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• (1555)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 136 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, and I'd like to remind participants of the following points.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we are able.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on November 21, 2024, the committee is commencing its study of the impacts of President-elect Donald Trump's announced measures on border security and migration.

I'd like to sincerely welcome our esteemed guests today. Thank you for honouring us with your time. We know, certainly, that Canadians are anxious about this topic in particular, and we look forward to your comments and your feedback.

Today we have with us, from the Canada Border Services Agency, Erin O'Gorman, president, and Aaron McCrorie, vice-president, intelligence and enforcement.

Welcome.

We also have, from the RCMP, Michael Duheme, commissioner, and Mathieu Bertrand, director general, serious and organized crime and border integrity.

Welcome.

I now invite Ms. O'Gorman to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Ms. O'Gorman, go right ahead.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman (President, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you, Madam Chair, for the invitation to appear again before this committee.

[*Translation*]

Today, I'd like to begin with a few observations about how the CBSA, the Canada Border Services Agency, continues to work

closely and productively with its partners, both domestically and in the United States. Every day, border services officers at ports of entry across Canada protect Canadian communities by keeping dangerous people and goods out of the country.

[*English*]

But we don't operate alone. Organized crime is a multi-jurisdictional endeavour. It would be unrealistic to think that one agency—even one country—could thwart their efforts. That's why the CBSA works in lockstep with domestic and international law enforcement partners.

For example, domestically, the CBSA conducted eight joint operations with the Ontario Provincial Police and the Sûreté du Québec just this year alone. Working together, we intercepted hundreds of stolen vehicles and thousands of kilograms of illegal drugs.

Just this past Monday, CBSA officers in British Columbia made a major seizure of contraband and prohibited weapons, thanks to collaboration with the RCMP's federal serious and organized crime division.

I would like to add that on the same day, at Hamilton International Airport, we seized six kilograms of suspected cannabis in three different shipments destined for France, among several other seizures that day. I could go on.

I will give you another international example. In 2023, my counterpart with the New Zealand Customs Service wrote to CBSA, thanking us for sharing vital and timely intelligence that resulted in the largest single drug seizure in New Zealand's history: over 700 kilograms of methamphetamines.

We collaborate with countries around the world to stop the illegal import and export of drugs and other criminal activities all the time. What's more, CBSA officers are deployed in 40 missions in 35 countries, which is our way of pushing the border out and preventing criminal elements from coming in the first place.

[*Translation*]

It goes without saying that our closest collaboration is with the United States. The cooperation between CBSA and U.S. Customs and Border Protection has been going on for a very long time, spanning the entire continent. We talk to each other regularly, at ports of entry, at my level, and everywhere in between.

[English]

We have several CBSA officials deployed across the United States, including two officers embedded within the U.S. CBP targeting center in Washington. They collaborate in the international effort to target and track illegal drugs.

• (1600)

[Translation]

The CBSA and its U.S. counterpart are jointly planning infrastructure investments. We've harmonized our work hours at ports of entry and coordinated our operations.

[English]

In some areas, our officers share the same building. Sometimes the border even cuts through the boardroom: in one case, one half in Canada and the other half in the United States. Our two agencies are co-located in Little Gold Creek in Yukon, where the Top of the World Highway connects Canada and Alaska. We're literally working side by side.

The CBSA's collaboration goes beyond its partner agency, the U.S. CBP. We work with Homeland Security Investigations, the Coast Guard, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Our partnership with the U.S. is a two-way relationship characterized by frank and open communication and ongoing problem-solving, and that will serve us very well going forward.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): I now invite Commissioner Duheme to make an opening statement for up to five minutes.

Commissioner, go right ahead.

Commissioner Michael Duheme (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Good afternoon, and thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to appear before this committee to talk about the RCMP's activities in relation to security at the Canada-U.S. border.

I'm joined here by Chief Superintendent Mathieu Bertrand, director general of federal policing criminal operations, serious and organized crime and border integrity.

I'll begin by providing some background on the RCMP's responsibility and actions with respect to the Canada-U.S. border.

[Translation]

The RCMP's border security functions and authorities are established by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act and its regulations, the Customs Act, and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and regulations.

The RCMP is responsible for protecting Canada's borders between official ports of entry against criminal threats to and from Canada in all modes, whether air, land, sea or Arctic.

To delineate areas of shared responsibility and cooperation in border security, the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, have established several memoranda of understanding.

The memoranda of understanding between the CBSA and the RCMP describe in detail the division of responsibilities and specific areas of cooperation and investigative responsibility with respect to border enforcement and the administration of borders, public safety and supporting national security outcomes.

[English]

As you are aware, border integrity is a priority for the RCMP. I can assure members of this committee that we continue to work with our portfolio, law enforcement and indigenous partners across the country to ensure that we are prepared to address any border concerns.

The RCMP continues to have regular engagement with its U.S. partners on various fronts, including border integrity, serious and organized crime and issues related to the change in administration, through existing mechanisms and fora.

The RCMP also participates in numerous cross-border initiatives with the U.S. that allow for joint operations and investigations. Highly integrated multimodal cross-border teams investigate criminal threats to the Canada-U.S. border, including irregular migration and human smuggling. These teams allow for shared communications, improved response times to a border incursion and enhanced investigative capacities.

Furthermore, the RCMP has regular engagement with indigenous law enforcement partners through the existing integrated border enforcement teams located in the provinces along the Canada-U.S. border.

The RCMP is aware that cross-border crime goes beyond irregular migration. Canada and the United States are both seized with an overdose crisis that continues to be driven by synthetic drugs, including fentanyl. This crisis continues to have devastating impacts on individuals and communities in both countries.

• (1605)

[Translation]

The RCMP and its partners, such as the CBSA, are committed to addressing this public safety issue and work at all police levels in Canada and abroad. You've recently seen press conferences and news releases on the subject.

One example is the extensive cooperation among the RCMP, the FBI and other partners in the Giant Slalom Project, which targeted large criminal organizations that were producing drugs abroad and then shipping them to Canada and then to the United States; second, a seizure at a port of entry of cocaine being shipped north; and finally, the recent dismantling of several drug labs.

It's essential that the RCMP and law enforcement agencies in the United States work closely together to address threats related to these harmful substances, both at the border and elsewhere.

For example, the RCMP is working with the United States as part of the Trilateral Fentanyl Committee's task force, the North American Dialogue on Drug Policy, the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats and the Canada-United States Joint Action Plan on Opioids.

The fentanyl task force is a bilateral initiative established in 2023. It aims to increase cooperation and information sharing on fentanyl trends, investigations and patterns of use among various law enforcement and federal government agencies, including the RCMP.

[English]

Moreover, through the Canada-U.S. opioids action plan, the RCMP regularly collaborates with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, better known as the DEA, by sharing samples of illegal substances in Canada for testing through DEA's drug signature program. This co-operation provides the opportunity for intelligence sharing between our two countries to increase our collective knowledge on drug trends.

We remain confident in the ability of Canadian enforcement agencies to work together to maintain the integrity of the Canada-U.S. border and to enforce Canadian laws.

With that, I would like to again thank the committee for the opportunity to meet with you. I would be pleased to answer any of your questions.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you, Commissioner.

We will start now with our questioning, first with the Conservatives, beginning with Mr. Shipley for six minutes.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

In the news lately, obviously, there's been a tremendous amount about the border situation and the 25% tariff that's being thrown around down in the States, which would affect Canadians greatly. There are a lot of Canadians who are very nervous and upset about this. It could be coming forward and it could affect a lot of businesses and people. Now there's even talk of retaliation coming back from our side.

It's interesting that this all appears to have happened so quickly over the last couple of weeks with President-elect Trump's announcement of the issues of fentanyl and illegal immigration as problems at our border. Just a week ago or so, we had the minister here, and I asked that minister why it took comments by President-elect Trump to start acting on this serious situation.

Since that meeting, we've actually done some great research and found out that this has been an issue for quite some time. It has been very well known. I have here a meeting note from September 2023. The meeting was between the Minister of Public Safety and Ambassador of the United States David Cohen. This is an official document from Public Safety Canada.

In a nutshell, this talks about how, in September 2023, Minister LeBlanc met with the U.S. ambassador, David Cohen. A memo prepared for the minister ahead of this meeting, with input provided by the CBSA, stated that topics of interest and concern for the ambassador were fentanyl and illegal immigration at our shared border.

My question is for the CBSA individuals here today. Is it fair to say that the Government of Canada and the Minister of Public Safety in particular have been aware of the United States' concerns on these files well in advance of the election of Donald Trump?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I'm not going to speak for the minister. He's well able to do that himself.

I will point out that since taking on this role, I have attended the cross border crime forum with both this minister and his predecessor, where fentanyl, drug and firearm smuggling and human smuggling featured prominently in the agenda. Canada brought as much substance to that meeting as our American colleagues.

Out of that, the ministers and the attorneys general recognized the work we were doing to establish information-sharing agreements, told us to hurry up and asked for feedback on how we were operating together. We were quite able to give that feedback, and we were operating quite collaboratively.

I have been in several meetings where these were on the agenda and, like I said, the minister was well briefed by me and the commissioner in terms of the risks related to it.

CBSA has received funding on firearms and drugs in the past few years, as well as addressing irregular migration and stolen vehicles. The extent to which we have been given additional funding for technology, detection tools, increased law enforcement—

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that.

I'm sorry. I have very limited time. There's a second part to the question. Thank you.

What we're really trying to get down to is the root here. It seems that in the last two weeks this has been a big surprise. Everybody is panicking now and trying to resolve a situation.

Further to that meeting that happened in September 2023, there was a meeting in May of 2024 that was, quite boastfully, posted on X. I have the post and picture here in my hand. The post says: "Good to meet with [Minister] LeBlanc at the Embassy today to discuss how the United States and Canada are working every day to deepen our law enforcement cooperation, secure our shared border, fight the scourge of fentanyl and combat against the infiltration of transnational criminal organizations."

That second meeting happened in May of 2024, so we know that there have been two meetings about this. This can't be a surprise to anybody within the government. The U.S. ambassador shared this photo on X, with this caption, in talking about securing the border, fighting the scourge of fentanyl and combatting the infiltration of criminal organizations.

To reiterate, would it be fair to say that the Government of Canada and the Minister of Public Safety have been aware of the United States' concerns about fentanyl and illegal immigration well in advance of November 2024?

• (1610)

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I would say that they're Canadian concerns about fentanyl and irregular migration and illegal migration. They're concerns that are shared with the U.S., but they're not U.S. concerns. They're Canadian concerns, and they are the preoccupation of the CBSA every day. The minister is well versed in the activities that we undertake and interested in our seizures and the trends we're seeing.

These are absolutely Canadian concerns, and they're Canadian concerns that we're working on every day.

Mr. Doug Shipley: They have been Canadian concerns, obviously, for a while. I'm not sure how well they've been dealt with.

My last question on this issue is this: Prior to President-elect Trump raising concerns about activity at our shared border, did the Department of Homeland Security, or any other department, approach the CBSA with concerns about fentanyl and illegal immigration?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: We talk about it all the time.

By way of example, twice a year, I meet with our Border Five colleagues, which, of course, include the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and the U.K. My U.S. counterpart and I consistently put fentanyl on that agenda. Fortunately for our other homologues, it hasn't reached their shores to the extent it has here. We put it on the agenda. We discuss it. The Americans aren't pushing Canada. We are sharing information all the time on what we're seeing in terms of trends, precursors, transit, what's coming out of Mexico and what's coming out of China.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you.

I would say they're pushing us now.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you for the questions.

Thank you, Ms. O'Gorman.

Now we will go to the Liberals.

Mr. MacDonald, you have six minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to continue some of the questioning by my colleague Mr. Shipley.

I want to make a reference to the cross border crime forum, which I think was just mentioned by the President. It was created in 1997.

Is that correct?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I could come back to you on that.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Okay.

I know that, under the previous Conservative government—I want them to be aware of this—the forum was disbanded, then re-established in 2021 or 2022.

Is that correct?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: As I said, I've attended two cross border crime forum meetings. I believe there was one prior to my taking on this role. Again, we'd have to confirm, but there have been two meetings in the last two years.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you.

First of all, thank you guys for being here today, and for what you do.

I want to continue with the fentanyl discussion, because that seems to be on everybody's radar right now.

Canada and the United States share a joint commitment to secure our shared border and ensure those who would traffic in fentanyl are stopped, apprehended, disrupted and what have you.

Can you tell the committee how much fentanyl is entering the United States from Canada?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, who may have some statistics.

The DEA has characterized that amount as “slippage”, which is to say small amounts for personal use, mostly through the postal service. However, it's not an insignificant amount, particularly in the last couple of years, since the economics of the fentanyl coming out of Mexico make it much cheaper.

Aaron, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie (Vice-President, Intelligence and Enforcement, Canada Border Services Agency): I would just add that, in the first three quarters of this year, the CBSA seized 4.9 kilograms of fentanyl. For the most part, the biggest seizure was a 4.1-kilogram seizure that was export-bound for the Netherlands. The other seizures were all fairly small, personal-type seizures that were caught along, I believe, the land border.

I don't have stats that indicate any significant shipments moving south.

• (1615)

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. McCrorie.

I may stay with you for a moment.

What percentage of fentanyl interdicted by the U.S. originates from Canada? Do you have any of those numbers?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I don't have U.S. numbers. I think we'd have to go to U.S. CBP to get that kind of information.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you.

When speaking about fentanyl, we often hear law enforcement talk about precursor chemicals.

Can someone describe what a precursor chemical is, where the precursor chemical is developed and how easy it is to ship from abroad?

Maybe Mr. Duheme has that information.

Commr Michael Duheme: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Basically, precursors are mostly coming from China. A precursor is a chemical that is, most of the time, regulated. Some of it is legally coming into Canada because it's used for different things. That's a challenge for both the RCMP and the CBSA. When it enters, it is legal. Then, when it's transformed through a lab, it becomes meth or fentanyl.

The challenge we have is regulating what is legally coming into the country.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: May I add to that question?

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Certainly.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: On your question about how easy it is to ship them, on occasion, we have seen and seized large quantities in vats that, of course, looked suspicious. What's difficult is that we also see them in smaller containers being shipped through couriers. As we talk to the U.S., it's a collective challenge that we both have with the courier mode. They're being shipped in smaller quantities and they don't register in the same way as some of the large volumes we've been able to seize at the land border.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: President O'Gorman, you talked a bit about some of our successes. I know that under the previous Trump administration, there was increased interjurisdictional collaboration through these forums that we just discussed, like the North American drug dialogue and the joint action plan on opioids.

Can you tell us about the successes and take-aways from these international forums? Have these forms continued to meet post-2020?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: The North American drug dialogue meeting happened just recently. Our senior official responsible for opioids and fentanyl was there, joined by an executive former frontline officer from our B.C. region, who is sadly quite familiar with them. It's a bit of ground zero for Canada. The two of them went down, along with other colleagues from the Public Safety portfolio.

The discussions are wide-ranging, from waste-water testing to trends, targeting, disruptive efforts, sharing intelligence and harm reduction. They're quite extensive.

Health Canada is also represented there.

Increasingly, they're inviting countries from Europe just to get ahead of what they might be facing, or to help those that are starting to find fentanyl coming into their countries as well.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you so much.

Chair, I'm not sure how much time I have left.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): You have 16 seconds.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Okay. I'll pass that on, Chair. Thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you so much.

We'll go now to the Bloc Québécois and Ms. Michaud.

[*Translation*]

The floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all four of you for being with us today. I also want to thank you for the work that you do. We don't do that often enough.

From what I've heard, there's very good cooperation between the Border Services Agency and the RCMP within the Valleyfield detachment, under the direction of Martin Labrecque, I believe, and with the member for Salaberry—Suroît. We know that a number of mayors and prefects from border RCMs are concerned about the situation. So I want to thank you for the work that's being done in this regard and that certainly reassures many people.

The border issue has been on the agenda for a few weeks now. I have in front of me a Radio-Canada article entitled "Ottawa could spend more than \$1 billion on the border with the United States." This article pertains to the government's desire to spend a significant amount of money on border protection to allay Donald Trump's concerns and avoid the 25% tariffs that he threatened to impose very recently.

The Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, Dominic LeBlanc, has said that he intends to increase the number of officers at the border and purchase additional equipment. A number of drones and helicopters have been in the news. As we understand it, details of the plan will be released next Monday in the economic update.

I'd like the RCMP to give us more details about the equipment and the number of officers on the ground. I'd also like to ask them to give us some clarification about comments made in Radio-Canada articles. They reported that, in some cases, only six officers were patrolling the border and there were only a few police cars.

Could you tell us whether the planned investments will enable us to purchase the necessary equipment and increase the number of officers on the ground?

• (1620)

Commr Michael Duheme: First of all, I'd like to say that the \$1 billion figure surprises us. Ms. O'Gorman and I had submitted our request, but I wasn't sure what the outcome would be.

Minister LeBlanc also made it clear that he would invest in resources, drones and helicopters. The best approach, in our view, is to rely on technology so that we can react differently. Rather than using humans as "detectors," we can rely on modern technology that can be acquired quickly and yield convincing results. That's what we're advocating for the entire border, from the east coast to the west coast.

With respect to field officers, I'm not aware of the exact number per patrol. However, I can tell you that on several occasions there will be an intensification of operations in the evening, a kind of energetic impact. We work in parallel with U.S. Customs and Border Protection when we do that work, but also on a day-to-day basis. Two days ago we intercepted two people trying to get south of the border. There's very good cooperation in that area.

Having said that, we're really talking about relying on technology to modernize the equipment we have.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I know you're already working with technological devices. Tell me if I'm wrong, but there's often cooperation between human beings and technology. For example, a drone is used to track down or obtain certain evidence about a vehicle that we see often and that could be transporting migrants or illegal weapons. You make sure that you have all those images in hand, that you have all the evidence, and then you arrest the person. I don't know if it works that way, but you can tell me.

If you're dealing with migrants who cross illegally—they'll probably just go through there once and try to do it quickly—what's the relationship between technology and human beings? If the drone or helicopter detects a person, family, or group of people crossing the border, is adequate personnel available to ensure a quick response?

Does the RCMP have the necessary tools? Do they need evidence? Do they need a warrant or can doubt alone allow them to intervene if they think that someone has crossed illegally? Do you have the authority to arrest those people without having any evidence against them?

Commr Michael Duheme: First, I'll explain how drones work.

Ms. Michaud, you gave a good explanation; drones are used, and they're also used in cases where the locations are more difficult to access, for example, places that can't be reached with snowmobiles or all-terrain vehicles. In addition, they allow us to notify our American partners if we see movement close to the border.

I think I said it the last time I appeared before this committee, but the offence occurs when they cross the border. That's where the offence occurs. Obviously, the RCMP has the necessary authority to arrest people when it has reasonable grounds to believe that an offence will be committed; this is based on the perception of the officer in the field and the information he or she has.

Lastly, when it comes to the use of technology, we want to marry technology and teams. If technology is deployed, we want to make sure we have the personnel needed to intercept people or warn our American counterparts.

• (1625)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you, Commissioner.

Thank you.

We'll go to the NDP with Mr. MacGregor for six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of you for joining our committee today.

Commissioner, maybe I'll start with you. Would you agree with me that the growing use of synthetic drugs has presented a very real challenge to law enforcement in recent years?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would say that the growing use of synthetic drugs is a challenge.

I see that Mr. Motz and Mr. Shipley have backgrounds as former police officers. We've been fighting the war on drugs for years, years, years and many years. I think the place we should start investing in is the social aspect of deterring people from using drugs.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I want to focus on fentanyl in particular. I'm just looking for a ballpark figure. For how many years now in Canada has fentanyl been identified as a drug of major concern because of its potency and how many overdose deaths it's been responsible for?

Commr Michael Duheme: I wouldn't have.... I'll have to ask Mathieu. I wouldn't have an exact date as to when it came—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: It's been a while now.

Commr Michael Duheme: It's been a while.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Yes, and its potency has obviously been the issue of concern. Would you agree with me that both Canada and the United States are dealing with crises in our communities from coast to coast? This is a very real problem that both our countries are facing.

Commr Michael Duheme: I would agree, but I will expand that internationally. There are several countries that are dealing with the same problem.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Yes.

I think it's important for our committee to not just go back a couple of years. We have to put this in the context of this being a problem that our communities have been dealing with for quite some time.

I'd like to turn to the CBSA and maybe to you, Mr. McCrorie, because of your responsibility for intelligence. Do you have any way that you can provide this committee with, roughly speaking, a comparison of the drugs that are entering the United States from the Canada side versus the drugs that are entering the United States from the Mexico side? I mean, looking at those two borders objectively, which one does the United States have to worry about the most?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I don't think we have an existing study, for example, that does that comparison in terms of.... The U.S. would be the best source of information for that data.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: What kind of seizure numbers do they have at the U.S.-Mexico border versus the U.S.-Canada border? Do you know that?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I will say that Canada is not a significant source of fentanyl in the United States. The vast majority of the fentanyl in the United States, as we understand it, is coming from Mexico.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: That's good. That's a very important point to get across. I think we have to remind Canadians of that. I'll put this diplomatically: Sometimes fact-checkers have a very tough job with the incoming president. There's evidence. In every single one of his interviews, you can point to stuff that is factually not correct. I think the challenge for us is separating the rhetoric from the reality.

All of you have talked about the excellent relationship you have with your U.S. counterparts. I believe that to be true. You've told us that we have this great working relationship.

If there are, objectively, areas with room for improvement, can each of your agencies tell us policy-makers which areas we should be looking to for improvement, in order to provide you with the resources to do your job?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: From a border perspective, it's challenging, in that drugs are moving around the world all the time. What we're grappling with, alongside our B5 partners at the World Customs Organization, are small packages. As we've seen, a handful of fentanyl pills through the mail can become many doses out on the street and lives lost. We are working very closely with our partners. We recently talked to courier companies that don't want to be shippers of lethal drugs themselves, and don't want a pile of new reporting rules put on them. We all recognize that balance is needed between the supply chain and stopping drugs from coming in small packages.

That's an area we're focusing on and getting at through intelligence and targeting. At any one time, it's risk-based—looking at what's coming in and what's going out, but also grappling with the significant post-COVID increase in small parcels that are transiting the world at any one time.

• (1630)

Commr Michael Duheme: Mr. Chair, I would add this. I mentioned the regulations around precursors. I think that there is something to be done there. We could examine, for import businesses, what the regulations are for the precursors coming in and tighten them. We've seen, on occasion, illegal precursors that we could not do anything about staying in a warehouse for a number of days before they would ship—so that would be a sign. However, again, if they're legal, there is nothing much we can do.

Is there any way we can tighten the regulations and reverse the onus on the person importing the material?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Quickly, I suppose we can keep running into the precursor problem because now they're starting to import precursors to the precursors. Is that right? Criminal organiza-

tions are always going to react to our latest tactics and evolve, so this is the challenge.

Would you agree?

Yes.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you very much to both of you.

Now we'll start over again with the Conservatives and Mr. Lloyd.

You have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, all, for being here.

We've long had an issue with contraband tobacco in this country.

Wouldn't you agree? Is contraband tobacco a significant issue that CBSA and the RCMP deal with?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would agree that it's still an issue.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Do you see an overlap between organized crime in the contraband tobacco trade and in the fentanyl trade? Is there a strong connection there, or no connection at all?

Commr Michael Duheme: I am not aware of any connection.

However, what I will say is that, when organized crime is involved, if there is a way to move commodities, a substance or anything, they will use the routes that are already pre-established.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: What you're saying is that you don't have evidence before you today to say that the groups doing these are the same, but they're using the same supply chain networks to move their product over the border.

Commr Michael Duheme: That's a possibility.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Would you say that, if we were to aggressively crack down on contraband tobacco, we would also see benefits in terms of breaking up the supply chain for fentanyl, other drugs, smuggled guns and human smuggling, for example, across the border? Do you think there is that potential?

Commr Michael Duheme: It could have an immediate impact. However, as someone mentioned earlier, organized crime will adjust based on legislation and how we operate.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Of course, I know funding is always an issue. We're in tight economic times.

Do the Canadian and provincial governments lose a significant amount of money on contraband tobacco every year?

Commr Michael Duheme: I don't have the exact numbers, but one can assume that they're losing money.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: If we were to crack down on that, perhaps we could get the revenues and the funding needed to crack down on the fentanyl and drug trades.

Do you have any evidence of how organized crime is using the profits it gets from contraband tobacco? What are those profits being reinvested into?

Commr Michael Duheme: It's the way of life. It's how they make the money. They get richer by bringing in contraband, illicit substances or firearms, or by human smuggling, and they just reinvest it.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: The revenues from the contraband tobacco trade are also leading to the drugs trade, the firearms trade and the human trafficking trade. There's a connection.

Commr Michael Duheme: As I said, if you look at organized crime, they're involved in anything that can make them some money.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: There is a strong connection.

We just recently finished our long auto study, and we heard time and time again that stolen vehicles in Canada are being exported through our ports and used to finance terrorist organizations around the world. They're being used to finance the purchase of firearms smuggled into our country. This is a very serious issue.

Clearly, our ports are the weak point. Does the CBSA have any recommendations for things we can adopt to strengthen our ports so that we can not only protect Canadians from the drug trade, but give our American and other trading allies and partners assurances that Canada's taking the necessary actions to protect them?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: From the CBSA perspective, we work extremely collaboratively with our port authorities. You mentioned stolen vehicles. The port of Montreal, in particular, where we've seen the highest volume, has been an excellent partner and has been taking its own initiative on how it can further stop the contraband coming into its ports.

The more containers we look at, the more slowly things go—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: What about the precursor chemicals that are coming from China through the port of Vancouver, I would assume, given that it seems to make more sense logistically?

What are we doing to intercept those shipments coming into Canada? How can we strengthen our ports to block them?

• (1635)

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I don't want to speak on behalf of the ports. The work we do in inspecting and interdicting precursors and other contraband coming in through the ports is done through a combination of intelligence, targeting information from allies and information that we have received through the many information-sharing and collaborative arrangements we have with our policing partners.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Do you have any recommendations on how we can strengthen that today? Is there a plan?

The president-elect of the United States says he's going to put a 25% tariff on us. Do we have a plan to show that we're taking action on this, or are we currently just working on the plan?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I'll defer to the minister's remarks yesterday about the plan that was consulted on with the provinces. He has indicated, as has the Prime Minister, that they will talk to the Americans.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: There is a plan.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: To your question on the ports, one issue for the CBSA is that ports are required to provide us space to do our examinations for imports, but they're not required to provide us space for exports. That being said, we haven't run into ports that are resistant to providing us that space, but that's an area with a legislative gap that we would be interested in considering.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. O'Gorman.

We'll move to the Liberals.

Ms. Vandenberg, you have five minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd just like to follow up, Mr. McCrorie, on something you said in your previous answer. You said that Canada is not a significant source of fentanyl into the U.S. I actually have some numbers here that show that the amount of fentanyl that's been seized by U.S. authorities at the Canadian border is only 0.2% of the fentanyl entering the United States. I also have a figure here that says that the number of illegal crossings of people going into the United States from Canada is only 0.6% of the total number of people entering the United States.

Could you confirm whether those numbers are accurate?

My understanding is that the number of people crossing from north to south is actually decreasing. Could you confirm that as well?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I'm not sure what the source of that data is, so it's hard for me to confirm it or not. We saw a significant increase in the number of southbound movements over the last year. They peaked in June at around 6,000 to 7,000. This is based on data we got from the U.S. CBP.

It peaked in June. It's now down. In November, I think it was around 400 or 500.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Those numbers of 0.2% and 0.6% don't sound completely out of the ballpark for you.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: They don't. No.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: It would be somewhere around that number. It's a very small number.

How does this compare—perhaps this is for President O'Gorman—with what's coming the other way in terms of people, firearms and fentanyl? What are the numbers going into the United States versus the numbers you're able to get at the border?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: If you’re asking about people coming up and crossing illegally northbound, I would defer to my colleague. We process people who duly show up at the port of entry. I’ll pass that over to my colleague.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, for the northbound people and what we’ve seen over the years, if I go back to 2022, we finished that year with about 40,000 such people. Mind you, that was before the STCA. It dipped in 2023, down to 15,000, and that’s a result of the STCA. Now, this year to date, we have 1,100 people on record who have come up northbound.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay. If you compare—

Commr Michael Duheme: If you’re referring to the southbound people, we don’t track those southbound. We’re starting to track the southbound people, but we report it to the U.S. CBP, and then we’re not always aware or informed of what they do with it. It’s difficult for us to have an exact number for the southbound people.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: While I have you, Commissioner, and just to make sure, in budget 2023 we provided funding for a renewed Canadian drugs and substances strategy. Could you talk a bit about the additional resources that the RCMP may have received for that and how you’ve deployed those resources?

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes. They’re predominately injected into our intel and our investigators. I don’t have that exact number, but I’d be more than happy to circle back with a breakdown.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Yes, please do that.

President O’Gorman, in looking at some of the changes we’ve made, I understand that in 2017 we allowed the CBSA officers to look at mail that is 30 grams or less, because previously they weren’t able to do that. Can you talk a bit about the impact of that?

• (1640)

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: Sure.

The CBSA did need a warrant, actually, to look at parcels that were under 30 grams. As I mentioned earlier, we were seeing pills coming through the postal and courier services. That allowed us to open them. Again, for certain people, that’s for personal use, but for other people, that’s mixing with other things and creating significantly higher numbers of doses that would go out onto the street. It was very helpful.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: How many lives would you say that has saved?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I wouldn’t be able to estimate.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: How much time do I have, Madam Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): You have 46 seconds.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Just very quickly, Commissioner, we talked a lot about the work you’re doing with the American authorities. Could you just very quickly talk about how successful that co-operation is?

Commr Michael Duheme: We have excellent co-operation with Aaron’s team, CBSA and the U.S. BP. We’ve been at it for several years with this—and I mean several, several years. We’ve been

through COVID, where the relationships were excellent. There are joint operations that are run with the U.S. BP.

Aaron and I are planning to visit Washington and the newly appointed people so that we can introduce ourselves and see if we can work better together. There’s a lot of good work going on across the country with U.S. BP. There are several international forums that we participate in as well.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you very much.

Ms. Michaud, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Having so little time is disappointing. Thank you nonetheless, Madam Chair.

I have the same figures that Ms. Vandenberg just mentioned. This comes from an article in *La Presse*, by investigative journalist Vincent Larouche, which said that of the 49,000 pounds of fentanyl seized over the past two years—I imagine it was at the U.S. border—only 53 pounds came from Canada; the rest came from Mexico. It would therefore be true to say that 0.1% or 0.2% of fentanyl entering the United States comes from Canada. According to the article, those figures are from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s “National Drug Threat Assessment,” which is a periodic report listing the major threats associated with illegal drug trafficking. I understand that the Border Services Agency can’t necessarily confirm those figures, but the quantities seized seem small compared to those from Mexico.

I don’t know if Mr. Trump has made any statements about illegal drugs coming from Mexico, but this reminds me of the statements he made the first time he took office. Members will recall that he was proposing to build a wall at the southern border with Mexico. Now, suddenly, he seems to be attacking Canada. He says, perhaps jokingly, but still, that Canada could become the 51st state of the United States. He also refers to the Prime Minister of Canada as a governor. In short, he seems to be making fun of Canada.

Why do you think Mr. Trump is doing this to Canada? I understand that this is a difficult question, because few people can grasp what’s going through Mr. Trump’s head, or explain what he thinks.

So the question is: when we see that such a situation can arise with our greatest ally, how does the Border Services Agency prepare for it, in cooperation with its partners? What can be done to prevent this type of perhaps impulsive behaviour from an American administration?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I don’t want to repeat myself, but this is a very important point. We work very closely with other U.S. agencies, whether it’s the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, or CBP, the Drug Enforcement Administration, or DEA, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, or ATF.

That being said, I don't know if everyone is familiar with our collaboration and successes.

[*English*]

Operationally, we are sharing information every day. Every intelligence report we create, we send to our U.S. counterparts as a matter of course. If we find a new way that drugs are hidden, we share it with the U.S.

Operationally, I'm not concerned that there's a view that our agency is not doing enough.

[*Translation*]

I don't know what's in the minds of people who say we're not doing enough, but the government has indicated that there's always more to be done, and that's the subject of ongoing discussions. In fact, the minister has said publicly that he's looking at additional investments.

• (1645)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. MacGregor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thanks, Madam Chair.

To the CBSA, I'm focusing on northbound contraband trafficking, so that originating in the United States and coming into Canada. Based on the data you have available at your agency from seizures made at ports, or in collaboration with the RCMP if they are seized farther inland, can you list the imports of greatest concern coming from the United States into Canada?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: In the first three quarters of this year, CBSA seized 750 firearms. We do see many weapons and firearms coming northbound. We see people bringing currency. Bringing more than \$10,000, without an explanation, leads us to suspect ill-gotten gains from travellers.

We see cocaine coming in. There was a major seizure of cocaine made by CBSA based on intelligence from the U.S. It was transiting from California to Europe. To my earlier comment, drugs are going all over all of the time. The agency seized 500,000 kilograms of tobacco.

The point was made about the revenue and the links to organized crime. I don't know if there's anything the commissioner would want to add.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that. I'll turn to you, Commissioner.

How has the RCMP seen the fentanyl trade evolve over the last decade? In the beginning, was it more like fentanyl coming in? Have we now evolved to a situation where the precursors are coming in? Is there more manufacturing happening within Canada? Is that how the evolution has roughly happened?

Commr Michael Duheme: There's more organized crime involved with fentanyl because it's so lucrative. It's very cheap to make. The return on investment is very high, which is concerning.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you very much.

We will now go to Mr. Motz, for five minutes.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being here. Thank you to both of your frontline organization members who are boots on the ground to stand in the gap at our borders and across this country. Thank you for that.

We know that, through an order paper question that was submitted, the Liberals lost track of some 30,000 individuals scheduled for deportation, which is troubling in itself. How can something like this possibly occur? Specifically, there are 29,730 people who have been issued warrants by immigration authorities, and they have failed to appear.

How does this happen?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: On removals, indeed, you're right. The removals inventory we have right now is significant. It's not static. Last year, we removed over 16,000 people, the most in a decade. We're on track to do the same this year. Our officers are very focused on removals.

When people have gone through the immigration process, and they are not granted status, sometimes they've been here for years. It will be time for them to be removed, but it will take a bit of time. The school year will finish and so on. Our expectation is that people will leave when they are not granted status, and, indeed, many do.

Mr. Glen Motz: Right, but keep in mind, Ma'am, that in the next two years, 2.4 million visas are due to expire. How do we, as a country, expect to have the people who should be leaving under those orders be leaving, when we can't keep track of the ones we have now at only 30,000?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Yes. There are the people who will leave voluntarily. There are the people who CBSA needs to help leave, and I say that not euphemistically: buy their ticket or perhaps put them in an immigration detention centre because we are concerned they will abscond. Also, then, there are those who our investigators and Aaron's staff are looking for all the time.

That's to say that we are putting in a big effort, as we did this year, to increase by 59%, but as you say—

• (1650)

Mr. Glen Motz: There's more to do. There's a lot more to do.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: There's always more to do.

Mr. Glen Motz: Let me move on.

We've seen this in the media. We know that the Americans have seen a huge increase in the number of people coming from Canada into the United States illegally.

It's estimated that between 2022 and 2024 that number increased by 82% to roughly around 19,000 people in those two years and, in fact, there has been about a 680% increase from 2015, from when this government took effect to now, in Canadians illegally crossing the border into the United States. Why?

How would you recommend that we reverse or mitigate this trend?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Some of it was mitigated with the imposition of a partial visa on Mexico and recent decisions by IRCC and the minister to tighten visa requirements and to end a process or temporary public policy for temporary resident visas. Those have all had a material impact, from what CBSA has seen, and we continue abroad—

Mr. Glen Motz: Okay. I want to continue with the Canadians or people from Canada illegally entering the United States, but of greater concern than that—that is concerning in itself—there are nearly 1,200 people on various terror watch-lists who have been stopped by U.S. authorities from entering the United States from Canada. By contrast, the number of people on terror watch-lists entering the United States from Mexico in that same time period of three years was right around 200.

It's concerning. Why are U.S. border patrols able to interdict these individuals and we seem to have a problem?

Then, in a minute, I'm going to get to the question of how these people get into Canada in the first place.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I'll begin by saying that the way in which the U.S. reports their data is a subject of discussion.

A certain number of those people, when they say “interdicted” or “encountered”, are people going through a port of entry and are turned back to Canada—and that happens going the other way all the time. That's the system working, and they say they're on a terrorist watch-list. I don't have information in those specific databases, but I think it's important to understand—

Mr. Glen Motz: You have the access to those databases, do you not?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: We do, and—

Mr. Glen Motz: Yes.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: —these are people whom the Americans turn around and so—

Mr. Glen Motz: Right, so then my next question would be—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm so sorry. The time is up.

Mr. Glen Motz: I'll have to use the next round.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Yes. Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Zahid for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

My first question is for Commissioner Duheme.

When we think of securing our border, my mind instantly goes to the good work done by the CBSA. However, between ports of entry, it is the RCMP jurisdiction. What work is the RCMP doing to surveil our borders between the different ports of entry?

Commr Michael Duheme: The RCMP relies on different means of ensuring protection between the ports of entry. We have boats that are on the Great Lakes. We have a program called “Shiprider” for the Great Lakes.

We have the marine security operations centres, that coordination piece that happens on the east coast and the west coast.

Between using both our technology and the human patrols we have, that is how we ensure the security of the border.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: The RCMP are not the only eyes on the land border with the U.S. What should we understand as parliamentarians about the co-operation between agencies, whether federal, provincial, territorial or indigenous, when it comes to border security and border-related law enforcement?

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, I think it's fair to say that, as Canadians, we all want the same thing: a secure border. If provincial premiers are providing additional resources to assist, I would say that we should ensure there's coordination and that we work together to ensure that the borders are safe because, ultimately, that's the end objective for Canadians.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Similarly, regarding co-operation with the authorities in various jurisdictions on the American side, how long have such relationships existed? Can you please point to some specific instances of successful inter-agency co-operation?

• (1655)

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, as for length of time, I'm not aware, but it goes back several years.

In terms of success stories, I think I shared one with the committee the last time I was here. We had a case in Manitoba where our U.S. CBP colleagues spotted six individuals, I believe, crossing northbound on a cold night. We were informed. We dispatched our team there to, I would say, save the people, because most of them were transported to the hospital. I believe that, to this day, there's still one who is in the hospital with severe frostbite. That's good co-operation, and a good example of how we collaborate with U.S. CBP.

I'll go back to what Aaron said earlier. This is done on a daily basis. We have our integrated border enforcement teams—better known as IBETs—working collaboratively. We have people from different agencies and law enforcement coming together, sharing intelligence and sometimes planning operations. This is strong, because nobody can do it alone. It's bringing people together to ensure the border is safe.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Commissioner.

What measures does the RCMP currently have in place to prevent unauthorized or irregular crossings of people at the Canada-U.S. border?

Commr Michael Duheme: Excuse me. I didn't hear the first word.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: What measures does the RCMP currently have in place?

Commr Michael Duheme: The measures include data that comes in on a daily basis. At the end of the week, we have a chart of who crossed, how many apprehensions there were, how many were gone on arrival and the ethnicity of the people who are crossing the border. That's spread out on a monthly basis and a yearly basis, as well.

I know we also look at the data the CBSA gets, I think, on a daily basis. I don't want to speak on behalf of Aaron, but I think they collect it on a daily basis.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: How do you think the safe third country agreement supports the RCMP's efforts in preventing irregular border crossings?

Commr Michael Duheme: Well, based on our observations and interceptions, and as I shared earlier, we have 1,100 people to date who crossed northbound. They were all apprehended. Then the safe third country agreement kicks in, so we hand them over to CBSA and they do their work.

Yes, it has an impact, for sure.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Commissioner, you mentioned that—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): I'm so sorry, Mrs. Zahid, but we're out of time. We'll come back to you.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Actually, I might use my prerogative as chair to follow up on something you said briefly about the shiprider program.

That's a dual American-Canadian program. They ride the boat together. When they cross into Canadian territory, the Canadian takes over. In American territory, the American takes over.

Is that correct?

Commr Michael Duheme: I brought Mat here for a reason, so I'll let him expand on that.

Chief Superintendent Mathieu Bertrand (Director General, Serious and Organized Crime and Border Integrity, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Commissioner.

You're correct. It's a truly binational operating program. The members train together. The training is done in South Carolina. The premise is this: If there's an interdiction required on the Canadian side, the Canadian law enforcement officials utilize their authorities. When the ship crosses over to the U.S. side, there's respect of sovereignty, and U.S. law enforcement uses its powers.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Okay.

I have a brief follow-up.

You were looking at a "dirt rider" program—an on-land comparison—but that never really came to fruition.

Is that correct?

C/Supt Mathieu Bertrand: Madam Chair, the term is "land rider". I believe it's still being discussed between the two countries.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you.

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, I would say "air", as well.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Oh, an air rider....

Commr Michael Duheme: We're looking at something.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you very much. That's good to know.

Mr. Glen Motz: That's a good question.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you, Mr. Motz.

We'll go to Mr. Shipley for five minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to return to the commissioner to ask some questions about fentanyl, right now.

Everybody has to agree that, across Canada, fentanyl is a very serious situation. It's harming many people and affecting families. It's right across the country. Obviously, it's across the world, but we're here today to talk about Canada.

Recently, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs said that Canada is now a net exporter of fentanyl. I understand there's been some talk today about how much goes to the States and how much goes here.

Overall, Commissioner, would you agree with the statement by the Department of Foreign Affairs that Canada, right now, is a net exporter of fentanyl?

• (1700)

Commr Michael Duheme: Canada is producing quantities that it would be impossible for Canadian consumers to consume. There is an export. We are considered to be exporting some fentanyl.

As was mentioned earlier, my new trace goes to the United States, based on the intelligence that we have, but it is being exported at a greater cost than what the cartel is actually making from it right now.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Recently, 11 kilograms of fentanyl originally from Canada was seized at the Australian border. I'm not, obviously, an expert in the size of that, but I assume that 11 kilograms is a lot of fentanyl. Is that a lot?

Commr Michael Duheme: It is a lot. During my Five Eyes meetings, I do chat with my counterpart from Australia to see how we can work together—not that we don't work together but so that we have a stronger partnership in addressing fentanyl.

Mr. Doug Shipley: That's just one example. Obviously, we're exporting it here now from this country.

Commissioner, could you also confirm that there are at least 350 organized crime groups operating in the domestic fentanyl market and that these groups are importing precursor chemicals into Canada, mostly from China, for the illegal production of fentanyl?

Commr Michael Duheme: I don't have the exact number of organized crime groups operating or importing precursors, but I could commit to look in our holdings and come back to you.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Yeah, the Chief Superintendent is nodding a little bit.

I know you're—

C/Supt Mathieu Bertrand: I don't have the exact number. I was agreeing with the commissioner, but we could get that figure from Criminal Intelligence Service Canada. We have that data in our holdings, yes.

Mr. Doug Shipley: That would be great. I think that's really good to have because here at the public safety committee, we're always talking about many of the issues, and some of those are about auto theft, which I know my colleague, Ms. Michaud, has mentioned many times. A lot of that could be being fuelled by this, too, so that's why that would be good information to get if we could.

I would just like to talk about the United States. It's taken significant steps against the People's Republic of China to stop the illegal flow of fentanyl and its precursors into the country. It has sanctioned dozens of individuals and companies profiting from the illegal fentanyl trade, and both the U.S. and Mexico have bilateral working groups with China to consult on counter-narcotics and precursors.

As of October 2024, Canada has not made a request for a formal working group with China. Given that 82% of overdose deaths in 2023 involve fentanyl and that China is the main source country for illegal fentanyl precursor imports into Canada, should we not be willing to take steps similar to those of our North American allies? Do you not think that would help curb some of the situations going on here?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would say that either we take similar steps or we join our American colleagues and the Mexicans, becoming a stronger force to address it.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that.

Ms. O'Gorman, since 2019, Beijing banned the production and sale of fentanyl. How many kilograms of precursor chemicals were seized by our border officers?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Unfortunately, the way we classify precursors and other drugs is that they're all kind of lumped together. I will ask Mr. McCrorie. We have some data, but it's not exclusively on precursors. It's on a small amount of precursors and other drugs mixed in there.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: In terms of how we track the data, unfortunately, we can't break out the precursors from other drugs. In the first three quarters of this year, we seized over 21,000 kilograms of other drugs, narcotics, and precursor chemicals.

Mr. Doug Shipley: How much time do I have, Madam Chair?

I have 20 seconds. That's...

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you very much.

Ms. O'Connell, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

I want to follow up on Mr. Shipley's questions on the exporting of fentanyl, for example, because part of that, in fact, confirms that it's not just a question of borders. It's production. It's my understanding that, through investments in the RCMP, there have been 40 drug labs shut down since 2018.

Without going into any operational kinds of tactics that would help organize crime, can we talk about...? I would think that very large, clandestine drug labs would require intelligence-sharing and sophisticated RCMP investigations, and that the ability to do this type of work requires resources.

Could you speak a little bit about the investments to be able to do that work? If you shut down any labs at the production level, then the export of that becomes less of an issue at the borders.

• (1705)

Commr Michael Duheme: [*Inaudible—Editor*] seized drums—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'm sorry. There wasn't a mic on for you.

Commr Michael Duheme: If you read the CTV article, this happened at the end of last week. The RCMP seized several barrels of chemicals based on information provided by our U.S. colleagues.

To your question on where we're going, there are a couple of approaches here from the Canadian perspective.

Our CIROC initiative, the Canadian Integrated Response to Organized Crime, is putting the final touches on a fentanyl strategy. CIROC is made up of key police leaders from across the country who come together to discuss ongoing problems and tackle them together. That's one thing.

What we are looking at is shifting to where we have dedicated teams that are targeting strictly fentanyl, because when you have a drug team that is looking at different commodities—but considering what we're seeing.... With the additional funding we're hoping to get, the resources to target specific things when it comes to not only us, but....

We have a call with the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police to make sure that all law enforcement are gathered together and are informed about what's going on on the border, as well as how to tackle fentanyl.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: When did that group looking specifically at fentanyl come together?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'll turn to Mat to see if he has anything on that, but we've had some groups via the different international committees that we've been working on. From there, there's been drums intelligence and then sometimes, we're successful in some of the operations.

Mat.

C/Supt Mathieu Bertrand: Thank you for your question.

At CIROC specifically, fentanyl has been a priority for the last three years. The fentanyl strategy was implemented last year. However, as the commissioner was saying, there are multiple areas where we work on fentanyl.

To your question about resources, and to the commissioner's point on the superlab in B.C., the cleanup cost of the chemicals alone at this point right now is already at half a million dollars.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

C/Supt Mathieu Bertrand: That money cannot go to other operations unless there are additional resources put in.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

I'm sorry, as I don't mean to cut you off. We're just limited for time.

That suggests that there's been a surge of activity just since President-elect Trump has come forward. That specific fentanyl group has been working for at least the last three years and has been ramping up and, obviously, that adjustment has to be made.

I also understand that in 2023, Canada listed fentanyl precursor chemicals under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Do you happen to know what the maximum sentence is that a person can face if they are found guilty of trafficking precursors?

Commr Michael Duheme: I do not have that information.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Okay.

Commr Michael Duheme: I would say it depends on the judge who is presiding.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's fair enough. Maybe we can follow up on that with Justice. It's my understanding that it's actually a life sentence, but we can certainly follow up with Justice on that.

On some of the precursors, Commissioner, you mentioned the reverse onus. Are there other countries that have that?

It would help if we had pretty strong sentences for the trafficking of precursors. If there were additional legislative proposals that had a reverse onus, there would be pretty strict penalties together.

Do you have examples of what that reverse onus approach looks like, and if there are other countries currently doing something similar?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Give just a brief response. We're over our time.

Commr Michael Duheme: You would have to look at the process when the precursors are imported into Canada and then look at how they are collected by the person who imported them, and see what we could do to tighten up and reverse the onus on the person. Why do you need these drums? Do background checks. Some of the background checks are already being done on the companies, but I think there's something to be done whereby we can tighten that up.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

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

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There's a lot of talk about the government's plan to avoid being subject to the 25% tariffs imposed by the U.S. government. However, I think that this plan must go both ways.

I'll remind you of a few statements made by President-elect Donald Trump during the last U.S. election campaign.

He announced his willingness to declare nothing less than a national state of emergency, and to use the U.S. military to enforce measures concerning the deportation of people who are illegally in the United States. At a press conference, he even announced that he was going to launch the largest deportation in American history.

Let's go back to 2017, when he was last in office. More than 60,000 people had claimed asylum in Canada at the Canada-U.S. land border. Today, more than 11 million people in the United States are without status. In addition, hundreds of thousands of people have limited status, which will expire in the coming months.

Let's recall his plan during his last term. He spoke of building a wall on the southern border between the U.S. and Mexico; putting an end to the "catch and release" policy regarding undocumented people; creating a special force to deport illegal criminals; blocking immigration from certain countries after thorough investigations; forcing other countries to repatriate people whom U.S. authorities wish to deport; and setting up a tracking system through biometric visas. Other things are mentioned, and I won't list them all.

So it seems that we could be facing a large influx of migrants at the Canadian border.

I'm not asking you for the details of the plan that will supposedly be released next week, but I imagine that the Minister of Public Safety has consulted with your various organizations to find out what you recommend.

It seems to me that we question you often, and I don't want you to get the impression that we think nothing is being done at this time. We know there are many things being done that we just don't know about.

In that context, I imagine that additional measures could be taken and that's what the \$1 billion investment will allow.

Ms. O'Gorman, could you tell us about the recommendations you made to the minister, without telling us what will be retained? Maybe you don't know that yourself.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Absolutely, the minister has consulted us on...

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Please give a very brief response. We're a bit over time.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I don't know if I'll give the precise advice, but, certainly, additional resources in all of our business lines would yield increased outcomes.

[Translation]

The minister did consult us on those issues.

It's quite clear that more people would be needed to monitor exports and imports.

I've already mentioned the monitoring of postal packages, detection equipment, new technologies, detector dog teams, which would allow us to do more.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much, Ms. Michaud and Ms. O'Gorman.

[English]

Next, we have Mr. MacGregor, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also want to follow up on that particular subject point. The incoming president, Mr. Trump, has referred to using the U.S. military to enforce measures regarding the deportation of people who have entered the U.S. irregularly. In practical terms, what are the consequences for Canada if he follows through? Do you have some projections on what that would actually mean? Would our immigration detention centres be up to the task?

I just want to know: if he is actually going to follow through, what does that mean for Canada? How many people do you perceive might actually come our way? The United States says, "They are not our problem anymore, and they need to leave."

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: The safe third country agreement is in place. As my colleague said, we implement it every day. People come to the ports of entry to seek asylum every day. We process them. If they qualify for one of the few exemptions, they come into the country into the asylum system. We are prepared for a surge, but recognize the safe third—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Do you have a figure attached to that surge? Roughly speaking, do you know how many that would result in coming to Canada?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: No, because it would mean knowing, one, the number of people who would want to come to Canada; and two, those who would qualify for an exception. That's just an unknowable. The exceptions include a family member, a minor, or U.S. citizen.

• (1715)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Are the three detention centres we have up to the task? Are you going to have to rely on provincial prisons for people you believe are a flight risk? We just want to know.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I'm sorry. I forgot your question.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: These are human beings. We want to make sure they are going to be treated with dignity and respect, with all of the resources afforded to them.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Yes.

Every day, a very small number of people who seek asylum in Canada are subject to detention. There are 13,000 who are subject to alternatives to detention, which is to say bracelets and reporting. The small number who are detained based on a decision by the Immigration and Refugee Board are held in our IHCs.

We regret having lost access to provincial detention facilities so quickly before we could build the infrastructure, but we are retrofitting our infrastructure to take on that task. I don't expect the level of detention would necessarily change from what it is today.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you, Ms. O'Gorman.

Mr. Lloyd, go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

To the RCMP, how many people do you estimate are involved in the production and distribution of fentanyl in Canada? Do you have a ballpark estimate? Is it 1,000 people? Is it 10,000 people?

Commr Michael Duheme: I don't have a ballpark figure on it.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You have no idea how many people could possibly be involved in the fentanyl trade in Canada.

Commr Michael Duheme: There are a significant number of organized crime groups.

If you're asking for a specific number, I can't give you one.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: How many organized crime groups are involved?

C/Supt Mathieu Bertrand: There are over 4,000 organized crime groups in Canada, as assessed by Criminal Intelligence Service Canada.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Are these 4,000 individual organized crime groups, all with their own distinct leadership and membership?

C/Supt Mathieu Bertrand: That's correct.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That's stunning.

During the auto theft study, we heard from the Ontario Provincial Police that, oftentimes, when they catch people in the act of stealing cars or as a result of their investigations, it's people they've already been interacting with. It's people they've caught previously. In fact, many of these people are out on bail.

In your fentanyl investigations—when you're cracking down on these labs, making these great busts that we like to see and are catching people—are you finding that these are people who are known to law enforcement generally, or are they people who have had no interaction with law enforcement before?

Commr Michael Duheme: Go ahead.

C/Supt Mathieu Bertrand: I'm happy to take that. Thank you, Commissioner.

Yes, it's fair to say that organized crime individuals are not individuals who have been arrested only once. We deal with the same individuals and groups very often.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Would you say that, in the majority of cases, the people you're catching in these things are repeat offenders?

C/Supt Mathieu Bertrand: That's fair to say, yes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: In a previous Parliament under this Liberal government, Bill C-5 reduced a number of mandatory minimum penalties. Some of these mandatory minimum penalties were related to drug trafficking, and the import and export of drugs. These schedule I drugs include fentanyl. As a result of legislation like this, we're seeing that the people involved in this deadly fentanyl trade are getting back out on the streets more quickly. Obviously, you guys are catching them again in the act. It's clear that mandatory minimum penalties keep these drug pushers in prison for longer, which hopefully acts as a deterrent for them continuing that activity, or at least takes them off the street.

What is the time period between when these criminals get back on the street and when you catch them? Are they getting caught 10 years later, or are you finding that it's more frequent?

Commr Michael Duheme: It would be speculative on my part to say when they get back in. Most of the time, they're released under strict conditions. Some obey their conditions, and some don't.

To put a specific timeline on when they get involved again in organized crime, it's hard to put that into a quantifiable number.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: It wouldn't be a huge amount of time. We could be talking, in some cases, about days or months—maybe, in some cases, years. Certainly, there's a wide spectrum of cases.

Commr Michael Duheme: I would agree that there's a wide spectrum, as you covered days to several years.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I agree. We can shut down all the labs we want, but if we're not shutting down the people setting up the labs, we're not going to be very effective. We need to shut down the people involved.

What can we do better to get these people behind bars so they're not out there pushing the drugs that are killing members of our communities?

• (1720)

Commr Michael Duheme: I think there are multiple avenues here.

One is stopping or slowing the precursors coming into the country.

I think we need a strong outreach program to inform the Canadian public about the harm of fentanyl.

The other one is sharing information, which is ongoing in law enforcement.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I don't want to correct you because I agree with you, but this fentanyl opioid overdose crisis has killed more people in Canada than Canadians died in the Second World War. I think many Canadians know that this is a deadly epidemic. It's killed people in my family. It's killed people in many families across Canada. It's devastating. I hope you will get the resources and the legal backing to be able to continue to do your work in cracking down on these people, because we cannot allow this to continue.

As we've seen with this study, it's now costing us our international reputation. I support you in the work you're doing. I only hope that you get all the tools that you need to get that job done.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

I'll just follow up because I don't believe you answered this question, Commissioner. I'll just use my chair's prerogative.

Would stiffer penalties for drug traffickers and importers be an effective tool to combat this issue?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would say stiffer penalties are one tool to combat the issues, for sure.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. Sheehan, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in this important study that you've undertaken.

I represent Sault Ste. Marie and the riding thereof, which is a border town. It's also a steel town. Studying Trump's tariff threat because of the border, I don't accept the premise that we're a problem, as I didn't accept that we were a problem with the section 232 tariffs.

I open up my windows when I wake up in the morning and I can see the United States. There weren't any gun turrets or barbed wire or protected....

Fast-forward to today, when I look at the investments we have made at our border just in Sault Ste. Marie.... We cross every day. I went to school in Michigan at Lake Superior State University. I crossed every single day and I saw how well the border functioned. With the sharing of information between America and Canada, when I go to the United States, they know what I potentially have done. I've done nothing, but it's that kind of sharing of information.

I remember one time when I was at Lake State, we had a Chevy Chevette full of my American friends and we pulled up to our border crossing. We were waiting in line and one of the Americans said, "Oh, man, wouldn't it be great if we were all just one big country?" I quickly said back to him, "Sure, it'd be great having one prime minister," and then the ensuing discussion started.

That border crossing has totally changed. I recently cut the ribbon on a \$51-million investment at the Sault border, which made the facility larger with bigger inspection rooms, more lanes and areas for the staff to work in.

My question, through you, Chair, to our fine friends here is, that's one example, but could you please share the examples of some of the investments in facilities?

I also toured afterward and saw the new equipment being put in there—the X-ray machines and the stuff that identifies the drugs so the officers can identify it right away—as well as the training that takes place.

Would you mind putting on record the investments that we've made to continue to work closely with the Americans and protect our borders?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: CBSA is in the process of a \$480-million infrastructure improvement across our land ports of entry. We have finished several of them: Fraser, Bloomfield and Ste-Aurélie. You mentioned already the new equipment in Sault Ste. Marie. We're in the process of getting ready to do St-Bernard-de-Lacolle and early work around Pacific Highway.

We are talking to the Americans about a joint facility in Beaver Creek and looking to see what that would look like. We also have additional detection equipment across the country—it's quite a long list—as well as small and large teams with detector dogs.

We've been aligning with the Americans on the infrastructure projects that have been done, hoping to not build vastly different scales.

I would then take the opportunity to point out the Gordie Howe bridge. We're getting ready for that to open and putting finishing touches on there as well.

• (1725)

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Could you highlight for the committee what kind of training our officers undertake?

Again, the place where I went to university educated a lot of police officers, from both the United States and Canada. A lot of border officers, either Canadian or American, went to school together.

What kind of continuous improvement in training do you have? We have the infrastructure, the facilities and the equipment, but we

also rely on officers to do what they do to identify. They do quite a good job.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Absolutely. There's an excellent introductory training program that spans several months at our campus in Rigaud, and then there's training throughout, but we are continually sharing intelligence and information.

When an officer uncovers a secret compartment where you need to kind of press four buttons before it will open, this will be shared with officers across the country to look out for the same thing. A lot of the training they do is just looking unrelentingly at different ways people are trying to conceal contraband as they cross the border.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: You mentioned the sniffer dogs. That's like old tech, if you will. They've been around for a while, but they still play a very important role. I know we have one at the border in the Sioux as well.

What's that program doing? I'll talk about the old tech and the new tech. What are the plans for the future for investing in the border? I know that the minister is looking at announcing something, but are you able to share anything with the committee right now?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Not in terms of the announcement this week.

Regarding your comment about detector dogs, they are old technology but they will have a place for the foreseeable future, barring any kind of new technology that we haven't thought of. In terms of the places they can get into and how quickly they can do their jobs, I don't foresee our not needing our detector dogs, but, certainly, we're always looking at new equipment.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Ms. O'Gorman, I'm so sorry to cut you off. I apologize, but we're a bit over time.

Thank you, Mr. Sheehan.

I will go to Mr. Motz for five minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to change gears for my last line of questioning, but if I have time, I'll come back to it.

Recently, the Minister of Public Safety was here and indicated to this committee that he's working on a plan to strengthen our borders. Commissioner, you had indicated as well, as reported by the National Post, that you had presented the government with a plan to bolster the country's border security.

Can you describe what that plan looks like from the RCMP's perspective? I also want to ask Ms. O'Gorman—both of you—what developments have been made since the minister's meeting with us here a couple weeks ago on the plan? What does it look like? How is it rolling out, and what does it look like moving forward?

Commr Michael Duheme: We've briefed the minister on the need to increase our capabilities by evergreening the technology that we have and increasing resources. This has already been said by the minister publicly. It includes having more ability when it comes to surveillance by means of drones or helicopters.

There is an also appetite to increase the resources. We have to be mindful that, like any other organization, we have limited resources, but how can we benefit from other organizations by working together and having additional people at the border?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Actually, that would almost be the same answer I would give insofar as we are working extremely closely on a day-to-day basis with the RCMP as we carry out our mandate at ports of entry; the RCMP does it in-between. The extent to which they benefit from technology.... We know what new technology is out there that would help us increase the number of seizures that we are able to make.

Mr. Glen Motz: Fair enough. If I'm hearing you correctly, there's not necessarily a specific plan other than capitalizing on some ever-green technology that we already have. We're going to maybe put some more boots on the ground there, and we're going to use some other technologies like drones or those sorts of things along the border.

Is there a plan to develop bilateral agreements with the United States and partner in some of those border processes? The minister says that we have a plan or that we're going to develop a plan, but are we bolstering a plan we already have, or are we doing something even bolder than we're doing now?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I would leave it to the minister to announce his plan. As he said, he's consulted the provinces.

I have to respond to your comment about agreements with the U.S. because I don't want it to be understood that we don't have them. We have information sharing, and we're increasing them and operationalizing our agreements. I just want to make sure it's clear that we do absolutely have multiple agreements with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, with the DEA, with the ATF and with HSI. I'm sorry for the acronyms, but I expect that you know what they are. Those agreements are well in place.

• (1730)

Mr. Glen Motz: Apparently, the minister has had conversations with the provinces. Was part of the plan to include them or have the provinces step up?

For instance, Alberta made an announcement this afternoon putting resources, manpower, technology and other things on the border and for spending \$30 million to augment the resources there in Alberta.

Other provinces, I understand, are looking at doing similar things along the border. Is that part of the plan that the government is talking about? Can any of you speak to that?

Commr Michael Duheme: I can't speak about the conversation that the minister has had with his counterparts in different provinces. What I can say is that Public Safety, at the deputy minister's level, has a weekly call. Erin and I are on the call with the deputy ministers from across the country. Throughout the calls, there's a strong appetite to see how they can help. The Premier of Alberta has announced that they are looking at mobilizing 51 officers. We welcome that. Obviously, as I said earlier in the committee, this is a shared responsibility. We all want what's best for Canadians and to ensure that there's a safe and secure border.

Mr. Glen Motz: Commissioner, that's great. I applaud the Premier of Alberta for moving in that direction.

I'm wondering how you plan when it comes to both CBSA and the RCMP patrolling and being part of the border security there. It's a very vast border, I might say, as I have in my riding all the border crossings that matter in Alberta. How do you intend to incorporate those efforts so that you don't work against each other and you share intel, you communicate together and you are on operations together? How do you plan on doing that?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Give just a very brief answer, please.

Commr Michael Duheme: It would be no different from how we're doing it right now in the province of Quebec, where we're joined at the hip with la Sûreté du Québec. We collaborate together and share information. You might have joint teams, joint command teams, to make sure everybody knows what each other is doing and shares intelligence at a fast pace in real time.

Mr. Glen Motz: I would encourage you guys to make sure that happens in all the provinces.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you, Mr. Motz.

Ms. O'Connell, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, Chair.

I couldn't help but laugh at Mr. Lloyd's last comments in his round, when he said, "I hope you will get" all the resources you need to do this work. He had the opportunity to vote on some of these resources and he actually voted against them.

Following up on the questions about organized crime, it actually brings me back. I come from a region where the Hells Angels have been active at different points of time. They don't really go away, but there are spikes in their activity. In fact, when I was in high school I did a placement with our local police in forensics. Organized crime was a big focus of some of that work.

Did organized crime groups just spike after the Supreme Court shut down mandatory minimums?

Commr Michael Duheme: When it comes to the activities of organized crime groups, I wouldn't say they spike. They're constant. The groups are forever engaged in criminal activity. Even if you break one cell down, another cell replaces it and continues.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Part of their operations is really what the market demands. It's almost organized crime capitalism. If there is a large profit opportunity in fentanyl today, let's say, but in five years from now it's some different drug, they will change operations. It's not that the organizations themselves don't continue to operate. It's that the drug of choice, or the guns of choice, or the trafficking of choice might change, depending on where there's an actual market.

Commr Michael Duheme: As I said earlier, organized crime is driven by financial gains. With regard to profit, they will change from one commodity to another. Geography also plays a key role. This is why you sometimes see turf wars with different organized crime groups. They're expanding their territory and whatnot.

Whatever is the commodity of the day and the demand of the day, organized crime is involved.

• (1735)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Commissioner, in response to an earlier question, you started to talk about dealing with some of the societal challenges. If there weren't a market, for example, for some of these drugs, then that profit margin wouldn't exist. Can you speak to some of the programs? I would assume that task forces within your agency are working on this with local partners on how best to actually deal with some of the roots of the markets of some of these illicit drugs in particular.

Commr Michael Duheme: It would vary across the country, but RCMP commanding officers in each division and commanding officers for the federal regions work closely with the provinces to see what's required to make sure there's the right support. Obviously, there's always a question of funding in that. It's about the right support and basically how to get the information out to the people who are actually using it.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

President O'Gorman, you provided in your last appearance, I think, some numbers with regard to questions we've had at this committee about staffing levels. I know this continues to be a question. I would love to ensure that we have the most accurate and up-to-date numbers. It's my understanding that CBSA recruits something like 500 new agents every year. Is that accurate? Is it also accurate that the previous cuts of over 1,100 CBSA agents or staff have been fully restored and that additional officers or agents have been hired?

Can you confirm some of those numbers for me, please?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: We can put about 500 officers through our college every year. We're regaining after the pandemic, when we had to close. It's about 500 a year.

Right now, we have 16,700 employees, 8,500 of whom are front-line officers.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Can you answer my question about the previous 1,100 CBSA agent cuts? Have they been restored in addition to more officers added?

This seems to be a question of contention, and I would like to have some answers on that.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Our overall complement has increased. I'm afraid I can't answer about the 1,100 very specifically.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's fair enough but, overall, the complement has increased.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Yes, this is the highest number of people we have had working at CBSA.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Is it the highest number ever?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you very much.

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

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have two quick questions for Ms. O'Gorman.

The first concerns the request by the Customs and Immigration Union to allow officers of the Canada Border Services Agency to patrol between border crossings to assist the RCMP. The last time you appeared, you talked about this request and said that it could very well be done.

In your opinion, or to your knowledge, is this the kind of thing that could appear in the plan that the minister will table?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Thank you for your question.

I find it interesting that the union is saying that officers could patrol between border crossings as early as tomorrow if a certain order in council from 1981 didn't exist, while thousands of agents are still needed.

You can't do everything at the same time. We carry out our mandate every day at ports of entry.

[English]

We work side by side with the RCMP, who is carrying out its mandate. If the government provided CBSA with the resources and the mandate to do that, we would. That's not my area of focus right now. My focus is on the ports of entry, our people internationally, the marine ports and inland. We have 200 investigators. That is my focus.

• (1740)

[Translation]

So it's a little easy to say that this order in council is the only thing preventing us from doing that. We carry out our mandate at ports of entry across the country and around the world.

Thank you for asking me this question and for giving me the opportunity to clarify certain things about a comment that, from my point of view, was somewhat simplistic.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

In terms of border crossings and the reduction in hours of service, the last time you were here you said that you had aligned yourselves with the U.S. schedule and that about two cars went through every hour anyway. Your organization has provided us with the data on how many vehicles go through every hour. We see that between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m., at the Trout River and Herdman border crossings, the ones I mentioned to you, on average, more than two cars go through every hour. That's 14 for Trout River and in 18 for Herdman. So the effect is perhaps greater than we thought.

At this point, would it be possible to resume discussions with the U.S. to see if we can keep those border crossings open between 6:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.?

I even see that before 8 p.m. or 9 p.m., there are fewer crossings than after 6 p.m. Is that decision taken with the United States set in stone, or can we still talk to them to make adjustments?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Yes, it's an average. So there are periods when there are more and periods when there are fewer. I don't want to minimize the situation for people who were using those ports of entry at those hours—I know it has an impact on them—but in both cases, another port of entry isn't very far away. I know that adjustments are necessary—

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Ms. O'Gorman, I'm so sorry to cut you off.

[Translation]

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: —but that was the result of lengthy negotiations.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you.

Mr. MacGregor, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I think that, in a previous exchange with Mr. Lloyd, you reported the rough number of 4,000 organized crime groups in Canada. They are on a spectrum; they don't all have the same capacity, number of members, etc. Amongst that 4,000, I think that there are some that operate in many different countries. They have very organized and sophisticated distribution networks and so on. I guess what I'm wondering, Commissioner, is about resources that the RCMP has specifically for organized crime.

In your opinion, what is the most effective way to combat organized crime? Is it economic starvation, continuously interrupting their source of income?

I'm worried that a lot of the people who are getting arrested may be quite far down the organizational ladder. What more do you need from us to go after the people who are the leaders of these organizations?

Commr Michael Duheme: I just want to clarify something mentioned earlier. The 4,000 number comes from the CISC, which

is the Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, and the definition of organized crime in the Criminal Code is a group of at least three individuals engaged in ongoing criminal activity for the purpose of making money. I don't want to alarm everybody. That definition is very....

With regard to your point, Mr. MacGregor, I think there are strong collaborative partnerships—intelligence-sharing is one—making sure that it's not only law enforcement. However, I think we have to look at bringing a different perspective of who is better positioned to ensure that there is maximum impact on organized crime. Maybe it's the Canada Revenue Agency, if you get into the books. Often, a money laundering file does not start with the money laundering itself; it starts with the commodity, and then it leads you into money laundering.

Definitely, if you cut off the source of income, that's where it's going to hurt the most.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you very much.

We have about 11 minutes left. We're supposed to have two more five-minute rounds. If that works for everyone, we'll wrap up after that.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): All right.

Mr. Motz, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I have just one question. I want to go back quickly to the people on the terror watch-list whom the U.S. has intercepted down there.

What have we done here in this country to tighten our border security so that these terrorists aren't admitted in the first place?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: The scenario you cited was people going to the U.S. and being turned back.

Mr. Glen Motz: I'm talking about the ones in Canada already. What are we doing to make sure that those on terror watch-lists aren't allowed to continue to enter Canada?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: With regard to the statistics of people whom the U.S. encounters and turns back, those people may be Canadian as well. I wouldn't take that whole number and say that they are all foreign nationals into the country.

● (1745)

Mr. Glen Motz: I would agree with that assessment.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Okay, so, with regard to your question about those who have come from abroad, who are foreign nationals in Canada, being turned away, certainly, our colleagues from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada would be well-placed...but they have tightened up their visa requirements.

Mr. McCrorie can talk maybe a bit about the security screening process if you'll—

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I like to think of it as layers of defence that start prior to the border. That's where, for example, IRCC requires a visa, and a portion of those are referred to us for security clearing. I think we did 34,000 applications last year and had a non-favourable recommendation for about 700 or 800 of them.

Our national targeting is—

Mr. Glen Motz: I'm sorry. I'm just going to interrupt you for a minute because we've heard some of these numbers before, and I know we all can agree that we need to do a better job.

I just want to put a motion on notice before I pass the rest of my time to Mr. Lloyd:

Whereas break and enters against small businesses in Toronto have risen 19% in [the last] year, and the Ottawa Police Service is warning of an alarming rise in residential break and enters, the committee undertake a study on the issue of break and enters and home invasions in Canada of no less than three meetings; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

I will turn the remainder of my time over to Mr. Lloyd.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you, Mr. Motz.

Mr. Lloyd, you have just under three minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will also be putting a motion on notice:

Whereas new data shows that homicides in Canada have increased 27% and the homicide rate has increased from 1.71 to 1.94 per 100,000 Canadians since 2015, the committee undertake a study on the causes of homicide in Canada of no less than three meetings; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

With my remaining time, I will ask this: Where are the majority of these transnational organized crime groups coming from? What countries are they tied to, generally?

Commr Michael Duheme: Based on CISC's 2024 report, you have organized crime groups that work within the country, and you have a percentage—I don't have the exact number—that have international ties, if you wish.

We were talking about fentanyl earlier. We know that the Mexican cartel has a strong presence and is involved in the making and distribution of it.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

Maybe this is a question best put to the CBSA.

Can someone tell us what percentage of import containers are scanned at our ports, what percentage of import containers are scanned at land crossings and what percentage of containers are scanned at rail crossings?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I don't have the percentages, and we would typically not speak publicly about how we do our targeting and the numbers we scan. It depends on our risk. It depends on the information that we've received. Generally—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: We did have a representative from the union who said there's a zero per cent chance that anything will be scanned at a rail crossing. Is that true?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Again, it's disappointing that they felt the need to put that information out there without any more context.

I'm going to ask Mr. McCrorie to address that quite directly. Thank you for the question.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: All goods coming into Canada need to be reported to the CBSA. As the president alluded to, we do a risk assessment of all those goods. We also have targeting in certain modes that allow us to target.

In any mode, when we have a suspicion, whether based on the targeting, our intel or our risk assessment, or based on the experience of well-trained border services officers, we will pull that conveyance aside and search it.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: We know that the U.S. discloses their percentages. Is there a reason why they can disclose their percentages, but Canada does not?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: As I've suggested, we get data on all material coming into the country. We use that data to perform the risk assessments, and we prefer not to talk about how many actually will undergo an examination, because we don't want to give away our methodologies.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Would it be a number that Canadians would consider high, or a number that Canadians would consider low?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I think Canadians should take solace in the fact that we do a risk assessment on everything coming into the country.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you very much.

For the remaining five minutes, we'll go to Mr. MacDonald, please.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses again.

Quickly, I just want to touch on Bill C-70, Canada's new Countering Foreign Interference Act, which came into effect last June. How will the measures in that bill enhance the ability of CBSA to leverage intelligence at the border?

• (1750)

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I wouldn't say that CBSA is a central player in foreign interference, but I will say that we are an active member of the national security community and we do have tools at our disposal, not least the ability to remove people. As I understand, it's sometimes quite challenging to obtain a criminal justice outcome for foreign interference, so sometimes the best outcome is removing somebody who is engaged in that activity from Canada. We have relevant tools.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you.

I know that back in 2017, we introduced legislation allowing CBSA officers to inspect imported and exported mail weighing 30 grams. I want to put this into context, so I'll ask you this: How many doses can be defined in approximately 30 grams of fentanyl?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: A small number of pills can be mixed with other things and made into several doses, so I don't think I could give you an exact equation, but the fact is that people were sending pills through the mail.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Okay, thank you.

I know obviously your organizations have to be very agile. You mentioned at the beginning of this session that you're heading to Washington, D.C. in the near future.

Can you talk a little bit about the positive things that are happening in the relationships between the U.S.'s organizations and your organizations, and what could be improved?

Maybe each of you could take a quick run at that.

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: Sure. I'll start.

One of the good things that is happening is that we have people embedded in the U.S. targeting centre, and they will be sending somebody to us starting in January, so we're quite pleased about that.

We're coordinating our infrastructure investments, as I've already mentioned.

We're going to undertake a pre-clearance pilot that would have Canada Border Services Agency officers co-locate on the U.S. side and pre-clear people before they come to Canada. I'll say that's a pilot with the express purpose of seeing if it works, and I think that's quite important.

Working internationally, when we send liaison officers out, the first people they meet, in addition to meeting people in their host country, are their U.S. Customs and Border Protection and DEA counterparts.

As I said, information is being shared all the time to very good effect.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you.

Commissioner, would you like to comment?

Commr Michael Duheme: From an RCMP perspective, at national headquarters we have someone from the United States Border Patrol embedded in our national headquarters with our border team, as well as someone from the U.S. Coast Guard. The relationship we have with them is strong, and we're building and making it even stronger. There's good sharing of information. We're trying to align technology as well with U.S. BP so we don't duplicate things and so we can benefit from, on both sides of the border, the technology that's being used.

There's a lot of good work going on. Again, Aaron and I going down to Washington is really to meet the newly appointed people who are going to be responsible for it and build that relationship at the most senior level.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: I'm just curious. We heard that approximately 0.2% of fentanyl in the U.S. comes from Canada. Where does the 99.8% come from that goes into the U.S.?

Commr Michael Duheme: I have a report here from the U.S. BP and Homeland Security that dates back to July 2023. It does cite in the report that Canadian-produced fentanyl cannot currently compete with Mexican-sourced fentanyl in the Pacific northwest, and it is not currently known to enter the U.S. market at the retail level.

I've mentioned before that it's 140th the cost or price of what is being done in Canada. We strongly believe, based on the intelligence we have, and it's confirmed here by the U.S. BP, that the Mexican cartels' flow of fentanyl is coming up the west coast. We believe it is being predominantly used in the United States, because of its cost versus the cost of fentanyl produced here.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Commissioner Duheme, I have to mention that some of your friends in Tignish, P.E.I. speak highly of you and your hockey ability when you were there. It was not about your profession, but just about hockey. I had to mention that.

I certainly appreciate your time. You're dealing with extremely important issues. We know that the innovation and technology with which criminals are advancing on a daily basis and that you have to be very agile in what you're doing. We appreciate all the work you've done so far.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1755)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

With that, we've ended our formal line of questioning. I want to very sincerely thank all of you for being with us today. We know you all work very hard on these important issues. I'm certain that the committee will be inviting you back in the coming months and years as we deal with the new challenges that are forthcoming. Thank you very much for your hard work.

If there's agreement, I'll adjourn the meeting.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raquel Dancho): The meeting is adjourned.

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