. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available. You have the choice, at the bottom of the screen, of “floor”, “English” or “French”. If interpretation is lost, please immediately inform us.

Although this room is equipped with a powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to the interpreters and cause serious injuries. We're asking you to be very aware of your earphone getting near your mic.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

As you know, today we are starting a very important study. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, November 27, 2023, the committee will commence its study of the implementation of a red dress alert.

I want to give a bit of context on this as we're starting.

In its 2019 final report, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls called for the establishment of a nationwide emergency number to ensure consistent protocols to investigate cases of missing indigenous women and girls across provinces and territories. The committee agreed to study a red dress alert after the House of Commons declared that violence against indigenous women, girls and 2-spirit people in Canada is an emer-

gency. The House called on the Government of Canada to provide investments for a red dress alert system through a motion adopted unanimously on May 2, 2023. The committee will be hearing from expert witnesses on how such an alert system should be implemented here in Canada.

To begin, we have two witnesses for our first panel. I would like to welcome them. Online, from the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, we have Leslie Varley. She is the executive director. From the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, we have Jennifer Jesty, who is the emergency resiliency manager.

We are going to start off by providing you with five minutes each for your opening comments.

I'm going to pass it over to you first, Leslie, for the first five minutes.

Ms. Leslie Varley (Executive Director, British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres): The red dress alert system in British Columbia must be a central feature of a comprehensive provincial service delivery model, which should be led by indigenous women representatives of and should provide services to all first nations, Inuit and Métis, urban and off-reserve, status and non-status indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQTT+ people. I'll get to the “why” shortly.

The province is thinking about two red dress alert pilot projects in B.C. One would be along the Highway of Tears, which runs over 700 kilometres, from Prince Rupert to Prince George. The other pilot would be in an urban area, perhaps Surrey or Vancouver.

What would these pilots look like? They might rely on different tools and they would have to be coordinated by the same central indigenous women-run provincial agency.

For the northern pilot, our primary tool will be billboards. There are signs on first nations land that advertise coffee shops, hotels and such. We could negotiate agreements to electrify those signs to enable red dress alerts, and the first nation could revert to the usual advertising when there was no alert. Where there are no existing billboards, we could negotiate agreements to install them.

There are at least 10 provincial points along the Highway of Tears that would need signs, and we would need them to face both east and west for all traffic in most of these small towns, so we would need a minimum of 20 signs that would have photographs and information about the missing person, a QR code and a central phone number to call. Signs could be programmed for a missing person alert along the entire highway in the direction we think the person was heading or we could focus on a smaller region in which we know the person was very recently seen and might still be.

The electrified signs could be used in combination with apps. Both the urban and rural pilots would utilize newly created apps that people would voluntarily download. One app could be a “find my missing loved one” app that people would use to search for loved ones in a coordinated and organized way. The app could show grids and offer other functions.

We would also need a similar nationwide app that would work for both urban and rural areas. Indigenous people currently use existing social media for searches. We're already connected to each other, but coordination should be centralized and effectively targeted and managed. The apps and signage should also draw in mainstream Canadians.

An urban pilot might rely more on apps and less on billboards.

We need an indigenous-run anonymous app to report sightings or to relay information we might know about a missing person. The City of Vancouver recently moved to provide free Wi-Fi in the Downtown Eastside, where indigenous women continue to be at high risk. The urban indigenous community is small, and we notice each other, but we know there's a lot of human trafficking, which is often gang-run and therefore dangerous. We need to have safe, anonymous reporting of sightings of missing persons so that those reports can be made without fear of retaliation.

Given the size of the province, we need a central system to coordinate with emergency services, police services, victim services, anti-violence services, transition services and safe houses. I have stated the need for the development of a provincial indigenous women-centred organization. I envision an indigenous organization for indigenous people to report missing women, to analyze data from apps and to provide services related to violence. The organization would provide standardized search training and could get funds out to the community within the hour to immediately start a search. It would provide community-based wraparound services for victims who have been found. It would coordinate and disburse provincial and federal anti-violence funds and oversee the ongoing development of indigenous anti-violence capacity.

An indigenous women-centred service model would address the distrust and discomfort indigenous people have with police services, the larger justice system and the existing mainstream anti-violence service bodies. These apps won't work for indigenous people

if they are police- or mainstream-run. If appropriately structured, an indigenous women-centred organization would effectively serve all indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQT+ people. It would disburse training and capacity funds and evaluate the change we desire.

Finally an indigenous women-led agency could keep safe the missing women who reported into the agency to state that they were not indeed missing but they simply didn't want to be found for safety purposes.

Thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Leslie.

We're now going to move over to Jennifer Jesty, who is with the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq.

Jennifer, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer Jesty (Emergency Resiliency Manager, Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq): *[Witness spoke in Mi'kmaq and provided the following text:]*

Pjila'si. We'ltasi pe'jitiy'oq.

[Witness provided the following translation:]

Welcome. Nice for you all to come.

[English]

Welcome. It's so nice to see you all.

My name is Jennifer Jesty, and I am the first indigenous woman to become a member of the Nova Scotia firefighters association, as well as the first indigenous woman to become an advanced care paramedic in the province of Nova Scotia.

Currently, I am the emergency resiliency manager for the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq.

There are 4,127 people registered to receive alerts across our five Cape Breton indigenous communities, for which I created our very own Unama'ki emergency alert system. We have sent 183 alerts since its inception in September 2020. We have reunited 67 young people with their families because of the alerts. Some 96% of people were reunited with their families within the first hour of sending the alert.

Utilizing the Everbridge platform, our Unama'ki emergency alert system has been wildly successful. Every time we send a noteworthy alert, several more people subscribe.

In August 2022, there was a man who had a French accent and a white beard, and was driving a grey car. This person approached a young, indigenous female store clerk and attempted to lure her into the sex trade. He made promises of riches and asked her to get her friends to come with him as well. She immediately called the police and the man fled.

The chief of the community where this took place immediately called me and asked me to send out the alert. For all we knew, he could have been headed to one of our other communities. Because we own and operate this alert system, we did not need to go through any red tape, we did not need the say-so from authorities and we did not need to wait one more minute. I sent the alert within minutes of this event taking place, and I was able to send it to all five communities at once. The alert was sent to the over 3,000 subscribers we had at that time. Some of them took screen captures of the alert and posted it on their socials, which meant it reached far more than those who were actually registered. After that alert was sent, another 150 people subscribed to our alert system.

Because this system was designed by us, for us, we were able to create our own protocols around when, how and why an alert should or shouldn't be sent. The collaboration between our five community chiefs and me allowed us to use this system in a manner that works best for us. There has not been one single request for an alert that has been denied, and every single alert has been sent out within minutes of receiving the information.

The Everbridge platform gives us the ability to tailor the delivery of the message. Once the message has been typed out, with the press of one button, it will be sent to all forms of communication at once. It will text a cellphone, call a cellphone, send an email and, most importantly, call a land line. There are still several of our elders who have a land line and no other form of communication. In some areas, there is no service or very little cell service, which makes the land line option that much more important.

I was able to work with Everbridge to make some adjustments. We are now able to send just a text and an email. The second option is what we call "all paths", which means it will then ring a land line.

Waking an elder in the middle of the night with a land line call is now reserved for immediate threats to life and safety only. We can choose to not wake people if it's something that does not directly affect them or that they can do nothing about.

Currently, the chief and two other staff in each community have been trained and have access to send the alerts alongside me. I was worried that the username and password for each community might fall into the wrong hands, so it's been designed that the only thing the username and password will allow you to do is send a message. It will not give access to the sensitive data that is within the system. As the administrator, I am the only person who can see, change or update that information.

This alert system started out as a simple little idea in my mind. I had no idea it was going to take on a life of its own. People continue to subscribe, even now, after four years. We often send out media campaigns to remind people to register or update their information.

Now, our alert system is getting nationwide attention. When there is something going on within communities, people are quick to take to social media, asking, "Where's the alert?"

● (1115)

That's a sure sign, in a community, that members support, approve of and rely on our alert system for critical information that directly affects their safety.

In my perfect world, I would love to take this alert system to every single indigenous community in this entire country. Would it save lives? I believe it already has.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to start with our first round of questions, with six minutes to each party.

I'll turn the floor over to Michelle Ferreri.

You have six minutes, Michelle.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. This is obviously a very important study.

I love that you ended, Jennifer, with this having already saved lives.

I want to read into the record a few stats for people who are watching at home. We look at this red dress alert and the very shocking statistics on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

Between 2009 and 2021, the rate of homicide against first nations, Métis and Inuit women and girls was six times higher than the rate among non-indigenous counterparts. Eighty-one per cent were killed by someone they knew. Thirty-five per cent were killed by an intimate partner. Twenty-four per cent were killed by an acquaintance. Twenty-two per cent were killed by a family member. Eighty-six per cent were killed by an indigenous person.

Ironically, today the Auditor General released a report on indigenous housing. I think there's a real link when we look at all of these issues. There's been no meaningful improvement in housing conditions in first nations. From 2015 to 2022, the percentage of homes in first nations that needed to be replaced increased.

The other shocking one is mould. It's been a massive issue in first nations housing. Despite this, only one Indigenous Services Canada regional office collected the information. The 2008 mould strategy is no longer being used, with no reasoning as to why.

You can see there's been a real disconnect in terms of servicing these communities and what the stats say about the violence happening within them. We're not giving the support and resources needed.

Two things jumped out at me when you gave your testimony, Jennifer.

One, the government wasn't in charge of this app. I would be very curious to hear your thoughts on this. Would you like government to be in control of the red dress alert system?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: No. I don't believe this should be government-run. It should be community-led, just as our alert system is. It was designed by indigenous, for indigenous. I believe that's how the alert system for the red dress campaign will be most effective.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: That's powerful. Thank you.

That record has not been fulfilled in terms of those broken promises in housing and the conditions.

The other thing that jumped out at me is this: You said you're the only one. That doesn't seem like a great system if something happens to you.

What would you like to see done differently there?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: Well, we needed to get this up and running as quickly as possible. That was the whole purpose. Yes, that means Jennifer is on call 24-7, 365 days, but that's okay. That's just for now.

Now that the alert system has taken on a complete life of its own, it is time to bring in another way or another person. Yes, I'm available 24-7, but what if something happens to me? Who is my back-up? I have developed a complete instruction book, detail by detail, with screenshots included, to hand over to my superior along with some of my colleagues. If, in fact, I were unable to do this, somebody else could carry on my legacy.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I mean, it's incredible. This is how things get done. It is the power of one. It is one person. We hear these stories often. This isn't rocket science. It's just, "I took action". That's the real missing piece, and you did that. I give huge accolades to you for doing that and saving the lives you have saved.

We all agreed on this red dress alert. It's going to save lives.

What would you like us to know, in order to ensure there are more Jennifers out there, that it's not just on your shoulders to take action, and that there is opportunity for communities across this country to have this implemented and working efficiently?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: I was hired right in the middle of a pandemic and literally had nothing to do. I couldn't go into the community. I couldn't visit. I couldn't even introduce myself. I sat there and thought to myself, "What can I do?" We were right on the heels of the Portapique incident in Nova Scotia, which was the largest mass shooting in Canadian history. I started to think, "What if?" What if somebody walked into one of our communities and opened fire?

What are we going to do? Well, what's the first thing we need to do? We need to tell everybody. How are we going to do that? The Unama'ki emergency alert system was born.

I don't think it needs to be a one-person event. What needs to be done is this: You need to do something. I didn't get it right, right out of the gate. We made some mistakes in the very beginning. I believe the red dress alert won't be perfect right out of the gate, either. However, it's time to do something.

I did this all on my own. I came up with the idea. I presented it to my superior and said, "Can I do this?" She said, "Yes". Away I went. I didn't ask for anybody's permission. I didn't ask for anybody's help. I just did it. I think that partly goes to its success. Sometimes, when there are so many voices telling their own opinions and giving their own ideas, things don't get done.

I think we're in a position right now where we just need to do something.

• (1120)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Hear, hear! That's what we call "bureaucracy" here. That's bureaucracy, my friend.

How is it funded?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: I started out using funding for my own program when I first started the program. After the first year—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I'm sorry. I only have 20 seconds. How is funded, and how much does it cost?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: It's based on how many people are subscribed to the system through the Everbridge platform. Currently, mine is funded through Indigenous Services Canada's EMAP.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Do you have a number of how much?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: I'm not really sure. I think it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$8,000 per year for 10,000 subscribers and under.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: If you can submit it to the committee, if you get that information, it would be very useful for us.

Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it over for the next six minutes to Anita.

Anita, you have the floor.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you so much, Ms. Jesty, for being here.

Thank you, of course, to both witnesses.

I think it's remarkable, what you were telling us about your accomplishments—96%. If that were extrapolated across the country, what an incredible impact that would have.

I heard you emphasize in your testimony that because it is owned and operated by the community, this is specifically what allows you to act quickly and nimbly and to do it in a way that actually supports the community. Can you tell us how something like that might be replicated elsewhere?

Also, what would be the role of law enforcement in that? I think what you were saying is that you didn't have to wait for anything; you could just act. Could you give us some lessons for if we were to expand that?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: Sure.

For every missing person in our community, law enforcement is involved. If I am contacted directly by a community member saying that his or her loved one is missing and asking if we can send an alert, I say, "Did you contact the police?" The reason for that is that I want to make sure there is a record, and I want to make sure that the said person is not over at auntie's place.

It needs to be a true missing person. We don't want to cause alert fatigue, so we don't want to be sending out alerts for missing people who are not truly missing. We have sent out alerts for people who have threatened self-harm. Again, law enforcement is involved.

It took a lot to get their buy-in, and some of the things they said to me were not the most pleasant. It was nothing but pure persistence on my end, knocking on their door and sending them phone calls and emails asking them to please utilize our system. I would tell them, "It's a tool in your tool box that you can utilize to assist in your own investigations."

Once they caught on.... It's a lot different now. They call me all the time.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: That is very good to hear.

I want to go to Ms. Varley, but if we have time, I have some more questions for you as well.

Ms. Varley, I'd like to pose a similar question to you in terms of the role of law enforcement. If this were to be expanded nationally, what would be the key lessons and key components that you would suggest?

Ms. Leslie Varley: I agree completely with Jennifer's model. I think the important thing is that it needs to be indigenous-run and indigenous-led. Including law enforcement and getting them on board is, of course, key, but it can't be run by the police. It needs to involve and include the police, but it can't be run by the police.

I think the question that Jennifer asked, "Did you contact the police?", is a key question. I think that's important to ask to weed out the people who don't want to be found or who are not missing.

Yes, there is definitely a role for police, but it's not a lead role in this process.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much.

Ms. Jesty, I noted that you talked about land lines. I'll be honest: I hadn't even considered that, but certainly for older people and in

communities, those land lines might be the only way they get information.

Again, thinking about how this could be extrapolated in terms of a national program, how would you see that rolling out, and what other technical considerations do you have?

• (1125)

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: I am a big fan of the Everbridge system and not only because we use it. The land line was a major component for me. Also, the other big selling point for that is that you can record your own message, which means that the chief in the community can record his own voice in his own language before he sends the alert out. I think that's a very big, important part of it.

In thinking about this red dress alert system, I see it kind of dividing the country by province or by area, such as one in the Atlantic. If somebody goes missing in Halifax and we find out about it within minutes, we're sending that alert out to Halifax. Then, 12 hours later, we'll send it out to Nova Scotia, and 12 hours after that, we'll send it out to the entire Atlantic. Having said that, though, what we also have to take into consideration is that you can get from one end of this country to the other by plane within hours.

How do we know that these people are, in fact, missing and have been abducted, as opposed to just deciding that they don't want to be found, maybe even for their own safety? Those things have to be worked out on the ground with the people who have direct contact with the people who are going to be reported missing, and who utilize the system.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much. That absolutely shows why it has to be locally controlled.

What about what you said about how some people are amplifying the message through their own social media, through their own mechanisms? I'm very interested in hearing about that, because obviously you want to get to people where they are, and some people will not necessarily get a message unless it's through something that they use day to day. Can you talk more about how it's being amplified?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: For most people now, as soon as we send out an alert, I would say that 80% of our messages are going out by the text only option. It's about sending a text message and sending an email. People are doing screenshots of it and putting it on their socials. Now it's even carried to non-indigenous communities. Some of our community members who have been missing have gone outside our community, so it's very important to get the message to non-indigenous members as well.

Every single time I send out an alert, I immediately go to social media to have a look and see if it's being shared, and it is. I also have the Unama'ki alert system page on Facebook. As soon as we send out an alert, I also post it on our Facebook page. That doesn't have a whole lot of followers just yet. It's gaining traction. Every month, we get a couple more. I love that they're taking the screenshot, that they're putting it on their socials and that it's reaching far more people.

The Chair: That's perfect. Thank you so much.

I'm sorry, but what was that called?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: It's the UNSM emergency management Facebook page.

The Chair: I'm going to now pass the floor over to Andréanne Larouche.

Andréanne, you have the floor for six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank both witnesses for being with us for the first hour of the meeting.

We are all keen to undertake this study. Organizations like Amnesty International have already denounced the situation of indigenous communities and, more specifically, indigenous women in Canada. Internationally, it remains a stain on Canada's flag.

It is sad to see that, when it comes to the majority of studies we conduct here at committee, indigenous women and girls are always affected disproportionately. We can come back to it, but we did recently conduct a study on human trafficking in Canada, where women and girls are also overrepresented. It's rather troubling. The committee travelled to Vancouver and Halifax last year, and it was troubling to hear the numbers on this subject.

Ms. Varley, you represent a friendship centre, and I think rural and remote communities are impacted. How can these rural and remote communities, as well as indigenous people, receive an alert like the red dress alert?

I wonder if this alert could actually reach every community. I'm thinking specifically of remote regions, where access to communication networks is uneven. I invite Ms. Varley to answer the question, but I also invite you to answer it afterwards, Ms. Jesty.

• (1130)

[English]

Ms. Leslie Varley: Absolutely, there is unequal access, which is why I think we still need the old-fashioned billboard model, whereby people are driving down Highway 16, the Highway of Tears, and can see those alerts flash up on those billboards.

For sure, some of the communities are lacking high-speed Internet access. There is a commitment to ensure the entire province is connected, so hopefully that's not going to be a problem for very long, but we do need a variety of applications.

We've already connected indigenous people on Facebook, as I said. We all know each other. We can put up those missing notices

really quickly, as Jennifer described, but we also need some older-fashioned communication models, which is why I'm suggesting the billboards in the northern and more rural areas of the province.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Varley, I'd like to ask you a question related to the one I asked previously.

Once again, if you want to add something related to your own experience, Ms. Jesty, please do not hesitate to do so.

Last year, while the Standing Committee on the Status of Women was travelling, we met with members of an organization I had already encountered during a meeting in Winnipeg on the issue of human trafficking. This organization launched to the #NotInMyCity initiative. It uses conventional display methods in busy areas, such as stations and airports, as well as communication networks, which can mean uneven access in rural areas.

Have you communicated with members of this organization?

[English]

Ms. Leslie Varley: I'm not familiar with it.

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: I'm not familiar with it either.

Nonetheless, you mentioned that indigenous women are overrepresented in this area. What's sad about that comment is that this is the only area in which indigenous women are overrepresented, and that's a very unfortunate situation to be in.

I absolutely agree with you. We need to have a form of communication to reach northern areas. That's why using our Everbridge platform was so important to us so that we were able to reach that land line.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: You are correct, Ms. Jesty.

I did specify that you could answer my question, which you did very well.

You talked about the link with reconciliation. I completely understand your point of view, according to which the alert system must be managed by and for you. You explained it well.

Do you think your alert system might have influenced police response regarding the disappearances and murders of these women and girls?

Could this have been a significant way of raising awareness about their safety?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: Yes. Thank you.

I believe they are fully aware. Being proactive about it is a different question.

We had an indigenous woman go missing. It was reported by an off-reserve organization. She didn't show up for curfew. They immediately phoned the police—this was at 10 o'clock at night—to say, “Hey, she didn't show up for curfew.” The police chose not to request an alert to be sent out by me, and she was found dead the next morning.

Would my alert have saved her life? Maybe, maybe not, but they didn't even give me a chance.

Yes, there needs to be more work with the police organizations to get them on board and to get them to be a lot more proactive.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Jennifer, for that testimony. I think we're all probably dropping our jaws.

I'm now going to move it over to Bonita for six minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you so much.

I appreciate the witnesses today. I know this is a difficult topic, but it's one that you're both working on. I appreciate you both so much.

I'm going to start with Ms. Varley. I want to talk a bit about the structural factors that we need to address alongside the red dress alert.

My colleague from the NDP, Leah Gazan, when she brought this motion forward and wanted to do this study, recognized that there are decades of insufficient action from all levels of government that have failed to address the effects of the residential school genocide.

I would really like to hear from you about some of those structural factors that we need to address in government, and even in policing, that I heard today. What are those structural things that we can do alongside the alert that's needed and is working, as Ms. Jesty mentioned, in her community?

• (1135)

Ms. Leslie Varley: I think the important structural thing you're talking about is the systemic racism that exists in this country. We are under the only race-based act in the western world that we know of as indigenous people—the Indian Act—so that is something we have to contend with.

One of the issues Jennifer suggested was that the police still have the discretion to decide whether or not they are going to enact an alert system, support it or call her. The reason they don't is that they have that discretion. When we look behind the reasons for why they're not calling, they go back to systemic racism and the ideologies we're raised with as Canadians about indigenous people and the fact that we're undeserving, or maybe we're party girls and not deserving. They go back to us not being fully human.

All of these old colonial ideologies about indigenous people still exist in this country everywhere, in every service that we're trying to access. Therefore, I think the most important thing for us to address, alongside providing these safeties, is socializing Canadians to understand that we are indeed human as indigenous people, and to start working with us to dismantle these racist structures that are in existence.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

Before I move on to ask Ms. Jesty this same question, I have a follow-up question to you.

I know that you work in the aboriginal friendship centres. Concerning the community that's built through these friendship centres, how can the federal government—and this is a federal committee—learn from the way that community comes together in the aboriginal friendship centres and the way that community interacts in so much less of an institutional way? Is there something that the federal government should take away from that model that the federal government needs to learn and to do business in a different way that you could share? I know it's a big question, but is there anything that comes into your mind?

Ms. Leslie Varley: It is a big question, and we could spend a lot of time on it, but what I think I want to say is that both federal and provincial governments could put the trust in us. We see Jennifer's program operating really effectively with very few funds, and she's done it on her own without asking for permission. In most cases, we do have to ask for permission.

One of the challenges that we have is that, when there's a woman who has gone missing, it's really hard to get funds out to that agency, that community or that family so that they can immediately set up a search site, say, along the Highway of Tears. It's really challenging, but from an indigenous community within friendship centres, within first nations and within Métis organizations, it's quite easy for us to get that money out to those organizations. Supporting us and trusting us to get that funding out to search groups and communities as and when it's needed and with immediacy is really key. I think that's something that the government can learn from and support us to provide those services.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

Ms. Jesty, I wonder if you wouldn't mind just expanding a little bit on the racism and some of the barriers that you run into when dealing with police or any other government institutions around your alert system.

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: To address your first question asking what can government do, I think the most important thing—and this doesn't just apply to government; it applies to every person—is inclusion. It's a very simple, one-word answer, inclusion.

In my opening statement, I said that I was the first firefighter and the first paramedic. Why am I the first? Why did it happen in 2020 when I was the first? Here we are in 2024, and nobody has come behind me. Why is that? It's inclusion. It's because we're not included, that's why. It's inclusion in proceedings, in idealism and in moving forward in any manner, even in staff. How many indigenous people are employed within non-indigenous organizations? Inclusion is incredibly important.

Since I first started this alert system, believe me, police organizations are pretty sick of seeing my face and hearing my name, because I won't give up. I won't give up until it gets to the point where they are calling me without hesitation.

To answer your question, yes, I have run into several barriers along the way. I was even asked, “Do you know how bad it will look on us if we send out an alert through your system before we send out the provincial alert?” I said, “Okay, I hear that public safety is not as important to you as your reputation”. That’s how it sounded to me.

Yes, we do still deal with that on the daily.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Jennifer.

We’re now going to go into our second round.

Anna, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses. This is something really important that we need to deal with that’s gone on long enough. I admire your spirit and your strength, and I applaud you for doing what you’re doing.

Before I ask my question and because we have a male here, Marc, I want to recognize you because today is San Giuseppe Day, it’s Father’s Day in Italy. Happy Father’s Day, Marc.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Jennifer, I have a couple of questions for you, and then I’m going to ask a question of Ms. Varley.

You talked about the mass shooting in Nova Scotia and how it rocked the entire province, especially because there was no alert system in place at the time and many lives were lost. How do you see this getting out to people who aren’t subscribers in the future? I know you mentioned Facebook and people posting it.

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: Right. Although our alert system is run by us and for us, we do have non-indigenous people signing up for the system. Why is that? It’s because they’re not getting the information they require anywhere else. They see that our system is successful, that we’re delivering information in a timely fashion and that we’re getting it out to them quickly.

I believe every single Nova Scotian has some form of PTSD regarding the Portapique incident. Therefore, people are information-hungry. They want to know more information for their own personal safety. If our alert system is attracting non-indigenous people, that’s wonderful. I welcome them with open arms.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: We know the arrive scam app was a disaster. Your app requires a very minimal amount of funds, which is incredible. I would love for you to share that with us. Could you table that to the committee?

We need to learn how to be more effective and cost-efficient. Listening to you today gives me hope that there is a way we can do this and not burden the taxpayer. You’re amazing. I just love listening to you.

There’s something I learned, and it’s still embedded in my head. We did a tour last year. I think some of my colleagues mentioned it. It was a cross-country tour on human trafficking. One of the things

that I noticed was that they had—I believe it was in Sudbury—pictures of the girls who were missing in the airport.

Ms. Varley said that billboards are impactful. I think they are. For areas in which there is no infrastructure, would you agree that incorporating both programs together would give more people the information they need to help the victims?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: Yes, absolutely. Just recently in Cape Breton, Chief Annie Daisley of the We’koqma’q First Nation was very successful with posting billboards. There’s a very beautiful, powerful billboard on the sign of each indigenous community in Cape Breton. There may be some on the mainland in Nova Scotia as well.

My vision for that is to have a QR code or something right on the bottom of that sign to allow people to access the red dress alert system.

• (1145)

Mrs. Anna Roberts: You mentioned this earlier. We also learned during that tour that it could take minutes for them to kidnap someone and put them on a plane and they’d be out of here, or to drive on the hidden highways so they couldn’t be stopped.

I have listened to you and Ms. Varley. We need to do this. We need to take your program, along with her ideas—the two of you together—and expand it right across the country to all areas. I really believe this is something that would benefit everyone—indigenous or otherwise. Would you disagree with sharing that information?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: Well, I’ve been shouting it from the rooftops since I’ve had this up and running. Nobody’s really listening, but I’m certainly not going to stop. So far, I’ve gone over to Lennox Island, P.E.I., and set up exactly the same alert system that I have in Cape Breton. I am now scheduled to go to Conne River in Newfoundland to set up exactly the same system there.

I have assisted a couple of communities in developing proposals to get funding from Indigenous Services Canada. I’m waiting for them to get those proposals approved so that I can travel to their communities and assist them as well.

As I said at the beginning, in my perfect world, I would love to go to every single indigenous community. If Indigenous Services Canada’s EMAP funded me, why wouldn’t they fund every single community in the country? I’m able to get this alert system set up in a community in an hour. It can be up and running, and people can be registered within an hour.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We’re going to Emmanuella for the next five minutes of questions.

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

I want to thank both of our witnesses for their incredible testimony and for the work they’re doing on the ground.

I really like both witnesses’ perspectives on how we should go about having a red dress alert.

I want to speak first to Jennifer and to ask her a few questions.

You did mention that there is federal funding. It was through Indigenous Services Canada that you received some of the funding. What is this funding helping with? Is there a need for an increase? Would you say there are some gaps in the system you have currently? Are there ways of reaching more people that you think you could use some help with?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: The only downfall to my current system... This is probably where it wouldn't work nationally, and we would need to tailor it a little bit. Everbridge is so technologically sophisticated, it can do everything but wash your dishes.

I'm sure that if we were able to work with Everbridge, we could make the registration process for the red dress alert system a little easier. Right now, I subscribe to a website called Jotform. I went in and created my own form. It's very easy. You submit your name, your phone number and what community you want to receive the alerts for. We don't need any more information than that. In fact, I don't even need to know your name. You could tell me you're Donald Duck if you like. I just need to know how I get hold of you, and what community you would like to receive the alerts for.

With regard to funding, yes, I do believe there should be a little bit more funding put toward this. We're talking about tens of thousands of people registering for the red dress alert system. The funding that I receive pays for my subscription to Everbridge, and also pays for my subscription to Jotform.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

What strategies did you use in the beginning, when you first started this system? What strategies did you use to publicize and to inform communities about it, and to get that buy-in and actually make them register? The step that they have to take themselves to register is that additional step that many people don't take.

What was it that enticed people, do you think? What lessons could be learned in order to be effectively reaching out to communities across the country for the red dress alert?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: In the very beginning, the five chiefs were so supportive of my idea. They gave me their summer students. We sent summer students to the doors of every single elder in every one of our five indigenous communities. It was to keep this culturally appropriate, and to receive the elders' approval before I moved forward any further.

Our second step was to go everywhere that was kind of busy. We went to the band office, the gas bar and the market, and we sat down with paper forms. We have many people who are still illiterate. We have to give them the option. They don't have the technology in order to sign up through a phone, an app or online. We set out with paper forms, and we were able to collect that information and upload the data.

The next step was to do the media campaign. We reached billboards within communities. They were all funded by the chiefs of the communities. They were so supportive that they paid for some of the advertising. We utilized community radio stations and community television stations. We used community billboards, and, of course, social media. It was very surprising that within the first

hour of launching this system in the communities, 1,200 people registered for the system immediately.

● (1150)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much for that breakdown.

I think there are lessons to be learned. That ground approach, the fact that you started on the ground going door to door, really helped.

In terms of law enforcement, you spoke about some of the barriers you faced. Thanks to your persistence, you helped increase that co-operation between yourself and law enforcement.

What was the response like at first? What type of culturally appropriate or trauma-informed training might they need? Do you think that's necessary? How do you think the government could help with that?

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: Yes, I believe their training does need to be expanded. I believe there already is cultural sensitivity training for law enforcement agencies. However, it doesn't seem to be very effective.

When I first launched this system, they all thought it was a great idea. Did they actually use it? Not really. It took my constant persistence, and then the communities got involved. We had an incident that was related to criminal activity where there was a large police presence in the community. One of our chiefs looked out his window, and there was a police officer with an AK-47 on his front lawn. He didn't know that this was happening. He called me immediately and said, "Why didn't you send an alert?" I can't send an alert for something I don't know about.

Bridging the gaps with the police agencies has been a difficult challenge, and still ongoing to this day. They are getting much better, but we definitely need to push it a little bit further. If it means more cultural sensitivity training, maybe that's what it needs to be.

The Chair: That's perfect. Thank you so much.

We're now going to pass it on to Andréanne Larouche, for two and half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Jesty, I sincerely congratulate you for the work you do.

We are also conducting a study right now on women's economic independence. As a paramedic, you are a great example. There aren't enough examples like yours encouraging indigenous women to break themselves out of the cycle of poverty that keeps them in a cycle of violence.

I read up on some initiatives, and what you did was so very extraordinary. In the 2023 budget, \$2.5 million was granted over five years, “to facilitate and coordinate work on advancing the National Action Plan by establishing a standing Federal-Provincial-Territorial-Indigenous table on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQI+ People.” Among other things, this table will enable conversations on the best approach for launching a red dress alert.

Last year, the government also organized the first national round table on missing and murdered women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people, specifically to identify priorities.

In January 2023, the Government of Canada appointed a ministerial special representative to provide advice and recommendations on call for justice 1.7, which calls for the creation of a national indigenous and human rights ombudsperson.

Considering all of your experience, were you consulted during the government's implementation of these measures?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Jesty: No, this is my first consultation. I did reach out to the senior policy analyst for the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, who spoke with me in December. I met with a committee in January, but this is the first time I'm speaking in person to government about what I've been doing.

I believe I have to go back to saying let's not complicate it; just do something. We've been talking about it for months, and still nothing's been done. As I said, I can set up an alert system in the community within an hour and have it up and operational. This can be very simple. It doesn't need to be as complicated as it's been.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

Ms. Varley, I also congratulate you for the work you accomplish at indigenous friendship centres.

I will ask you the same question. For your part, were you consulted within the framework of the initiatives I mentioned, which were implemented last year?

Did the federal government call on your expertise?

[English]

Ms. Leslie Varley: I'm sorry. I didn't get translation on that at all.

The Chair: I've stopped the clock. Please go ahead and re-ask the question, and then once it's answered, we'll go on to our next round.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

Ms. Varley, I was congratulating you for the work you do. Given your expertise—

[English]

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt.

There is no interpretation.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Varley, I wanted to congratulate you for all the work you accomplished in your indigenous friendship centres.

Given your expertise, did the federal government consult you last year about the initiatives it implemented?

[English]

Ms. Leslie Varley: That's a really straightforward question. We've been working with the federal and provincial governments just very recently on this, but we haven't been engaging for very long on these issues. We've certainly been working with Minister Gary Anandasangaree's crew as well as Minister Farnworth's group here in British Columbia.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm now going to pass it over for the next two and a half minutes to Bonita for the last round of questions.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

Ms. Varley, I wanted to hear from you about what the community is saying in and around Vancouver on the red dress alert.

Ms. Leslie Varley: We definitely have a need for a red dress alert in the Vancouver Lower Mainland area, because most of the human trafficking routes in British Columbia end up in either Surrey or Vancouver. Those are the areas where we have the highest urban indigenous population and human traffickers are parked outside indigenous housing blocks trying to attract young girls.

It is an acute need in the urban centres where we have high indigenous populations, and we're eager to get going on it.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I have one last question, Ms. Varley.

You mentioned that you're working with the minister and CIRNAC right now, but we heard testimony earlier today that Ms. Jesty's program is funded through ISC.

Do you see any problems with or have concerns about the fact that funding is coming from one ministry, whereas consultation on the red dress alert is coming from another?

Ms. Leslie Varley: I think government is going to work together to ensure this happens.

We're all astonished at how little it actually costs, from Ms. Jesty's perspective. I think there is going to be some movement here to move this along. Certainly, from a first nations' perspective, the fact that she can set this up in an hour is going to accelerate a lot of requests coming to her to set this up.

From what I am understanding, we would love to talk with Ms. Jesty right now and get this going without asking the government for permission or the funds to do it. It's such an urgent matter, and it seems so straightforward and—as she said—simple to do.

Do we need government? Yes, we do, over the long term. To start it up and get it going, I'd love to act right now.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This has been an extraordinary first panel on this study. I would like to thank both of you for coming and providing us with excellent testimony to start this off.

There is only one witness in the second panel.

I'm going to suspend for about two minutes, and then we'll be right back to business.

• (1155) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1200)

The Chair: We're getting back to our second panel.

Kurt, be sure your earpiece isn't too close to the microphone, and make sure you are using French or English interpretation—whatever your choice of language is. It is excellent to have you here.

I would like to welcome our guest today. From Pelmorex Corp., we have Kurt Eby, director, regulatory affairs and government relations.

As I mentioned, we had a last-minute change. We'll be giving Kurt his five minutes. Our other person is now rescheduled for Thursday.

Kurt, I'm going to give you the floor for your opening statement.

Mr. Kurt Eby (Director, Regulatory Affairs and Government Relations, Pelmorex Corp.): Thank you.

I am pleased to be here to speak with the committee about the critical issue of red dress alerts.

Founded in 1989, Pelmorex is best known for The Weather Network and MétéoMédia television channels, websites and mobile apps. Indeed, we are a Canadian institution. Most recent public polling has shown that The Weather Network and MétéoMédia are Canada's most trusted media brand and Canada's most trusted news source.

Pelmorex is also a global trilingual weather, alerting, safety and technology company that serves consumers, governments and businesses alike and reaches 60 million people every month, all while remaining a family-owned Canadian business.

For the past 14 years, Pelmorex has operated the national alert aggregation and dissemination, NAAD, system, which is the software infrastructure of Canada's first and only national public alerting system, also known as Alert Ready.

The CRTC approved Pelmorex's proposal to build the NAAD system in 2009, which initially enabled emergency alerts to be sent to TV and radio stations. Cellphone alert capability was added in 2018. If you have ever received an alert, for instance, for a tornado,

flood or wildfire, or to notify of an abducted child anywhere in Canada, that alert was processed and delivered by our NAAD system in less than five seconds from the time the issuer hit “send”.

In 2023 more than 1,000 emergency alerts—the types that interrupt TV or radio or set off the attention siren on your phone—were sent in Canada to warn of an immediate threat to life or property. An additional 70,000 warnings, watches and advisories for non-life-threatening situations are processed by the NAAD system every year and distributed by services such as The Weather Network.

Pelmorex is constantly innovating and exploring opportunities to deploy the latest advances in technology for better alerting. Each year the NAAD system is being used more and more to issue alerts that are helping to mitigate impacts and unquestionably saving lives. Nothing we do at Pelmorex makes us prouder than that.

We also recognize that, as with any evolving technology solution, there are opportunities for improvement. Specifically any instance in which the NAAD system could be used to save a life should be explored, and that includes red dress alerts.

Red dress alerts should be issued and processed using the NAAD system. It is the national system. It is secure, fully redundant, supported, tested and reliable. It is the only system that delivers life-saving alerts directly to all TV and radio broadcasters and cellphone providers without requiring consumers to sign up or opt in. The system has been constantly enhanced and improved over 15 years at the direction of federal, provincial and territorial public safety officials, and the technology is second to none. In fact, no alerting system in the world processes more alerts and reaches more people than the NAAD system.

Pelmorex is set to add a red dress event code to the NAAD system and can do so in a matter of hours. However, we do not determine what situations warrant an alert. That decision rests with public safety authorities and government agencies.

Technically, Pelmorex is a software provider for Alert Ready. We provide and maintain the user interface and the processing system. We upgrade the technology. We train users on how to use the technology, and we administer accounts. Therefore, we can answer questions about the technical requirements to enable red dress alerts in the NAAD system.

In practice, we also take a broader and active interest in advancing public alerting in Canada overall. We led and defined the concept of a public alerting system in Canada 15 years ago. We built the system, and we helped to bring all of the relevant authorities to the table to use it and continue to improve it. We have knowledge of public alerting that extends well beyond the technology.

I would be pleased to share any knowledge that could help make red dress alerts a reality. That includes how new alert types are added to the approved list of events and how system access is managed.

Finally, if any additional technical solutions or additions are needed to address any challenges specific to red dress alerts, Pelmorex can assist with those things as well. With more than eight million app users and 24 million digital users overall in Canada, we are the Canadian company with the most proven track record of delivering critical information to the greatest number of people.

Thank you for your time.

I'm looking forward to answering your questions.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Kurt.

We'll be starting off with our six-minute rounds of questions.

I'll pass the floor over to Dominique.

Dominique, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Eby. I want to welcome you to the committee, which is undertaking a very important and very serious study of indigenous women and girls' safety. Thank you for your presentation.

I am probably not the most technologically well-versed person in this group. However, I'm sure you can tell us about various aspects of the solution you could design.

While you were in the room, you heard the testimony from both previous guests. Ultimately, what they are asking for is that this project, which could be deployed on a national scale, be developed by indigenous communities and, if possible, by women.

Taking into account the very specific challenges indigenous women and girls must face, how can a business like yours, which develops many alert systems, design such a system while working with them?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: I think what the previous witness has said is exactly right in terms of working with the communities. Right now, we work within the jurisdictions in Canada to issue alerts, so the federal government, primarily Environment and Climate Change Canada, and then all the provincial and territorial public safety agencies. They typically decide within their jurisdiction who gets to issue an alert. We heard a bit about that from Ms. Jesty. Obviously this is a different case. It's really important to work with the com-

munities. If we were given that direction by our board, we would do that. If the alternative is another private company doing it, we would want to step up and do that as well.

We hear it's a different use case and the witnesses talked about having maybe a clearing house to share information on where victims may have been seen and about protecting privacy. This is different from what alerts are used for right now. We could build all of that. We would want everything to be processed by the national system. That's what it's made for. This is a national issue. I think that this should be part of the national system, but we recognize that it would be important to have this consultation with and direction from those it affects the most.

• (1210)

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I assume you have more than two employees, right?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: Yes, correct.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: That's reassuring, thank you very much.

What about the costs of doing business with your company? How does it work? How do you get paid?

In the event that we launch a Canada-wide system in collaboration with indigenous communities, which would be aligned with their principles and values, how would it work afterwards?

How would we get the revenue needed to do business with a company like yours?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: We pay for the whole system and we and we have from inception, through a condition of our broadcasting licence that is part of having The Weather Network and MétéoMédia on the basic cable package, which guarantees us access to all homes in Canada and a certain amount of fixed revenue. That was the model that we proposed in 2009 to the CRTC when we envisioned this whole system, and that's the way it is now.

We have a budget that we put forward and we work to that budget every year. If we're talking about adding new channels and things like that, we would probably seek some additional funding for that, but commensurate with the costs, but just to be clear—

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: To whom do you send the bill? How does that work?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: The concept of charging every first nation or every community, I think, is not the best option. You want it to be a national system with open access for all first nations and all communities. I think either the provinces or the federal government singularly would be most ideal. These are more business decisions, but that would probably be the easiest way to open it up and have everyone be able to use it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Could we combine the alert that flags the disappearance of indigenous women or girls with the existing Amber alert system? Everyone is now familiar with it and it's integrated. No one is surprised or wonders what's going on when that alert comes up, and it still generates concern.

Is that feasible, maybe even desirable?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: Absolutely. Everyone is familiar with the amber alert. We've recently added silver alerts to the system, which is when someone with Alzheimer's, dementia or cognitive disabilities goes missing. That's been piloted in Quebec. It's really no different from that. It's another vulnerable person use case and we would add that to the system and issue the alerts the same way. I think this is a well-known issue. I think Canadians generally, if they saw a red dress alert, would understand what it was about.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Ms. —

[English]

The Chair: Sorry.

[Translation]

Your time is up.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: In rural areas, problems due to cellular network access cause concern.

Does anyone else want to keep the ball rolling?

[English]

The Chair: We'll have lots more questions. We've got a couple of rounds, so it's okay.

I'm now going to pass the floor over to Marc.

Marc, you have the floor for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank Mr. Kurt Eby for being with us to participate in our important study.

[English]

Right now, you do missing persons alerts in Ontario, the amber alerts.

You just mentioned that you added the silver alert for dementia. Thank you for doing that. I think it's very important.

Why are you not just adding the red dress alert? You've done it for other categories.

● (1215)

Mr. Kurt Eby: As I said, we don't decide to add those. We built a national system, so we—

Mr. Marc Serré: Who decided to put the silver alert for dementia?

Mr. Kurt Eby: It was the senior officials responsible for emergency management, SOREM. Basically, the senior officials for emergency management from all the provinces, territories and Public Safety Canada sit on a board. They meet and talk about all sorts of public safety issues and this is one.

There's a thing called the “BI list”, or the broadcast immediate list, which is all the events. We get told what the event is. We add it into the system and then when someone logs into the user interface, they see that as one of the options for an alert they can send.

Those are the rules right now.

Mr. Marc Serré: That's a systemic problem we seem to have. We've heard from witnesses in the past and even today that a lot of the missing indigenous women are not getting through the proper police authority.

You're saying you don't decide. You work in Ontario with the OPP only.

Is that correct? Do you work with first nations?

Mr. Kurt Eby: We have contracts with every province and territory, Environment and Climate Change Canada, NRCan and Public Safety Canada. Within every province, they decide how to use the system.

I have a list here that shows all—

Mr. Marc Serré: It's within every province.

Mr. Kurt Eby: Public safety is a provincial jurisdiction, so it's up to them.

Twenty-six first nations in Alberta have access to the system. Basically none—

Mr. Marc Serré: The provinces are saying they're not adding the first nations because it's not a provincial jurisdiction, it's a federal jurisdiction.

Mr. Kurt Eby: No, they've just chosen not to. For instance, some provinces have one agency or two agencies in total that use the system, so you would want to talk to the provinces about why they aren't pushing that out further.

Mr. Marc Serré: We heard clearly here about indigenous-led—like Jennifer from Nova Scotia—and how important that is.

Right now, you're not dealing with any of the first nations. You're just dealing with the provincial authorities.

Mr. Kurt Eby: That's correct.

About a year and a half ago I appeared before the indigenous and northern affairs committee and said that we would love direction from the federal government, provincial governments or both to work directly with first nations because of the nature of the jurisdiction there. We're still waiting for that.

Mr. Marc Serré: What recommendation would you have?

Obviously, this is a federal committee, so we're looking at federal jurisdiction.

What is the separation between the provincial and the federal?

What do you need from the federal government to make this more national and also indigenous-led?

Mr. Kurt Eby: We would need direction, which would come probably from SOREM. We would want the federal government and the provinces together to tell us to please go and start working with the first nations.

Alternatively, another group works with the first nations and comes to us with the technical aspects that are needed to add to the system. As a technical provider, that's what we would do.

Mr. Marc Serré: Can you work with, for example, the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq organization that has an app?

How can your system integrate with existing first nations-led apps?

Mr. Kurt Eby: We have a piece of national, secure infrastructure. We can take other alerts and run them back through our system, if needed.

Ideally, we would work with them directly and they wouldn't need another vendor or another private company to do it; they could use the system.

To be clear, I applaud what they've done to take that on, but I think that's not necessarily necessary.

Mr. Marc Serré: Can you explain the process in 30 seconds?

Do you need to get a call from the OPP? Can the Anishinabe first nations call you or is it only the OPP?

Mr. Kurt Eby: Do you mean to set up an account?

Mr. Marc Serré: I mean just to put the red dress alert.

Mr. Kurt Eby: We don't issue the alerts. We give an interface. They type it in. We don't touch it. It goes in five seconds.

The provincial government would say to the first nation that they can have an account and give the instances for which they can issue an alert—

Mr. Marc Serré: Why won't you let the first nations have access to that then?

Mr. Kurt Eby: Because we're operating—

Mr. Marc Serré: If you let the OPP do it...?

Mr. Kurt Eby: We don't let the OPP do it. The Ontario government lets the OPP do it.

Mr. Marc Serré: What about training? I know you do the software, but is there any element here, from a provincial perspective, like training, to ensure that alerts are done properly?

I ask because the community doesn't have confidence and doesn't have trust in the systems.

Mr. Kurt Eby: Yes. I hear that.

We train on how to use the technology. We're not public safety officials, so we don't train on what the threshold is for when an alert should be sent or what the content should be. Although we provide examples of what you typically put in an alert, we don't do that training.

It's a public safety matter. People like Ms. Jesty would know that better than us. They just need the technical tool to issue the alerts.

• (1220)

Mr. Marc Serré: How do you deal with regions that don't have cell coverage and don't have Internet?

Mr. Kurt Eby: Right now, all the alerts also go over the radio and over the air on TV. We have the Weather Network app. We're working on another app more specific to alerting, because people might want to get alerts, not just on the Weather Network app—

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to move it over to Andréanne Larouche. You have six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Eby, for being with us today. As we can see, your services have become extremely useful, especially in the era of climate change. The weather alerts we receive can sometimes even save lives.

My questions follow up on my colleagues' line of questioning. The first question came from my colleague, Mrs. Vien. I am also concerned about wave technology. We see that in certain rural communities that waves, telecommunications, still lead to problems. They don't make it everywhere. It poses a safety problem in many rural areas.

How do you deal with the telecommunications inequality these communities experience, which compromises their safety?

How do we ensure they can participate in this initiative?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: Absolutely. I agree.

It's really interesting to hear about all the different use cases, from billboards to "direct to land line". Anything is possible. We can do anything.

Right now, we work under a structure whereby we are directed on what to do, and we've been directed to do TV, radio and cellphone alerts, but all of that is possible and, I think, wonderful. It's great to make sure that you can reach everyone who needs to be reached.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Like my colleague Mr. Serr  , I also listened to the testimony from guests who appeared during the first half of the meeting. They clearly pointed out that communities had already undertaken projects in some areas. The witnesses clearly explained to us that, in the spirit of reconciliation, the alert system should be managed by and for indigenous people.

In this context, how do you picture your collaboration?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: Absolutely.

Like I said, I think what the previous witnesses said about working directly with the communities on this issue, particularly, is key. Making sure that they have the power to issue these alerts and to use the technology to its fullest extent is super important.

This is a very specific use case, so I think, as mentioned, different approaches from those that have been taken to date are needed.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: The issue was already raised, but since it's a very important subject for me, I'd like us to talk about it again. New technologies, numbers and data are always linked to ethical and security issues. We're talking here about protecting private information. You're working on designing a system and you still have to deal with the CRTC.

What control measures could the national public alerting system and a strategy like yours include when it comes to respecting privacy and collecting information?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: That's a great question.

The way the systems works now means that there is no privacy concern because it's one direction. It's over TV and radio. The way the wireless alerts work is that they are sent from a cellphone tower directly to your cellphone, and there's no return path. Nobody signs up. Nobody gives a phone number or any personal information. If you're talking about direct to land line phones, you might have to have phone numbers. That would be something we would take on.

Pelmorex has more than eight million users in the country. We're "privacy by design" certified. We take privacy extremely seriously, so we would use similar approaches if a situation existed where we needed to have personal information.

• (1225)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: We therefore would not need additional legislation or regulations to better govern collecting this information, even if we broaden the alert system to include red dress alerts.

Isn't that so?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: I don't know. What we do presently in terms of privacy is well beyond what's required under current privacy laws, so in our case we wouldn't need any additional incentive. We would never jeopardize any privacy at all.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Just as you did for silver alerts in Quebec, which helps find people with a neurocognitive disorder more quickly, you are ready to modify your system and include the alert for indigenous women and girls reported missing.

In short, there are no security problems and you are ready to modify your system, as you did for silver alerts in Quebec. It's something you could do relatively quickly.

Is that right?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: Yes, that's definitely one option. They've chosen silver alerts because usually the missing person has stayed within a confined area. They're only using the cellphone channel; they're not using TV and radio, which are extremely broad, because they have a sense that the missing person is probably within blocks or within a confined urban area. The system can be adjusted and used for different use cases, and that's a great example of one.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now going to move it over to Bonita.

Bonita, you have six minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Eby, for being here.

I know that with you being the only witness now, you're getting a full hour of questioning from us, so I feel for you.

I'm not sure if SOREM representatives are coming to this committee. They are? Okay, that's great.

The Chair: No, but thank you for adding that.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Yes, I think we should definitely invite them to come.

Mr. Eby, we don't do procurement in this committee. We don't do anything that has to do with purchasing services or anything in this committee, so I understand you and I hear that you're just here to give technical experience as asked.

I note that you are the regulatory affairs and government relations person for Pelmorex. I was wondering if in your role of regulatory affairs and government relations you have lobbied the federal government. If so, what topics have you lobbied on, and what ministers or departments have you met with?

Mr. Kurt Eby: I am a registered lobbyist. I do meet with government officials. I've met with members here. I reach out all the time.

The thing I talk about most with MPs is the NAAD system, public alerting and how it works. A lot of people don't understand that The Weather Network operates that system. In the past, when our broadcasting services licence came up for renewal, MPs would write into the CRTC and say, "We think this is great service," and, "Please support it." That's the nature of our lobbying largely. I have met with public safety ministers, environment ministers and the industry minister. Minister Anand is our local MP. We've had her to the office and met with her.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: That goes to my next question.

You mentioned that you're lobbying on changes to the CRTC. This is a federal committee. This is an opportunity to get a number of MPs at one time to talk about the federal changes that would be needed to the CRTC or others who could assist in alerts. Today, we heard much testimony that micro alerts might be as effective or more effective. What are the changes that are needed?

Mr. Kurt Eby: Well, alerting is such an interesting field, because, like I said, public safety is a provincial jurisdiction, but certain federal agencies have their own jurisdictions. Environment Canada obviously can issue a tornado alert in any province, but mostly it's run by the provinces.

This has always been a collective and collaborative effort among the federal government and provincial governments, and it's not really about changes so much as directing us to add new features to the alerting system. That's really what it's been about.

Any lobbying I've done about federal government regulations recently has been related to the Broadcasting Act, and that's been specific to the work to regulate streaming services. It's not really part of a public alerting file.

• (1230)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Okay.

Diversity and inclusion were mentioned in some of our earlier testimony, and I think about that in employment, about having indigenous people in an organization.

I'm wondering if Pelmorex has indigenous representation in the organization. Is there a movement around cultural sensitivity and understanding the nations across Canada?

Mr. Kurt Eby: Absolutely, there is a movement. I would have to ask HR. I don't believe we have many indigenous employees. We have an indigenous advisory circle of paid indigenous advisers. We meet with them a few times a year and ask them about content for

The Weather Network and MétéoMédia, and things like the use of place names on our apps and websites, things like red dress alerts. Definitely we are trying to push that movement forward.

We recently launched a weather product across the northern territories in six Inuktitut dialects, airing on Uvavut TV, so it's like The Weather Network local forecast but in six different indigenous languages.

We are sensitive to that and trying to do our best.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: My last question is about innovation in your space. What is happening in the way of innovation? Are there new platforms, new ways to communicate? What kind of innovation are you talking about in your industry?

Mr. Kurt Eby: Is that in terms of alerting, or everywhere? We're an innovation company. We started as a broadcaster and we are the most popular Canadian app in Canada. We're constantly innovating. We're doing a lot of work with AI right now that we want to apply certainly to weather forecasting and better early prediction of weather events, but that can be used in conjunction with alerting and all sorts of opportunities.

We're trying to push the envelope as much as we can as a Canadian company to take innovation to Canadians and to other countries around the world.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much for that.

You said something about provincial jurisdiction. I was at something recently in B.C.—I'm a B.C. MP—and Bowinn Ma and the Minister of Public Safety were there talking about some alerts for climate change. We're dealing with climate change, so we were talking about some of those alerts.

Are you aware of any other tables where provincial, territorial and first nations, Métis, and Inuit leadership are sitting that would be of importance to this study?

The Chair: You have about 15 seconds to respond.

Mr. Kurt Eby: No, not specifically, but I could get back to you.

The Chair: That would be wonderful.

Because our time is limited, we're now going to reduce it to three minutes, three minutes, one minute and one minute. When I say one minute, that is flexible.

I'm going to pass the floor over now to Anna.

Anna, you have the floor for three minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for being patient with us; you're a very popular person today.

I live in a rural area, and I'm really happy that I have a generator, because we have lots of power outages.

What weaknesses in the alert systems in Canada, especially in rural areas, do you see?

Mr. Kurt Eby: Obviously, that final reach in terms of coverage can sometimes be an issue. Even if a town has good cellphone service in a rural area, when you get outside the city, it is probably not as good. Certainly I think that's well known, which is why we have the broadcast channel, the radio channel, because the propagation is usually quite good for that, but certainly just for that region.

Taking the technology and adding additional channels to meet those needs, I think, is important.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: There's a reason why I bring this up. You're probably too young to remember this, but in 2003, the north-east blackout saw 50 million people lose electricity across Ontario and seven American states. On July 8, 2013, 300,000 Torontonians saw a power outage, and 1,400 passengers were trapped in trains and subways, and whatnot. It took them hours to free these individuals.

When there's a power outage of that magnitude, nothing works. I lived through the 2003 outage. At the time I was working at a financial institution, and we had to shut everything down, obviously, for reasons I'm sure you're aware of.

How can we communicate when things like this happen?

• (1235)

Mr. Kurt Eby: I'm not too young to remember that.

There are other discussions going on through the CRTC with the communications providers about that exact issue, because I think everybody recognizes it. I know that, out east when the hurricane came, a lot of power went down. If there's not power to the cellphone towers, can you issue alerts? They're looking to determine if they can share infrastructure with the—

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I'm going to stop you there for a second because I only have a few minutes. I can tell you that there is a company in my riding that has a solution to that, but that's a topic for another day.

We love to give our business to Canadian companies, so how would you say your company differs from the company that was used? I believe it was Everbridge. Where do you see the differences there? We've heard from our previous witnesses. Can you give us some comparisons and cost measures?

We just spent a fortune on arrive scam, like \$60 million, so how cost efficient is your company compared to Everbridge?

The Chair: You have about 15 seconds.

Mr. Kurt Eby: As I mentioned, we've operated this alerting system since 2010, when it launched for free, at no cost, so I don't—

Mrs. Anna Roberts: We could have had the arrive scam done by you for no cost. Where have you been?

The Chair: I'm going to pass it over now to Lisa.

Lisa, you have the floor for three minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witness.

Kurt, you were speaking with my colleague Ms. Zarrillo about people you've lobbied. You met with me in my office in my previous role on the heritage committee, and we talked about broadcasting licences and things like that.

One of the things I remember from that meeting—and I believe this is true—is that, when we buy a cellphone in Canada, it's not your weather app that's installed in these phones. It's an American weather network app that comes preloaded on our phones. Would that cause any issues in rolling out a red dress alert through your system?

Mr. Kurt Eby: That's a great question. That is true. All of our app users are gained by our company through reputation and quality. People have to go and download the Weather Network app themselves, and we're superproud of that. We didn't pay to be on something.

Right now, the broadcast and media alerts don't go through the app; they just go right to your phone. The Weather Network app does pass on the rest of the alerts, including those in Canada. Having that on your phone helps to make sure that you'll get an alert if, for some reason, you're not in an LTE coverage zone or you're just working off Wi-Fi. That's one good reason to have our app on your phone among many other good reasons.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Some of my other colleagues have intimated that your vision of how this red dress alert would work through your system would be like Everbridge. Instead of Everbridge, we would use the Weather Network app. Could it be as culturally sensitive and as on the ground and able to be used? You've answered this a little bit, but I'm trying to envision whether The Weather Network could play the exact same role that Everbridge plays in Nova Scotia, where it's completely community driven. There's no bureaucracy and it moves quickly.

Could you replicate that as well through The Weather Network?

Mr. Kurt Eby: Absolutely, there's no question. Any technology that needs to be added, we can do. Our track record is that we would take whatever steps are necessary to make it work. Also, as we heard from the previous witnesses, we could make it work the right way, a way that has trust and reliability.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: What I understood from your previous testimony is that nobody pays you for the silver alert or the amber alert. Would it be the same for the red dress system? Would it be cost-neutral for the communities that are looking to have this service?

Mr. Kurt Eby: The way it works right now, because we have a fixed budget, is that the budget is directed by all the provinces and territories. I would envision that it is possible that there might have to be a commercial model to build out some additional channels, and we would wait to see where this committee goes and where the results go for that.

• (1240)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Just really quickly, would it require a lot of negotiations with provinces and territories?

Mr. Kurt Eby: No, we could do it without that.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Great, thank you.

The Chair: Andréanne, you have a minute and a bit.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Eby, I will ask you a similar question. Creating a red dress alert was recommended some time ago. It's included in reports on fighting violence against women and girls, especially indigenous women and girls.

In the 2023 budget, the government set aside funds to set up a federal-provincial-territorial-indigenous table to move priority issues forward, including the creation of a red dress alert.

Were you consulted? Did you have discussions with the government, who will have to fund this table and fund an action plan?

[English]

Mr. Kurt Eby: I was consulted by MP Gazan and MP Damoff about a year ago. They asked very similar questions to what's happening right now. How does the official system work and how would you add the red dress alert? I provided pretty much all the same information I'm sharing today about that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass it over to Bonita for her final question.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

What are the relevant laws and regulations already in place to protect the use of personal information within alert systems in Canada?

Mr. Kurt Eby: I think the existing privacy law would be the law in place. It's not relevant to our current alerting system, because it's a one-way distribution feed. We don't have any personal information within the system. None is gathered or used, at all.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Great.

That's it.

The Chair: I want to ask a question and get a bit of chair's prerogative here, if you don't mind.

One thing we've heard so much about with missing and murdered indigenous women is this: We know about that remote part. Many have been much further north, so there may not be police. In one case, within 500 kilometres, there was one police officer.

When we're looking at that type of security, what is your reach into those remote and rural communities further north, where they

don't even, sometimes, have roads? If you were able to do something like the red dress alert, how would you do it in the most remote areas?

Mr. Kurt Eby: Presently, as a broadcasting company and alerting provider, we reach those places through satellite TV. All of the alerts are intrusive on satellite TV, as well as cable. There is cable in some remote areas, obviously. There are cellphone services in some remote areas, as we discussed. There are still areas that could use, I think, better service, but we reach them that way, as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you.

We're going to suspend for a few minutes. We have some issues on the red dress alert and budgets to pass.

• (1240)

(Pause)

• (1240)

The Chair: Everybody, we're going to get back to committee business here.

There are five motions we need to get through today so we can do the business of the committee. If there's additional business, we can add that.

• (1245)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I have a point of order, Chair.

Do we mean to stay in public here?

The Chair: We can stay in public, because we are passing budgets. There's nothing that is an issue of privacy here.

The first thing we're looking at is the proposed budget, in the amount of \$29,400, for the study of the red dress alert. I'm looking for adoption of that motion so we can go forward with that study.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We heard some excellent testimony today. I'm sure we've all sent in lists of potential witnesses. Now I think we might have to ask a few others.

I spoke to Leah Gazan earlier today and last night about potentially asking a minister. Maybe that's something we want to look at. There are two ministers we could ask. She mentioned Crown.

I'm going to pass it over to Clare to explain why.

Ms. Clare Annett (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Madam Chair.

As Madam Chair mentioned, there could be two departments or ministers the committee might be interested in hearing from.

Crown-Indigenous Relations is the department that would be responsible for the federal pathway for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. That is where consultations, including discussions, on a red dress alert are going to be happening or have been happening. That is the department responsible for that aspect.

Then, as the committee heard today, Indigenous Services has provided funding, for example, to Jennifer Jesty's initiative.

There's an opportunity, potentially, for the committee to hear from both sides about the support this red dress initiative is receiving from those departments, if they wish.

The Chair: Yes. I just wanted to bring that and exactly what Bonita said to the committee.

We heard about SOREM today, and we're trying to understand what SOREM is. We did a little research. You probably saw Clare and Alexia working on this. SOREM is that federal-provincial...what does it do? It may be something we want to bring to this committee, as well. We are only listed for four meetings, meaning we only have three meetings left on this. I think, even after today, we probably know we may want to go a little deeper.

I'm going to ask all parties to go back to their lists, because we want to make sure that we have the indigenous voice, but also that we understand the technological side of it. Many of the groups that have come in have first nations voices, but we need that technical side too.

I'm just throwing it back at everybody. Please review your lists. If we need to rejig them, let's do that, but let's just make sure that we have a very fulsome study on this.

We passed the budget of \$29,400, but we may have to add an extra meeting. I think we should discuss that at our next meeting quickly.

The next thing is a motion for the provision of mental health services to witnesses. As a reminder, when we're having these types of meetings, sometimes we get rather deep. In our last study with Sport Canada, we wanted to ensure that athletes had the opportunity to speak to counsellors, as necessary.

This motion reads:

That, in relation to the study on the Red Dress Alert, the committee offer mental health supports to the witnesses, and that the clerk be authorized to make the necessary arrangements, if requested.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Regarding instructions to the clerk and analysts for the news release, earlier today you should have received in your email inbox the news release regarding the study. The motion is:

That the clerk and analysts of the committee, in consultation with the Chair, prepare a news release for publication on the committee's website, at the start of the study, and upon presentation of the report to the House.

Everybody has received the draft. I just want to see if there are any questions before we send the draft out on this study.

Go ahead, Lisa.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: To clarify—because I saw that news release and I forwarded it to a couple of people who I thought might want to do briefs—this hasn't gone public yet.

The Chair: It's only gone to us.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Okay. I'm sorry. Hopefully I didn't.... It seemed pretty safe. It was, "Here's who to contact if you want to submit a brief."

The Chair: No, I think that's absolutely fine.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I continually meet people who I think would be great additions to this study, so I think my office has sent more names to the clerk in the meantime. I love your idea that we might need a more fulsome discussion.

The Chair: Absolutely. Thank you, Lisa.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Once we approve this news release and send it out, our next part is briefs. Briefs are very important. Here is the motion for the deadline and word count for the submission of the briefs on the red dress alert.

That, in the context of the study on the Red Dress Alert, the deadline for the submission of briefs be no later than 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 11, 2024, and that briefs not exceed two pages (approximately 1,000 words).

We have received briefs in the past that were novels.

Go ahead, Andréanne.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I understood February 16. I think I don't have the right date, Madam Chair. Could you repeat it?

[English]

The Chair: That's not a problem. The deadline for briefs is April 11. That lines up with after we've heard all the testimony. It gives everybody a chance for that.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: This is with regard to hospitality. The motion reads:

That the clerk of the Committee make the necessary arrangements for an informal meeting with a delegation of Finnish parliamentarians on Monday, April 8, 2024, at which the Committee will provide coffee and a light snack.

We have looked into it. It's going to cost about \$172.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I have further committee business.

Michelle, you had your hand up.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I missed the last point you raised.

[English]

The Chair: That's not a problem.

Is it the motion for hospitality that you missed?

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Okay. That's perfect.

[English]

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Madam Chair, on the [Inaudible—Editor] the officials, I think Crown-Indigenous...one minister with officials.

The Chair: That's a very good question. Once again, I'm going to pass it over, because as we're doing this meeting, we're looking at who is in charge, and that's exactly one of the issues.

I'm going to have Clare read to you what she found, and then we can decide who we need to see.

Ms. Clare Annett: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, it's up to the committee whether the committee wants to hear from both the ministers from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous Services Canada. As I mentioned, one department, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, is responsible for the federal pathway for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls where a lot of that round table discussion and consultation about a red dress alert is under way or about to be under way. Indigenous Services Canada, according to witnesses who were here today, has provided funding for certain community-based initiatives. There's a possibility of hearing from both of those departments.

Then, as Madam Chair mentioned, SOREM—senior officials responsible for emergency management—“is a Federal/Provincial/Territorial...body that works to harmonize and improve emergency practices across the country. SOREM includes representatives from provincial and territorial Emergency Management Organizations and Public Safety Canada”.

There is one person who we have found who we are not sure is the right contact. We haven't narrowed it down, but it seems like they would be able to speak about a broad range of topics, potentially with that jurisdictional piece that the committee heard a little bit about today.

The Chair: We do not have to make the decision today. That's why I'm asking everybody to go back and look at their lists. We're going to make the clerk have to rework some more things, but I just think that we found out from today's testimony some different directions or different pathways that we may or may not need to take. We can reassess that.

Please go ahead, Andréanne.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Actually, I was just reviewing all the points you raised. I just want to make sure of the date we are receiving the delegation of Finnish MPs.

[English]

The Chair: The Finnish delegation is on April 8.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Okay.

[English]

The Chair: Michelle, you have your hand up.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you very much.

Thanks for all of that in getting this done.

I'm going to table a motion here today. With April 1 just around the corner, I'm going to ask for my colleagues support on what I'm going to table. April 1 is April Fool's Day, but a lot of Canadians are struggling. In fact, 70% of Canadians are. There's going to be a planned 23% increase in the carbon tax. What I'm asking here today in the status of women committee is for support of the following motion:

Given that,

- a) Canadians are facing food insecurity in record numbers, and that one of the groups at the highest risk of facing food insecurity are single mothers;
- b) According to the “Food insecurity among Canadian families” report, using data from the 2021 Canada Income Survey, 48% of single mothers living below the poverty line struggle with food insecurity;
- c) Increasing the carbon tax by 23% on April 1 will only make food more expensive.

In order to help single mothers afford groceries for their children, the committee report to the House its recommendation to immediately cancel the Liberal Government's 23% carbon tax increase by April 1.

That motion was sent in on Friday, March 15, to everybody. I think the reality is that life has never been more unaffordable, particularly food. I came back last week from a tour in New Brunswick, and I travelled to a few food banks. Not only are numbers at least doubled and in some instances tripled, but the demographics of those actually accessing these food banks is what is most concerning.

In Oromocto, 40 to 50 actively serving military families are accessing the food bank. This absolutely floored me. I had no idea. I guess, as the status of women committee, it is our duty, and this is something that we can do right now today. I'm asking my colleagues directly to help make life more affordable with regard to food. It is unbelievable the messages that are coming through across this country of people genuinely struggling to eat, particularly moms and families who are trying to feed their kids.

I would ask this status of women committee today to approve this motion that we cancel the Liberal government's 23% carbon tax increase on April 1.

Thank you.

• (1255)

The Chair: I have a speaking list. Next are Anna and Anita, followed by Andréanne.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Michelle, because this is a very important cause.

This is dear to my heart, because I spent New Year's Eve day at a food bank in Toronto. I saw the lineups. I'll be honest and say that I was appalled. A lot of the individuals in that lineup were mothers with children. I will tell you that this particular food bank, by the name of Sai Dham, supports everyone in the community. In one month alone, they served 3.17 million meals. They also served 3,000 food baskets to seniors. These are individuals who can't afford to eat. These are single mothers who are too ashamed to go anywhere else. It really appalled me.

If we really care, we need to pass this motion so that we can continue to feed our communities. This is Canada. The number of people who have to use food banks is appalling. I think we need to make sure that this doesn't go on.

I'm supporting this motion, Madam Chair. I would like to see it go forward so that we are here for all single mothers and everyone to ensure that they don't go to bed hungry and nobody goes to bed with an empty stomach.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I know that there have been some questions on this. Yes, it was sent on Friday, and it's being moved today. It's debatable at this time.

Go ahead, Andréanne. I know that there had been a change. It's your turn.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, it is currently 12:58. I don't know how much time you set aside for the debate, but—

[*English*]

The Chair: Can you stop for a moment? We need some translation.

Okay. Got it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, it is 12:59. I do not know if you set aside time for the debate, but we could extend the committee meeting. As I understand it, the motion on food banks was sent on Friday.

The Government of Quebec asked the federal government to conduct a study on coercive control. Furthermore, Ms. Ferreri moved a motion on transportation safety. So, there's a great deal more work to plan. I think we are going to run out of time to debate this motion right now.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, Anita.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Following on that, as it's the common practice in this committee to discuss these things in the subcommittee, I move to adjourn debate.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3)

The Chair: Are we seeing anything else under committee business?

Seeing none, today's meeting is adjourned. We'll see you on Thursday.

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