



## STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENCE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

## COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA DÉFENSE NATIONALE ET DES ANCIENS COMBATTANTS

### EVIDENCE

*[Recorded by Electronic Apparatus]*

**The Chair:** I'd like to reconvene the defence committee meeting.

We have before us Mr. Sean McManus, who is assistant to the general president of the International Association of Fire Fighters.

Mr. McManus, on behalf of the committee, welcome here today. We're very interested in getting your comments, particularly in relation to the joint threats I suppose we all face, in terms of fire fighters being first responders, and the interface with the military, where that's required.

You have the floor, Mr. McManus. We look forward to your comments.

**Mr. Sean P. McManus (Assistant to the General President for Canadian Operations, International Association of Fire Fighters):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon.

On behalf of our general president, Harold Schaitberger, and the over 17,000 professional fire fighters and emergency response personnel we represent in Canada, we appreciate the opportunity to share our views on national security before this committee this afternoon.

I would like to begin by thanking each of you personally, on behalf of our 245,000 members across North America, for the many kind words of condolence and support that have come from Parliament Hill, in response to the loss of the more than 340 members of our association in the World Trade Center attacks on September 11. Those brave professionals showed us the finest examples of selflessness and public service when they gave their lives on that day so others might live. We, too, mourn their loss.

As we all know, the world was forever changed on September 11. A new and frightening reality was born, in the wake of the despicable attacks that resulted in the loss of some 5,000 innocent lives. The loss and devastation we face are enormous, but so too is the challenge that lies ahead in preparing the nation for the potential of additional terrorist attacks.

In this new kind of war, the battle lines are the communities and workplaces of our cities, and civilians are the explicit targets. In the wake of the attacks, the federal government has rightly identified national security as a priority, having appointed Foreign Affairs Minister John Manley to chair a new national security committee. The defence minister also plays a key role on this committee, as his portfolio includes emergency preparedness.

Consequently, the federal government has in recent weeks introduced a number of measures designed to prevent acts of terrorism on Canadian soil, and to respond to those incidents should they occur. The recent incidents of bioterrorism that have claimed multiple lives in the United States and gripped all of North America have underscored the urgent need for these measures.

In terms of major disaster response, or what is being called disaster mitigation, the federal government has focused its approach on the use of Canadian Armed Forces personnel, particularly through the funding of specialized and centrally located teams, such as the Joint Task Force 2 and other units designed to handle biological or chemical incidents.

While the IAFF does not disagree that our armed forces have a critical role to play in national security, we have to question the practicality and effectiveness of this approach for addressing a domestic terrorist threat.

A military team based in southern or eastern Ontario would be hours or days away from providing emergency assistance to an attack on Canadian soil. As seen in the attacks in New York and Washington, fire fighters are our nation's first responders. They are the first ones on the scene; they are our domestic defenders. When the alarm sounds, fire fighters are on the scene in four minutes, long before any military-based team can be assembled and deployed.

But the problem is that the vast majority of professional fire fighters are not adequately trained and equipped to respond properly to these incidents. As a result, the fire fighters and the citizens they are duty-bound to protect are unprotected from this threat. In short, there is a significant gap in this nation's ability to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks. Those who will be immediately on the scene are not properly prepared, and those who are currently equipped for the task are hours away from arrival, at the earliest.

While some cities like Ottawa have first-responder-based hazardous material teams in place, the majority do not. Frankly, in this new world it is just as easy to mail or otherwise deliver a biological agent, such as anthrax, to Ottawa as it is to Saint John, Winnipeg, or Surrey. The measures recently announced by the federal government would not add any protection, in this case.

The Ottawa hazardous materials response unit could serve as a model of a dedicated hazardous materials response team that is adequately trained and equipped to respond to any kind of biological or chemical incident, whether natural, industrial, or as a result of an act of terrorism. But ultimately, the Ottawa hazardous materials response unit and its dramatically increased level of activity in recent weeks should also serve to underscore the critical need for rapid biological and chemical response in Canadian cities, whether in the form of a dedicated team or broadly applied hazardous materials training for first responders in a particular community.

- 1655 

As the topic of national security has been debated with some urgency in recent weeks, this gap has been acknowledged by senior armed forces personnel. Just this week the commander of the armed forces nuclear chemical and biological response team was quoted in the national media as saying there was a misunderstanding of his team's role. He fully acknowledged that fire fighters and other first responders were Canada's front line of defence in the immediate aftermath of an attack, not centrally located military

teams.

The Chief of Defence Staff testified before this committee last month that the military's nuclear chemical and biological response team is not adequately staffed to perform its functions. I must add, however, that even if the military teams were fully funded, they would still not be the first ones on the scene; it would be Canada's fire fighters.

The associate deputy minister responsible for the Office of Critical Infrastructure Protection and Emergency Preparedness, in testimony before this committee three weeks ago, could not answer the question when asked how long it would take for the disaster assistance response team to respond to a particular incident.

These concerns I've highlighted were duly acknowledged in this committee's interim report and recommendations, which were released yesterday.

While addressing the needs of Canada's armed forces, the report explicitly refers to the important role that civilian first responders play in the immediate aftermath of an incident, calling them our first line of defence. The interim report discusses the critical importance, in terms of disaster mitigation, of the fastest response possible.

In discussing both natural disasters and terrorist attacks, the report states:

In both cases, first responders such as firefighters, police and medical personnel determine the extent of the disaster and the resources required to mitigate the consequences.

With the identification of national security as our priority and the acknowledgement that military-based teams are not designed to protect Canadians from the immediate aftermath of a biological or chemical attack, the government, whether through the national security committee, the defence ministry, another ministry, or a combination of the above, has to look at the critical role to be played by fire fighters and other first responders in disaster mitigation.

We commend the members of this committee for advocating that additional resources be allocated to increase funding for training programs for first responders. The creation of the national security committee presents the federal government with the perfect opportunity to address the problem of initial response with a fresh solution, which I will present to this committee in a few moments.

But I must also comment that training and equipping first responders for disaster mitigation specifically in response to terrorist attacks is not new, nor is it advocated solely by the first responder community. In 1998 a special Senate committee on security and intelligence was struck to assess Canada's risk from nuclear, biological and chemical attacks. The report of that committee, released in January 1999, contained the following recommendation:

Although much has been accomplished at the federal level, the role that first responders play in an incident is critical. First responders will, by definition, be first on a scene and have to manage a nuclear, biological or chemical incident until help...arrives. Depending on the circumstances, help may be some time coming. Most municipal police forces and other first responders make no claim to having an effective response capability against a nuclear, biological or chemical attack.

Further, the committee recommended:

We need to ensure first responders receive the protective and diagnostic equipment they require in order to be able to perform mass decontamination, have available approved drugs for first responders and casualties and sufficient quantities of ventilators and hospital beds for mass casualties, and to treat people with injuries who may also be chemically contaminated.

You have the rest of the quote from the special Senate committee in front of you. I'm not going to belabour those points. I think it's appropriate, though, to raise them with you.

A matter of national security should not be left for cities to fund. This need for training and equipment is tremendous and can no longer be borne solely by local jurisdictions. The government must recognize that terrorist attacks are not local incidents, but national tragedies that require a national response.

We have come here today not only to identify this problem for the committee—one I acknowledge you already addressed in your initial report—but to also present a clear and attainable solution that has proven to be effective, takes advantage of an existing infrastructure, and can be implemented on an extremely cost-effective basis with annual funding from the Canadian government in the amount of \$500,000. Each of you has been presented with a report about the IAFF hazardous materials training for first responders program, which includes a proposal for that federal funding. We would ask you to review the material carefully.

• 1700 

Through 2001, the IAFF has trained close to 30,000 emergency responders in the United States with the hazardous materials curriculum. More than 5,000 of these students were instructor trainees, who were then able to return to their communities and deliver training to their fellow emergency response workers, thus multiplying the effectiveness of the program. As a result of this effect, more than 500,000 first responders in the U.S. have been educated with the IAFF curriculum.

As this program is funded by the U.S. government through a series of grants, Canada's first responders are not eligible to participate. If the federal government were to provide annual funding, the training of Canadian emergency workers through this program could begin immediately. The curriculum already exists. The administration is already in place. The instructors are already lined up. Funding from the Canadian government would go strictly toward training Canadian emergency workers. The IAFF hazardous materials training for first responders program is just waiting to be utilized. All that is required is the funding.

Annual funding from this government would enable a significant number of Canada's first responders to be trained to a recognized standard for hazardous materials response. It would fully fund one hundred 24-hour courses in communities across Canada, providing 40,000 contact hours. It would train 1,600 students, including fire fighters, but also other emergency workers. At this funding level, a substantive portion of the nation's first response community could have the appropriate training in just five to ten years.

In conclusion, this committee has heard testimony from a number of sources that are all saying the same thing: first responders must be included in any disaster mitigation strategy. The IAFF adds its voice to those who recognize this critical need. Make no mistake, it's not our military personnel who are on the front lines of this new war. They are not the first line of defence. That job, by definition, belongs to the nation's fire fighters and other first responders. They are the ones who will be at the scene in the

immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack. We urge the committee to recognize this and recommend to the defence minister that federal funding be made available to give fire fighters and other first responders the training and the tools they need to respond to a biological or chemical incident safely and effectively, permitting them, in turn, to protect the public.

Again, on behalf of the International Association of Fire Fighters, thank you for this opportunity to present our views on this vital national security issue. I'd be more than pleased to answer any questions you may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. McManus. I'm sure there will be lots of questions.

Mr. Benoit, followed by Mr. O'Reilly.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to defer most of my time to my colleague, but I will ask questions later. I have lots of them.

However, I do want to take this time to thank you for the letter you sent thanking us for the tributes we paid to fire fighters and those lost, in particular in New York. You may think that it's not particularly meaningful, but I want you to know that it means a lot. We get some letters like that, and they're very much appreciated.

I want to say that in putting the response together to your letter, it really caused me to think about what it must have been like for those fire fighters after they knew the first tower had collapsed and they continued to go into that second building. They had to have known that it was going to collapse too. And responding to your letter I think really caused me to think about that once again, and very deeply. So I thank you and all fire fighters for the great service you provide.

I look forward to questioning you later, but I'll defer to my colleague for now.

**Ms. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance):** What has the response of the Government of Canada been to requests for emergency disaster pilot project funding from the municipalities in Canada? Have such projects been funded?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** At a municipal level?

**Ms. Cheryl Gallant:** Have the municipalities received federal funding for these pilot projects?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Not specifically earmarked for hazardous materials training, not that we're aware of, no.

**Ms. Cheryl Gallant:** What about the equipment, even the vehicles, the fire engines they have? Many municipalities have not been able to replace their equipment for decades. Are you finding that, through any existing programs, this is being addressed?

• 1705 

**Mr. Sean McManus:** What we have found in the immediate aftermath of September 11 is a lot of nervous fire fighters. They're going to do their job, they're going to show up. The concern we have is that they're going to inadvertently put themselves in more harm's way, in turn creating more of an alarming situation than already exists simply because the level of training across Canada is not at a sufficient

baseline level. What we're finding is that across Canada you have a real hodgepodge with respect to the level of expertise. Some municipalities—Ottawa, for example—have a good program, but outside of Ottawa and outside of the major metropolitan centres you really have a very basic level of training.

You've also identified another very important issue, which is it's one thing to have all the proper training, but if you don't have the equipment to be able to carry out that training, you're also at a disadvantage. And that's something we are working on, not only with the federal government but at a provincial level, to address those needs.

**Ms. Cheryl Gallant:** So the training programs do exist; it's just that the rural communities, or those outside the metro areas, aren't able to access them. Is that because the funding is required from the municipalities, or there just isn't the time or the number of people to be able to let them go to the courses?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Right now there is no national hazardous materials training. What there is is on a department-by-department basis. So if you are in a large metropolitan department that has a dedicated hazardous materials team, you are getting that training. As the U.S. has shown, with the effectiveness of the program, the curriculum already exists. Right now the problem we have—and I brought some of the materials from the program that exists—is because it is all funded through U.S. Congress money, if we were to start doing the training for Canadian fire fighters we would put that grant in jeopardy. That's the problem.

**Ms. Cheryl Gallant:** In other words, if the municipalities want their fire fighters trained, they have to pay for it out of their own pocket, when they're already trying to upgrade their water purification and waste situations?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Yes. It's all coming out of a local fire department budget.

**Ms. Cheryl Gallant:** So you're asking for federal funding for equipment and training.

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Correct.

**Ms. Cheryl Gallant:** What about the emergency preparedness plans? From community to community outside the metro areas, are there plans in place, and if so, do they have a chance to exercise them?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** There are plans in place, but if you're talking about a rural community and you're dealing with a suspicious substance, I dare say the level of familiarity and training right now is not there. You have a very basic first responder level of training, but in terms of how to handle it and things like that.... I can give you an example. We're fielding calls right now in the Canadian office from members across the country who are saying, "We've had a call from the post office with a suspicious package. How do we address it?" That is not the best way to be dealing with it. What you are hoping for with the implementation of a training program is that there would be a baseline level of knowledge and then you would have advanced training.


In addition to that, what we're advocating for in the United States, now that we have a curriculum in place for hazardous materials training, is weapons of mass destruction training. As the events of September 11 have shown, and subsequent events, that level of training needs to be brought into place as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

Mr. O'Reilly, I understand that as a volunteer fire fighter you would like to ask some questions.

**Mr. John O'Reilly (Haliburton—Victoria—Brock, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Mr. McManus.

I was on a fire department for six years as what we call a volunteer, or a part-time, fire fighter. When we get to training, I think that's where the training breaks down, although you face the same dangers as a permanent fire fighter. You're usually with a group of maybe five or six other people, and after the first call goes out, then the volunteers section comes in. Some of them are well trained. I was an instructor in first aid, and there was an ambulance component there also. I think they were probably really well trained, although I do remember going to a chemical fire and trying to identify the flammable materials when they're burning in about eight different colours and you're trying to figure out which one is which. You put on your SCOT air pack and hope it will keep you from whatever it is you're breathing.

• 1710 

So I've been there. I've been on the roofs. You get off when the hose starts to sink in and you realize there's a fire underneath you and the roof has caved in. So I've been there, done that, still have the T-shirt—and actually, I have the money clip they gave me for that.

When you're talking about first response and time and training, I think there has to be—and I've already made this pitch, by the way, to Paul Martin—some kind of expansion of the emergency measures organization, the JEP program that is available, and those types of things. I think that's where we can take advantage of further training—by putting money into that program so that the rural municipal fire departments such as I was involved in would have some other area where they could draw money. The fire department budget is a big budget in most municipalities. It comes out of a municipal conglomeration, and when the chair of the fire committee makes his pitch to the municipal finance chair, that's where the crunch comes. Sometimes, in small municipalities, there just isn't enough money.

I think it's time for some type of expansion of a federal program that would be geared towards rural fire departments. As I said, that's where my experience comes from. I've made that pitch to Paul Martin personally and have given him the numbers and so forth—for generators, for radio stations, and all the things that are involved with first response.

Concerning the hazardous materials team, I talked to the fire chief in Sunderland the other day and said “Do you have a HAZMAT team?” He said “Yes, we do. Basically, what we've learned is you stay up-wind if there's a hardware store on fire, because there are so many strange things burning in a hardware store—so many chemicals—that you don't know whether they are toxic or whatever.”

Some of them don't have that training, and I wasn't sure how we could get it on a federal level, because the budget comes out of the provincial and the municipal government. That's where the budget comes from—from taxes people pay.

I would like your comments on my dissertation as a former fire fighter and ask, do you think that would be a way we could get into the training end of it—through some of those programs that already exist?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** I appreciate those comments.

I can tell you this. We obviously would look to any type of creative funding solution for this situation. I


can tell you that the great thing about the program, which already exists, is that everything is in place, and it's a train-the-trainer program. The effectiveness of this program is such that you don't have a professional group of instructors as the only ones who can do this training. Once you bring in a class and do that training, they're certified and can then go out and do the training. Very quickly, the multiplier effect kicks in, and you are able to train rural fire fighters, other front-line emergency workers, police officers and the like, so it's very effective.

Yes, in terms of looking for ways to resource that program, we would certainly be prepared to look at any model that was able to get that training into fire fighters' hands.

**Mr. John O'Reilly:** I think it's a valid point, that this should committee try to find some program that exists and put some pressure on to try to have it expanded, so that it could fit into some type of first response training without interfering with the provinces.

As you know, when we get into provincial jurisdiction we sometimes have problems in every province, because no provincial government seems to want the federal government in there. But they do want the money, so I think there is a way, if existing federal programs could be expanded, that the money would be there and wouldn't interfere with training that already exists.

I would look forward to expanding on that a little as far as our committee is concerned, to recognize that fire fighting is a dangerous occupation. Most fire fighters know that when they join it. You go in and sometimes get your eyes open very quickly.

• 1715 

I would ask that we take a hard look at some way to make sure fire departments are equipped, whether it's bunker gear or air packs or new equipment that we have to look at—not to let the provincial government off the hook on it, nor municipalities, because they raise taxes to provide services, and among them are fire fighting, police, and all that type of first response. There's a lot to learn from September 11, for first responders and for governments.

**Mr. Sean McManus:** May I just follow up on that?

**The Chair:** Very briefly.

**Mr. Sean McManus:** When we looked at this situation, the reason we felt it appropriate to bring it to this committee's and other federal departments' attention is that if we're now going to address national security issues on a national basis it's perfectly timed to be able to start the training on a national basis. If it requires some cooperation between provincial and federal funding, so be it. The point is, we have it in place and we just want to start that training as quickly as possible.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. McManus. Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Plamondon.

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** I think that my friend O'Reilly identified the problem very well. I hope that the government will listen to your requests, because I think they are justified. It is a good thing that you came here to remind us that you are the ones on the front line. The first thing that came to mind

throughout government and among most members of Parliament was defending ourselves against terrorism through the army, police forces, by increasing budgets, by suggesting new anti-terrorism training. But there is one thing we forgot. When an event happens, the firefighter is the first to arrive on the scene and he is in danger. He must have absolutely correct and adequate training as well as the equipment needed to carry out the job. That is what you are recommending.

Half a million dollars does not seem like a very high figure to me, especially since you are telling me that the course does not have to be developed since it already exists. We simply have to train people who in turn will train others throughout Quebec and Canada.

However, there is the issue that the colleague who spoke just before me raised regarding jurisdiction. Some times it is touchy to talk about this problem in the context of jurisdiction, but that is often where things break down. Then the money comes quickly. Given what I know about the situation in Quebec, the federal government cannot intervene directly with the municipality. It must go through an agreement with the province in order to talk to municipalities or give them money. The ideal solution would be for the federal government to transfer the money to the provincial government, so that they in turn can help the municipalities on that specific point, in accordance with their usual criteria. But we must understand that the federal government does not often tend to do that because it loses visibility. One could even say that visibility is what feeds government. The federal government seeks it out in this area as well.

Have you considered this problem of jurisdictions, and if so what were your conclusions?

[*English*]

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Yes, indeed we have. With any of the issues we have addressed or attempted to address at a federal level, invariably—and it really doesn't matter which issue it is—we run into that jurisdictional battle.

With respect to this issue, I would hope—and that's why we brought this forward in the manner we did—this would be a case where the jurisdictional lines we've traditionally seen would not be raised, simply because we are talking about an absolutely critical issue of fire fighter and public safety. Nobody wants a fire fighter to respond in an inappropriate manner to any of these incidents.

• 1720 

You're right, when governments make a decision to fund a particular program, they certainly want the citizenry to know it came from that level of government. What we're saying is, in this new spirit of cooperation we think we have seen since the events of September 11, there would be a willingness to look at some type of a partnership in cooperation to get this level of training.

This level of training.... That's why we say the program is already in existence, because hazardous materials response is not something that knows a border. Hazardous materials response in Alberta is going to be the same as in Quebec, and the same as in Washington, D.C. We're saying it's there; we need just that seed money to get the program going.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** Thank you, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Plamondon.

Mr. Wood.

**Mr. Bob Wood:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was looking over this stuff, and I wondered how far you've gone with this. Is this your first opportunity to come before a committee and express your views on the \$500,000 that you think could do this?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** We had the opportunity to appear before the finance committee a week ago and make the submission there.

**Mr. Bob Wood:** In your mind, what kind of response did you get?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** It's difficult to gauge response because, as I'm sure you're familiar with, you're there with a number of different groups, and you are only given a small amount of time in which to present those views. The feedback we got was fairly positive, but again, because of six groups being there, it was difficult to gauge.

**Mr. Bob Wood:** I notice that in the United States they've divided up their funding into four different departments.

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Correct.

**Mr. Bob Wood:** If you're looking for \$500,000—I've just jotted down some numbers here—I don't understand why you couldn't break it down the way the United States does and also approach these various departments for the money. Have you thought of that?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Yes, we have. In fact, this morning we had a meeting with one of the health minister's assistants with respect to this program as well. So we have talked.

The department that we have yet to have a face-to-face meeting with is the Solicitor General's, and we hope to do that shortly. But all the—

**Mr. Bob Wood:** What about Transport Canada? Have you been there?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** We have sent a letter to the transport minister with respect to that.

**Mr. Bob Wood:** HRDC?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Yes.

**Mr. Bob Wood:** As a hypothetical question, if you got this money—which I don't think should be a big problem, but it might be, I don't know—how are you going to do it? How are you going to rationalize all this stuff? How are you going to do this on a national basis? Who gets what? Does Alberta get more than Saskatchewan or Ontario? How are you going to train people and make sure that you get the rationale across Canada?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** We would immediately certify trainers in Canada who would start the training. How we would do that is we would bring in U.S. instructors to provide that level of training to

Canadians, and then, on that basis, we would start providing training to departments right across Canada and other front-line emergency workers.

The brilliance of the program, like an awful lot of adult education programs now, is that we've developed it on a CD. It can be done through the web as well. So a lot of ways that you traditionally weren't able to reach individuals, you are now able to do with this curriculum.

**Mr. Bob Wood:** Are you saying there are no fire fighters that you know of who are trained in hazardous materials?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Oh, there are, and what we would do is—

**Mr. Bob Wood:** Wouldn't they already be instructors? Couldn't they already instruct the program?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** We would make sure that they are fully familiar with the IAFF program and certify them as instructors in the program, and provide them with all the materials. What they don't have right now are the materials. They've probably been trained to the appropriate level for hazardous materials in accordance with NFPA, the National Fire Protection Association, and the other standard-making bodies that provide standards in hazardous materials. But we would make sure we have a Canadian contingent of instructors, which would take very little time to identify.

**Mr. Bob Wood:** I don't have any other questions. I think it's a great idea. It's just getting it together—

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Sure.

**Mr. Bob Wood:** —and implementing it, and maybe breaking up the funding so it doesn't give the impression that it costs a half a million dollars. But in the scheme of things, I think it's probably a great program and worth every cent that we can get into it, if we get into it.

• 1725 

Do you have any problems with the province? Are there any other regulations that perhaps I don't know of that are a barrier to getting this thing going?

**Mr. Sean McManus:** No, we haven't identified any other problems. As I say, given the fact that hazardous materials response is a universal-type response, we haven't seen that, no.

**The Chair:** Mr. Benoit.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. McManus, on the first page of your report—and I don't think you read all of this, but I'm just going to paraphrase it—you're saying that in recent weeks a number of measures to help prevent acts of terrorism have been introduced by the federal government, but they tend to focus their approach on the use of the Canadian Armed Forces personnel, particularly through the funding of specialized and centrally located teams such as the JTF2 and the NDC team.

You go on to say that you don't think they should be the primary focus, because firemen are first-response people. Of course, it should be generally understood that the armed forces provide backup to the police and fire fighters. So that is a fair comment.

Do you think perhaps the reason the federal government focuses on those areas...? Because those clearly

are federal areas of responsibility, and they're going to have to fork out the cash for them anyway. They don't want to take any more responsibility for fire fighters. They want to leave the funding to the provinces and municipalities.

We might have a rare opportunity right now to get by some of that jurisdictional thing, but I'd just like your comment on it.

**Mr. Sean McManus:** I'm sure the first reaction, given the traditional areas of jurisdiction, is to address those things that are in the federal sphere. There is no question about it. The health minister made some announcements in mid-October with respect to emergency room physicians and things like that.

Also, in the rush to make sure that the Canadian public is adequately safeguarded, there's been this knowing—and I don't think it's conscious by any stretch of the imagination—that the fire fighters are there, that they will do what they need to do. It's overlooked in the sense that, well, we have traditional areas of responsibility.

I do sincerely hope, and I'm hearing it from the members of the committee, that in this new realization there would be a forgoing of those traditional battles that have been fought with respect to who's responsible for what.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Yes. I certainly hope so.

We have in Vermilion, in a small town that I actually do my business in, a fire fighting school that trains fire fighters from across the country and from other countries. Because of the industry in Alberta that's built up on industrial fires, I'm really not aware how much they've done on chemical and biological training, but I know they'd be all too happy to get into that. So there are the institutions around.

Your idea sounds like a very responsible approach to this. I certainly hope we can get the federal government to become involved in some way in the training. Then from there, I guess, we'll see about materials. I do think that provincial governments and local governments are in the mood right now, because people are putting them in the mood to focus some resources on this too. So now's the time.

I do think it will be critical that you continue to push as hard as you can for a quick response, because six months from now, who knows? It may be worse or it may be half-forgotten. I think that would be a real mistake. Perhaps I could have your thoughts on that.

**Mr. Sean McManus:** As I say, given the rash of calls that fire fighters have received right across Canada, we think it is entirely appropriate, responsible, and in all the best interests. So whatever we face in the future, fire fighters will at least have a base-line level of knowledge to address these situations.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** I have two sons. When they were around Mannville—it's a town of 700, fifteen minutes from Vermilion—they were in the volunteer fire department. They are about 15 members, even in a town of 700. They've done a great job. They've had to respond to some very serious fires. They have that training facility close by. Every week they're willing to take four hours out of their time for training. They're just hungry for whatever training they can get. These are volunteers. So any way we can upgrade the skills at all levels has to be a real benefit.

• 1730 

Even in small towns there are threats, of course, to water supplies, primarily, and perhaps it's a matter of securing those supplies. The threats are there, and I certainly hope that your ideas here are listened to. I'll do what I can to see that they are.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Benoit.

At this point, Mr. McManus, our time for this committee has expired. On behalf of the committee members, I'd like to once again thank you for being here. Your comments were very valuable for us.

As you may be aware, we did release the interim report yesterday. There is going to be a final report coming in the months ahead, and we're going to attempt to incorporate as many good ideas as we can into that final report. I'm sure your comments will figure in there somewhere.

**Mr. Sean McManus:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** The committee is adjourned.

