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• (1545)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to meeting number 36 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

We will start by acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, June 23, 2022, the committee commenced consideration of Bill C-21, an act to amend certain acts and to make certain consequential amendments.

With us today, we have the Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Public Safety. We have as witnesses Rob Stewart, deputy minister; Talal Dakalbab, assistant deputy minister; and Fred Gaspar, vice-president, Canada Border Services Agency. As well, from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we have Bryan Larkin, deputy commissioner, and Kellie Paquette, director general.

Please note that the minister and the deputy minister will be with us for the first hour. The remaining officials will stay for the second hour in order to answer questions from members.

With that, welcome to all.

I now invite Minister Mendicino to make an opening statement.

[Translation]

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to thank all the members of the committee for their good work on this study of Bill C-21, which we will be discussing this afternoon.

With me today are members of my departmental team, Rob Stewart, deputy minister, and Talal Dakalbab, assistant deputy minister, along with Bryan Larkin and Kellie Paquette, representatives of the RCMP.

[English]

I want to make a few opening remarks about the scourge of gun violence, which has been impacting our country now for many years, and signal to this committee that it is up to us as parliamen-

tarians to work together to reverse the alarming trends that have seen increases in gun violence and specifically in handgun violence. It is up to this committee not only to carefully study sensible laws that are designed with the intent of reversing those trends but also to discuss the efforts we are making to stop the illegal trafficking of guns at our borders. It is up to the members of the committee to support the work of Parliament in examining the root causes of gun crime, which requires us to work very closely with many partners, including grassroots organizations, so that we can stop gun crime before it starts. I look to you and to the various perspectives that you will be bringing from your own constituencies to have a thoughtful discussion about that today.

It is clear wherever you sit, regardless of the side of the aisle or partisan stripe, that the status quo won't do. Every time I meet with someone who has lost a loved one or who has been harmed by violence, I think we owe it to them to do more. These are far and away the most difficult conversations that I have in my capacity as a member of Parliament. I've had the privilege of speaking with the families of the victims from Portapique and Truro in Nova Scotia, from the Quebec City mosque, from the Polytechnique, from the Toronto Danforth in my hometown, and there's not a day that goes by that I don't think about them, not a single day. It is a singular motivation for me in this job to try to find a way to ensure that those tragedies don't ever occur again.

It's a complex problem. There are no easy or simple solutions to eradicating gun crime, and I readily acknowledge that, but from where I sit and from where the government sits, we need a comprehensive strategy.

That strategy is composed of a number of pillars. One is smart laws. From where we sit, assault-style rifles have no place in our communities, *point final*. That's why we banned them two years ago and that's why we're in the throes of implementing a buyback program that will get assault-style rifles out of our communities once and for all.

We need smart laws like Bill C-21, which, among other things, will introduce a national handgun freeze and introduce red flag and yellow flag protocols to reverse the trend in the connection between domestic violence and gender-based violence and the presence of guns, which has gone up tragically over the last number of years.

We need a bill that will provide additional tools to fight organized crime. One of the things that Bill C-21 will do when passed into law is increase maximum sentences from 10 to 14 years for those hardened criminals who would try to terrorize our communities with guns, as well as provide additional surveillance tools to law enforcement so that we can interdict those individuals who are trying to traffic guns, whether it's in our communities or at the borders.

This bill does all that. It also ensures that we deal with the challenges around straw purchasing so that criminals can be stopped from trying to use alternate individuals to purchase their guns lawfully and then have them transferred to them, and there is much more in there. I know that we're going to dig into some other substantive issues.

It is important that we study this bill. It is important that we take the steps that are necessary to stop the growth of a universe of guns and handguns, which have now become the number one type of gun used in homicides in the country.

That's not all we're doing. I have said on many occasions at this committee, in the House of Commons, in public that this government is invested in reinforcing our borders.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Over the past year, we have invested \$321 million to enhance the integrity of our border. That investment has provided more resources for the RCMP, the Canada Border Services Agency and other police services. We have also worked closely with our American partners, whose cooperation has been significant.

I know that this is a challenge and that, despite all the progress we've made at the border, we must do more. I'm always ready to work toward other concrete solutions with my colleagues here on this committee and in the House and to continue making progress at the border.

In the end, we need to prevent gun violence.

[English]

We need to stop gun crime before it starts. That's why our building safer communities fund is such an important opportunity to work with local community organizations—to tap into their experience, tap into their wisdom, identify where the risks are, and identify those who are most exposed and can be exploited by organized crime and other elements that would put a gun in front of them so that they make the right choices instead. We have been accelerating the rollout of that fund over the last number of months, and I think it will help us round out a strategy that has to be comprehensive.

Once again, I want to thank all the members of this committee for their thoughtfulness and work.

I look forward to reading this bill, studying this bill and, hopefully, passing this bill as quickly as possible so that we can stop gun violence once and for all.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, for your remarks.

We will proceed directly to questions, at this point, starting with Madame Dancho.

Please go ahead. You have six minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister and officials, for being here today.

Minister, I know you've gone across the country, as have I, and met with police forces. What I'm hearing is that they are stretched quite thin. Are you hearing the same thing?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

There is no doubt that we need to support domestic law enforcement. That's one of the reasons we have created an anti-gun—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm sorry, Minister. What I'm asking is whether you have also heard that police forces—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm sorry. If I could complete the answer—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: What I'm asking is if you have heard that police forces' resources are stretched quite thin. They're having challenges keeping up with the crime we're seeing. That's what I have heard.

Do you agree?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I was trying to complete my answer, Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: If you could just say yes or no—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think I'm being responsive to your question.

I acknowledge that we need to support domestic law enforcement, which is what we are doing through our anti-guns and gangs fund. Those resources are being transferred to provincial and territorial partners, and will, in turn, filter through to domestic police. We'll continue to do that.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Minister.

I take that as a tacit yes. You would agree that police resources are stretched thin and require more resources.

We're also seeing that violent crime has increased over the past seven years by 32%. Are you familiar with that statistic?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm alarmed by it, which is why we can't accept the status quo.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: The violent crime severity index is also up 18 points, and there were more than 124,000 additional violent crimes last year than in 2015. Are you familiar with that as well?

• (1555)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I am, which is why we presented Bill C-21.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: The vast majority of gun crime is caused by gangs and criminals using illegally obtained firearms. Do you agree?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: This is why we have new tools in Bill C-21 to combat organized crime.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: According to Toronto police, guns smuggled in from the United States represent upwards of nine out of 10 handguns used in crime.

Do you agree?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: This is why we've invested \$321 million since last year and seized a record number of guns last year at the border.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: During the 2019 federal campaign, the Liberal platform stated that your confiscation of firearms regime would cost between \$400 million and \$600 million. Recent estimates put it upwards of \$5 billion. That's considerably more money than you're investing in additional border protection. Is that correct?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would begin by saying that assault-style rifles have no place in our communities, which is why we want to implement a buyback program to get them out, once and for all.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Will you be spending, according to your federal campaign, \$400 million to \$600 million? Estimates say that it may cost upwards of \$5 billion. That's considerably more than you've invested in recent years in the border. It's also considerably more than your communities fund.

Is that correct?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would say two things in response to that question, Ms. Dancho.

First, we plan to be very transparent about the costing around the buyback program.

I also want to be clear with you and all members of this committee. There is no way to put a price on a life lost. All you have to do is look into the eyes of any of the families that have lost somebody to an assault-style rifle.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I think it is very concerning that we're seeing a rise in gun violence in our cities. As I outlined—and you seemed to agree—the problem certainly is gun smuggling. You're investing considerably less money in border enforcement and community protection, although you've acknowledged that is the primary source of gun violence in our country.

I want to switch gears a bit and talk about firearm owners. I am a firearm owner. We undergo rigorous licensing processes. We're trained, tested and vetted.

Would you agree?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We do, and I respect law-abiding gun owners. I've visited their communities. I know they place safety as a premium value.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You may be familiar with the Liberal long-gun registry from the 1990s. It was estimated to cost about \$2 mil-

lion annually to administer. I'm sure you're familiar with this. It ended up costing \$1.2 billion.

The estimates from your government were that you may be spending \$400 million to \$600 million. Now estimates are saying perhaps upwards of \$500 billion—or \$5 billion, pardon me—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: You didn't mean \$500 billion.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: It's \$5 billion.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Okay.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Well, you never know. Based on the Liberal track record, there are considerable questions to be asked about how much you're going to be spending on the confiscation regime.

Minister, I'm quite concerned about the recent news that your government will be redirecting police resources, which, as we outlined today in our conversation, are stretched quite thin. They are dealing with a 32% increase in violent crime since your government has been in office. You're planning to redirect RCMP resources, and possibly other police resources, to your confiscation regime.

Can you comment on that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think that's based on some false assumptions, which are that—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Then you won't be redirecting RCMP resources?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Again, could I just be permitted to answer your question, which is a thoughtful one?

Ensuring that police services, which operate within provincial boundaries, have the resources necessary to enforce laws to keep our communities safe is not mutually exclusive to buying back assault-style rifles. The reason is simple. Those guns were designed with one purpose in mind, and that is to kill, so we believe that by taking them out of our communities—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You outlined that in your opening statement, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino:—with the buyback program, with fair compensation, we will be keeping our communities safer.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: If I may just conclude, I would urge you to reconsider redirecting police resources to your confiscation regime. I think it is reckless and will further endanger our communities, Minister.

Thank you, Chair.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We respectfully disagree about that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

We'll go now to Mr. Noormohamed.

Please go ahead. You have six minutes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister and officials, for being here today.

Minister, I want to begin by thanking you for bringing this bill forward. Obviously our job as a committee is to take a good piece of legislation and make it better. What I'd love to be able to do today is just dig in with you on a couple of issues that I think are worthy of consideration.

The VPD—the Vancouver Police Department—presented to us during the course of our guns and gangs study, which I think was a very good piece of work done by this committee. One of the things that we learned about from them—and I've had the subsequent opportunity to dig in on it with them and other police forces—is ghost guns. The fact is that people can manufacture weapons at home using components that they can buy online or buy at local stores or, worse yet, they can use a 3-D printer to make their own weapons.

I'd love to know if you're willing to strengthen or open to strengthening the legislation in front of us to address ghost guns and how we can prevent them from becoming an even larger problem than they are, realizing that we may be dealing with a problem today that looks a certain way, but this is, in reality, in my view, the problem that we're going to be facing one, two or five years from now. Can we start to think about that more meaningfully?

• (1600)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Noormohamed, through the chair to you, your question is a very important one. It is about dealing with the advent of ghost guns, which are based on a new, cheap plastic technology. I have visited your community and I have met with both the mayor there and the chief of police, Chief Palmer, and they both identified the proliferation of ghost guns as an important priority for us to deal with.

I should tell you as well that I've had the chance to meet with our American counterparts, including at one of the headquarters of the FBI at Quantico, where I have seen this technology on display first-hand.

It is imperative that you study this issue. I believe it is one of the things that we are going to need to tackle, not only potentially through legislation but with additional resources. That's why the investments we put in place at the border, including the \$321 million since last year alone, are equipping the CBSA, the RCMP and other law enforcement partners with the technology they need to intercept and detect this new type of ghost gun so that we can stop them before they get into our communities.

I think the short answer to your question is that of course I'm always very open to receiving any recommendations that you or others may have from this committee with regard to strengthening the bill.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

Just digging in a little bit further, again talking about component parts, one of the other elements that I think we will hopefully be digging into a little bit is this: How do we make sure that we think about regulating purchase of component parts, and I think, frankly, licensing for purchasing of specific component parts and ammuni-

tion? Is this something that you'd be willing to consider in the deliberations?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I know that splitting up the different components of a gun is one of the ways in which organized crime attempts to subvert detection at the border or at other places within our communities. It is one of the more technical aspects of the bill that you may wish to study and for which you may wish to put forward a recommendation.

I would say that our overarching objective remains to stop gun violence, and that means taking a look at the various innovative technologies that are manifesting themselves, including through ghost guns and different components that can be assembled to then meet the definition of a prohibited, restricted or unrestricted firearm. It's so that we can keep our communities safe.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Minister.

I'm going to switch gears a bit and talk about airsoft guns. There are those who are opposed to this legislation and are using airsoft guns as an example of perhaps a lack of understanding of the sport and indeed of guns.

I think there are those who would try to convince people that the government thinks that airsoft guns kill people. I would submit that they don't, but that they can get people killed because, in difficult situations, if somebody has an airsoft gun that looks almost exactly like a particularly dangerous weapon, law enforcement may respond as though that is a weapon carrying a live round.

We obviously have those who are ardent supporters of airsoft as a sport, but who also don't want to be in positions where those weapons can get people killed. Do you see a way to address this issue without causing harm to the airsoft industry and to those who participate in it, and also do it in a way that makes sure law enforcement is not put in the unenviable situation of having to make a split-second decision when they see something that looks like it could be an assault rifle but is actually an airsoft gun?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First I want to indicate that I look forward to the committee's work on the issue of how we tackle what I think has been identified as a challenge by law enforcement. The challenge is around the industry's increasing ability to make airsoft guns look exactly like a real gun. There are others at this table, including Deputy Commissioner Larkin, who could probably give some additional testimony to that effect.

The object is really to be sure not that people can't participate safely in an industry, but rather to be sure that when law enforcement responds to a gun call, we are sure there will be no loss of life as a result of a gun that may look exactly like a real gun.

Indeed, this is something that has occurred, and we have seen a loss of life, including in my hometown of Scarborough not too long ago, when police showed up and a replica gun was mistaken for a real one. Sadly, somebody lost their life.

That is the intent behind these provisions. I know that the committee will be studying them very closely.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Thank you for being with us today, Minister. I very much appreciate it. However, I would have liked you to stay with us a bit longer because I have a lot of questions for you.

As you know, we currently have a serious problem in Canada's major cities. That's true of Montreal, where shots are fired every week. We often discuss this during oral question period.

In your view, Bill C-21 will help stop gun trafficking, smuggling, organized crime and all that. Your argument's mainly based on a single measure set forth in Bill C-21, the one that would increase maximum prison time from 10 to 14 years for those crimes.

I don't think that would really help matters at the border. As we know, many illegal weapons are smuggled across it.

Do you think Bill C-21 should contain a more specific measure on this?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First of all, Ms. Michaud, thank you for your leadership on the ground. I know we're equally concerned about this problem. I agree with you entirely: too many lives are being lost and we have to put an stop to that.

As regards our actions at the border, there are some notable parts to our strategy.

First, there are resources. CBSA must continue hiring people because they're the ones who do the front-line work of arresting offenders and seizing firearms. Proof of the progress we've made is that we seized a record number of firearms last year.

Second, we have to keep working in close cooperation with Quebec and the United States. I've spoken several times with Secretary Mayorkas in order to enhance cooperation, the exchange of information...

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Minister, allow me...

Hon. Marco Mendicino: No, but this is important. Our strategy includes a number of elements in that area.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Yes, I understand that efforts have been made and that we're increasingly attempting to intercept weapons.

I want to discuss the William Rainville case. In March 2021, he smuggled 248 handgun bodies across the border in a hockey bag. He was sentenced to five years in prison and was granted day parole barely one year later.

I don't know how much that particular measure will actually deter offenders. We know that the strategies criminals use don't often involve sending a hardened criminal across the border with a hockey bag full of guns. Instead, the people selected for the job don't have criminal records or have only committed minor offences and therefore won't receive maximum sentences. So I don't get the impression this specific measure will really discourage people from continuing to smuggle illegal weapons across the border.

However, I should note that there are some good measures in the bill. You decided to legislate specifically on high-security nuclear sites and officers. The bill also grants the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness more power than the Minister of Integration, Refugees and Citizenship.

However, it's curious to see there's nothing in the bill on assault weapons, whereas your government amended regulations on assault weapons in May 2020. In the meantime, other types of weapons have come into the market that circumvent those regulations. In addition, certain guns were initially overlooked and weren't on the list.

Why didn't you take advantage of Bill C-21 to plug that hole regarding assault weapons?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: There are lots of parts to that question.

Regarding assault weapons, we introduced a national prohibition specifically to remove all those types of firearms from our communities and committed to putting a mandatory buyback program in place.

I also agree with you that the tools proposed in Bill C-21, including harsher penalties, won't alleviate the problem if they're used in isolation. We have to introduce a series of measures simultaneously to send a very strong and clear message to all members of organized crime. That moreover is what Bill C-21 will do by imposing harsher penalties and establishing surveillance tools both within my department and in other authorities such as police services. The goal is to let people who want to terrorize our communities know that we've had enough and they have to stop.

• (1610)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Just one final question.

You said you wanted us to pass this bill quickly. However, you passed a firearms bill in 2019, just before I was elected, but regulations weren't made under that legislation until several years later, in May of this year.

We can see that certain aspects of Bill C-21 would come into force by regulation, in particular the definition of an elite sport shooter and the requirement of a licence to import ammunition.

Do you think you'll make regulations sooner next time? We had a long wait last time.

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting, Ms. Michaud, but your time is up.

Mr. Mendocino, I allow you 30 seconds to answer the question.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The answer is yes. I can give you some examples following the meeting.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

We go now to Mr. MacGregor. You have six minutes, please.

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

Welcome back, Minister. It's good to see you here.

I want to continue on the subject of airsoft guns that Mr. Noor-mohamed brought up.

I had a great summer of consulting with constituents and I got to visit the Victoria Fish and Game Protective Association. They have a large airsoft course, and I played the part of a referee during a match. The people who are involved in the sport really love what they do. It's a growing sport and all sorts of demographics take part in it. They are quite concerned with how Bill C-21 is currently written, and I know that your department has received a lot of correspondence.

When you introduced this version of Bill C-21, your department was kind enough to provide a backgrounder to members of Parliament. Your backgrounder stated that current owners would be allowed to keep and use the ones that they already own, but they cannot transfer them to another person. Manufacturers will be able to sell them, but they will have to adjust the designs, and your government will consult with industry and law enforcement on how to implement the law.

The backgrounder states that current owners will be allowed to keep the ones they already own, but I'm curious how that is possible with the current wording of the bill. According to the Library of Parliament's reading of the bill, it's going to effectively make them prohibited devices. There's a bit of a disconnect here.

As a quick follow-up, what kind of consultations have you had with the industry? What are some ways that we can find our way through this impasse?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, thank you very much for your advocacy on this issue. I appreciate that you've been speaking with the industry and with responsible airsoft owners and other gun owners. We do appreciate the feedback.

Second, we ourselves are at the same time consulting with a number of different industry leaders and lobbyists, and I just want to stress for the record that we look forward to working collaboratively with them in the spirit of making sure that legislative intent is aligned with language. Of course, if there is ambiguity there, let's

try to clear it up. That's one of the important functions of this committee: to be sure that the government gets the benefit of some input on how we can have a bill that reflects what we were trying to accomplish, including as it relates to airsoft.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I appreciate that. I know my constituents are listening to this, so the very fact that you said you're open to collaboration on this issue is good. I will commit to working with you to find a way forward that is satisfactory to everyone.

Second, again involving the Victoria Fish and Game Protective Association, I have to give them a plug. They also invited me, on a separate day, to witness a competition by the International Practical Shooting Confederation, IPSC. They were concerned about a reference made in the bill. I think it's clause 43 that would create a new section, proposed section 97.1. In that section, the only discipline that is mentioned is the International Olympic Committee or the International Paralympic Committee, which is a very small subsection of people. These are elite shooters.

I'm wondering what the correspondence has been like from representatives of IPSC. Is your department open to broadening the language, because, again, these are people—my constituents—who are very passionate about what they're doing. I witnessed a competition; it's very safe. The rules are pretty well enforced.

I just want to hear your comments on that, Minister.

• (1615)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, I think you know where we're coming from in the introduction of the national handgun freeze and its rationale. At the same time, we have proposed a number of reasonable exemptions, including for those who participate in sport shooting who represent Canada at an elite level.

I am sure that within the various communities across the country, there are different standards in mind about what the threshold should be, and this is part of the ongoing consultation we are embarked upon.

My response to you would be that if your constituency has concerns or would like to propose other areas where we can refine what that standard is, I think it is incumbent on us to be open-minded about that, while at the same time recognizing that what we are trying to do is to reverse the alarming trend around handgun violence. As I said in my introductory remarks, handguns have become the number one type of gun used in homicides.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Yes, that's understood.

I think I have time for one final question.

You received a letter on May 16 of this year. It was from a number of women's groups who were quite concerned with the so-called "red flag" law provisions in this legislation. They are very concerned about the downloading of responsibility, especially when the onus may be on an individual who is fleeing domestic violence, to go and face the court system by themselves. I know there have been improvements in this version to try to protect anonymity, but you must be familiar with this May 16 letter, Minister.

Do you have anything to say to this committee in response to the concerns they raised?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, first, we will continue to work with them and all of the partners who have come forward to offer constructive ways in which we can tackle gender-based violence, intimate partner violence and domestic abuse in connection with guns, which is a phenomenon that has become more and more serious, particularly over the last number of years.

What we had said in response, I believe, during one of the last times that I appeared before this committee, is that we would be receptive to finding ways to ensure that those protocols were present, not as an exclusive alternative to using or leveraging existing authorities but rather to be used in conjunction with them.

We did, I think, two things that were directly responsive to the concerns that were laid out in that letter and elsewhere. First, for those who want to see red flag laws introduced, we built in protections to reduce the potential for retaliation on complainants who wish to come forward. Second, in my renewed mandate letter to the commissioner of the RCMP, we set out as a priority the need to be sure that local law enforcement has the diverted resources necessary to respond to gun calls for which there is concern around intimate partner violence and gender-based violence.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll start our second round with Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Lloyd, please go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you're about to embark on a program that could reach into the billions of dollars. Have you or your department commissioned any studies that demonstrate that this buyback plan is an effective use of taxpayer dollars to enhance public safety?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I've spoken with the victims and the families of victims—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: But have you commissioned a study that proves this?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Of course we're studying the costing very carefully—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You're studying it currently? You don't have proof right now that it will?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Lloyd, let me unpack the answer for you for just a moment, if I can.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Well, I don't need to, because you said you don't have a study. You're currently studying it.

Minister, I have an engagement paper that was sent out by your department in October of 2018. It directly states, under the heading "International experience", that "In all cases the data does not conclusively demonstrate that these handgun or assault weapon bans have led to reductions in gun violence...."

Your own ministry recognizes that there isn't data to support your buyback argument. Why are you wasting billions of dollars on a scheme that hasn't worked?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Before I begin, I wonder if I could be permitted to actually complete an answer. If you're not interested and you would just like to read from a sheet—

• (1620)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —you can do that, but I'd like to be able to finish. Is that okay?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Go ahead.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We took the decision to ban assault-style rifles because they were designed to kill. We looked at some very careful standards around the definition that is contained in the order in council. We are now setting about the launch of a buyback program so that we can get these guns out of our community, because we owe it to the victims to make sure there isn't another tragedy or mass casualty.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: The fact is that you don't have any studies that demonstrate that this measure will enhance public safety.

Minister, since you believe that a gun buyback for law-abiding firearms owners will enhance public safety, as you just said, why are you also not launching a gun buyback for illegal firearms possessed by criminals?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, in the first instance, we've put in place a national handgun freeze and a ban on importing additional handguns into the country, which is a measure you oppose. We've also—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'm talking about buybacks, though, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Perhaps I could be permitted to finish, Mr. Lloyd.

You also oppose our national ban on assault-style rifles, and you would propose to make them legal again, which we think—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You're not answering the question, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —is fundamentally wrong.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You're dancing around the question. Why don't you have a program to buy back illegal firearms from criminals on the street? Why aren't you putting a program like that in place?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, we've taken a very concrete and tangible step forward to addressing handgun violence through the introduction of a national handgun freeze. We're also going to get assault-style rifles out of our communities in collaboration with our partners.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Minister, wouldn't you agree that it would be more beneficial for public safety to buy back an illegal firearm off the street rather than buy back a firearm from a sport shooter in Barrie, Ontario?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The first thing I would say, Mr. Lloyd, and I've said this before, is that I respect law-abiding gun owners. I—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Then why do you have a program that targets only them? Why don't you have a program to get illegal guns off the street by buying them back from criminals?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, you and I disagree about that, but I do respect—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You don't think a buyback program for criminals would be effective?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We've taken the judgment that when it comes to assault-style rifles, they have no place in our communities. With Bill C-21, we've also taken the largest step forward in probably a generation by putting in place a national handgun freeze so that we can reverse the trend and the growth of a universe of that type of gun by about 45,000 to 55,000 new registrations every year—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, my next question is this. You're seeking to cap magazine size to no more than five rounds. Is that correct, yes or no?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Will this apply to all long guns or only semi-automatics?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: What we have proposed is certainly with regard to—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Will it apply to all long guns?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: No.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay.

Do you understand that the Lee-Enfield rifle is a commonly used hunting rifle? It has 10 rounds in the magazine. You're aware of that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I have heard that.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Is the Lee-Enfield rifle, because it has 10 rounds in its magazine, on the list of things that will be regulated?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Let me take a step back and tell you why it is we've put these standards into the bill. We think that by doing so, we will reduce gun violence.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: See, the important thing, Minister, is that these firearms are predominantly used by indigenous people to fulfill their traditional treaty hunting rights. If you are limiting their ability to use a Lee-Enfield because of Bill C-21, you're limiting indigenous rights. This violates section 35 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

How is this not colonialism, Minister?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We're consulting with indigenous communities. We have consulted and will continue to consult on Bill C-21.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Good.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We're listening very carefully to indigenous leaders to make sure that for those who hunt as part of their tradition or who hunt to eat, this bill will be consistent with those principles of reconciliation. I assure you that those conversations are ongoing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

We'll go now to Mr. Schiefke. You have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the minister and his entire team for being here today.

Minister, I was very pleased to hear you say in your opening statement that Bill C-21 was part of a multipronged plan. That plan includes investments in activities for young people to prevent them from joining street gangs, but also historic investments amounting to \$321 million to strengthen our borders. That point is a source of pride in my riding of Vaudreuil—Soulanges. As you know, the CB-SA officer training centre is located there, in Rigaud.

Please tell us how important those investments are in preventing illegal firearms from entering Canada.

• (1625)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for your question, Mr. Schiefke.

First of all, I want to emphasize the good work that our CBSA officers are doing at our border. They've made a lot of progress against gun violence. As I previously mentioned, they seized a record number of illegal firearms last year. Despite all that progress, we have to do more. Consequently, we'll continue making specific investments to provide additional resources at the border and to the RCMP.

Last spring, I had a chance to visit the school that trains new CB-SA members in your riding. It was very inspiring. We have to continue supporting their efforts to combat gun violence.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you very much, Minister, for that response and also for the visit. I'm sure it was greatly appreciated by all of the newly trained agents who will be protecting our borders all across the country.

Minister, Bill C-21 is going to go a long way in protecting communities like mine in Vaudreuil—Soulanges and communities like Vaudreuil—Soulanges all across the country. I'm looking forward to diving in with committee members to try to strengthen the bill.

One of the questions that I and members of my community had was with regard to ghost guns. This was brought up by my colleague Mr. Noormohamed. We had an incident in Montreal just two months ago. A young man had purchased parts online and had put together a firearm that was used in violent crime in Montreal. I've received numerous emails and calls from constituents who are wondering if there's any way that we can combat this.

Minister, you mentioned earlier that you spoke with your colleagues in the United States, and I'm sure you've had discussions with other counterparts around the world. Have you heard from them any effective ways that they've been able to use to counter this? Can you share those with the committee so that you can help guide our work in the coming weeks?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It is not lost on me that the last number of months have been extremely difficult for Montreal. Last spring, I had the chance to participate in a forum to counter gun violence, at the invitation of Mayor Plante. In attending that particular forum, I was very struck by the young people who spoke about the friends that they had lost. Sadly, since then, we have seen ongoing shootings pretty much consistently and unabated. I have stayed in very close contact with both Mayor Plante, as well as my counterpart, Minister Guilbeault, to try to turn the tide around.

This is why in the summer, as you may recall, I went to announce funds directly for Quebec under the building safer communities fund in the amount of roughly \$40 million, of which, I want to say, I believe \$17 million or \$18 million was to go to Montreal. These funds are specifically designed to stop gun crime before it occurs by looking at root causes, by working with local organizations and by enhancing their capacity to offer programs and services so that people who are at risk, especially young people, make the right choices.

We think this is a critical pillar in our overall strategy to reduce gun violence, and we think that the funds that we've allocated to Quebec and to Montreal will go some way towards achieving that goal.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schiefke.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Earlier Mr. MacGregor raised an issue that I'd also like to discuss with you, Minister.

On May 16 of this year, several women's groups sent you a letter expressing their concern about the "red flag" measure in Bill C-21. They feel the measure is a real problem and even said it was counterproductive to allow victims to appear on their own in court to request that an attacker's gun be seized, for example. They say that could even increase the risk to victims. I saw that the bill provides ways to ensure the victim's anonymity, but, as you can understand,

victims don't necessarily have all the means they need to do that in an intimate partner or domestic violence context.

That letter was sent to you on May 16, and the bill was introduced around May 30, if my memory serves me. In short, it was introduced a few days later. I understand that it must already have been drafted at that time and that you didn't have time to make any changes. However, the position of those women's groups hasn't changed. They still think it's a bad measure and propose instead that the measures already available be used and that the community be granted more powers over education, for example.

Now that you know all that, would you be prepared to amend the bill given the fears of the individuals directly concerned on the ground?

• (1630)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for your question.

The purpose of the new protocol proposed in Bill C-21, the "red flag" law and the "yellow flag" law, is to reverse the trend of intimate partner violence and firearms possession.

However, I know that certain organizations representing women and women survivors have concerns, which is why we made amendments and, I believe, strengthened the provision in the bill. I should point out, however, that this is just an option; it isn't mandatory. It's another protective measure introduced for people who want to use it. I recognize that police services must be provided with resources so they can exercise the powers they currently have.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Do I have enough time to ask another question, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have three seconds left.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Never mind then.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, our first major report at this committee addressed gun and gang violence, and it was a study on which we all worked together quite well.

I've always approached the issue of gun violence by acknowledging that a single piece of legislation by itself is not going to address the problem. It has to be taken in context with policy, effective funding of law enforcement and working with international partners, etc., and I think you would agree with me. I think all colleagues would agree with me on that.

On the question of domestic diversion, I know that's a big rationale behind Bill C-21. We heard testimony at our committee of the dangers of people owning large numbers of handguns and setting themselves up as targets for criminal organizations. It's far easier to steal a handgun that's already present in Canada than to go to the trouble of trying to smuggle one across an international border.

We made a recommendation in that report to ask for additional research into the prevalence of domestic diversion. Since that report was issued, do you have any further updates from your department on how widespread the problem is? Are there any solutions, apart from what's in Bill C-21, that your government is considering for people who may be targets of criminal organizations?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Just that it is imperative that we continue to gather the best available data on the ratio of illegal importation to domestic trafficking. I know that is something the RCMP is going to be equipped to do in a greater capacity, as is the CBSA, specifically around tracing, because we've made investments to increase their ability to find the source of the guns.

By giving the RCMP those additional tools, we think we'll have an even clearer picture than we do right now about how many guns are coming in illegally, as opposed to those that are being transferred and trafficked illegally within the country.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'll leave it at that, Chair.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

I believe we have time for two more five-minute questions, so we'll go to Mr. Shipley for five minutes.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you. I may be splitting my time with Mr. Van Popta, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today. It's always nice to see you.

Throughout your dialogue today, Minister, you mentioned a couple times the great work this committee does. Mr. MacGregor just touched on a good report we did, which was "A Path Forward: Reducing Gun and Gang Violence in Canada".

Minister, have you read that report?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you.

So have I, as we all spent a lot of time on that one.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: You've done your homework.

Mr. Doug Shipley: I hope so.

In that report, we had 34 recommendations, and there was no recommendation for a nationwide handgun ban. Where is your data to support this handgun ban?

We did a lot of work on that and we didn't come up with that recommendation. Can you tell me where your rationale is?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, I do thank the committee for its work, and I know there is a diversity of opinions and views on an issue as important as firearms.

We introduced a national handgun freeze because of the alarming trends around the increase of handgun violence, and specifically because handguns are now the number one type of gun used in homicides. In my opinion, Mr. Shipley—and I don't know whether you agree with it—that is not arbitrary. There is a connection between the explosion of the handgun universe, which was increasing by approximately 45,000-55,000 new registrations a year for the last decade, and the fact that handguns are now the number one type of gun used in homicides. Our national handgun freeze is an effort to reverse that trend.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you.

We're all here trying to stop violence that's happening across Canada, in all of our cities especially. What we heard, though, from city after city and police chief after police chief, was that it was illegal handguns coming across the borders; it wasn't legal handgun owners.

If you don't have the data on that, I have had some people approach me on this issue who have told me, maybe cynically, that they thought this was more of a political situation and decision.

Is the data perhaps from some polling questions you've done across Canada for this decision?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Shipley, I can assure you there's nothing political about the approach we've taken in this bill. We've put forward what we think are the best and most practical solutions to stop the alarming trends around the increase of gun violence. We've looked at the data, and the data says unequivocally that gun crime is going up, that handgun crime is going up. My response to you is that the status quo is not working.

The most important thing I can convey to you, Mr. Shipley, is that I respect the work that you are doing. I know you bring different views from your community, but let's try to solve the problem together.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that, Minister. We both agree there's an issue. We're perhaps disagreeing as to where the situation lies when you talked about the root cause earlier.

I do have to ask. I wrote this down as you were speaking at the beginning. You said a very interesting phrase. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm going to quote you. You said this bill will stop gun violence once and for all.

Do you really believe that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That is the goal, but I want to be clear that Bill C-21 by itself won't accomplish that. We also have to invest in law enforcement. We also have to make sure we stop illegal trafficking. We also have to put into place preventive strategies, including the building safer communities fund.

If we do those three things together, then I think we can finally reverse the trend on gun violence and put an end to it.

Mr. Doug Shipley: I'll give my remaining time over to my colleague.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Minister, thank you for being here.

In your opening remarks, you talked about the gun confiscation program. You're calling it a gun buyback program. Even before it's gotten off the ground, it's already facing headwinds with the Province of Alberta and the Province of Saskatchewan. They are now saying they will opt out of it.

Given our constitutional structure of federal and provincial jurisdictions, clearly, for this program to be successful, you need to work with the provinces and get their co-operation. Do you have a plan B in place if Alberta and Saskatchewan are not coming on side?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm focused on plan A, and I want to assure you that we do collaborate with our provincial and territorial partners, including Alberta. I just issued a joint statement with my counterpart there to bring back the Siksika police service, which is a public safety priority. It's a priority that will help advance reconciliation. There are very important priorities on which we are collaborating.

I will come back to Ms. Dancho's question at the outset, which is an important one, that in the view of this government, advancing a fair buyback program, which will compensate law-abiding gun owners for the assault-style rifles that they originally purchased lawfully, is consistent with keeping our communities safe. We will always be collaborative with our provincial and territorial partners. My door will always be open to working with them in a wide variety of priorities to achieve that goal.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Popta.

The last question slot in this panel will be to Mr. Chiang. Mr. Chiang, please go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for joining us today. Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

As a former police officer, I'm aware of the many challenges law enforcement faces in addressing firearm trafficking and firearm smuggling.

Minister, could you please tell this committee how Bill C-21 will support law enforcement and provide additional tools to them?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: An example that I think highlights our response to organized crime in Bill C-21 are the more severe crimi-

nal sentences and maximum sentences for those who illegally traffic guns. These sentences are going from 10 years to 14 years.

You're a former police officer. I'm a former Crown attorney. I still read the Criminal Code. The last time I checked, the 14-year maximum sentence is the last stop before you get to life sentence, so that is a very strong and unambiguous signal to illegal gun traffickers that if you're in the business of trying to get illegal guns into communities, you face the prospect of serving significant time.

Second, we propose to offer new surveillance and wiretap powers to police whereby firearms offences under the Criminal Code become eligible for that particular investigative technique. It's one that will, I believe, help to disrupt illegal supply chains around firearms, both internationally and within our borders.

Those are two concrete examples in Bill C-21 that I think will help us tackle organized crime and the illegal trafficking of guns when the bill becomes law.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Minister.

In regard to authorizing wiretapping for the firearm offences, can you discuss how these new wiretapping measures will help support enforcement agencies in making our communities safer?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think the simplest way to explain it is that part VI of the Criminal Code designates a certain number of offences for which police can apply for a wiretap. This bill proposes to expand that list to include some additional firearms offences, which will give them greater capacity to hopefully disrupt the efforts of organized crime when it comes to trafficking or illegally possessing guns.

It's an important tool. It's not a tool of first resort. There are a number of steps that law enforcement has to demonstrate to a judge before a wiretap is authorized, including investigative necessity, but I think that this is another concrete way in which we can tackle organized crime. We often hear about the challenges of illegal guns at our borders or being trafficked in our communities. This is a very concrete additional measure that we can offer law enforcement to help reverse those trends and to bring those who are responsible for terrorizing our communities to justice.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

Can you also discuss some of the challenges that Canada faces related to an increased number of handguns in the country year over year, and can you tell this committee why it is so important that we set a cap on the number of handguns in this country to protect Canadians?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chiang, as somebody who lives in a city that's beset by handgun violence, as somebody who works with colleagues from across the country who have seen far too many lives lost, including law enforcement.... I was just at a funeral for an officer who lost their life in the Toronto Police Service.

The challenges are significant and they're really complex. I'm in no way trying to gloss over or simplify the complexity of that problem, but in Bill C-21 the government has made a best effort to try to put forward, for this committee and Parliament's consideration, a comprehensive legislative strategy that aims to reverse the trend around handgun violence, around organized crime, and around domestic violence and the presence of guns.

It is part of a much broader strategy that also looks to give additional resources to law enforcement to stop illegal trafficking at the border and to prevent gun crime from occurring in the first place. If we do this work together and if we remain focused, then I truly believe we can reverse the trends around the increases in gun violence and eradicate it once and for all.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chiang.

Thank you, Minister and, of course, Deputy Minister. I understand that you both have to leave at this point.

That concludes this portion of the meeting. We will suspend for five minutes and ask the remaining officials to remain.

Thank you. We are suspended.

• (1645)

(Pause)

• (1650)

The Chair: Welcome to the witnesses. Thanks for staying.

We will carry on with the questions. We will start with Tako Van Popta.

Monsieur, go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here to answer our questions.

We heard the minister say that there would be additional financial resources for the Canada Border Services Agency to stop the illegal importation of handguns.

My question is to Mr. Gaspar of the Canada Border Services Agency.

We just completed a study on guns and gangs. We heard from a lot of witnesses, including witnesses from the Canada Border Services Agency. One of the issues we heard from them was that there's a shortage of human resources, a shortage of people to do the work.

My riding is Langley—Aldergrove, and there's a land border crossing at Aldergrove. I meet with a lot of people who work for the Canada Border Services Agency, and they confirm the shortage of human resources.

When the minister said they have an additional \$321 million, where will that go? Is that going to help you? What do you really need to do your job effectively?

Mr. Fred Gaspar (Vice-President, Commercial and Trade Branch, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and through you to the member and to the committee.

I think the minister made it very clear that there will be a range of solutions that ultimately are going to get us to where we want to go in terms of abating and addressing the scourge of gun violence. Those most recent investments in budget 2021 that the minister alluded to are really intended to address the intelligence side of our work.

Much of the CBSA's activity, the primary interactions with Canadians and Canadian businesses, is obviously quite visible on the ground, but in addition to that, there's a lot of work that happens in the background, both with regard to investigations, intelligence and networking with our international partners and with regard to ensuring that we're managing the border in a smart way in addition to an effective way.

Your point is well taken. There's certainly no doubt we could always use more resources. I don't think you're ever going to have an official come before the committee and say we have enough. The reality is that to do it smartly and to manage a modern border, we need to do it intelligently, and that's really what the most recent set of investments are intended to do.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Good. Thank you.

We had witnesses who pointed out to us the obvious, that the Canada-U.S. border is the longest undefended border in the world—8,000 kilometres—and our neighbour is the largest gun-manufacturing culture in the world.

How do you possibly stop all the inflow of illegal weapons coming across lakes, rivers, and unauthorized border crossings?

• (1655)

Mr. Fred Gaspar: That's a good point.

Again, as the minister indicated, a lot has been done, but a lot more needs to be done.

I think the simple way to answer the question—and I'll expand from there—is that it really is about layering our approaches and not fooling ourselves into thinking that perhaps there is, if I can borrow the expression, a magic bullet or a solution that can be pulled out of thin air.

That's why the initiative to tackle guns and gang violence in 2018 and the most recent investments are part of a multipronged approach, with investments in officers, investments in technology such as advanced X-ray equipment, and investments in new detector dog teams, along with enhancements to our intelligence and investigatory capacity.

As the minister underscored, we have started to see some results. Last year we had the highest number of firearms seized since we started down this path, but of course there's much more to do.

It's certainly a matter of debate when you seize more. Is it because there's more coming in or because you're getting better at it? I think it's a combination of both factors, but certainly there is no single approach to be taken. It's about making sure we're investing smartly and continuously and taking the broadest range of measures that can be taken.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Of course we'll never know how many guns being smuggled across are not being caught.

Evidence that we received from witnesses was that our data on the source of guns used in crime was very sparse. I was surprised to hear that Statistics Canada doesn't have any reporting system. This is probably a question for the law enforcement people with us here today, but for police agencies across the country there's no consistent requirement to report on the use of guns in crime.

We were surprised that the government came out with an outright handgun ban when we don't have data that would support the idea that an outright ban will keep Canadians any safer. Do you have any comments about that? We understand that 80% of handguns used in crime are smuggled in from the U.S. illegally by people who don't intend to ever register their guns.

Deputy Commissioner Bryan Larkin (Deputy Commissioner, Specialized Policing Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Through you, Mr. Chair, to the member, good afternoon.

I'll provide some national data around that aspect. Clearly there is work happening with uniform crime reporting. As we've heard, the crime severity index around the use of firearms in the commission of criminal offences is increasing, but one of the investment pieces the RCMP is significantly focused on is firearms tracing. We've had a significant investment in a national approach, and we are working with all of our municipal and provincial agencies across the country. However, from our firearms tracing unit, when we look nationally, 69% of the firearms traced in Canada in 2021 were domestically sourced, so they were either diverted, lost, or stolen.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I'm just going to stop you right there. We had a witness who told us that—

The Chair: Mr. Van Popta, you have seven seconds.

D/Commr Bryan Larkin: I'm just going to point out that this doesn't include Ontario data, so we're working right now very closely with the Province of Ontario—

Mr. Tako Van Popta: One of the problems, of course, is that we don't even have a definition of what is a crime gun, and that's why we have these conflicting pieces of evidence.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Popta.

Does the witness wish to respond to that last comment??

D/Commr Bryan Larkin: The point is well taken, and I can assure you that we're working very closely with the FATE program in the Province of Ontario, clearly one of the provinces that have seen a significant increase in gun violence. We're looking at mechanisms as to how we can share data to provide that national support. We

have seen movement on that. We recognize it's an issue, and it's a good point for us to bring back and work on. We would be pleased, once again, to provide a written response as to progress in that area.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Commissioner.

We go now to Ms. Damoff. You have six minutes, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you very much.

My first question is for the RCMP. We've had some conversations around "red flag". The minister answered some questions.

I recall that when we studied Bill C-71, the Conservative Party opposed lifetime background checks. At the time, they were not supportive of any kind of a reporting system for mental health issues, yet we know that 75% or 80%, I think it is, of people who die by firearms are dying by suicide. Also, we know that women in particular are at risk when there's a firearm in the home. There's data that strongly supports the risk to women when there's a firearm in the home.

One of the things we did in Bill C-71 was that we extended to lifetime background checks. We listened to witnesses like Dr. Alan Drummond and Alison Irons, who talked about the need to strengthen red flags. We do have something in the bill that is better than what was in the previous version of Bill C-21, because people can remain anonymous.

That said, we also know that it's up to a judge to issue a prohibition order, and we don't control how a judge decides in a case. If a woman does go to court for that red flag, she can do it anonymously or through a women's shelter and she can appeal to the court, but we're relying on a judge to issue a prohibition order.

I was really heartened when I saw the mandate letter that was given to the RCMP that was also going to resource the chief firearms officer to ensure that calls are responded to promptly, and also, in working with local police services—in my area, it would be the Halton police service—ensure that if someone is reporting an issue with someone who has a firearm, whether that's for mental health or for gender-based violence, it's responded to in a timely manner.

Could you update us on how important that work by the chief firearms officer is and how we are progressing on that?

• (1700)

Ms. Kellie Paquette (Director General, Canadian Firearms Program, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you for that question.

We're actually progressing quite well. It's an end-to-end process, and I have to stress that point, because it's not only the training but the process of how they deal with these files.

Right now we're reviewing the training to ensure that it has the correct information in there from a police perspective—that's the UCR coding—so that they understand that timeliness is very important, and then that would go directly to a CFO as well, so that when it's identified to them, they know that they can action as quickly as possible.

Ms. Pam Damoff: When you're talking about training, was that with the RCMP or was that with local police services?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: It's actually the RCMP online system, but we're also going to use that tool to educate as well.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

The other thing that was in the mandate letter was about this "uniform crime reporting scoring", which sounds like a very complicated term. I actually didn't know exactly what it was until I spoke to Alison Irons, whose daughter, as many will know from when Alison testified, was stalked and killed by a law-abiding gun owner.

One of the concerns that Alison expressed was on this uniform crime reporting, so that if there is an incident with someone who has a firearm, it is reported by local police services. That was also included in the commissioner's mandate letter. I'm just wondering how you're doing on educating police services across the country on utilizing that tool.

Ms. Kellie Paquette: This is actually part of that process.

When the police of jurisdiction open a file, the file has to be scored. That scoring will automatically send a flag to a chief firearms officer if a firearm is involved or if it's a file that we want to be aware of. The timeliness of that scoring is very important. We are making some headway on that as well. Again, it's part of that training and education piece.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

I'm going to shift gears now to airsoft.

Last night I read a CBC article in which the Regina police chief, Evan Bray, said that replica weapons pose a problem because they're difficult to discern from real weapons. He specifically referenced a frightening school lockdown that took place in Regina that resulted in a weapons charge being laid against a 13-year-old girl. In my community recently, there was a lockdown of White Oaks Secondary School. A constituent sent me a video that one of the students took of the police coming into the portable. It was, again, one of these airsoft rifles.

If you have the data, can you talk about how often incidents like this happen, where a replica or an airsoft gun is used by someone and is mistaken by police as a real gun?

Do you understand what I'm saying? I didn't say it very well.

D/Commr Bryan Larkin: Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, it's a very difficult piece of data to capture. From a policing perspective, there's a delicate balance for

recreational use in entertainment, for which law-abiding citizens use them.

One concern from a policing perspective is putting frontline police officers in a very difficult situation when they are responding to complaints. When they are responding to crimes of commission or different types of events where an airsoft or a replica is present, it's very difficult to actually recognize the difference or recognize that it may not be a real firearm, handgun or a long gun, so what we see is a series of interactions around use of force, which does create challenges for policing. Hence, we're trying to balance and mitigate that. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and in particular Chief Evan Bray from Regina, are currently co-leading a Canadian chiefs working group on firearms. It's a working group on to how we modernize and progress on firearms within our society.

You will see fatal interactions across the country involving replica and/or airsoft guns involving police intervention. Of course, we're currently working on a national revamp or new approach to intervention around policing, because it does pose a real-life problem and we're seeing it escalate, but it's very difficult.

One recommendation and a gap that's recognized is about uniform crime reporting so that we actually have the data as a profession.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Commissioner.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue on the same topic.

Mr. Larkin, you said it was quite hard to gather data on airsoft guns and to determine how they might present a threat.

My questions will be for the representatives of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Have you provided the government with data or statistics indicating that replica guns have been used to commit violent crimes so the government can decide whether to prohibit them? What's the justification for prohibiting them?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab (Assistant Deputy Minister, Crime Prevention Branch, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Thank you for that question.

I'd like to clarify something here. Bill C-21 proposes a standard for airsofts that can fire a projectile at an initial velocity of 366 to 500 feet per second and that are replicas. The act already provides that it's prohibited to use other airsoft models that are replica guns. The intent behind the bill is thus to fill the current legal void for this specific firearm class.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, of which Mr. Larkin was the president at the time, made a request to the minister that this legal void be filled.

So this measure is in response to requests that were made because it was feared that police wouldn't always be able to determine the type of weapon used by individuals. We were also informed that police officers in some cases may believe an individual is using an airsoft gun when it's actually a firearm, which puts their lives in danger.

As my colleague explained, the data are hard to find. However, as mentioned a little earlier, there have been accidents in which people were murdered or injured by bullets because they were using airsofts when police officers thought they were firearms.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I ask the question because, as elected representatives, we get comments and expressions of fear from people who are in favour of firearms and others who support increased gun control. It isn't easy to read legislation. It may contain parts that are unclear or hard to understand.

The document your department has given us states that manufacturers and retailers may continue selling airsoft guns but that they'll have to alter their appearance so they don't look like modern firearms. That reminds me of the measure introduced in the United States requiring orange tips to be added to replicas to distinguish them from actual firearms.

Is that the kind of measure we're indirectly proposing? If manufacturers decide to produce guns that don't look exactly like firearms, they won't be classified as prohibited firearms under the bill. Is that what we're to understand?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: Thank you for your question.

I have to admit that, like the minister, I also get a lot of letters and requests for meetings. However, we've started the consultations. We're basing our analysis on international examples. England, in particular, has a good system that seems to work. I can't tell you right now what the final result will be, but I can confirm that we're talking to the associations. We're also trying to speak with our colleagues at the Canada Border Services Agency and the RCMP since sometimes there are operational enforcement issues.

We also want to ensure that our recommendation to the minister is well balanced and takes into account all factors, particularly with regard to the industry. There are all these examples, in the United States and England, where there have to be two distinct colours. For example, it may be decided that a particular type of gun must have a pink tip. In many cases, however, the industry may also start producing real firearms that look like those that are subject to the proposed changes, which we feel is another challenge.

These are aspects that we're analyzing. I can't give you a firm answer because we're still at the information gathering stage. However,

we're constantly talking to industry people and colleagues who will be responsible for enforcing the act.

• (1710)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I'm glad to know that studies are being conducted on this. Do you think they'll be ready and that we'll be able to use that data in our clause-by-clause consideration of the bill?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: If I'm not mistaken, the provision in question will come into force once the bill receives royal assent. So we won't have a choice. It will have to be ready.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: That's good.

We increasingly hear that weapons are being manufactured using 3D printers. Increasing numbers of people also order parts over the Internet to manufacture their weapons once they receive them at home.

Are you starting to consider that phenomenon? Do you think Bill C-21 could be amended to address that specific problem?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: Thank you for your question.

As an official, I can't tell you what the government will decide to do. However, that question was addressed in your committee's report. We've read it and are studying it very closely. My team, my colleagues and I look at every firearm that presents a public safety risk. These are situations that we constantly analyze. I can't tell you what amendments will be introduced, of course; that's not my role.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Yes, it's always a bit delicate to put that kind of question to officials. You aren't the ones who make the final decision.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We'll go now to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

One of the questions I have centres on the handgun freeze. Currently, I could go and visit my local gun range. I don't have an RPAL, but if I'm under the supervision of someone who does hold an RPAL and I'm at the range, I can legally use the handgun under their direct supervision.

If Bill C-21 were to pass as is, there would be nothing stopping the range from being a business owning a number of handguns, and people could still come to the range and legally use them under the supervision of a range master. Is that correct? Is that a correct interpretation of Bill C-21?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: The proposal is that businesses will continue to have the authority to own the handguns, and it is one of the things that we are discussing right now to see how this could.... There are comments we're hearing about elite sport shooters, and I earlier heard a question about that as well.

This is one of the ways that we're looking at it, but this will be defined later in regulations. I'm just explaining the consultations that are taking place right now to see if these kinds of options are available for people and if they have interest, talent or whatever.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: An individual may not be allowed to go and purchase one, but they could still go and use one in a controlled environment.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: In a business, yes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for clarifying that.

I also want to go back to airsoft. I know this is a recurring theme, but it shows that we, as members of Parliament, are getting a lot of correspondence on this issue as well.

I did ask the minister a fairly technical question, and I think he indicated his willingness to have some consultations about how we work through this, but I have to go back to the discrepancy that I believe exists between the Public Safety Canada handout, which I have before me, and how Bill C-21 is written.

If I look at the wording in Bill C-21, if it were to pass as currently written, airsoft, which looks like the real thing, is going to be deemed a prohibited device, but in your handout, you say that current owners would be allowed to keep and use those that they already own. How could a current owner use a prohibited device? I'm wondering how you square that circle.

• (1715)

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I heard your question earlier. It is the intent of the legislation to allow the current owner to keep their airsoft guns.

I'm going to turn it over to Kellie, who is responsible for the CFO part.

Ms. Kellie Paquette: I would add that they can retain what they have, but going forward, the manufacturers would no longer be able to manufacture those airsoft guns that resemble real firearms. They would have to be modified in some way going forward, either in colour.... This is the consultation that is happening right now with industry.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: If I were the current owner of one and I got grandfathered by Bill C-21, now I'm suddenly in possession of a prohibited device, because you have changed the definition, and there are some pretty serious consequences for owning a prohibited device. Would I feel at ease going out and using it, even though it's now deemed a prohibited device? This is the concern many in the community are having.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: As I mentioned earlier, there were consultations with the Library of Parliament. I would have to get back to you to confirm.

I can confirm that the intent of the legislation, as mentioned in the document provided at the tech briefing, is to allow them, but I

will have to discuss it with some colleagues and get back to the committee with a clear answer.

That's the document that we provided, and this is the intent of the legislation.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: From my communications with the airsoft community, I know they have been trying to find some solutions, such as requiring a minimum age for purchase, some kind of a licence to purchase, the requirement of an opaque bag to transport it from the place of residence to the airsoft range and the requirement of an orange tip.

What's the department's position on some of these proposals? I'm sure you're getting the same correspondence I am.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: As I mentioned earlier, we are getting a lot of correspondence, and we're looking at international best practices and seeking advice from everybody to formulate options for the minister. I can't say to the committee what the final decision will be, but I can reassure you that we are doing this work right now.

Again, adding a colour or two is done in some other jurisdictions. These are all considerations that the department is looking into.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

Very quickly, Bill C-21 makes specific reference to the Olympics and Special Olympics, which have a very elite level of shooting. Do you have a sense of how many people in Canada currently qualify at that level?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: Because this will be part of the regulations, we're working right now with Sport Canada to clarify exactly who will be allowed and to describe it in the regulation.

What we're doing right now is gathering the numbers of who they are and at what level. We're working out what implications provinces and territories will have with letters of recommendation or how the process will unfold for our colleagues in the RCMP to allow these people to be owners of handguns. All of these are exactly the kinds of things we're working on right now.

I want to remind members—because I heard multiple questions earlier about the regulations and about the large-capacity magazines—that all of these issues will be worked out through regulations.

As the committee is fully aware, the Firearms Act is very specific about the requirements in the regulations for firearms, and there is this exceptional measure of the 30 sitting days or referral to committee in both houses. I want to emphasize that it's important to know that whatever's coming into force through regulations—hopefully, not in two years—will be subject to in-depth consultations, not only with the committee and both Houses, but also with Canadians and industry, whether it's for large-capacity magazines or what kinds of exemptions should be included or not.

Whatever recommendations move forward will be available for at least 30 sitting days, and all this information will be gathered and considered before moving forward with registration or going further—

The Chair: Thank you, sir. I'm going to have to cut you off there.

• (1720)

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I'm sorry about that. I wanted to clarify the regulations.

The Chair: No worries.

Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

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

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question will be to you, Mr. Dakalbab, as well as to Deputy Commissioner Larkin and Ms. Paquette.

I think you'll agree with the principle that correlation does not equal causation. That's why I was so astonished by what the minister said in his testimony, when he said that the increase in legal registered firearm owners is causing an increase in gun violence in Canada.

Do you, Mr. Dakalbab, have any analysis or evidence to support that claim?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not here to defend or not defend what the minister is saying—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: But do you have that evidence?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: What we have as information is the increased number, in the last 10 years, of owners in Canada with handguns—I believe it's up over 50%, Kellie, if I'm not wrong—and the increased number of stolen handguns. This raised our attention. I don't have the number in front of me, but what I could tell you is that the data that we have available shows this increase.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Then it's not a direct connection. It's not that because there are more legal firearms owners, there is therefore more gun violence.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I can't tell you if it's a direct connection or not.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: There's no evidence from Public Safety Canada.

Thank you.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: Well, there is—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Deputy Commissioner Larkin, do you have any evidence to support that claim?

D/Commr Bryan Larkin: Again, we're focused on initiatives that will support public safety. Again, we don't have the correlation; we don't have that data. We work within the legislative framework that is provided to us, but, again, our approach—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you. I just wanted to know if you have the data.

Ms. Paquette, do you have that data?

Ms. Kellie Paquette: No, I don't have that data.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay, so I guess the minister was speculating there.

My second question is for Mr. Dakalbab.

When we're embarking on a massive, possibly multi-billion-dollar plan to buy back firearms and also to initiate a handgun freeze, I think Canadians would want to know that the department has done a study that the outcomes will lead to enhanced public safety. Does the department have such a study or analysis that indicates that these programs will increase public safety?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I just want to clarify, for the handgun part, that it's not only about gangs. That's obviously an important part, but there's the whole domestic violence part, and there is all the suicide, as well, by handguns. We do have data about how committing or attempting to commit suicide with a gun significantly increases deaths.

I just want to say that the way the department looks at it is really a holistic assessment, and we look at the impacts for public safety throughout.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Does your evidence show that this handgun freeze and the gun buyback will lead to enhanced public safety, or is that just something that you're speculating will happen if this is implemented?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: To be fair, I'm here to talk about Bill C-21, so I'm personally not in a position to talk about the buyback, but—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Or the handgun freeze, as I said.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: As mentioned earlier, all guns are subject to risk—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: So there's some risk.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I can't tell you exactly what the impact will be on specific—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: If you do have any studies, I would appreciate it if you could submit those to the committee, maybe at a later date. I'd really appreciate looking over those studies.

My next question is for Ms. Paquette.

Something that really concerns me—and maybe you can provide some more insight—is that Bill C-21 includes a provision that says it will automatically revoke a registration certificate for a firearm after a reclassification has occurred. Won't this turn people who have legally owned registered firearms into automatic criminals? Why was this included in Bill C-21, and will there be a grace period as we've seen in the past?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I think Madame Paquette is asking me to answer that question, because this is more of a policy question than an operational one.

It's no different right now from what it will be when there's a revocation of a firearm, and I think Madame Paquette could speak to the process itself with regard to how we're going to proceed with that. If there's a revocation following a complaint, a mishandling, a crime or an order from the court, it will be exactly the same process, and the people will have to abide by the rules in the same way they do right now, which I think Madame Paquette can—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'm not talking about people who have been accused of anything. It just seems that part of the policy is that the government can change the classification of a firearm from restricted to prohibited or from non-restricted to restricted, and this legislation is saying that their registration will automatically cease once that happens, so, on paper, they will be in possession of an illegal firearm, and that's criminal. How can we avoid turning innocent people into paper criminals overnight?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: The government has options, and I think it was done in the OIC of May 2020, in which an amnesty order was provided as well. I'm not in a position to tell you what the government will do, but what I'm saying is that what we saw in the past is what happened to avoid a situation of people becoming, from one day to the next, criminals for owning a handgun that they owned legally before.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

We go now to Mr. Chiang for five minutes.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming here today.

Assistant Deputy Minister Dakalbab, Mr. Lloyd asked for data with regard to this. Could you please include data on the connection between gun ownership and suicide and domestic violence?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

That's exactly what I was mentioning. The data we have is holistic data on all gun usage. We will be happy to provide whatever we have on mental health, domestic violence and gender-based violence.

I think it was mentioned earlier that in a violent environment, there is a much higher risk that if there's a gun, the gun will be used. There is a higher risk for the lives of women especially, to be honest, according to the data we have.

I'd be happy to provide this data and the numbers that we collect globally for all the questions from the committee members.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you for your answer.

I understand that firearm owners involved in acts of domestic violence or stalking will have their firearm licences automatically revoked under Bill C-21.

Could you explain the impact your department believes this will have on victims and survivors of domestic violence?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We follow your work here very closely, and clearly the committee heard from a lot of groups about the importance of removing guns in a situation of domestic violence and the huge impact that will have on the safety of anybody who's living in a domestic violence situation.

I can tell you that the department also meets with stakeholders who would like to meet with us and we collect this information. We are told that there's a significant impact in a domestic violence situation when they know that the guns have been removed automati-

cally following a complaint, rather than having a complaint and being back in an environment where there's a high risk of guns being used.

I can confirm that we are very aware of the positive impact that this will have on the well-being and mental health of not only women, but also.... We heard from doctors, and I think the committee heard from doctors in the past, about on mental health cases in which they were struggling to remove the guns and ensure the safety of these individuals.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much, Mr. Dakalbab.

In regard to regulations for guns, can you explain to this committee how this legislation will ensure that sport shooters are protected and will be able to continue competing in their sports? I have a lot of sport shooters and clubs in my riding that are concerned about this new Bill C-21.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think I mentioned earlier that we are working with Sport Canada and with the provinces and territories to ensure that we have clarity through the regulations on exactly what is required from these professional sport shooters.

The threshold is high in the legislation. As you know, Olympic and Paralympic disciplines will be included, but the details of how we are going to apply this policy will be coming through regulations. We are going to consult as required for any regulations to clearly identify this and make sure it is well understood by everybody in these disciplines.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much.

I'll turn my attention to Deputy Commissioner Larkin.

I understand that Bill C-21 will make it an offence to alter a cartridge or magazine to exceed its lawful capacity and will allow for wiretaps for this new offence. What impact do you think these measures will have on law enforcement agencies that are focused on reducing firearm violence?

• (1730)

D/Commr Bryan Larkin: Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, a resolution was recommended by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police through our working group. Our organization, the RCMP, is supportive of that, as we look particularly at curbing gun violence and the alteration of magazines where we see that type of violence, particularly in our urban areas.

The potential outcome is unknown. Obviously, we're hoping that it will allow our investigations opportunities for large-scale, multi-faceted joint force investigations where we're doing other types of covert operations that will actually curb the alteration of magazines and/or seize more. This would hopefully have an outcome around public safety and the use of such.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Commissioner.

Thank you, Mr. Chiang.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor once again. You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As my colleagues have done before me, I'd like to direct questions to the departmental people concerning the criteria used to define an elite sport shooter. Thank you in advance for your answer.

You said you're still consulting. The present bill isn't clear on whether you have to be an elite athlete or an active member of a shooting club to be able to acquire a handgun, for example. I know that's not your area, and I thank you for clarifying matters earlier regarding the regulations and orders that will come into force a little later.

I think it's unfortunate that the government has been saying since 2019 that it's going to do more on gun control but that consultations are still incomplete as we're examining Bill C-21 in 2022. That's more a comment than a question. I know that's not your fault, but I had to mention it. We have to make decisions in our legislative role, but we don't yet have all the tools we need to do so. It's somewhat disappointing.

Regarding the measures in addition to Bill C-21, you mentioned future regulations on large-capacity magazines and the possibility of requiring that long guns contain only five rounds. This bill would allow a maximum of 10 rounds for handguns and 5 for certain firearms such as semi-automatic centre-fire rifles.

When we did our guns and gangs study, witnesses told us it might be very easy to require manufacturers to make magazines containing no more than five rounds.

Are you studying that too? Is that also an additional measure that will come later because you don't have enough data to include it in the bill? What studies or consultations are you conducting on that?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: Thank you very much. There are a lot of questions in that comment.

First, I would remind you of the democratic process involved in holding consultations. We're currently conducting many consultations and gathering information, but I can't begin consultations on specific items in the bill until it receives royal assent. Our consultations are more general for the moment. If the bill is passed by Parliament and receives royal assent, we'll already have a certain amount of data. That's unfortunately the process we have to go through.

As you know, this bill is being introduced for the second time. Changes have been made to this version, of course, but the fact remains that we can't conduct official consultations on regulations unless authorized under the act to do so.

I hope that answers your question as to why we haven't yet...

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting, Mr. Dakalbab., but Ms. Michaud's time is up.

[*English*]

Mr. MacGregor, please go ahead for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

Clause 43, which is creating that new section 97.1 in the bill, specifically makes mention of the International Olympic Committee and the International Paralympic Committee. It does make mention of other disciplines, and I understand that through regulations, you're going to fill that in a bit more.

Why did you take the approach to codify the International Olympic Committee and the International Paralympic Committee in the bill, but then leave other disciplines open to interpretation in the regulations? Can you provide some rationale behind that?

• (1735)

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I can't really speak to the discussions that led to the decisions of the government.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: There are two disciplines which were specifically named in the bill, which means there is no leeway for regulations. It's going to be part of the act, but the others will be open to a bit more interpretation based on your consultations.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I could clarify that the intent of the legislation, as it's drafted right now in front of Parliament, is to limit and freeze the number of handguns.

To be clear, some people will be exempt from the law. This was clearly described in the law to provide guidance. To the earlier points, it's to provide the committee and Parliament with the opportunity to add clarity on the intent of the government.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm sorry to cut you off, but I have less than a minute left.

On May 30, when the minister made the announcement for Bill C-21, he also very clearly identified the fact that the government wanted to bring forward an amendment to capture some assault-style rifles, which had escaped.

Can you inform this committee what specific section of Bill C-21 you're seeking to amend and what it is going to look like, so we have some heads-up notice on this?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: The only thing I could say is that you heard the same thing I did from the minister on TV. I can't comment any further on that one. I'm sorry about that.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for clarifying.

I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll go now to Mr. Van Popta for five minutes.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

I may be splitting my time with Mr. Lloyd. He has a question.

I have a lot of constituents who are concerned about the handgun freeze. They might own handguns and were planning to transfer them to their children or grandchildren, or they have just recently obtained their RPAL licence and are hoping to buy a handgun because they're sport-shooting enthusiasts.

Can you assure all these people that if they have their application in for a transfer before the regulation kicks in, their transfers will actually be processed?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I'll take this one, if you'll allow me, Mr. Chair, because this is part of the policy work.

I believe today was the end of the 30 sitting days for the regulations. I can tell you the regulations will probably be publicly available shortly. I can't tell you exactly when yet. I don't even know that. What I can say is that in the legislation, there is clarity on transitional provisions. I can't tell you about the regulations yet, because, as I said, after the 30 days, we work on it with whatever comments we got. I can confirm that in Bill C-21, there are transitional provisions to that effect.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you.

I have another question.

To follow up on Mr. MacGregor's line of questioning about the Olympics and Paralympics, I have a letter here in front of me from a constituent, which states, "I'm a local elite athlete competing in the sport of International Practical Shooting Confederation." He is concerned that his sport or confederation will be excluded by the wording in the bill.

Can you give any assurance to Mr. Gordon that indeed there will be consultations with the public, so that he can make a presentation about why his organization should also be part of the exemption?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I can't guarantee that personally. I'm pretty sure the committee would request to talk to them, but we will be consulting. I can't tell you exactly how the consultation is going to take place yet, but we usually have an open forum; the technology now allows everybody.

As I said earlier, I am already getting a lot of letters. I consider them part of the consultation that we have to work on with citizens from across the country.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I will split my time with Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

My question is for Deputy Commissioner Larkin.

One of the sections in Bill C-21 would create a new offence. The offence is altering a magazine to hold more than the legal number of rounds, yet it's already an offence to possess a magazine that has more than the legal limit of rounds. This proposed new offence seems to duplicate an offence that already exists.

Why was this included in the legislation?

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I'm being told it's a policy piece, so if you don't mind, Mr. Chair, I'll take this one.

Right now, there is a requirement—

I apologize for my very simplistic way of describing this, but I do it for my own understanding as well.

Right now, there is a way to stop at five or 10, to pin it. It's a requirement. What is added as an intention in this bill is altering it. What's been reported to our attention is some people.... Right now it's just a pin, and it can easily be changed, so they purchase it and change it. This is the part that was not yet an offence, so they want to ensure, in the bill, that it is.

• (1740)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: The act of removing a pin means that you are now in possession of a magazine that can hold more than the legal number of rounds, so you would be committing a criminal offence if you removed a pin. Why do we need to create a new offence for something that's already illegal? It's like saying it's illegal to murder somebody, but we're making a new act to say it's illegal to commit the act of murdering somebody.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: Actually, it's five or 10. If you allow me, I don't want to go into too many details, but the alteration cannot be done if Bill C-21 becomes law.

Right now, as you're probably aware, there are some magazines that could be used for multiple guns, and some of them could be removed and be on a 10. That is allowed in the law right now. This alteration will not be allowed, obviously, unless it's authorized by our colleagues or done for the proper guns. Right now, there's a gap to be addressed.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I have 10 seconds left, but thank you for that explanation. It was illuminating.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

We will wrap up this round with Mr. Noormohamed for five minutes, please.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've spent a lot of time in this conversation talking about why this and why that and some important questions, but for me this always comes down to people. In 2021, 173 women were killed by either present or former intimate partners, and 40% of them were killed using guns, or just about 40%.

Deputy Commissioner Larkin, you've been the chief of police in Waterloo and you are here now in your capacity as somebody with a lot of policing experience. Do you believe that had Bill C-21 been in effect earlier, some of those lives would have been saved?

D/Commr Bryan Larkin: Mr. Chair, we do know that obviously there's a chance, a five times greater chance, of a fatality involving intimate partner violence when there's a firearm present, so it's very difficult to surmise what could have been prevented or not.

Again, our organization and I believe our policing profession support initiatives that will enhance public safety, but in particular, when we look at intimate partner violence in Canada, we see that we have a significant amount of work to do. In particular, the pandemic exacerbated intimate partner violence from coast to coast, so naturally, anything that we see as a progressive piece of policy that may ensure safety from intimate partner violence, particularly, generally speaking, of females, is a positive step forward.

Again, it's important to note that there's a five times greater chance of an intimate partner violence fatality when there's a firearm in the home. That being said, it's something that you want to evaluate and monitor, as with any public policy or legislative change, to see what the outcome will be once we see that change.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: But it is fair to say, based on your comments, that fewer guns in homes likely means fewer gun deaths?

D/Commr Bryan Larkin: Again, Mr. Chair, when we look at the actual data, particularly around family violence, we do recognize that a reduction of firearms in the home potentially can lead to a safer residence, a safer familial situation.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

Mr. Dakalbab, I don't know if you want to weigh in on that from a policy perspective as well, with any of the data or research that you've seen.

Mr. Talal Dakalbab: I think my colleague mentioned that there's obviously a link between guns and gender-based violence. There is no doubt about it.

From a policy perspective, we're very clear on that aspect, and I think when there's a risk and we eliminate the risk, automatically....

I can't tell you what the numbers are going to be in the future, but I am sincerely hopeful that it will significantly help the situation that we're in right now.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

It wouldn't be fair that we would go this entire meeting, Mr. Gaspar, without at least turning our attention to you a little bit. You're almost off the hook, but not quite.

CBSA officers have apprehended at the border ghost guns, 3D-printed firearms, so on and so forth. This importation is obviously a serious concern. In my earlier question to the minister, I talked a lit-

tle bit about this. Could you share your perspective from the CBSA's point of view on how Bill C-21 can or will or should help address this issue?

• (1745)

Mr. Fred Gaspar: Again, I have to be a little careful, because it's certainly a bit of a policy question. I can tell you that Bill C-21 codifies and cohesively brings together the overarching approach that the government and all members of the public safety portfolio have been using for a number of years now, starting with the initiative to address guns and gangs violence, and that is to take a multi-pronged approach.

Therefore, Bill C-21, as my colleague Talal has indicated, takes a look at the root causes and takes a look at initiatives that can be put in place to protect the most vulnerable members of society from a policy perspective. It underscores the kinds of investments that we have been making to support those types of outcomes through the budget 2021 provisions and the 2018 guns and gangs funding, which is intended to improve investigative capacity and enable us to better liaise with our international partners to identify the source of import threats.

I'd have to underscore that point more than anything else. It's not unlike any other kind of smuggling regime: The further upstream in the import stream that you're able to identify the threat and interdict it, the more likely you are to be successful. I think if we look at it holistically, that's the key benefit of Bill C-21 from a border effectiveness perspective: It brings together that cohesive approach through a multipronged solution to address gun violence in Canada.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't know how much time I have left, but I suspect it's not much. I'll give that back to you.

Thank you very much to all the witnesses.

The Chair: Thanks to all of you.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here. I know that there's been a little extra time, and I appreciate that.

I'd also like to thank all of our staff, our interpreters and the technical staff for bearing with us for this extra time.

With that, I believe we have a will to adjourn, so this meeting is now adjourned.

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