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Chair: Mr. Ron McKinnon



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• (0845)

[English]

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

Welcome, everyone, to meeting number 60 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 June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking. The chair takes particular note of that, because the chair fails to do this all the time. For interpretation, those on Zoom have the choice at the bottom of their screens of “floor”, “English” or “French”. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Friday, February 3, 2023, the committee resumes its study of the effects of the withdrawn amendments G-4 and G-46 to Bill C-21, an act to amend certain acts and to make certain consequential amendments regarding firearms.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

We have two panels of witnesses today. In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I am informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

For the first hour, we have, from Alberta's Chief Firearms Office, Dr. Teri Bryant, chief firearms officer; from the National Association of Women and the Law, Suzanne Zaccour, head of feminist law reform; from the Ending Violence Association of Canada, Erin Whitmore, executive director; and from Danforth Families for Safe Communities, Ken Price and Noor Samiei, who are members.

Welcome to all. I will give each group up to five minutes for an opening statement, and then we will proceed with rounds of questions.

I will now invite Dr. Bryant to make an opening statement.

Please go ahead. You have five minutes.

[Translation]

Dr. Teri Bryant (Chief Firearms Officer, Alberta Chief Firearms Office): Hello ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for having me today.

[English]

As Alberta's chief firearms officer, I have a dual mandate to supervise Firearms Act licensing in Alberta, as other CFOs do, but also to work relentlessly for a more principled firearms program in Canada.

Since assuming this role, I have made safety number one. This means rejecting trendy solutions and focusing on the work that will truly make a difference. Part of that work is ensuring that responsible, law-abiding firearms owners in Alberta understand all the laws and regulations they face.

I, therefore, regularly engage with members of Alberta's vibrant firearms community. In 2021-22 alone, I attended well over 50 events and met with thousands of Albertans. Time and again, I hear that confidence in Canada's firearms control system has eroded. That confidence is an essential element in building safer communities. If we want people to go beyond legal minimums and proactively contribute to public safety, they must feel heard and respected.

Even after the withdrawal of G-4 and G-46, Bill C-21 continues to undermine confidence in our firearms control system while contributing nothing to reducing the violent misuse of firearms. Bill C-21 is built on a fundamentally flawed premise. Prohibiting specific types of firearms is not an effective way of improving public safety. It will waste billions of taxpayer dollars that could have been used on more effective approaches, such as the enforcement of firearms prohibition orders, reinforcing the border or combatting the drug trade and gang activity.

The ban on most handgun transfers and the order in council prohibitions of May 2020 have had a devastating impact on the assets of hundreds of thousands of Canadians. With strokes of a pen, billions of dollars' worth of legally acquired property was rendered unsaleable.

The scope of Bill C-21 is absurdly broad. The ban on handgun transfers includes even single-shot muzzleloading flintlocks and percussion revolvers and pistols, as well as precious historical artifacts and family heirlooms.

The loss of the sales of handguns and, potentially, almost all popular modern rifle designs threatens the survival of many multi-generational family firearms businesses. Gun shows, which are often a major social event and economic contributor in struggling small communities, are also being hard hit. The survival of many long-established reputable shooting sports has been threatened. The competitions put on by these organizations bring visitors that support the economic viability of small communities. Without new entrants, these sports will atrophy and die.

Over time, Bill C-21's prohibitions will also undermine the economic viability of the shooting ranges Canadians rely on for a safe, well-regulated place to shoot. These ranges are not only where hunters go to sight in their hunting rifles, but also where police and others who require firearms for their jobs go to train.

Many things could have been done to lessen the collateral damage of Bill C-21. The firearms targeted for prohibition could have been made restricted and their numbers capped, or if these guns are prohibited, the cost to the taxpayer and the impact on property rights could be reduced by grandfathering them and allowing full transferability among licensed Canadians. Shooting sports could have been safeguarded by allowing the chief firearms officer of each province to designate which sport shooting organizations in his or her province can write letters allowing carefully vetted individuals access to sporting exemptions.

Provisions could also have been included to address the real issues around illegal firearms; 3-D printing alone could easily supply the entire demand for illegal firearms across Canada before long. Regulating 3-D printing without destroying new industries like video game development will require new and smarter approaches.

The fact that Bill C-21 does not include any such damage reduction measures reinforces the conclusion that the goal of this bill is demonstratively not about public safety, but an attempt to destroy long-established communities of law-abiding firearms owners across the country by targeting their property. These are the people who perform a vital public service by socializing new firearms owners into responsible firearms use. They are the allies, not the enemies of public safety.

I urge you to recommend the withdrawal of Bill C-21 in its entirety, or to at least allow amendments to reduce its collateral damage. Strengthening public safety is hard enough. Please don't allow Bill C-21 to make it harder.

[*Translation*]

Thank you. I'm happy to take your questions.

● (0850)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Bryant.

I now invite Ms. Whitmore and Ms. Zaccour to make an opening statement.

Please go ahead for five minutes.

Dr. Erin Whitmore (Executive Director, Ending Violence Association of Canada, National Association of Women and the Law): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the committee for this opportunity to speak with you today.

I'm Erin Whitmore, the executive director of the Ending Violence Association of Canada, a national non-profit organization that works closely with provincial and territorial organizations that support survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual assault centres, shelters and community-based services.

I am co-presenting today with my colleague, Suzanne Zaccour, head of feminist law reform with the National Association of Women and the Law. Both of our organizations are participating today as representatives of #Women4GunControl or #FemmesContreLesViolencesArmées, a coalition of over 30 women's and feminist organizations from all regions across the country calling for a ban on assault-style firearms.

This week, for International Women's Day, we released an open letter to all party leaders and members of this committee urging that a permanent and comprehensive ban on assault-style firearms be enshrined in the Criminal Code. We want to take this opportunity to remind the committee of the significance of Bill C-21 and its amendments to our collective efforts to minimize and prevent the harms caused by guns in situations of family, domestic and sexual violence. Banning assault-style firearms will increase community safety and reduce gender-based violence.

However, we are concerned that the opportunity before this committee to strengthen public safety and to prevent firearm-related violence—including femicide, family violence and mass shootings—is being lost in the current climate of emotional and partisan debate.

As representatives of organizations that work closely with survivors of all forms of gender-based violence, we see first-hand that gun violence takes many forms and plays out in distinct ways in the lives of women and children. Gun violence against women and girls can and does include femicide, but guns are also used as tools to threaten, intimidate, control, terrorize and physically assault women and girls. The use of a gun is one of the many tactics by some abusers to make it increasingly difficult and extremely dangerous for a woman to not comply with an abuser's demands or to leave the situation.

Statistics Canada data show that in 2021 almost one-quarter of the 197 women homicide victims were killed by shooting, and women accounted for 84% of the 803 victims of firearm-related intimate partner violence.

In the dynamics of an abusive intimate partner relationship, we know that the presence of any make or model of gun is a significant risk factor for more severe forms of violence and death. When that gun is an assault-style firearm—that is, a firearm designed for military or tactical use with the capacity to inflict significant lethality and harm—the potential of these individual acts of violence to escalate to mass shootings involving the broader community, and targeting women in particular, has already been demonstrated too many times.

In today's climate of increased anti-feminist sentiment and other forms of hate and racism, which have fuelled previous mass shootings, the need for a ban on assault-style firearms has never been more pressing. The risks are simply too great to ignore.

Provisions in other parts of the bill make important interventions that have the potential to better protect those at risk or currently experiencing family and domestic violence. The National Association of Women and the Law has previously submitted a brief to this committee, endorsed by 14 organizations, with recommendations to further strengthen these aspects of the bill.

Today, in solidarity with 32 women's and feminist organizations, we want to make clear that inclusion of the amendments that define and permanently ban assault-style weapons is an equally crucial step in mitigating current and future harm in the lives of women, children and communities.

Bill C-21 alone will not end gender-based violence. Greater investments in prevention measures are needed and are just as pressing as this current legislation. However, we are at a critical moment in choosing what steps we are willing to take as a country to ensure that we are doing all that we can to prioritize women's right to live safely without the threat and fear of gun violence.

On behalf of 32 organizations who have joined the #Women4GunControl coalition, we urge the committee and government to move forward with this legislation, including an evergreen definition and a permanent ban on assault-style firearms.

● (0855)

Gender-based violence involving guns is a terrifying and deadly problem in Canada. In supporting legislation that includes an evergreen definition and a permanent ban on assault-style firearms, members of this committee will be acting to reduce gun violence and save lives as the 32 organizations that have joined the #Women4GunControl coalition and a strong majority of Canadians want you to do.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now invite Mr. Price and Ms. Samiei to make an opening statement.

Please go ahead for five minutes.

Ms. Noor Samiei (Member, Danforth Families for Safe Communities): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, on July 22, 2018, what started off as a night of excitement in celebrating my 18th birthday ended in sheer horror and misery. It has been almost five years since the Danforth shooting, and I still struggle to find

the words to speak about what my friends and I experienced that night.

We were robbed of our innocence that day. We lost our sense of safety, security, trust and faith in society, but the most painful part of all was losing our best friend: Reese Fallon.

We didn't only lose Reese that day. We lost all the precious moments and milestones of life that she looked forward to the most. Reese will never be able to get married, have kids or live out her dream of being a nurse. Everything was taken from her in a matter of minutes, and all we were doing was eating ice cream out on a summer night.

Another precious life lost that evening was that of 10-year-old Julianna Kozis. While I did not know Julianna personally, her family shared stories of her pure, kind and loving heart. Julianna's legacy is kept alive through the kindness she embodied in life.

While this was an uncontrollable event, the only control we have is fighting for change. Today, I sit alongside Ken Price, Claire Smith, Samantha Price and Ali Demircan, all members of Danforth Families for Safe Communities.

No one ever deserves to experience what we went through that night. This is why legislation is vital and crucial. I don't want any more thoughts and prayers. I want policy and action. We hold a responsibility to ensure that no one experiences the pain and sorrow that we do.

Unfortunately, we learned the grave effects of a mass shooting. The Danforth shooting has left an everlasting impact on Reese's and Julianna's friends, family and community as a whole. To those who have tried to minimize this grief to defend their position, just know that gun violence is felt widely, deeply and profoundly, and it does not just simply go away.

Mr. Ken Price (Member, Danforth Families for Safe Communities): Our presence here today is a reminder of what happens when guns are used for violent ends. Knowing what we have experienced, we're here to urge you to put safety at the centre of your decision-making. There is evidence of a proliferation of powerful, rapid-fire, quick-loading weapons, and these have been used for violence among the citizens that this government must help to protect.

We recognize other stakeholders in this debate. Hunting, warding off pests on farms and most sport shooting are legitimate activities, but “reasonable for use” is the key phrase in the law guiding the availability and classification of firearms for private owners. Recognizing the lethal power of all guns, that should mean asking first why a particular gun is needed to accommodate an activity, not just letting industry and enthusiasm push new weapons into the mix. Permit firearms cautiously, because, as has been noted, any gun can be a weapon, and the more powerful, the more lethal.

The government has taken steps in the past in the law to protect the public from categories of weapons. The risk outweighed the utility, and we must now recognize and mitigate the unacceptable risks we face in current times, enabled by modern handguns and assault-style rifles.

We support Bill C-21. It is wide-reaching and is not just about gun bans, because addressing gun violence needs a multi-faceted approach. Bill C-21 does modernize gun control to reflect that in the last 25 years or so we added a bunch of assault-style rifles and allowed a million handguns into the hands of private owners, and that even with higher levels of training and scrutiny for those we restricted, and sometimes because we didn't restrict them, the availability of these guns has contributed to poorer public safety outcomes.

We have followed the debate on Bill C-21. We think the legislation could be improved in some areas, and we've made prior comments on that, but as G-4 and G-46 have been debated, we support the idea of a legally enshrined definition of what an assault-style rifle is, and a lawful ceiling would be clearer for stakeholders. Relying solely on the Governor in Council has led to obvious inconsistency and has permitted a proliferation of guns used in some of the most notorious shootings in Canada.

What the latest StatsCan report on gun violence in 2021 said to us is that, while we dither, more preventable deaths have occurred. The problem is still significant. It is national and it is more profound than in countries worth benchmarking. Let's get G-4 and G-46 and other amendments into the bill, and let's get Bill C-21 passed.

Time is of the essence. Thank you for your attention to this complex and important issue, and thank you for including us today.

● (0900)

The Chair: Thanks to all of you for your opening remarks.

We'll start our questioning now with Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Lloyd, please go ahead for six minutes.

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

I want to thank all the witnesses for coming here today.

My first question is for the National Association of Women and the Law.

In your email or letter that you sent to us on March 7, you said that the presence of firearms in a household where there is intimate partner violence significantly increases the risk that women will be killed. At face value I accept that argument. However, there is no

evidence to suggest that merely owning a firearm makes somebody more likely to commit an act of intimate personal violence. Isn't that correct? Is there any evidence? I don't see any compelling evidence to suggest that.

Ms. Suzanne Zaccour (Head of Feminist Law Reform, National Association of Women and the Law): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to answer the question.

It's important to know that intimate partner violence is often not reported. It's often invisible. Coercive control is not necessarily even criminalized. It's not that simple to say that it's only where there is intimate partner violence that a gun is dangerous, because it is difficult or perhaps impossible to know in advance in which families there will be intimate partner violence and—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I appreciate that, and I really appreciate what you said about preventative, because we know in cases where there is femicide, you wouldn't say that's the first thing that happens. There are lots of warning signs that lead up to that happening. Isn't that true? This isn't something that just happens and there were no warning signs leading up to it. This is something where there is a long trail of events leading up to these things oftentimes. Isn't that correct?

Dr. Erin Whitmore: I can answer that question. Thank you for that.

Certainly in some cases there are warning signs, but unfortunately, we really are lacking in strong data to fully understand the intersection of intimate partner violence and firearms in women's lives. The evidence we do have, though, indicates that there is an increased risk for extreme forms of violence and death. For the members of our coalition, this is enough evidence to support the implementation of this legislation.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you for that.

My next question is for Dr. Bryant.

We already have a classification system in Canada. We have non-restricted. We have restricted. There are prohibited firearms.

Isn't it true, Dr. Bryant, that every single firearm that is used by civilians in Canada has to be approved by the RCMP? Isn't that correct, Dr. Bryant?

● (0905)

Dr. Teri Bryant: I believe so, yes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: For some people to say that these firearms, semi-automatic hunting rifles and shotguns, are not legitimate for civilian use, the RCMP has approved these for legitimate civilian use. Is that correct?

Dr. Teri Bryant: In fact, in the case of many restricted firearms, the individual was specifically authorized to require that specific firearm for a sporting purpose.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That's interesting.

Dr. Bryant, I believe we already have an evergreen definition in Canada. As we said, we have non-restricted. We have restricted. We have prohibited. These are based on the functional capabilities of the firearms—wouldn't you say? It's not based upon how the firearm looks. It's based on what the firearm is capable of. Isn't that correct?

Dr. Teri Bryant: There is certainly an element of that, although I think there are a great many logical inconsistencies in the way we have categorized, particularly the definition between, for example, restricted and prohibited firearms. Many of those are more a matter of historical accident and political compromises than any actual intent.

There are firearms that are completely useless for any violent purpose but are categorized in the highest category. What I am saying is that, in general, there are many things that are put into the higher categories that probably shouldn't be there.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Would you say in your experience that, when the RCMP is reviewing a firearm to be classified in Canada, in almost all cases they probably err on the side of being more restrictive or less restrictive in their classification of those firearms?

Dr. Teri Bryant: I would say overall it's much more restrictive.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay.

When we're talking about the evergreen definition that the Liberals put forward in the amendments we're discussing today, semi-automatic centrefire rifles and shotguns that have the capability of accepting a magazine over five cartridges for the type that the gun was originally designed for, in your vast experience with firearms, this amendment would cover a wide variety of commonly used hunting rifles and shotguns. Isn't that correct?

Dr. Teri Bryant: I believe so, yes. In fact, for people who want an example, I have a model 1907 Winchester that was designed in 1907 and produced from 1907 on. It had a five-shot capacity, but later some magazines were made that did have higher capacities. This gun, which was explicitly designed for medium game shooting, like deer, well over a hundred years ago, could well be covered.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Do you think that, as some people have said, concerns about these Liberal amendments and their impact on hunting rifles and shotguns were an act of blatant disinformation? Was it disinformation to say that these amendments would ban legitimately used hunting rifles and shotguns?

Dr. Teri Bryant: I do not believe that it was disinformation to state that. I believe it was simply a matter of fact. Many firearms I know—I, personally, have friends who have used them for deer hunting for many years—would be covered.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd. You had four seconds left.

We'll go now to Mr. Erskine-Smith for six minutes, please.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thanks, Ron.

Noor, thanks for the testimony. I can't imagine. Having been close to it in my own way, but not nearly as close as you were, I

can't imagine having to revisit testimony like that. I really appreciate your being here today and your remarks.

Ken, similarly, I appreciate you both standing with the Danforth families and everyone on behalf of our community. It's been a strong voice in support of victims and in support of stronger gun control.

I want to ask not about the detailed nature of the amendments that this committee has been dealing with. Because I'm a visitor today, I want to ask a little bit about the culture war that in some ways at times affects the debate.

At the end of the day—Ken, you and I have had many conversations—we all want to get to the same place where we acknowledge that certain rifles are to be used for hunting. That's as it always has been and as it will continue to be. There are other weapons that are designed for a different purpose and should not be available to everyone in the same way. We want to make sure we have sensible gun control, take public safety seriously and listen to law enforcement, but also listen to victims. Surely we can do both.

Can you speak to how we might get past some of the talking points and get to a sensible discussion where we bring people together?

• (0910)

Mr. Ken Price: I think that's difficult. I think that, as evidenced by the—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): I rise on a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

The interpreter is telling me that it is hard to interpret what Mr. Erskine-Smith is saying because there are connectivity issues. We were unable to hear the end of his question.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Erskine-Smith, could you please give us the last part of your question at least?

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I was just asking Ken to speak to the need to get past some of the talking points. We've had many conversations on this. How do we get to a place where we acknowledge the reasonable use for hunting while also making sure we have the strongest and most sensible gun control measures to protect future victims?

Mr. Ken Price: Thank you for the question.

I would say it is difficult to find that centre ground, apparently. This is the public safety committee, so almost by its title we feel like this starts with public safety as the primary goal of any of the initiatives here. We would say that reasonable use should be paired very closely with what is required, recognizing that ever more powerful guns, if not used properly, have a lethal impact on victims, which is what happened in our case.

We would say that you should proceed cautiously. We should be adding firearms not with enthusiasm for more power and more capability, but very cautiously and with a view that it's going to be impossible to screen out every person who might abuse their privilege. Therefore, we need to make sure that the weapons are part of the mitigation strategy we have.

As victims and as the general public, we are stakeholders in this discussion as much as anybody else who uses those weapons. That's where you have to find that balance. We would say that now it's apparent to us that the balance is out of whack a little bit. We believe that G-4, and Bill C-21 overall, are an attempt to bring that into line. We hope this committee finds satisfactory middle ground to accomplish that.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Thanks. I appreciate your being here and I appreciate your advocacy.

I will cede the floor to Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you to all our witnesses for being here today.

Ken, I wondered if you could talk a little bit about gun manufacturers. The Coalition for Gun Control said that from “the 1995 orders in council that gun manufacturers will circumvent any lists”. That's one of the reasons they called for a clear definition.

Could you comment on that?

Mr. Ken Price: Again, maybe as an observer I'll make two observations. Number one, yesterday the article that was in the *Montreal Gazette*, and I think in the *Ottawa Citizen*, talked very specifically about new guns coming to market that are really designed to circumvent some of the provisions—that are designed to be able to accept, for example, large-capacity magazines—and there being evidence of communication around that.

The other part I find curious is that, I think with the exception of Wolverine, who's a distributor, we don't really see manufacturers at the table. I don't know if that's a product of the committee or a product of resistance, but certainly, if G-4 passes, and even in the current legislation, it would be interesting to hear their perspective. They're the ones who are designing these guns. What is their intention in their design? Will they abide by the five-cartridge magazine capacity rule that G-4 will establish?

I think we need to hear their voice.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'd like to thank the National Association of Women and the Law for the letter you released. I encourage people to read it and also to read the 32 organizations that have added their names to it. I always find it disturbing that gender-based violence gets minimized when there's a firearm in the home.

Can you talk a little bit about coercive control and how firearms are used in those situations, Dr. Whitmore?

Dr. Erin Whitmore: Yes. Thank you very much for that question.

One thing we wanted to bring to the attention of the committee is the reality that gun violence looks different in the lives of women and girls than it does in the lives of men. Not only can guns lead to femicide or murder. They are also used as tools to control and threaten women who are living in abusive situations. I personally have worked with women, and many of the organizations that are part of our coalition work daily with women, who experience sexual and physical assault by partners who own a firearm. The presence of that firearm in the home makes it much more difficult to leave a situation or reach out for help. It also makes it extremely dangerous.

I also want to draw attention to the fact that gun violence in women's lives is not the same for all women. It's important to understand those distinctions. We know that indigenous women, racialized women and women with disabilities also face increased risk for different forms of violence. We need to take these into account.

● (0915)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff. I've kind of lost control of my timer, but I believe that's your time, plus or minus a few seconds. I apologize.

[*Translation*]

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

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

I thank the witnesses for being here with us this morning.

Mr. Price, unfortunately for you, you have become a regular at these committee meetings. When you were speaking with my colleague, Ms. Damoff, you mentioned an article that was published in yesterday's editions of the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Ottawa Citizen*. It said that, while we are debating this issue, new weapons are coming on the market, as has been the case for a long time. Since the 2020 regulation, manufacturers continue to circumvent the rules to put new weapons on the market.

From what I understand of Canada's classification of firearms, there are three classes: non-restricted, restricted and prohibited. When a manufacturer puts a new firearm on the market, it is automatically considered a non-restricted weapon. Only later can it become classified as prohibited. The RCMP is not automatically informed of the arrival of all these new firearms on the market, so when it realizes that a new firearm may have to be classified as prohibited or restricted, it conducts an analysis and then the firearm can be classified as prohibited.

Would it be possible to do the opposite? Could a firearm automatically be classified as prohibited before the manufacturer puts it on the market? Then we could wait for the RCMP to analyze it to determine whether it should be classified as non-restricted or remain a prohibited weapon. Perhaps there is a way to include that in Bill C-21. Perhaps that is another way to change the Firearms Act.

Do you think such a change could be a good thing?

[English]

Mr. Ken Price: I think this follows up on our belief that what should be guiding this is reasonably used rather than commonly used. For example, allowing a gun into the system and then deciding whether it's dangerous after the fact seems backwards, so I would agree with your comment on that. I think the aid that this legislation is intending, from our point of view, is to articulate what that means so that those who are intending to design guns for the Canadian marketplace understand that clearly, because there's been a high level of judgment—to your point—about what's going to be allowable. I think we see that gun manufacturers will design to the very limits of that if left unchecked.

That's why we're supporting this more reasonably driven, proactive approach and a clearer articulation of what is allowable and what is not.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you very much.

Ms. Whitmore or Ms. Zaccour, do you have anything you would like to add? Do you think this might be a good idea and that it should be added to Bill C-21 or to another bill to amend the Firearms Act?

Ms. Suzanne Zaccour: I certainly echo the comments we just heard.

Safety is paramount and the risks must not be a secondary consideration. This proposal is in keeping with that idea.

● (0920)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you very much.

I'll continue with you.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of banning assault weapons. We have held that position for a long time and it has not changed. There were concerns about amendments G-4 and G-46, which have been withdrawn. The use of a list has been rather confusing for everyone because the list is hard to follow.

With the help of public servants, we have come to understand that the only list that will actually be continually updated is the RCMP's list. Any new weapon that comes onto the market will be added to that list and not the list of firearms set out in the Criminal Code under Bill C-21. Rather than using a list, I am wondering whether it would not be better to add some sort of safeguard to the act under which we could add, but not remove, firearms from the RCMP's list to the act without necessarily taking any legislative action.

That might reassure the groups that are advocating for better gun control that we will not start backtracking when it comes to prohibited weapons and those that have already been classified.

What do you think, Mr. Price?

[English]

Mr. Ken Price: Again, I think the intention of having the G-4 amendment is to try to articulate what that ceiling is on capability. That's why we're in support of it. I also might point out that I think other groups and this committee have considered also the loopholes related to large-capacity magazines because that's the other part that I think is of concern to groups: making sure that the guns abide by the five-cartridge capacity limit and that manufacturers are designing to that point and not finding ways around it. I think the combination of those two things—G-4 and then some closing of the loopholes—is what we're looking for as a group.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Before I hand it over to Ms. Zaccour, I would like to continue the discussion on that, Mr. Price.

One of the loopholes that I also see is the wording of the G-4 amendment, which stated that the firearm had to be designed to accept a magazine with five or more rounds. The bill says nothing about firearms that are capable of accepting magazines with more bullets even though they may not have been specifically designed to do so.

Are you concerned about the wording there? Should we not say “capable of” rather than “designed to”?

[English]

Mr. Ken Price: I think the intention is to ensure that it is designed for capable.... I think this is where, again, having the manufacturers at the table would probably help because it's really their motivation that we're calling into question with the wording as it is. It would be interesting to hear what that motivation is going to be going forward.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, ma'am.

[English]

We go now to Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. MacGregor, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

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

Hello to my fellow committee members. It's good to see everyone again. I appreciate being here and having this opportunity to ask questions of our witnesses.

Let me thank all of our witnesses for appearing, some who are reappearing.

Dr. Bryant, I'd like to start with you. I'm going to assume that, in your role in Alberta, you have also taken the time to travel to indigenous communities and have consulted with them on this issue. Can you confirm that?

Dr. Teri Bryant: We currently have an initiative, headed by one of my staff members, that will be doing additional outreach to indigenous communities, but many of the events that I attend are held in areas that are close to indigenous communities and are heavily attended by indigenous people. I do speak frequently with indigenous firearms owners at those events, although not as organized groups.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you. That leads to my next question.

In the previous Parliament we passed Bill C-15, which essentially is requiring the Government of Canada, through consultation and co-operation with indigenous peoples, to take all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada, the laws passed in our federal Parliament, are consistent with the declaration.

I believe it was in December that the Assembly of First Nations passed an emergency resolution by consensus. They specifically identified article 5, article 18, article 34 and article 39, where they felt Bill C-21 was contravening those parts of the declaration. I've spoken to the indigenous members of my caucus who have said that to have an emergency resolution at the AFN pass by consensus is virtually unheard of.

Obviously, that consultation had not taken place before the amendments to Bill C-21 were introduced. I don't think we get enough indigenous voices heard here in Ottawa. That is a disservice. It goes against the principle of a nation-to-nation relationship. It goes against the principle of Bill C-15, which was passed into law.

I want to hear from you, Dr. Bryant, because the indigenous members of my caucus and indigenous communities across Canada have repeatedly said that these amendments affect firearms that are tools. Particularly in the north, my colleague Lori Idlout—she's the member for Nunavut—said that when you're face to face with a polar bear, you can't be equipped with a bolt-action rifle. There is an absolute need for a rifle that can discharge in a semi-automatic manner.

Are you hearing the same thing from indigenous communities? Can you report back to this committee on what some of their concerns have been over this process? I think that's an important voice that needs to be added to this conversation to provide that important context.

• (0925)

Dr. Teri Bryant: I would certainly agree that not only indigenous but also non-indigenous individuals who may confront dangerous, predatory animals in the wilderness may have a need for rapid follow-up shots. In fact, there are quite a number of other situations where rapid follow-up shots are required. For example, in the control of feral pigs, which is an increasing problem in agricultural areas of Alberta, there definitely is a need for that capacity.

I would also point out that one example of many of the firearms that would have been affected is the SKS rifle, which has been used for hunting in a great many situations, particularly by hunters on a budget. The reason why that particular firearm has been very popular is that it was very cheap. At one point, you could get one for \$89. The ability to have a hunting rifle capable of taking deer

reasonably and to have multiple follow-up shots if they're necessary for the control of a dangerous animal, for that low a price, led to its very widespread sale across Canada.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

I only have approximately one minute left, so I want to get one last question to you, Dr. Bryant.

In your opening remarks you made some suggestions about amendments that could be proposed to Bill C-21. You did make mention of the possibility of using the firearms that were listed in amendment G-46, but also codified by amendment G-4, as moving that classification to a restricted category. I know you had a little bit of an exchange on this with Mr. Lloyd, but could you add a little bit to that?

By having a restricted category, what does that mean to the firearm owner? What additional safety steps are in place for the classification of a restricted firearm? I'm also assuming that an exemption might be needed to allow some of those firearms to be used for hunting purposes. Currently, restricted firearms can only legally travel between your home and the range, or a special authorization is needed if you're moving places of residence.

Dr. Teri Bryant: Yes. If they were restricted firearms, then first of all they would be registered. Currently, many but not all of the firearms that are under discussion here are registered. This would ensure that they would all be registered. That would mean that chief firearms officers would have some greater degree of control over who was allowed to possess them in particular jurisdictions.

It also means that you would have to have a restricted firearms licence in order to own them. That involves an additional step. For example, in the case of situations where there are allegations of spousal violence, those firearms could be removed from the home. I would hasten to point out, actually, that we take a very aggressive stance on spousal violence issues in Alberta, particularly since I took over.

• (0930)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Dr. Bryant, but I have to cut you off there.

Dr. Teri Bryant: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll start our second round of questions now with Mr. Motz.

Mr. Motz, please go ahead. You have five minutes.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being here today.

We have heard a lot of statements repeatedly about assault-style firearms and about large-capacity magazines. We know that magazines that are pinned higher than five rounds are already prohibited in this country and have been for a while. We had a witness at our committee this past Tuesday who mentioned automatic assault-style rifles. We've heard it again today: We have assault-style rifles being mentioned. I'm really concerned about the use of that terminology consistently, leaving Canadians to believe that we have automatic rifles legal in this country, and there's no clear definition. What is an assault-style rifle?

What's even more troubling is that this same nonsensical undefined terminology has been repeated by this government when it refers to the military-style assault weapons they want to prohibit in the May 2020 order in council.

Now G-4, which included semi-automatic hunting rifles and shotguns, was in my opinion a failed attempt to redefine what makes a firearm prohibited. As my colleague Mr. Lloyd has said, a gun should be classified by what it does, what it's capable of, not by what it looks like.

Dr. Bryant, with your expertise in this area, can you set the record straight for us? For Canadians who don't know, what is an automatic firearm? Are they legal in Canada? When were they prohibited? What is a "military-style assault weapon"? Do you think it's ludicrous that a government would invent a term, and then try to find a definition for it, including firearms that might fit into that definition?

Dr. Teri Bryant: Thank you.

First of all, fully automatic firearms are ones that continue to discharge when one pulls the trigger. The firearm continues to discharge as long as there's ammunition, so they are basically what most people would call a "machine gun". Those have been illegal for private individuals to have since 1977-78 approximately. There are a tiny number of people who still own them because these were grandfathered at the time, but those people are now extremely old. Well, they are even older than me, so I call that "extremely old".

Then to your question about what would be an assault-style firearm, it would be a fully automatic firearm that fires an intermediate power cartridge. Hence, the original assault rifles like the German Sturmgewehr or the original fully automatic AK-47s are assault firearms.

Now "assault-style" takes it a step back. Basically, they're suggesting it is anything that looks like that. Because some people have different tastes, you can buy a kit that will make a rifle made 150 years ago look like one of those military-style assault firearms simply by changing the stock and putting some accessories on it.

I'm not sure I got all of your questions. They were fairly long.

Mr. Glen Motz: We've heard, Dr. Bryant, the government speak about "military-style assault weapons". Is that what you're referring to when you defined these guns as ones where a single pull of the trigger results in continuous fire until it's out of ammunition? That's what the government says they're trying to prohibit. Have they hit the mark with their proposed prohibitions in this country, so that they would be banning military-style assault weapons that really don't exist anyway legally?

Dr. Teri Bryant: What I defined was an assault weapon. As I suggested with the term "military-style", is that a modern style of suit or a modern style of car? It is much in the eye of the beholder. It's pretty much a meaningless term. It is, as you've suggested before, somewhat ludicrous to create a term and then create a definition to try to match that term.

• (0935)

Mr. Glen Motz: In your opinion, Dr. Bryant, will prohibiting hunting rifles and shotguns, as was previously planned in G-4—the firearms the government wants to prohibit that were listed in G-46 and is still trying to find a definition for, even with the full list they had proposed initially—have any measurable positive impact on public safety in this country?

Dr. Teri Bryant: The short answer is no. The slightly longer answer is this: What's important is not what kind of a gun someone has. It's whether they're allowed to have a gun at all.

That's why, in Alberta, we have focused on improving our screening process, including having subject matter experts on spousal violence and having greater training on a wide range of factors to ensure that anyone who gets a firearms licence deserves to have one. That is why we are ramping up our staffing to ensure prompter attention to any cases—those rare cases—where someone who has a licence becomes a person who shouldn't have a licence, and we can follow up on that promptly in order to ensure public safety.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

We will go now to Mr. Chiang.

Mr. Chiang, go ahead please for five minutes.

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

I'd like to thank all the witnesses this morning for joining us. I appreciate your time and support on this.

My question is for Mr. Ken Price and for Danforth Families.

Personally, my niece was on the same synchronized swimming team as Julianna Kozis, so there is some connection for me. It may be indirect, but there is some connection for me in regard to what happened on Danforth that night.

Mr. Price, I'm confirming that the Danforth Families support the creation and enshrinement into law of the definition of what an assault-style firearm is. Is that correct? Do you support that?

Mr. Ken Price: Yes, we do.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Do you support the definition of the government's creation of the G-4 amendment?

Mr. Ken Price: Yes, we do. I think it's focused on the right things, like how powerful the gun is and what the capacity of that gun and the firearm is. It's focused on the semi-automatic weapons that are commonly referred to as assault-style rifles and have been since the 1970s, including in advertising by the industry.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much.

The gun used that night on the Danforth was a handgun. Why are you speaking out about assault-style rifles to this committee?

Mr. Ken Price: When that happened to us, it was in the summer, and it took us months to decide what we were going to do, to even find each other and to come together. I think we took some time to look at the broader landscape and picture. We decided we would speak from our experience but also acknowledge what's happened to other people.

We've been very consistent. Right from the February 1 news conference in 2019, we said we are against these kinds of guns: handguns and semi-automatic assault-style rifles. It's very consistent with our position that we would be here today to comment on this.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much.

My next question is directed to Dr. Whitmore. In the past, I was a police officer for 28 years, and in my previous career I investigated a lot of domestics and a lot of femicides where weapons were used—different styles of weapons.

In your view, what steps can our government take to ensure that hunting rights of indigenous communities are protected, while simultaneously taking dangerous assault weapons off our streets?

Dr. Erin Whitmore: Thank you for that question. I'm going to pass that to my colleague, Suzanne Zaccour.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you.

Ms. Suzanne Zaccour: Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

There are a lot of stakeholders in this debate and everyone recognizes that indigenous people should be consulted in this debate, and I might add indigenous women and indigenous women's associations. There's been a divide between the hunters and the intimate partner violence in the indigenous, as if there's no overlap between some of these categories. We support continued consultations with first nations, Métis and Inuit people, and indigenous women's associations.

We also, as has been said, support the amendments and support both the list and a permanent or evergreen definition of guns that are not reasonably used for hunting, for anyone, in a view to protect public safety.

• (0940)

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much.

How would you feel about a possible exemption for indigenous communities related to prohibited firearms? Do you have any concerns with potential exemptions for indigenous communities?

Ms. Suzanne Zaccour: I'm not able to take a position on that on behalf of the coalition because that's not the viewpoint that we're here to represent.

If guns are identified as not reasonably used for hunting, then they're not reasonably used for hunting. However, whether there should be an exemption and whether it would work in practice is something I'm not able to take a position on right now.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much.

Mr. Price, I'd like to come back to you.

Since you have participated in this committee a few times, I just want you to wrap up by telling us what you feel our government should do to keep Canadians safe in the cities and in the rural areas. What do you think we should do?

Mr. Ken Price: It's a big question. I think Bill C-21 captures a number of topics, and it is worthwhile that the committee is looking at that and trying to figure out how we can improve it.

Maybe one comment I'll make is there's still, I think, an open discussion with respect to the handgun freeze, exemptions for that handgun freeze and exemptions particularly for elite sport shooters and whether that will be expanded to continue a handgun market that I think we're intending to freeze. That's an open discussion, one that we have taken a position on and one that we're concerned about.

When we look back at what Bill C-21 has in it overall, it talks about borders. It talks about punishment for abusers. It talks about resources for underserved communities. It talks about gun control, and it's starting to address, I think, issues around ghost guns and replica weapons. Those are the topics. It's the breadth of Bill C-21 that we admire, and we would say that we want to support it because, imperfect even as it is today, it would be a far cry better than where we are right now.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chiang.

I forgot to say that we will have to end this panel after Mr. MacGregor.

[*Translation*]

It is now Ms. Michaud's turn.

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

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

Ms. Bryant, the Government of Alberta appointed you as the Chief Firearms Officer to defend the rights of law-abiding gun owners. In an article published by Radio-Canada in November 2022, you said that the G-4 amendment would have an impact on hunters and recreational gun owners and that nearly all firearms could be used for hunting.

To your knowledge, right now in Canada, how many makes and models of firearms can be used for hunting? Is it about a hundred, several hundred, thousands? Do you have any idea of the number of firearms on the market that could be used for hunting?

Dr. Teri Bryant: I think there are thousands of models.

There is a firearms reference table that shows the classifications, and it includes thousands of firearms. Many models could be used for hunting even though their use is prohibited by law.

It is difficult to say exactly, but there are certainly thousands.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I understand. Thank you. That gives us a good idea.

After they were presented, the amendments caused a lot of surprises and everyone was talking about them. In my riding, hunters were concerned that their firearm might end up on the list of prohibited weapons. Some of them said that, if the gun they use for hunting ended up on the list, then they would simply buy a different one. They were not too worried about it.

What we finally understood from the amendments, because they were rather difficult to comprehend, is that some 480 makes and models of firearms would be classified as prohibited. Only about a dozen of those are commonly used for hunting.

Even without those 480 models, don't you think that there will still be some firearms left on the market that can be used for hunting? Is that your understanding given the number you provided earlier?

● (0945)

Dr. Teri Bryant: There will certainly be some models that can be used for hunting, but not all firearms are created equal. Every person has specific needs. Quite often, a person's specific requirements can be met by one gun and not another. That is why there are thousands of models out there.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

We'll go to Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. MacGregor, please bring it home in two and a half minutes.

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

I'll devote this last section to the National Association of Women and the Law.

First of all, I want to recognize your work on this bill. We've had some fantastic conversations about possible amendments to strengthen it. One unfortunate thing about amendments G-4 and G-46 is that they suck all the oxygen out of the room when we talk about Bill C-21, in general. When you look at the middle clauses of this bill—especially the ones empowering chief firearms officers to be much more vigilant in revoking licences, if there is ever any suspected domestic abuse or violence going on—they are, in fact, probably much more effective, in my view, in terms of public safety.

I was also very interested in Dr. Bryant's opening suggestion of a half measure, perhaps: the possibility of using the classification of "restricted" so that the firearms in question have to be registered. There's a need for a restricted possession and authorization licence, with much more stringent requirements put in place. I think that, in a home where domestic violence is present, any firearm in the hands of the wrong person will be dangerous, no matter its make or model.

I know we can't talk in detail about the amendments in place for other clauses of the bill, but I would like to invite the National Association of Women and the Law to talk about the submissions they made to committee members that attempt to strengthen those particular clauses of the bill, so that chief firearms officers have even more authority to target individuals when a firearm is present, so we can address violence going on in a domestic situation.

Could you talk about the rationale behind what brought you to that, and your experience and expertise in this area?

Ms. Suzanne Zaccour: I appreciate the question.

I want to add a little pre-answer: Every time we take a position on anything, we're always asked, "Is there not another, better way, and is that going to be sufficient?" Every time, we say we want to reach full equality and will take every necessary step. We don't believe in choosing between two partial ways to make women safe.

That being said, I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the other proposals we've made regarding Bill C-21. When there is danger, it's important to act quickly. Guns need to be removed quickly and not returned to the gun owner to dispose of them where they see fit—to give them to their brother or roommate. We proposed solutions to make these yellow flags—I think they've been called that—quicker and more effective.

We also made suggestions regarding protection orders. People currently subject to one should be ineligible to have guns. We understand this would have limited use for public officers, who are not subject to the same regime, but it would be useful to target some gun owners engaging in family violence.

I also want to respond to your idea that the air has been sucked out of the rest of the discussion. That is certainly true. There's been an escalation in the debate. I believe disinformation is part of the reason. We hear questions about automatic weapons, which are not part of the debate. We hear questions about the way a gun looks. I've read the amendments, and there's nothing about colour, so there's some kind of disinformation going on. We felt compelled to re-enter this debate, in order to recentre the conversation on what it's really about, because most people don't read laws for a living and might be very confused by the debate currently.

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

That brings our questioning to an end for this panel. I would like to thank all the witnesses for their time today and for sharing their expertise. It is most helpful to our study.

With that, we will suspend and bring in the next panel. Thank you, all.

• (0950)

(Pause)

• (0955)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

I would like to welcome our second panel of witnesses.

With us by video conference we have, as an individual, Dr. John Kortbeek, professor emeritus of the Cumming school of medicine at the University of Calgary. From Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns, we have Dr. Najma Ahmed, doctor, and Dr. Anna Dare, general surgeon. From the Nunavut Association of Municipalities, we have Mr. Joe Savikataaq, president.

Welcome to you all. Thank you for being here.

I will give each group an opportunity for up to five minutes of opening statements, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions. I will invite Dr. Kortbeek to make an opening statement.

Please go ahead, sir. You have five minutes.

Dr. John B. Kortbeek (Professor Emeritus, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, vice-chairs and members of the committee. I appreciate the privilege of presenting this morning.

My name is John Kortbeek. I'm a recently retired physician. I practised trauma, general surgery and critical care in Calgary for over three decades. I also held a number of leadership positions, including head of trauma services in Calgary. I was chairman of the department of surgery at the University of Calgary and the Calgary zone for 10 years. I served as president of the Trauma Association of Canada and as a governor for the American College of Surgeons. I also recently served as a director for Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns until my retirement.

I had an early introduction to the effectiveness and power of policy and legislation. When I completed my surgery and critical training in Canada, I travelled to the southern United States to pursue a trauma fellowship. I resuscitated and operated on six gun-

shot wounds that first night. That was more than I had seen in my entire residency at that time in Calgary. When I returned to Canada, I was fortunate to bear witness to significant improvements in our trauma systems and trauma care over the subsequent decades.

Today, in Canada, if you arrive at a trauma centre following a gunshot wound, you don't have a head injury and you have a blood pressure, you have a reasonable chance of surviving. That comes at a cost. That cost may be prolonged stays in the intensive care unit on a ventilator; days, weeks or months in hospital; multiple operations by multiple specialists; and prolonged rehab.

After discharge, we follow these patients for weeks, months and, in some cases, years to manage their complications. Often, they need reoperations for correction of their bowel stomas, reoperations for bowel obstructions, debridement of ulcers, referrals to chronic pain specialists, etc. There also exists a significant mental health cost to this. Many of them cannot return to their former work and pursue a living. As you can imagine, it also has a tremendous effect on their families.

My engagement on this issue was precipitated by several things. One was that I was on call in 2011 when the Claresholm massacre occurred. That involved four young college students who were returning from Lethbridge to Calgary. They were pursued by a gunman and shot near Claresholm. Three died at the scene and one presented to our hospital alive. The gunman subsequently died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

I have seen a lot in my career, but I find that episode particularly troublesome to this day.

The other event that was occurring was my colleagues in the trauma service and I—and in the ICU—were noticing what we thought was an increase in the number of gunshot wounds we were admitting to our hospital. That was the impetus to do a full literature review, retrieve our trauma registry data and present city-wide critical care rounds at the University of Calgary. Some of that was subsequently reviewed in a podcast on CJS, the Canadian Journal of Surgery's Cold Steel.

During the rounds, we were able to substantiate the significant increase in admissions to our hospitals for gunshot wounds. We pulled Edmonton and Calgary data. It more than doubled in 10 years, despite a 20% increase in the population. Today, gunshot wound admissions are a weekly event in both Edmonton and Calgary, with about 100 a year.

Through the literature review, we were also able to substantiate good evidence in the literature that there is an association between the number of guns in a community or a society—particularly handguns—and endemic gun violence, and an association with the presence and access to semi-automatic weapons with large-capacity magazines and multiple mass shooting events.

On a personal note, I don't own a gun, but I grew up hunting with my father. My family hunts. They own guns. I accompany them on hunts because I like the walk and the venison. I own land in southern Alberta where we allow friends and family to hunt. I've spoken to many of my friends who hunt. None of them own semi-automatic weapons or use them for hunting. None of them have large-capacity magazines. At least for sport and recreation hunting, they're not necessary in the view of my friends, my family and the people who hunt on my land.

In summary, there's clear evidence on the association between access to handguns and endemic gun violence, and access to semi-automatic weapons and large-capacity magazines and multiple mass shooting events. There is good evidence that the restriction of access to these weapons reduces endemic gun violence and reduces the number of victims of multiple mass shooting events.

Ultimately, it's a choice society has to make. What guns are permissible? What should we allow access to? What level of gun violence are we willing to accept in our community?

Thank you.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you, Doctor.

We go now to Dr. Ahmed and Dr. Dare for an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Please, go ahead.

Dr. Anna Dare (General Surgeon, Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns): Thank you.

I am here today as a scientist, physician, Canadian citizen and mother. I am a surgeon and epidemiologist at the University of Toronto.

I did not set out to study firearms deaths or policy. During my post-doctoral fellowship I examined the major causes of death in the Americas. I was surprised to find that firearm injury was an important cause of premature death, including in Canada, and one that could be addressed with a public health science approach.

Legislation is widely considered to be the foundation on which effective public health responses to firearm harms are built. Amendments G-4 and G-46 specifically address assault weapons. The public health intent of prohibiting these weapons is to remove from public circulation those firearms that can quickly and efficiently inflict maximal harm on the human body.

Assault weapon bans reduce mass shootings. This has been studied in several peer nations that have introduced them. The highest-quality studies demonstrate that legislation prohibiting assault weapons and restricting magazine capacity has led to the reduction in, one, the number of mass shootings, and two, the number of fatalities per event.

Australia's national Firearms Act, which was introduced in 1996 after the country's largest mass shooting, closely resembles Bill C-21. Its definition of assault weapons is similar to the G-4 and G-46 amendments. Many scholars have analyzed the impact of these laws over the past 25 years since they were introduced. There is strong evidence that the laws caused reductions in mass shoot-

ings in Australia. No public mass shootings have occurred in Australia for 23 years after the legislation was adopted. The chance of that happening, in the absence of the law change, is one in 200,000. There's also consistent evidence that rates of firearm suicides decreased after the law was introduced, by 74%, on average.

Prohibitions must be comprehensive, restrictive, national and durable. Definitions are critical. Legislation prohibiting assault weapons must outline a specific set of characteristics of a firearm and its ammunition that make it lethal and inappropriate for civilian ownership. Loopholes and limitations can substantially weaken the public health impact. A definition must cover both current and future variants.

I would like to speak now to my experience as a surgeon and as a Canadian.

I wish I could bring you into our trauma bay to show you the harms firearms do every week in our community. It is shocking how quickly someone can lose their entire blood volume after a gunshot wound. The heart looks like a deflated balloon—still trying to beat but with nothing to pump out. Making your way to the quiet room after never gets easier. You are telling someone's mother, partner or child that they have been shot and have died.

Mass shootings leave an outsized imprint on the national psyche. They strike at the heart of our belief that we live in a safe, tolerant and peaceful country. The political responses that mass shooting engender also define countries on the international stage. "Tough on crime" is not the answer here. Nine out of the last 10 mass shootings in Canada were reportedly committed by Canadians without a criminal record.

Canada is not exceptional in its need to balance firearms ownership and use with public safety. Other countries, including New Zealand, have all been through similar national reckonings. In 2019, following a mass shooting, New Zealand banned semi-automatic rifles and shotguns and further restricted magazine capacity and firearm caliber. Just like in Canada, emotions ran high as the legislation was being crafted, but the conversation has moved on. When the public was polled a year later, 81% supported the law change. Three years later, my family members in New Zealand and many others still go hunting with legally owned firearms.

To practice science is to ask questions. I leave you with these: How do we balance public safety with legitimate firearm use? What are the core values of our society? What trade-offs are we willing to make for fewer deaths and for safer communities? When the next mass shooting happens, will we regret failing to act today? Would we be able to say to someone's family member, "I did everything I could"?

The physicians represented in our organization and the patients and families across Canada ask that you permanently remove firearms that are designed to kill people efficiently and quickly from our communities.

Thank you.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you, Doctor.

I now invite Mr. Savikataaq to make an opening statement for five minutes, please.

Go ahead, sir.

Hon. Joe Savikataaq (President, Nunavut Association of Municipalities): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to thank you for the invitation to present to this committee.

I would also like to express our appreciation to our member of Parliament, Lori Idlout, for her work in representing the issues of Nunavut with respect to the proposed amendments to Bill C-21.

Finally, thank you to all those who agreed to withdraw the amendments. By doing so, you have recognized that hunting is an important part of Inuit identity, culture and survival. Had this proceeded, it would have had a devastating effect on Nunavummiut.

This morning I'm representing 25 communities and 25 mayors, as I'm the president of all the municipalities here in Nunavut. The Nunavut Association of Municipalities, representing the 25 municipalities across Nunavut, have openly opposed the recent amendments to Bill C-21. If the amendments were passed, the use of firearms that are critical for hunting and for safety on the land would have made us criminals in our own land and our own country.

Many of the proposed firearms—there are approximately 1,500 of them listed in the amendments—have become a necessary part of our culture. They provide protection from aggressive wildlife and allow us to harvest for our families and for our community members where we're living. With the cost of living in Nunavut being approximately 44% higher than the national average, we need to hunt to offset the cost of food. The other factor is the potential for human-animal conflicts that we may encounter on the land. The legal firearms that we are currently using allow us to maintain our own food security and personal safety.

To provide you with an example, a hunter would use a firearm to deter an aggressive bear. Most often it takes more than several shots to ward them off. If a bear cannot be scared off and continues to charge a hunter, the amendments would not allow the peace of mind and the ability of the hunter to return to their loved ones. If this bill were passed, there would have been more shoot-to-kill situ-

ations rather than deterring. This legislation, if amended, would have increased fatalities for both wildlife and people.

Trying to reduce gun violence by including the firearms used by law-abiding gun owners for survival would have caused hardship to Nunavummiut. Inuit respect their firearms. They are a tool for survival. Gun owners in Nunavut are licensed with a background check and a renewal every five years. A national ban on hunting rifles that allow us to maintain our own food security by hunting and personal security while maintaining a cultural lifestyle on the land is continued colonialism and does not respect our way of life. Nunavut was created so that our culture and lifestyle would survive.

If the intention of these amendments was to improve the safety of humans living in urban areas, that would make total sense. It does not make sense to include the firearms that Inuit hunters need to harvest their food from the land and the water. Life is hard enough as it is for Nunavummiut. Nunavut has the highest rate of indigenous low-income households, with 22% of the population living below the poverty line in Canada.

If these amendments were passed, a hunter providing for his family, the elders and the community by using the right piece of equipment to maintain the safety of the hunter against aggressive animals would have unknowingly committed a crime. They would have a prison sentence of possibly up to 10 years. People who take other people's lives often receive less time than this. To counteract gun violence, the policy to do so should not affect law-abiding Nunavummiut trying to survive, make a living, get by and provide for their families.

If there are further amendments to Bill C-21, we request that Inuit be consulted so that we can inform you of the impact the amendments will have on our culture and traditional lifestyle. Thank you very much for that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savikataaq.

We'll start our first round of questions. I will have to shorten these rounds. Instead of six minutes, they will be five minutes. The following round will be reduced somewhat as well in order for us to get through this. We have a fairly short time.

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

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

Thank you very much to the witnesses for being with us today.

I have a few questions for Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns. Thank you for being here.

Dr. Kortbeek, I believe you were also associated with the Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns as well, but you're appearing separately. Is that correct?

Dr. John B. Kortbeek: Yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much. I appreciated the physician testimony we received today.

It's my understanding that you as a group have been to committee a few times now. Is that correct?

I see nodding.

You have met with the Liberal government on several occasions over the last number of years. Is that correct?

Dr. Najma Ahmed (Doctor, Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns): I'll take that question, thank you.

We've met with representatives from many parties, including municipal and federal representatives from the NDP government as well as the Liberal government, and we have sought to meet with members of the Conservative government but have, as of yet, not been successful.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm the lead on this file. I don't believe I've ever received an invite, but if I have, I'm happy to meet with you anytime.

Dr. Najma Ahmed: That's good to hear.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Absolutely.

I know that you have met with Jagmeet Singh, which is great to see, but you've specifically met with the Liberals since 2019, either the PMO, staff, Minister Mendicino, Minister Blair or Minister Freeland. In fact, since 2019, it's been 22 times.

Is that correct? That's what I have from the lobbyist registry.

• (1015)

Dr. Najma Ahmed: I can't verify the number of times. It's true that we've been in communication, email communication or phone communication, with multiple ministers on this file. That is correct.

I am a constituent of Minister Freeland, and I've met with her on various matters while she's been in government.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

I'm just taking the numbers from the official lobbyist registry. I appreciate that, and, again, the feedback you've provided to this committee is an important piece of what we're discussing.

Dr. Ahmed, I want to ask you about a few things. Again, I know that certainly the Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns has met with the Liberals 22 times in the last few years and certainly has appeared at committee before, but I did want to ask you about some of the positions you've taken concerning firearms.

On July 6, 2020, you tweeted out that you were in favour of banning civilian ownership of guns. You said, "Honestly—it's the guns, it's the guns. Ban civilian ownership of guns."

On January 15—

Dr. Najma Ahmed: May I answer?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm just going to finish, and then I'll go over to you.

On January 15, 2019, you said "No civilian needs access to guns" on Twitter. On December 18, 2019, you retweeted something from an account called NoGunsInCanada.

Again, your group has met with the Liberal government to advise on policy several times, and the position that you've taken is that no one in Canada should own guns. Would you like to comment on that?

Dr. Najma Ahmed: Yes, I'd like to correct the record.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Please do.

Dr. Najma Ahmed: Our organization has met with members of different and various parties and continues to seek an audience with the Conservative government and would be happy to do so at any time.

Our position statement is very clearly articulated on our website. We support an evidence-informed policy to reduce harm, death and injury from guns, including legislation to ban the most lethal types of weapons, which is what we are—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Dr. Ahmed. Thank you very much.

Dr. Najma Ahmed: May I finish?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I am going to continue. I have a few more questions but, again, I appreciate that you've met with Freeland on other issues as well.

Dr. Najma Ahmed: I'd like to clarify for the record, please, that our organization does not support the banning of civilian ownership of all guns.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm sorry. Are you saying that the policy of the group you're representing is not to ban all civilian ownership? Is that just your personal opinion?

Dr. Najma Ahmed: No, it's not my personal opinion either. It's my personal opinion and the position of the group to ban handguns and semi-automatic weapons, but not civilian use of all weapons.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

Okay, so what you've tweeted on three separate occasions endorsing the ban of all civilian ownership, you don't—

Dr. Najma Ahmed: That's a misrepresentation.

Thank you.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Those are the words that you wrote, ma'am, respectfully, on Twitter. I read them verbatim. It's fine.

I noted that you have mentioned evidence as well, but there were two studies on your website that your group has since removed. Again, new studies come and it's fine to add and remove them, but I did note that the two studies that were removed don't serve the policy position that you've taken.

In fact, one of them in particular was talking about suicide and the correlation between firearm restrictions and suicide. The study itself, which has now been removed from your website, suggests that suicide was not decreased by restrictions of firearms. In fact, unfortunately, as other evidence has shown, if people want to commit suicide, they will use whatever means they can. I did find it interesting that it was removed from your website, and I know your group has cited a lot of information, so it's just a bit odd to me.

There was another study that you removed from your website as well that did not support your conclusion. It said, "Specific laws directed at firearm trafficking, improving child safety, or the banning of military-style assault weapons were not associated with changes in firearm homicide rates. The evidence for laws restricting guns—

Again, that was removed from your website.

The Chair: That is time.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wish I had that last minute, but thank you.

The Chair: I understand.

I invite the witness to respond in 30 seconds, if you wish to respond.

Dr. Najma Ahmed: I would just make the point that there's overwhelming evidence internationally that decreasing access to lethal means decreases suicide rates on a national level, on a per-population level, and that the majority of people do not substitute a lethal mechanism. Even if people attempt suicide and that attempt does not result in their death, the majority of people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, I do feel that if the witness is going to be allowed to go over time, she should have to table the required evidence that she's talking about.

• (1020)

Dr. Najma Ahmed: We would be pleased to table the evidence—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

Thank you to the witness.

We'll go now to Ms. Damoff.

Please go ahead for five minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

Dr. Kortbeek, I listened to a podcast you did where you talked about the "burden of injury" from firearms and said that the burden of injury is why you became involved in this issue. Could you maybe talk about that a bit?

Dr. John B. Kortbeek: Yes, certainly. As I said, we were experiencing an increase in injury admissions in Alberta and were able to substantiate that we're now admitting about 100 patients a year for gunshot wounds, in addition to homicide and suicide. The national figures for homicide and suicide are approximately 200 and 600 for firearms.

In Alberta, the admission data often doesn't get presented. We did have a national database for injury admissions that was within CIHI—the national trauma registry—but it was discontinued due to funding approximately 10 years ago. Having a national repository that captures all of the injury admission data for firearms would actually be very useful to inform policy.

Nevertheless, we've seen an increase in admissions. The prairie provinces have the highest number of admissions per capita in Canada. Based on the data I've seen from B.C. and Alberta, annual admissions in Canada probably exceed 500. There's a significant—

Ms. Pam Damoff: Are all those admissions—

Oh, I'm sorry, Doctor.

Dr. John B. Kortbeek: There's a significant burden of injury from firearms.

Multiple mass shooting events fortunately are uncommon. They still attract media attention and grab the public's attention, as was seen with the 2019 shooting of three people in northern B.C., which resulted in daily frontline headline news and the largest manhunt in recent Canadian history.

They occur about once a year. The majority of them have been associated with either handguns or semi-automatic weapons with large-capacity magazines, the latter resulting in a greater number of casualties per incident.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you very much.

Dr. Ahmed, do you support the government's proposed red flag laws?

Dr. Najma Ahmed: Thanks for the question.

Our organization supports well-written and properly implemented red flag laws, as they have been shown to decrease the number and severity of public mass shootings, as well as having an effect of decreasing suicides. Our organization does support the proposed red and yellow flag laws.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

To go back to you just quickly, Dr. Kortbeek, have you conducted any academic research on the topic of firearm injuries?

Dr. John B. Kortbeek: Only with respect to treatment and not with respect to surveillance, apart from the presentation at city-wide critical care rounds and the publication of the interview podcast with the Canadian Journal of Surgery, Cold Steel.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

Dr. Ahmed, we had Dr. Langmann here, who testified that his research says that access to firearms does not result in an increase in suicides and that stricter gun control measures do not lead to reductions in homicides. Do you agree with his work? Are you familiar with it? I wonder if you could elaborate on that a bit.

Dr. Najma Ahmed: Thank you. That's a great question, Ms. Damoff.

I'll hand it over to Dr. Dare, who is prepared to answer.

Dr. Anna Dare: Thank you.

As with any field of study, there are varied opinions and perspectives on the data. There are some lone wolves in this area of research, no question, but the consensus within the scientific community internationally is that comprehensive firearm laws save lives.

Within the context of Canada's measuring the impact of gun laws, one of the challenges we do have is that we don't disaggregate data, and it makes it very difficult to study this problem. We should also be very wary of drawing any sweeping conclusion. That said, there have been some Canadian papers looking at major gun control changes in the late 1970s and in 1995 that are considered to be methodologically sound and do show reductions in homicides and suicides.

I would note and caution this committee and the references it draws to a couple of the Canadian studies that have come before the committee most recently. They ask very important and relevant questions, but there are major flaws in the design, analysis and reporting of the results. We will be submitting a more thorough statistical assessment based on input from independent academics and biostatisticians across North America, including in leading universities such as Johns Hopkins, Harvard and Toronto, to both the journal and this committee.

The method used in 2023 and the 2020 paper looking at Canadian legislation by a sole author, called difference-in-differences, cannot be applied to a single population exposed to the same legislation. It chooses the incorrect control group and it is highly selective in which laws it chooses to include and how it divides time periods up.

I would also like to acknowledge that not all peer review is created equal and not all journals are created equal. PLOS One, where these studies have been published, does not rank in the top 5,000 scientific peer-reviewed journals currently. I do publish on firearm mortality surveillance around the world, and my work has been published in *The Lancet Public Health*, which is the world's leading public health journal.

• (1025)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you very much.

Dr. Najma Ahmed: Ms. Damoff, if I could add one comment, I've read that paper and Dr. Dare's done an excellent analysis of it as well, but I would urge anyone to read that paper and particularly the discussion in which the author himself documents and acknowledges the many, many limitations of that study.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have to go now to our next panellist.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, you have five minutes.

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

I thank the witnesses for being here today. We are very grateful to them.

I have a question for the representatives from Doctors for Protection from Guns. As you said, you have witnessed gun violence first-hand. Quite frankly, you see some rather traumatizing things.

You are not necessarily obligated to advocate for better gun control, but you do and you are here. I thank you for that.

In a letter from last December, you spoke about disinformation and the tactics the gun lobby was using to claim that certain guns would be included in or excluded from the legislation and amendments. Upon closer examination, we see that this information is not true. Most of the guns that were described on social media as firearms that the government wanted to ban would not be affected. The posts were referring to a similar model or there was some other issue.

Certain tactics have even been used against you, Ms. Ahmed. I learned that, in 2019, you had close to 70 complaints filed against you by members of the Canadian Coalition of Firearms Rights.

I would like you to tell us about that experience.

Do you think that this kind of tactic hinders the debate that we are having and interferes with the passage of legislation for better gun control?

[English]

Dr. Najma Ahmed: Thank you for the question.

Yes, you correctly point out that when we first started this work, I was personally targeted by members of the Canadian Coalition for Firearm Rights. Seventy of their members, people I had never met or treated as a physician, made complaints to the regulatory body in Ontario, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, alleging that my work in this area, my advocacy in this area, was somehow unprofessional and that my licence to practice medicine should be revoked. After a review of those complaints, the college concluded that those complaints were an abusive process and frivolous, and dismissed each and every one of them out of hand.

To answer the second part of your question, I would like to say I believe these tactics are specifically used to intimidate, harass and quieten the other side. I would say that the majority of physicians and the majority of Canadians are in favour of evidence-informed firearm policy, but there's a very loud, vociferous and constant drumbeat from the other side, the intent of which is simply to harass and intimidate those of us who would come forward with a voice of science and advocate on behalf of the communities and patients that we serve.

I would also note that a key function and role of physicians in society is that of advocate. This has been true if you look at smoking legislation, seat belt legislation, asbestos or safe water. All of those public health advances have in many cases been spearheaded and in all cases supported by physicians who have seen the results of poor legislation at the coalface, which is in our emergency departments, operating rooms and hospitals.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

I am sorry that happened to you.

At this stage of the game, what do you expect from the government and the members of this committee when it comes to the passage of Bill C-21. I know that the government is reworking some amendments and may come back to us with amendments on military-style assault weapons. As it has been said many times, this was not an accurate way of describing the weapons in question. There are some good things and some not so good things. The process could be improved.

At this stage of the game, what do you expect from the government and the opposition members?

• (1030)

[English]

Dr. Najma Ahmed: Thank you.

I'll start and perhaps I'll ask Dr. Dare to jump in.

I will be brief. I think it's exceptionally important, as we consider amendments G-4 and G-46, that a clear definition is put forth, one that does not allow copycat models to come forth in the future. I think it's very important that we address the proliferation of handguns and that we continue to use the science to inform public policy in this matter.

Dr. Dare.

Dr. Anna Dare: Thank you.

I would echo those comments, and I think it is helpful to consider the international context as well in which much of this legislation has gone before. Internationally, legislation really seeks to target two common features when it comes to assault weapons: prohibiting semi-automatic rifles and shotguns, and restricting magazine capacity. Those two things must go together.

The technical details of how those are realized are specific to each country context. However, it's very important to retain the core intent in mind to reflect on what is known and the evidence, to be aware of what are high-quality studies and what are not high-quality studies in support of that, and to acknowledge that many countries do grant narrow and detailed exemptions in specific areas. That may be an important way forward, particularly for some of our more unique communities.

The Chair: I'm sorry to have to cut you off there. Thank you.

Mr. MacGregor, please go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank all of our witnesses, some of whom are reappearing, for helping to guide our committee through this study.

Mr. Savikataaq, I'd like to direct my questions to you. I want to thank you for your opening statement, for making an appearance and for also giving a very important perspective—the indigenous perspective—on what these proposed amendments would mean for communities like yours.

When Bill C-21 was first introduced, on the day it was introduced, the minister made mention of the fact that amendments would also be added to the bill. When they were brought in, and we did spend a lot of time on them, there was quite a visceral reaction from many indigenous communities.

I just want to know, before those amendments were brought in, were any communities within your jurisdiction ever consulted by the Government of Canada on these amendments and what they would mean for communities like yours?

Hon. Joe Savikataaq: Thank you for that.

That's a negative. No, we were not consulted on anything, on how we would have been affected or impacted. There was absolutely no consultation or information flowing to us in the whole territory of Nunavut here at our level.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: In other words, the amendments were brought in and then we saw the Minister of Public Safety make a trip up to the Yukon. Therefore, they were brought in and then consultation happened after the fact. Is that correct, or was it an attempt at consultation? I would label it more as an engagement and not a consultation.

Hon. Joe Savikataaq: I am not aware of anything that happened in Yukon territory, as I am in Nunavut. As I am aware, there were no consultations that took place in Nunavut.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for clarifying that and confirming that.

In our previous federal Parliament we passed into law Bill C-15. One of the primary aims of that legislation was to ensure that the Government of Canada, in consultation and co-operation with indigenous peoples, takes all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the declaration.

We saw in December of last year that the Assembly of First Nations took a very unusual step in passing an emergency resolution that identified article 5, article 18, article 34 and article 39 as the reasoning that they were opposed to these amendments of Bill C-21.

In your mind, Mr. Savikataaq, do these amendments in the proposed legislation from the Government of Canada satisfy the principles of the government's previous Bill C-15 when it is attempting to harmonize Canada's laws with the declaration?

• (1035)

Hon. Joe Savikataaq: No, they do not. In my opinion, they do not do that.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I only have a couple of minutes left.

You detailed at length what these amendments would have done in terms of not only the safety of hunters living in your community but also food security. You mentioned that 22% of residents in your territory are living below the poverty line, and many have to supplement their diets from the land.

What does consultation mean to you? In order for the government to satisfy the legal requirements of Bill C-15, what does that mean? What, at a bare minimum, does the Government of Canada need to do with indigenous communities before introducing laws that can have this kind of profound impact on their way of life?

Hon. Joe Savikataaq: I'll start off by saying that maybe the 22% part there.... Please be aware that every Nunavut community is fly-in only. There is no road connected to here, so nothing can be trucked here. Everything is flown in, which raises the prices dramatically.

With regard to the consultation part, I believe that the proper way would be to consult with the people on the ground who will be affected. Consult not only certain people who could make decisions, but go right to the people who will be affected in person and on the ground. Have a foot there. That would be the best way to consult with the people on how to get the actual word from the heart of the people right on the ground.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

I want to close by saying that I think it's incredibly important. This government has clearly identified a nation-to-nation relationship as being the most important relationship, and I think it's quite obvious in this instance that this very high bar has not been met.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll start our second round. We have about 10 minutes left—less than 10 minutes—so we're going to abbreviate this round to four two-minute slots, one for each party. We'll start with Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Shipley, please go ahead for two minutes.

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

This first question will be for Mr. Savikataaq.

Sir, I had the privilege and honour of coming up last summer to Iqaluit and spending a couple days. It was a great learning experience. On one of those days, we went out with a local gentleman for a seal harvest. It was a long day. It was on a boat on a very cold lake. It was windy. It was just an eye-opening experience.

He was successful in getting a seal that day. It took a long time to get one. It's not quite as easy as you would think. They harvest them with a long rifle. I don't have the calibre of what the gun was at the time.

Upon return to the community, it was heartwarming to see, once we got back to his home, his wife come running out with excitement that he had been able to get this seal. Even his children came out and watched and helped him dress that seal. They were going to be using every single part of that seal for feeding their family, for even making mittens. Anything left over was going to go to the dogs that they had for wintertime transportation.

Could you expand on how important the hunting is, and lifestyle, in the community up there? I also did take the time to go to a grocery store when I was up there, and I was astounded at the prices. Perhaps you can expand on that a little bit, please, sir.

Hon. Joe Savikataaq: I'd like to thank you for coming to Nunavut. I encourage everyone who is here listening across the country and our nation to come see our beautiful territory.

Hunting is so important. Like I said, we are so isolated. There are no roads connecting us. Everything is really expensive, and it's fly-in only. Prices are expensive. We get some subsidies on certain types of food. However, the main staple of our diet is country food, which comes from the land and from the water. That is very important to provide for people who are barely getting by. Many harvesters appear to help others in need. They go out for them. They get the food for them, and they deliver it to them, right to the house of the elders or anyone who might be...like a single mom or a single dad raising children.

In that way, that's very important. It really helps. It's very healthy food, all the country food that we get from using these firearms to provide for everyone and for food security, which is quite a serious issue up here in Nunavut.

Thank you.

• (1040)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

We will now go to Mr. Noormohamed.

Go ahead, please, sir. You have two minutes.

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

First of all, Dr. Ahmed, thank you for what you do not just in your advocacy work but also as a physician.

I want to clear something up: There was some attempt to imply that, because you've met with the government, somehow you have undue influence over us, or we have undue influence over you. I think it's also important to note that members of the opposition—many of whom will make these claims—have met with the gun lobby numerous times in the last few months. This is an important point for us to make.

I want to clarify a couple of things.

Do you get paid to do the advocacy work you do?

Dr. Najma Ahmed: Thanks for the question.

No, none of us receives any salary or in-kind support for the work we do.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Why would you do this, then? Why put yourself through this?

Dr. Najma Ahmed: Part of being a complete physician is advocating for the communities we serve. I'm a trauma surgeon. Many of the patients I primarily treat in my trauma practice are injured by gun violence. The overwhelming scientific evidence shows that a multipronged approach is required, including legislative action.

I am not the only one. Our organization has over 1,000 members. Our position statement is endorsed by 16 medical organizations, nursing groups and women's groups, all of which believe in the work we're doing. They comprise tens of thousands of members who also advocate for the health of the patients they serve.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you very much.

I hope my colleagues across the way heard your answer, because it's a very powerful testament to the important work you all do.

I want to thank you for taking the time to do what you do and to care for patients. I can't imagine the impact that work has on all of you. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

[*Translation*]

It is now Ms. Michaud's turn.

Ms. Michaud, you have two minutes.

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

Dr. Kortbeek, I would like to ask you a question in closing.

In the open letter that you published with some of your colleagues last December, you indicated that it is quite possible to have legislation similar to Bill C-21 while preserving hunting practices.

You mentioned other countries where this works quite well, including Australia, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom and many others. That seems to be a desired and desirable compromise.

One of the biggest concerns people have about the G-4 and G-46 amendments is that they will no longer be able to hunt, which is not necessarily true.

Can you tell us a bit more about what you learned about the legislation in other countries?

[*English*]

Dr. John B. Kortbeek: The best-publicized one is probably the Firearms Act passed in Australia after the Port Arthur massacre. It restricts handguns and requires a reason to purchase them—target-shooting or some other rationale. They also have to go through training and use a borrowed gun at a gun club for six months prior to being issued their own firearm. They have to show continued active participation in a gun club to use the firearm. That is one approach. They banned semi-automatic weapons with large-capacity magazines, but they still have an active hunting culture, just as Canada does.

The U.K. went further. They banned handguns. They have an incidence of firearm homicides and admissions that's probably one-10th of ours. They took a different approach.

Ultimately, in public health, the solutions suggested need to be evidence-based, and those that are accepted need to be acceptable to the public. They have to be economically viable and feasible. They have to be legislative efforts the political parties can support, which is the exercise we're going through, right now.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, ma'am.

[*English*]

Dr. John B. Kortbeek: Thanks.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. MacGregor, please bring us home. You have two minutes.

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

Mr. Savikataaq, maybe I'll direct my last question to you. It's obvious that the firearms issue in Canada brings forward strong emotions on both sides. We're a very regional country. The situations in our urban centres are quite different from those in our rural areas. Both of course do suffer from instances of firearms crime. I think ultimately every member at this table is trying to find a way forward. Everyone wants to have safer communities, and we also want to respect legal firearms ownership. You bring this important perspective from indigenous communities.

Perhaps you might want to offer your final thoughts. You've heard the concerns from people regarding firearms violence. What's your message to other parts of Canada and to the Government of Canada? Do you have any perspectives on a way forward that balances that need for public safety while respecting the rights of indigenous communities and hunters in your territory? Do you have any thoughts on what the best way forward in tackling this very big issue might be?

● (1045)

Hon. Joe Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

I respect everyone's views and stance and thoughts, but it's very easy for someone who is living down south in the urban area where they're connected to highways and grocery stores and everything to just pick up food. They don't need firearms and have no use for them. We're in a different world up here, in which we depend on firearms. That's how we get food. It's almost equivalent to your going to a grocery store to get what you need to survive. A firearm provides that for us, and it's so important for us to keep doing that.

Definitely there could be common ground that we could agree on to move forward, but not in a sneaky way. If something comes up again, go to the north, to Nunavut and all the territories and tell all the aboriginal people which firearms are going to be affected. If there is a common one, tell them it will be affected, because right now, with the writing on certain firearms, there are even single-shot firearms and shotguns with removable magazines on there. This will impact too many people. I fully understand where everyone is coming from, but the Government of Canada should keep in mind that we should be consulted if we're going to be affected, because with this we are the most impacted ones in this country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Savikataaq. You had the last word on this panel, and rightly so.

Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

With that, this panel is wrapped up.

To all of the witnesses, thank you for your participation today and for sharing with us your time and your expertise. It is most helpful to us.

As a video participant in this particular meeting, I'm also fully aware of the interpretation staff. I would like to acknowledge them.

They are so often unsung, but they're always there in the background helping us out. As the chair, I apologize for not muting my microphone quite quickly enough. Thank you all.

Thank you to everyone for being here. With that, we are now adjourned.

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