



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 024

Tuesday, June 7, 2022

Chair: The Honourable Marc Garneau



Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Tuesday, June 7, 2022

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone. I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 24 of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

[*English*]

We are gathered here today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation.

[*Translation*]

We are continuing our fourth study today, which is about Arctic Sovereignty, Security and the Emergency Preparedness of Indigenous Peoples.

[*English*]

On today's first panel we will be hearing from Mr. Robert Huebert from the University of Calgary; from Sara Brown, CEO, Northwest Territories Association of Communities; and from Mayor or Nick Daigneault from the northern Village of Beauval.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind you of the Board of Internal Economy's requirements regarding physical distancing and the wearing of masks.

[*English*]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules for us to follow. Members or witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services in English, French and Inuktitut are available for the first part of today's meeting. Please be patient with the interpretation. There may be a delay, especially since the Inuktitut has to be translated into English first before being translated into French, and vice versa.

The interpretation button is found at the bottom of your screen, in either English or French, or Inuktitut. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we'll attend to it and pause for a bit.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer.

The “raise hand” feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or alert the chair. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

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

Members, please direct your question, otherwise, if it's assumed to be for all three witnesses, there may be a long pause, because nobody knows who should start.

[*Translation*]

Without further ado, we will hear from the first panel.

[*English*]

For the benefit of the witnesses, you will have five minutes each to make opening remarks, and then we'll proceed with a question period.

Without further ado, I would ask Professor Robert Huebert from the University of Calgary to kick us off.

Professor Huebert, you have five minutes.

Dr. Robert Huebert (Associate Professor, University of Calgary, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

First of all, let me tell you what an honour it is, and how intimidating, to come before such an august body in this regard to talk about such a critically important topic. I have two sets of comments to offer in my first five minutes.

The first is, of course, the traditional addressing of what we mean by sovereignty and security as they pertain to emergency preparedness and the indigenous peoples of the north. One of the big problems that we face whenever we have any discussions about sovereignty is that it is one of those terms that everybody uses, but very few people really understand what it means.

Sovereignty, of course, refers to the ability of a government to control a specific land mass and maritime region. For the Arctic context that means the control of the maritime zones; that means the internal waters of the Northwest Passage. We will be having a sovereignty issue coming forward with regard to the continental shelf. As it pertains to the roles of the indigenous peoples, we are going to have to be dealing with the terms of sovereignty as they pertain to the land claim settlement regions and what that means in terms of control, particularly of maritime navigation through the Northwest Passage.

In terms of security, we talk of two things. We talk about human security, which of course many of the preceding experts have addressed, and we also talk about the issue of—

• (1620)

The Chair: One moment please, Mr. Huebert.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gill, you have the floor.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Chair, the interpreter informs me that the sound quality is not good enough to do the interpretation. It has been like this for about a minute.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Huebert, it has to do with the ability of the interpreters to translate your language. Have you set up on Zoom with the microphone as your headset microphone?

Dr. Robert Huebert: Yes, I have.

I'm looking at it right now. Is this better quality?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Gill, can you check if things are working on your end?

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Yes, of course. I'm sure the interpreters will let me know.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll try to keep going. Perhaps speak a bit more slowly and a little more loudly. That will help.

Thank you.

Dr. Robert Huebert: I'm sorry about that.

We have the issue of sovereignty and security. The security that I want to talk about is the security that is often overlooked in our discussions of emergency preparedness, which is military security.

The reality is that the issues in Ukraine have illustrated one of the greatest dangers that we have pretended have disappeared, which is the possibility of nuclear war. We have heard this several times coming from President Putin as he made threats to NATO and the NATO members, and it is a threat that we need to take seriously as it pertains to emergency preparedness. Once again, many people will say, "Well, it has a very low probability," but the reality is that before the pandemic hit us, the possibility of a disease that would kill over 27,000 Canadians and have the impacts that it has had was, of course, viewed as a low probability.

Putin has not only threatened nuclear war. He has built the necessary weapon delivery systems and weapons to carry it out. A scenario is very easy to come up with. He is losing the war in Ukraine. He wants to hit the resupply regions. In doing so, before he hits them with the tactical nuclear weapons that he has, he has to blind the Americans. To blind the Americans, he has to hit the airbases in Anchorage and he has to hit the Tully radar sites. That presents Canada with a very real and explicit threat.

In terms of emergency planning, that means that we need to be able to deal with the Arctic and with the indigenous peoples and their communities, which would no longer have communications. The EMP blast that would occur in such a strike means that any electronics would be down. The Russians also have the capability of cutting all cables, so those communications would be down. This would be a long-term cut, and it would be a problem that the southern sections also have to deal with in Canada.

The other parts that we have not prepared for in Canada are any form of emergency preparation for the residual radio activity that would inevitably occur. We used to have plans during the Cold War, when we recognized a similar threat. In 2022, most of these plans are either non-existent, or are so old as to not be practical.

I come back to the point that this is a low probability, but as we have experienced through the pandemic, to not be prepared for the very worst means it will only become that much worse in our overall context.

Moving ahead, we of course have to be able to begin and prepare for the existential threat that climate change will present for all Canadians, but northern Canadians and northern indigenous peoples, in particular. At the same time, we also have to prepare for the threat and the possibility of a limited nuclear exchange. It is unfortunate, but it is something that I think the evidence is increasingly pointing to.

Thank you very much.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Huebert.

We'll now go to Sara Brown. You have five minutes.

Ms. Sara Brown (Chief Executive Officer, Northwest Territories Association of Communities): My name is Sara Brown and I represent the NWT Association of Communities. I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you. We represent all 33 communities in the NWT, and as such we are planning to discuss four key areas.

First of all, the use of smart military investment is the backbone for building the new north. This relates to some of what Mr. Huebert was saying earlier. Certainly all of the aggression in Ukraine is creating angst about Arctic sovereignty for residents of the NWT. It's been raised in the press and in the legislative assembly.

Canada devotes fewer resources to the protection of northern and Arctic regions than does any other major power in the world. Russia's most recent assertion of national interest at the North Pole has already caused general concerns in the NWT, and the actions in Ukraine have increased this concern.

We need to leverage military investment. This would lay the foundation for sustained growth and prosperity in northern communities while supporting Canada's long-term economic and military interests in the region. We need a vision for the north that integrates an increased military presence with building healthier communities, protecting the environment and diversifying the regional economies. This includes projects like the extension of the runway in Inuvik.

The pandemic has recently highlighted the north's vulnerability due to telecommunications challenges, whether in terms of online schooling, telehealth or virtual meetings. The development of a more robust communications network could not only assist the military and assert sovereignty but also greatly assist communities in enjoying a level of service that the rest of Canada takes for granted.

These conflicts have potential to recast the north as we know it and to bring about dramatic and wide-ranging change. The convergence of these issues has reawakened national interest in the north. The role and effect of these transformations on northern communities must now be part of the federal decision-making process.

Second is to develop a long-term plan to invest in northern infrastructure. Canada needs to provide the funding to build the infrastructure necessary to sustain communities and support new industry, tourism, research and military activities. Recent federal investments are helping, but they are not enough to build the modern infrastructure and transportation linkages that northern communities need to grow stronger and be more secure. In particular, these investments need to respond to indigenous aspirations in the north. These include investments in hydro and all-weather roads. Every effort must be made to complete these projects using local resources and contractors.

Third, we need to make Canada's north the world leader in climate change adaptation. Like the rest of Canada, NWT communities have been experiencing increased risk from wildfires, and ice jams have been causing unprecedented flooding for the last several years. For the second year in a row we have seen large and small communities alike impacted in ways they never have been before. Communities are responsible for providing the first layer of response during an emergency, but communities are going to require more and more support from the territorial and federal governments moving forward. Further, there is a need to clarify roles in communities in terms of community and indigenous governments.

Massive environmental change has the Arctic emerging as the poster child for the real-world impact of climate change. Northern communities have so many more and different risks from climate change than southern Canada does. They're not limited to flooding and wildfire but also include permafrost thaw, melting winter roads, eroding river banks, thawing coastlines, extreme weather, reduced access to the land, overland flow, and the list goes on.

The costs from only a few of these risks has been articulated. For example, the cost of decay of permafrost on public infrastructure is in the order of \$1.3 billion, or \$51 million per year. This is outside the capabilities of both community and the territorial governments, and this is just one risk and only public infrastructure.

Climate change funding to date has focused on data collection and design. It has been hugely oversubscribed in the NWT, and we have been focused on treating traditional and local knowledge with respect. There's soon going to be a need for far greater amounts as we head into the capital phases of adaptation and communities attempt to take a proactive approach.

Canada has the opportunity to make sure that the north is a world leader in climate change adaptation, and we have done recent work to demonstrate that the greatest economic stimulus from dollars spent is at a community level. Every \$1 million spent by federal, territorial and community levels creates six, seven and 13 jobs respectively. This clearly demonstrates the benefits of providing funding through community governments. Further, this leads to developing and fostering northern capacity.

• (1630)

The longer we work on the climate change file, the more it has become evident that tackling climate change through risk-based partnerships is really the best approach. This leads to recommendation number four, which is to make partnerships official policy. Leaving community and indigenous governments to try to become experts in and to tackle the various challenges on their own is unrealistic. Further, it leads to much duplication.

We have used the risk-based partnership a couple of times, first, working to do a geotechnical review of the community assets of the seven communities most vulnerable to permafrost thaw. This has proven an effective approach, with a lower burden on the community, and the data can be aggregated. We have more recently done a joint application to the DMAF with the GNWT and the 29 impacted communities, to complete firebreaks.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Brown. Could you wrap up very quickly, please?

Ms. Sara Brown: Finally, I'll just highlight the four things that I found in a 2010 report saying the same things: Use smart military investment; develop a long-term plan to invest in northern infrastructure; make Canada's north the world leader in climate change adaptation; and make partnerships official policy.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Brown.

We'll now go to Mayor Nick Daigneault from Beauval.

Mr. Daigneault, you have five minutes.

Mr. Nick Daigneault (Mayor, Northern Village of Beauval): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm both humbled and honoured to be able to present today, from a small village in northern Saskatchewan. I'd like to extend my thanks to our MP, Gary Vidal, for the invite to present today.

As mentioned, I am the mayor of the northern Village of Beauval, which is located roughly 500 kilometres north of Saskatoon, just to give some context. We are at the centre of two major highway arteries, Highway 155 and Highway 165, which makes us the centralized location for northwest Saskatchewan.

I've had an interesting 10 years in my time as a politician in northern Saskatchewan. Previously, as a councillor, I was much involved in the emergency measures coordination for the wildfires that happened in 2015. There were a lot of wildfires surrounding our community, not necessarily near, but close enough to cause worry. With the smoke, we had a significant number of community members who needed to evacuate. In recent years as well, we've had wildfires break out near the community, but none to the extent of 2015, when we had to do some minor emergency coordination as well with the Saskatchewan protection agency. We've since developed a great partnership with Saskatchewan now that they've amalgamated all their resources into the SPSA. We've been coordinating efforts on the ground and creating a good emergency team.

There have been a lot of lessons learned over the last few years, and we've decided that our village staff should become a very pertinent part of that emergency planning as well, so as not to rely too much on volunteer services in the community. We made sure that the resources were flowing to the community and that accurate information was being presented and disseminated to the community through social media posts as well as radio spots on our local TV and radio station. We've had some very good communication resources to utilize to get that proper information out to the community.

During this recent emergency, when we had the COVID pandemic, we had a real opportunity to create a government-to-government relationship with the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. For the most part, this relationship started off very strong, and we were very proud to sit down with our Métis government to discuss the strategy for the communities.

Again, here is some background. Most of the communities, from Green Lake all the way up to La Loche along Highway 155, are predominantly Métis communities.

This also presented an opportunity to work with our surrounding first nations. We created Beauval as a staging area for the whole northwest region, to create a regional approach to the pandemic response. Through federal supports and relief funds, we were able to procure PPE here—purchases as well as donations—and food supplies for the homes, so that we had food security during this tough time when stores, including grocery stores, in the surrounding area were closing.

We were also able to procure rental RVs that were deployed when isolation events occurred. This was very much appreciated at a time when we had households that were already experiencing overcrowding. We did not want to experience outbreaks in the households. They were able to isolate the specific case and move to an RV for the time of isolation.

The partnership was working quite fine for the most part, until the months passed—unfortunately, politics tend to get in the way of great ideas sometimes—and then it appeared that agencies wanted

to be the hero of the day and claim credit when it came to news media time. This was not our intent at the time, and it didn't become an issue until the later part of the pandemic, when requests for resources and the sharing of resources went unheard. This then became a concern for our community.

Municipalities are not necessarily given any sort of emergency response budget, so a lot of unrecoverable costs went into managing our communities to protect ourselves from an invisible threat. As you all know, this was not a wildfire situation, where we can see and assess the threat. We had to create some very impromptu responses, such as blockades, whereby we had to close entrances and exits to and from the community and funnel everybody through one entrance and one exit. They had to be screened coming in and out of their communities. We were not the only community to do this. This also happened in Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan, Buffalo Narrows, Saskatchewan, and La Loche, Saskatchewan.

● (1635)

We also had to hire nightly security, who did patrols to make sure that individual households were following the emergency measures laws that were created by the province for families to stay within their own bubble, with no mixing between households, to curb the pandemic. We had to create that nightly security detail that would create logs that would come to the mayor and council in the morning. They would sometimes warrant a visit from one of our community leaders or the RCMP themselves, to remind households and educate them that we were in the midst of a pandemic and that rules needed to be followed.

The introduction of the CERB money also made matters a little bit worse, especially in a community that's already struggling with addictions. This money, which was well intended, obviously, for those suffering job displacement or loss, was abused by so many individuals already on some sort of social assistance program, causing further incidents for our community and breaches of the pandemic orders.

The Chair: Mr. Daigneault, I will have to ask you to wrap up at this point, so we can get on with the questions.

Mr. Nick Daigneault: We wanted to ensure that there was a regional approach to this as the communities banded together at the beginning of this pandemic.

I really would like to see some sort of a federal response to bring all first nations, Métis communities, Métis governments and municipalities together, as we here in the northwest believe we have the ability to create a very strong regional emergency response team. We also have the resources and people to work with the existing Saskatchewan protection agency as well.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present this and give you a ground-level idea of how we responded.

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

We'll now proceed with the first round of questions. I have Ms. Stubbs up for the first six minutes.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all of the witnesses for being here.

Of course this motion is very diverse and wide-ranging. For my portion of the questions, I'm going to focus on the security threats relative to the people and communities in the north.

Dr. Huebert, in early April, you testified at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security that "Russia is an existential threat to Canada". You said that it is reaching the potential level of a crisis. You touched on this again today, and your testimony there noted that the most important element of that threat, which has been largely ignored, is the Russian way of war, in particular the potential use of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles and Russia's willingness to do so in order to achieve its policy objectives of putting it on a direct collision course with NATO.

I think your testimony at the public safety committee pertained to a general threat to Canada. I wonder if now, for this committee, as you did in your opening remarks, you could add some more details and context to the threat in particular for the people and communities in northern Canada. In addition to that, could you outline perhaps three to five top priorities that governments could move on immediately to get prepared?

• (1640)

Dr. Robert Huebert: Thank you very much for this opportunity, and thank you for paying such close attention to what I have been arguing for a long time.

The Russians have been a threat since the return of an authoritative governance in Russia. This was, of course, when Putin became acting president in 1999. What many people do not know is this: One of the first decisions Putin made, from a military security perspective, was to develop a series of weapons systems, as early as 2002 or 2003, that could challenge the American anti-ballistic missile system. In other words, they were clearly developing the capabilities to engage in the series of wars they have engaged in: Chechnya, Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine in 2014 and 2022.

How does this pertain to the north? It pertains to the north because the Russians clearly see the Americans as the greatest challenge they have in achieving their policy objectives. In order to meet the American challenge, they have developed a series of weapons systems—hypersonic Avangard missiles and underwater autonomous vehicles—that are all designed to take out the American capability of striking back. The ability of the Americans to strike back is based on their northern capabilities, which we share with the Americans under NORAD.

If the Russians were, in fact, to strike the Americans, to allow them to then escalate in other parts of Europe, the conflict would automatically spill over into the northern component of Canada. This is what's leading the Americans, under the leadership of General VanHerck, the head of NORAD and U.S. Northern Command, to talk about the concept of integrated deterrence. He has publicly stated that the Americans do not have the capabilities of detecting the new Russian delivery systems, and that these new Russian delivery systems are, in fact, designed to take out the American ability to know and the American ability to respond.

Thule and Elmendorf are two of their most important bases. These are in the north. Canada, as a member of NORAD, supports the Americans through co-operation at forward operating bases for

our aircraft and such, and with our NORAD radar systems under what used to be known as the DEW Line. The North Warning System is also part of it. Therefore, a Russian strike to blind the Americans would inevitably require a strike on Canadian targets, as well.

Once again, I want to make this clear: This is not a high probability, but it is still something that is clearly in the Russian way of war.

You asked me what our priorities should be. The first, of course, is to take NORAD renewal seriously. We have, in terms of our detection system and radar, 1985 technology. We need over-the-horizon radar systems. We need an improvement in our satellite capabilities. I dare say that simply having the systems we have in place now, never mind maintaining them, is problematic.

We also have to show the Americans that we are serious. This committee is looking at sovereignty. As much as Russia is a direct and existential threat to Canada for the reasons I have just outlined, there is the ongoing possibility—as illustrated in comments made by Senator Sullivan two weeks ago—that American political leadership may see us as a "freeloader". When that happens, the Americans will act on their own to provide themselves with the necessary security.

That becomes a sovereignty threat for all of Canada, therefore, particularly for northern Canadians. If the Americans feel they have to do something in the north, they will act accordingly when they believe—as I believe they already understand—the Russians to be an existential threat.

Ensuring our seriousness about NORAD is the first priority.

The second, in terms of the response of this committee, is to ensure we have the proper emergency plan in place. As I said, our COVID response—

• (1645)

The Chair: Professor Huebert, you're going to have to wrap it up. It's been six minutes, so please wrap it up.

Dr. Robert Huebert: Second is the NORAD.... Get the procurement—the F-35s—and an emergency plan in place, one that goes beyond what we've been able to respond to.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just before we go to the next witness....

Mayor Daigneault, the IT people have asked if you could lift your head microphone closer to your nose, if that's possible. Thank you.

The next speaker is Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod, you have six minutes.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the presenters today. It has been a very interesting discussion, for sure.

I'm glad to see Sara Brown joining us. She always brings forward a lot of energy and many good ideas.

I wanted to ask about the north's preparedness when it comes to emergency situations. In the last three years in the Northwest Territories we have experienced quite a few floods in the communities. Last year we had seven, and we have had several this year. There's always the threat of forest fires, and many of the calls I get are from community leaders and individuals who are asking for information on the process and who is responsible for what, even when it comes to looting in the community after the community is evacuated. Sometimes the communities will be asking for the rangers, but the rangers don't have that mandate.

I want to ask Sara if she thinks that additional training opportunities and additional resources would help ensure that there is no confusion in the emergency situations that we've experienced.

Ms. Sara Brown: Certainly it is an ongoing challenge for us every time we come up against a new risk or a new challenge. The roles and responsibilities are very unclear.

We would definitely benefit from additional training, even if all it does is establish relationships beforehand so that people know who they are dealing with, know who they are speaking to, understand the communities, understand the territorial resources, and understand the federal resources better before they go into it.

The pandemic really demonstrated that. It was an unanticipated risk and event, and we were really making things up as we went along. However, because we had relationships, we were able, for example, to convene regular meetings of mayors and chiefs and the territorial government, so the more training that happens in advance, the better set up everybody will be to respond effectively.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I have another question for you, Sara. I want to know if you have any suggestions for the government on supporting infrastructure, especially in our smaller indigenous communities, that could help mitigate the damage they may face from natural disasters. We have a lot of communities that are under threat from flood. We have a lot of communities that now are being challenged by erosion, and we're still seeing communities that don't have berms or dikes.

In fact, they don't have the ability to relocate major pieces of infrastructure, some of them very important pieces of infrastructure like power plants and sewer lagoons and water treatment plants that are located in flood areas. When those go, then it's the whole community.... Whether the house is flooded or not, if you don't get water or power, you're out of luck.

That's something that seems to be lacking.

• (1650)

Ms. Sara Brown: Yes, absolutely, and part of the challenge is we are leaving community governments to sort these issues out on their own and not supporting them in doing those mitigation measures and helping them with hiring an engineer, for example, to come in and do some of those analyses. That's where I really strongly believe we have to embrace this partnership model.

We should have a working table of everybody who has a flood risk, so they can learn from each other. They can identify knowl-

edge gaps. They can identify engineering gaps. They can then go look for funding as a group and try to start addressing those issues, but when we leave communities to just struggle on their own with individual risks or a collective of risks.... These are already people who are extremely tapped out. Many of them work 80 to 90 hours a week. We have huge turnover, all those things, so we definitely have to do a better job of supporting them and doing the mitigation that will reduce the impacts of these natural disasters.

Mr. Michael McLeod: For my last question, I want to ask you if you could expand a bit on your recommendation to make partnerships official policy. Could you explain what that really means?

The Chair: Be very quick, please.

Ms. Sara Brown: Yes.

I think we have all experienced all the work we do being in silos, whether they're territorial, community or federal. We have to move away from that approach. We have to see this as a collective problem, and we need to work together. We will achieve so much more. We're a small jurisdiction here, and our communities are that much smaller. If we don't work together in partnership, we will all be in trouble.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Ms. Gill, who has six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to ask Mr. Huebert a question with respect to his area of expertise. In fact, I know that he previously appeared before the Standing Committee on National Defence in 2010.

You spoke then about Arctic sovereignty and defence. Can you tell us if there have been any improvements since 2010? If not, what steps should have been taken between 2010 and 2022 in this regard?

[*English*]

Dr. Robert Huebert: That's an excellent question.

If I'm being honest, I think, if anything, the cupboard has been demonstrated to be bare.

If we look at the period between 2010 and 2022—and I would just move the bar over to 2007—we have had two instances in which vessels have, in fact, entered the Canadian Northwest Passage without permission. In fact, we were not able to stop them.

We had, in 2007, the *Berserk II*, which sailed from the eastern side of the Northwest Passage all the way to Cambridge Bay. Finally, because community leaders were able to alert the RCMP to the arrival of this vessel, we were able to arrest the participants, who had criminal records, and deport them a second time.

It's since, obviously, grown to something much larger, such as the sharing of resources using Beauval as a staging ground for all PPE, RVs, etc. to be disseminated and deployed from here. It grew even further so that each individual community didn't have to attend a one-on-one with the SPSA. We created an ad hoc regional EOC with a coordinator from Beauval who served as our go-to centralized person to get all of the resources together, including the medical health officer for our region and the director of the Saskatchewan protection agency, to get them all on to the same Zoom call and share that information so that everybody left with the same message at the end of every day when the call was done. We all went away with the same message to take back to our communities and the same strategies that we offered back to agencies to take to the governments, the province and the federal government, as the resources were coming in. Like you said, there were a lot of moving parts, and there are a lot of resources that each government can offer, and we wanted to make sure that we, as the boots on the ground, were giving them those suggestions directly so that we could work together.

As a region, all our communities have a kinship, and we capitalized on that. It's just expanding that concept in coming up with an actual legal plan, because, as you all know, there's an emergency preparedness act for the province, and it's just bridging the gap between federal jurisdictions such as first nations and the Métis governments and the municipalities. The province needs to put pen to paper.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you.

I'm going to drill a bit there, Mayor. You're talking about bridging the gap and putting pen to paper, so in the context of a post-mortem, you're going back and analyzing what worked and what didn't work. Could you maybe just be a little more specific on the things that need to be better so that you will be better positioned next time? Whether it's the 2015 wildfires or the pandemic of the last couple of years, what very specific recommendations would you suggest for that regional group? What should be put pen to paper, as you said, to learn what we can?

Mr. Nick Daigneault: Thanks, Gary. We would definitely need to come up with a framework as to what it looks like, so that all levels of government can make those suggestions. Obviously, what we're giving up when it comes to the emergency measures is our authority to the committee. What exactly is the devil in the details? What does that mean? What authority would the regional emergency coordination team have, and then where would we as the mayor in councils and chief in councils also step in? Lots of those little details need to be hammered out in order for us to all feel comfortable at the table as to what authority the regional EOC would have and what authorities we would retain.

Obviously, it's financial resources. What are we committing to this regional EOC, and then what are the frameworks around responses? What do we have in our backyards in terms of resources, and what are we lacking? We need to really get into that level of detail in order to make this work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vidal.

We'll now go to Ms. Atwin, who will share her time with Ms. May. You have a total of five minutes.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll go as fast as I can.

Thank you to our witnesses today for this incredibly important and fascinating discussion.

I'm going to continue down this line around communications, because I can't think of anything more important in the event of a disaster. Maybe I can talk a bit with Ms. Brown. You represent such a collective of communities. Are there issues around cellphone coverage, Wi-Fi access? How does communication generally happen if there is an emergency situation? How would your members get to know what's going on?

Thank you.

• (1710)

Ms. Sara Brown: We definitely have lots of challenges around communication. Some communities have very compromised Wi-Fi—harken back to dial-up. We have lots of challenges with cell coverage. It's getting better, but it does not exist between communities; it exists only within communities, and that in itself creates lots of problems. As well, we have a vulnerability in that right now there is no redundancy. We are often offline for days at a time, even in a major centre like Yellowknife, when somebody has dug up our cable in northern Alberta or northern B.C. and we're offline. We're already very vulnerable. If you added the layer of some sort of event, it would just be so much more so.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you.

I'll ask Mayor Daigneault as well. You mentioned using local radio and social media. Have you received any feedback from your community members about how effective that was, or if it reached the majority, the different demographics?

Mr. Nick Daigneault: Yes, I'm certainly glad you brought that up.

We've also had to rely on the good neighbour system as well. I know that not everybody logs onto social media, especially our elders. They rely on what we call the moccasin telegraph. We ask them if they could at least go and knock on a window or a door and spread the information door to door. We're a small community, so we know who's who, and we know who would struggle with logging into Facebook or any other social media. Like I said, the good neighbour system is also informing them by word of mouth, going directly to their house.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: I'll pass it to Ms. May now. Thank you.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thanks so much, Jenica.

I'll try to ask this question as quickly as I can to Professor Huebert. You talked about the governance structure as federal and territorial and first nations governance. I'm also looking at the circumpolar governance, the question of the Arctic Council, and whether it can play a role, or if it's fatally flawed, for instance, by Russia's right now being in the chair. Does it hold promise for security and sovereignty for us?

Dr. Robert Huebert: The Arctic Council was specifically designed not to deal with security, and that was one of the requirements that the Americans had. It is my belief that the Arctic Council will now transform, the way the G8 transformed into the G7. It's too important for the rest of the countries, but the reality is that the Russians will never come back to an Arctic Council that includes seven members that are NATO members. Remember, Finland and Sweden are now pursuing NATO membership, therefore Russia is not going to come back.

Does this mean that we now have the opportunity to give the Arctic Council a greater human security role? I think there would be a great appetite for addressing many of the issues we're dealing with here with the Emergencies Act. Remember that the Arctic Council is the only international organization that has given standing to the indigenous peoples of the North. No other body, until UNDRIP comes forward, even gets that consideration in international law.

I would say that, yes, we're going to have an Arctic Council. It will be different, just as the G7 is different from the G8, but we have an opportunity here if we are willing to go forward with bold leadership.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, do I have time for one quick, additional question?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Good.

I don't know if this would go to Sara Brown or somebody else. This is much more granular. I've heard it referenced that the Canadian Rangers are our line of defence in our north, but they don't even have.... As I understand it, we don't even buy the equipment for them. They don't have snowmobiles provided.

What is the status of the Canadian Rangers, and what should we be looking toward, given an increased security threat in the north?

Ms. Sara Brown: I'm afraid I couldn't provide that kind of granular detail. I could certainly research it and get back to the committee.

Dr. Robert Huebert: The one person you need to talk to in that regard would be Whitney Lackenbauer, who is the honorary lieutenant-colonel for the 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group. He's probably written every single book there is on the Canadian Rangers. He would be completely up to date on that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I understand that particular person is coming next week to the committee.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gill, you have two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask Mr. Huebert, Ms. Brown and Mr. Daigneault another question about their own priorities.

I would like to know how protecting Arctic sovereignty and increasing defence activities will have a positive effect on other potential crises. There can be political crises and military crises, but also climate crises. Ms. Brown talked about infrastructure, among other things.

Other than the communications issue that has already been discussed, I would like to know how the protection of sovereignty can be done in conjunction with the increase in defence activities.

Ms. Brown, you may begin.

[*English*]

Ms. Sara Brown: It's, again, the connections. How can we make those connections happen? How can we already be dialoguing, when we go into a crisis, so that all we're doing is changing tracks and not trying to re-establish relationships? I think that's the most important thing.

As I mentioned a couple of times, it's making sure the communication tools are there, making sure there's access to the Internet and cellphone service. All those things are absolutely critical to the success of any response.

Dr. Robert Huebert: If I may, there is one solution that has great promise in this regard. I've already mentioned the Arctic security working group. In 2005, the group had the director of Health Canada come forward, and they had a discussion at which they presented to the body—I attended some of the meetings—the outline of the possibility of a pandemic of a respiratory disease that basically cripples the country.

We did a tabletop. We tried to have communications, but it basically stopped in 2005 or 2007. The Arctic security working group and other bodies like it have to do two things. First of all, they have to think of bad problems. We can't just simply assume these problems will not come. The second part then becomes practice.

If we were able to have the type of ability, and the funding, to see how badly we do things... It's when we see how badly we do something that we come up with the best practice. We then go forward and say, "We have this problem that we don't think is a problem. Pandemics. Let's pretend one actually comes, and see what the communications are like."

If we had had more than a tabletop in 2007, I dare say we would have had a much better preparation for 2020. You need that big thinking. That comes from a constant ability to look at these problems as they're coming, and then having the necessary funds. Fund the federal government to say, "Okay, territories, indigenous governments and municipal governments, we're going to give you a bit of an open budget here to address and play out the problem." You do that, and I guarantee that the communication issue that Sara was talking about, and many of the central problems that we have.... We will be that much better prepared for it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Ms. Idlout, for two and half minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut as follows:*]

The war in Ukraine over the past few months has significantly altered the strategic landscape; however, many of the capabilities that Russia utilizes for Arctic security have not been employed in that conflict and thus remain a potential threat. Russia's assets available to operate in the north will likely plateau for the time being, whether due to lack of funding or lack of access to key components in western countries. If the current regime remains in power, Russia is likely to remain hawkish in pressing its sovereignty claims, which would become a flashpoint for future conflict.

There are also much less acute challenges that require response. Disputes over and access through Canadian territory in the north require the government to possess the wherewithal to maintain its sovereignty over the region. These disputes are often with close allies, such as the United States, and they are exceedingly unlikely to result in direct military conflict. While diplomatic tools remain the most likely way to resolve these issues, Canada still must maintain the civil and military capabilities across the entire spectrum as a potential response.

That being said, Canada's capabilities in the north are growing, but significant deficiencies remain. The recent announcements on defence spending specifically targeted towards northern security and modernizing NORAD are welcome, but these address only certain challenges, and it is far from certain that they'll be deployed under the current estimated timelines and costs. For example, the government has recently announced the selection of the F-35 as a replacement for the CF-18; however, there are doubts as to whether it can phase in these aircraft according to the schedule it has announced.

The navy's ongoing acquisitions of the Harry DeWolf class ships will be an excellent addition to Canada's northern presence. These vessels will assist in increasing the country's northern presence and make major strides in providing a wide range of capabilities to coastal communities above the Arctic Circle.

Lastly, Canada faces some key deficiencies. As I discussed in a recent Hill Times article, Canada's fixed-wing search and rescue fleet seems to be in trouble due to the selection of the CC-295. The aircraft has numerous technical and performance deficiencies that make it unlikely to enter service in its intended role, which may require a third competition to fill this capability. Furthermore, Canada has no effective counter to Russian or even allies' nuclear submarines, which can be effectively countered only by other nuclear submarines.

I hope this gives a good overview of the general state of security in the north. I'm happy to elucidate any area during the question period for this meeting.

• (1725)

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

Now we'll go to either Grand Chief Fox or Mr. McKay.

The two of you have five minutes combined, so please go ahead.

Grand Chief Derek Fox (Nishnawbe Aski Nation): Thank you.

Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to first of all acknowledge that we're on the unceded Algonquin Anishinabe territory.

I appreciate this opportunity to appear before this committee on behalf of the 49 first nations of Nishnawbe Aski Nation.

Emergency management is critical for first nations, especially our remote communities. It has been six years since the tragedy in the Pikangikum First Nation, which claimed nine innocent lives, including that of Amber Strang, a five-month-old infant, and three generations of her family. There have been many other similar tragedies, including the fatal house fire in the Sandy Lake First Nation in January, which claimed the lives of three children. These fires were preventable tragedies, and lives will continue to be lost without meaningful action.

The Ontario Chief Coroner's Table on understanding fire deaths in First Nations examined fire-related deaths in 20 communities, over the last decade. The report confirms what our leaders have been saying for years: Too many innocent lives have been lost in tragic house fires that might have been prevented if safety measures and prevention services had been in place.

The report found that first nations children under 10 had the highest fire-related mortality rates. Communities with no year-round road access had the highest number of fire fatalities. Eighty-six percent of fatal fires in first nations communities had either no or non-operational smoke alarms in the housing structure. Fatal fires where the primary sources of heating were wood stoves or wood heaters were highest in communities with no year-round road access.

Everyone should be able to go to bed and expect to see their families in the morning. It is unacceptable that our children are at high risk.

Despite numerous reports over the last few years, our communities have continued to suffer losses from tragic house fires. These reports state that our communities need resources, training, updated equipment and the ability to service and maintain equipment and related infrastructure to deal with and prevent fires. In the last decade, we've seen minimal improvements in these areas, primarily due to a lack of will to support proposals and initiatives.

In 2021, NAN identified the following priorities for major improvements to fire safety and prevention: increase fire safety awareness and education through Amber's fire safety campaign; implement a standardized service delivery model across NAN territory; and ensure that community infrastructure and housing conditions are acceptable and built to code.

These are solid recommendations that require action.

House fires are not the only threat to our communities. On-reserve first nations in Ontario are 18 times more likely to be evacuated due to floods, forest fires, a failure of community infrastructure and severe weather events, compared to the general population of Canada. More than 80% of these emergencies occur in NAN territory. These emergencies are only increasing in frequency, severity and duration due to climate change, and are especially devastating in remote communities, where the lack of services, capacity and infrastructure are detrimental to an efficient response and recovery.

Last summer was a record-setting forest fire season in northern Ontario, particularly in northwestern Ontario, which is NAN territory. Thousands of NAN community members were evacuated because of smoke and fires threatening their health, homes and safety. Despite these threats, some community members risked their lives by staying behind or returning to their communities, rather than remaining in seriously inadequate conditions in faraway locations. Evacuated community members from one community were forced to stay in a school gymnasium without adequate washrooms or showers. Those who didn't evacuate stayed in their communities without access to basic health services and policing.

The distances that remote communities must travel for evacuations can be immense. For example, last year, hundreds of Deer Lake First Nation residents were evacuated to Cornwall, Ontario. The direct overland distance from Deer Lake to Cornwall is 1,500 kilometres. That is further than from Ottawa to Corner Brook, Newfoundland. They were allowed one suitcase each, not knowing when they'd be able to return home or if they would have a home to return to.

• (1730)

This year has already seen an increase in communities struggling with flooding due to higher-than-normal amounts of snow and precipitation in the winter and spring. This has put homes and other infrastructure, including water treatment plants, at risk for damage and loss. For two fly-in communities this spring, flood waters covered the only road to the airports—their only source for incoming groceries and clean drinking water and the sole means for medical and emergency evacuation.

When a tragedy such as a house fire, a threat of forest fire, an outbreak or a flood happens, the chief and council and support workers must work at maximum capacity. They require immediate assistance from all available agencies. Emergency situations often lead to leadership and frontline workers becoming overwhelmed and requiring additional support and relief.

For fly-in communities, there are no nearby communities or municipalities with road access to provide quick relief, equipment, or additional supports in times of crisis. This reality caused undue stress a few weeks ago, when multiple NAN communities were scrambling to get sandbags into their communities. Due to shortages in northwestern Ontario, sandbags needed to be purchased and flown to tribal councils from as far away as Winnipeg.

States of emergency are often declared due to widespread trauma and persistent significant shortages of services and resources. Declaring a state of emergency should eliminate barriers to accessing accommodations and resources that are desperately needed, in-

cluding such wraparound supports as health care and mental health services.

However, this is not always the case. We see a continued failure from the government to respond, which raises questions about whether the government understands or cares about the threats to our first nations. The emergency management concept we have presented outlines this and is the direction that the province and both levels of government should be headed in. The creation of a first nations-led emergency management service is a crucial part of saving lives and infrastructure in our NAN first nations, with the goal to establish and apply the same or higher standards for fire safety and emergency management as you see elsewhere in Canada.

This is the foundation for action towards a holistic and successful approach to emergency management for NAN first nations. Partners must acknowledge these issues and gaps and move forward together for a successful and culturally appropriate service delivery model that supports and empowers our first nations communities.

It must be understood that underfunding or shortchanging proposals for prevention ends up unnecessarily increasing the risk of both death and loss. The time for talking about this is over. As I always say, leadership is action.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

• (1735)

The Chair: Thank you, Grand Chief.

We'll proceed with one round of questions, beginning with Mr. Shields.

Mr. Shields, you have six minutes.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Shimooka, you were referring to a Hill Times article, which I read, that goes back through the history of the Buffalo, the Hercules, the Leonardo and up to the Airbus. For 20 years we've been looking at this. Could you just refresh us a bit more on where we can go with this?

I understand the F-85, but the workhorse we need in the north is a different plane from the F-85. What do we need to do to get this done, and do you think it can happen within the next five years?

Mr. Richard Shimooka: I think it's unlikely, given the situation we're in, that we will see any change in the capabilities that are available. Because of the unavailability of the C-295 Kingfisher for operational service, the Royal Canadian Air Force has been forced to utilize its C-130 fleet, specifically H models, to operate in the north and provide fixed-wing search and rescue capabilities across Canada. The problem is that the C-130 fleet has a life limit. It can be used only for a certain number of hours, after which it cannot be refurbished any further and must be taken out of service.

As we see right now, we haven't seen a gap in the capability that is being provided in the region. Given the unlikely outcome that a C-295 will operate.... Right now the government has actually said that it will not have entry into service until at least 2025. In reality, I do not believe it will actually meet that time frame at all, and we'll have to find a different solution.

I don't believe there will be any ability for the Canadian Armed Forces to change the current makeup of its fixed-wing search and rescue capability in the country. The problem is that five years from now, it's going to need a solution. It will not have enough flight hours left with the existing fleet to do search and rescue and all the other stuff it's required to do, such as transport, providing transport within Canada or outside of Canada—anything.

So it needs a response. The government must outline pretty quickly here what its response will be if the C-295 is unable to meet the requirements it's been set out to meet.

Mr. Martin Shields: We've heard in committees about the barriers to economic development, challenges with health, and transportation issues in the north. At this point, you're saying it's handling it, but, I would guess, not handling it well, and that we have a real problem until the next plane comes into service—which is another issue in itself.

Mr. Richard Shimooka: The C-295 is specifically focused on fixed-wing search and rescue. It's a rapid-response capability for emergencies. Let's say there's a crash, somebody's lost, or a ship's in distress. That's specifically what that capability is focused on.

The problem is that in order to make up the gap the C-295 is unable to fill, it's utilizing other capabilities, specifically the C-130 fleet, which is a really important capability. It's probably the most important capability the Canadian Armed Forces have in terms of providing sovereignty in the north or aid for refugees in Africa. It's an extremely heavily utilized fleet.

The whole idea of the fixed-wing search and rescue program is to remove the requirement of the C-130 fleet's role in fixed-wing search and rescue. The exact opposite has happened. It's now the complete capability for doing fixed-wing search and rescue. In particular, the C-130s are used in emergency management roles in the north. In the future, they may not be able to do so, because we've used so many hours filling this gap.

• (1740)

Mr. Martin Shields: The process of getting a plane to replace the C-295.... You must be familiar, from what I've read, with the shortcomings in the process to get a replacement.

Mr. Richard Shimooka: Yes. In 2004, there was a process to replace the Buffalo. There was only one aircraft identified by the

Royal Canadian Air Force to replace the Buffalo at the time, and that was the C-27J. It was basically scrapped at the time, because they wanted a competition.

The revised competition that came after that loosened the restrictions, which allowed the C-295 to be selected. It has now become a serious problem, because that aircraft is seemingly unable to meet the requirements of the Canadian Armed Forces to do this mission.

Mr. Martin Shields: Some of those deficiencies would be critical, when you're talking about the north and distances.... I'm looking at the information.

Mr. Richard Shimooka: Absolutely. Many of them are specific to the north. There are icing system issues and issues with power to weight. The likeliest problems have to do with its rough field-handling capabilities, which really restrict its ability to operate in the north from unprepared strips, gravel strips or whatnot.

Mr. Martin Shields: When we're talking about sovereignty in the big picture—the F-85, as you mentioned.... That's one level. Without the other aircraft to fill the gaps that occur from many things, the overuse of one particular line and how it's stretched will risk all sorts of things in the north.

Mr. Richard Shimooka: Absolutely. I think this is probably one of the areas where there should be little disagreement. You can have disagreements over the security risks posed by Russia, China or whatever, but providing search and rescue is probably one of the most common public goods that everybody would agree upon.

The lack of ability for Canada to have or replace this fleet is actually pretty shocking. It's coming up to over 20 years now. I would think this would be something that should have been easily dealt with earlier, with very little disagreement, yet here we are today. We're now looking at, possibly, a third competition on this topic.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Badawey, you have six minutes.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to preface my comments by saying that one of the reasons I brought this study forward was to in fact create that action that Grand Chief Fox spoke about. With that said, what we as a committee need is for a report to go to the House, to the minister, for a reaction, and therefore to create that action.

I'm going to make a statement and I'm going to ask you a question. I'm going to make the statement because I need it on the record and I need the analysts to include it in their final report. When it comes to emergency preparedness, it's been mentioned in past meetings that, one, to move forward, a team has to be established within your community. That team has to embark upon making an emergency preparedness plan. As part of that, infrastructure capacities have to be recognized and identified. The infrastructure supports needed during emergencies have to be identified, hopefully in advance but sometimes that doesn't happen until the actual emergency happens, understandably. Advanced ancillary services have to be identified, such as your haz-mat, your PPE, as was mentioned, mutual aid with neighbouring communities if there are neighbouring communities, and other services that might be available to you, along with communications within your team and of course outside. Lots of times when an emergency happens, the community doesn't get prompted. If it's a water situation, for example, what prompts the community to actually recognize that there's an emergency? What opportunities and what infrastructure can you have in place to prompt the community? There could be an air raid siren, for example, and then when people hear that they would go to a certain radio station, with a battery-powered radio, of course. That would then prompt them to do what needs to be done.

With all that said, and with respect to the investments that have to be made, one, there is the community's strategic plan. That leverages not only emergency preparedness and ongoing infrastructure updates to emergency services to prepare for those situations, but also the investments for overall infrastructure capacities, even during times when there's no emergency. Those can include fibre, water and waste water, asset management declarations, habitat and community restoration after the fact, indigenous procurement, governance priorities and, of course, communication between ministries.

With all that said, I have two questions. Do you agree with that premise? That's so the analysts can include that on the record. Second, do you have any further comments on that?

• (1745)

The Chair: Who are you directing it to?

Mr. Vance Badawey: That's for Grand Chief Fox and/or Mr. McKay.

Grand Chief Fox.

Grand Chief Derek Fox: Good afternoon. Thank you for the statement.

Yes, we definitely need that service. Before I proceed, I'm going to ask Mike McKay, our lead on this, to speak to some of the things you said shortly. Yes, emergency preparedness is much needed, I don't think there are many plans in place for our territory. What's happening in the north is fairly new. We have forest fires and flooding, situations that have never occurred in the history of man. I think those things are going to increase, so I believe we need to start planning at both levels of government and with our partners and tribal councils.

There's a lot of work to be done there, but when you talk about partners and neighbouring communities, there are tribal councils.

There are a lot of nations within the Nishnawbe Aski Nation that need to work together also, so it's going to take a lot of collaboration as well as funding to start that process within NAN, and of course, that support from both levels of government, as you said, in a committee or whatever it might look like.

I'm going to ask Mike to speak quickly here.

Mr. Michael McKay (Director, Housing and Infrastructure, Nishnawbe Aski Nation): Sure. Thank you, Grand Chief.

I think within the current emergency management system, especially with our communities—there are 49 first nations in NAN, 33 of which are remote—a lot of times, an emergency event lands on the chief and council. Everything lands on the chief and council—emergencies and any sorts of phone calls. What we're proposing with what we submitted today is for investments in an emergency management service that can oversee and deliver a community emergency preparedness program to have on file and to update ongoing community emergency management plans. That's why it was important. What the NAN executive council is advocating for is to have the service in place to oversee, react and be prepared in the case of emergencies.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Mr. Chairman, how much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Vance Badawey: I just want to solidify that we are in agreement with what was said earlier. I want to make sure that's on the record.

Second to that is the need to also align the investments that would be attached to emergency preparedness management to some of the other infrastructure needs you have as part of your growth plan in terms of new housing, for example, and the infrastructure that would support that growth for housing, industry, economy and things like that over and above the investments you're going to make for emergency preparedness. Would you agree with that as well?

Grand Chief Derek Fox: Yes.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, let me thank all the witnesses for their testimony, which is very relevant to this study.

In his opening remarks, Grand Chief Fox stated that the government does not understand the reality of First Nations and their needs with respect to crises.

Can Grand Chief Fox elaborate on those needs and what the federal government needs to do?

I will ask Grand Chief Derek Fox a quick question.

What would you like to see as an improvement? What is the highest priority to you in terms of how we are going to work together in reconciliation and partnership?

[*English*]

Grand Chief Derek Fox: First of all, we would like to see a service for the north, a committee, as the member mentioned in a question earlier—a committee and a service to ensure we are prepared. That is why we are here today.

Of course, I can go on and on about reconciliation and the many things that our first nations people want as far as treaty recognition, our homelands, jurisdiction, ownership of our homelands and honouring the treaties.

With respect to this question, a great first step would be that service, ensuring that we have support from both levels of government and, of course, our many partners—municipalities, tribal councils, and neighbouring first nations—across the country, who have been there and who have taken our evacuees in.

We are appreciative of the support that we have gotten so far, but it needs to be more than incremental. It needs to increase. It needs to be consistent with the changes that are happening with respect to climate change.

The things we're seeing in the north are things we have never seen before. You probably see it across the country. You probably see it across the world. The government needs to be consistent, or align itself, with what is going on in our territory, which is what's also going on throughout the world. This is huge. I don't know if those changes involve pollution, those things that are hurting our country and our world. I'm not sure, but action needs to happen.

The Chair: Thank you very much to our panellists, Mr. Richard Shimooka, who was with us virtually, and Grand Chief Derek Fox and his associate, Mr. Michael McKay, who were in the room with us.

We really appreciate your taking the time to come and see us and answering our questions as we continue our study on this very important topic.

Thank you very much for coming today.

With that, colleagues, we will now suspend briefly as we go in camera.

I just want to mention that I have to leave. Our first vice-chair, Mr. Schmale, will take care of the last 20 minutes or so, on committee business.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>