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Chair: The Honourable Jim Carr





# Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Thursday, February 17, 2022

• (1110)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

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

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. I remind you that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk will advise the chair on whose hands are up, to the best of his ability, and we will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to the order adopted by the House of Commons on Tuesday, December 7, 2021, and the motion adopted on Tuesday, December 14, 2021, the committee is resuming its study of gun control, illegal arms trafficking and the increase in gun crimes committed by members of street gangs.

With us today by video conference, as an individual, is Christian Pearce, criminal defence counsel and author. Representing the Port Coquitlam and District Hunting and Fishing Club, we have Keith Loh, president.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Welcome to all.

I now invite Mr. Pearce to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Sir, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Christian Pearce (Criminal Defence Counsel, Author, As an Individual):** Thank you for having me, sir. I'll try to cut right to the point.

As the chair has just indicated, I started out as an author. I was a journalist for many years, which culminated in a book about gun culture and violence from a hip-hop perspective, titled *Enter the Babylon System: Unpacking Gun Culture from Samuel Colt to 50 Cent*. We had a co-author who allocated a lot of the book to what's called "diversion". Diversion is a process by which legal guns turn into illegal guns, largely through theft.

As I did research for the book, diversion became, somewhat surprisingly, such a huge factor in the availability of illegal firearms. I presumed—and it's still a factor, obviously—that most guns were coming from the United States. They're trafficked across the border, but I think about 50% of crime guns start as legal guns owned by legitimate Canadian gun owners. They are then stolen or otherwise find themselves into the black market and become crime guns to be used for crime.

As a criminal defence lawyer, I've seen that problem manifest repeatedly over the 11 years that I've been practising. When guns are found in my clients' hands or at crime scenes, I tend to think I'm going to see that they're traced back to the U.S., but what I see most of the time is that those guns came from legitimate Canadian gun owners.

My view of the situation is the one way that Parliament can really address gun availability, because that's the easier side of the gun crime problem, is through a complete ban on handguns. Handguns are implicated in the crime gun problem in Toronto 95% of the time and up. There is simply no legitimate, arguable reason that I have heard in researching the book and thinking about this issue over time, that justifies the possession of handguns merely for sport and collection purposes, when the downside risk is that those guns fall into the hands of criminals and end up being used to create the kind of carnage that we see on Toronto streets and in other cities around the country.

It's an unfortunate reality, but diversion is an extremely significant issue and the only way to address it is by cutting out the availability on the legal side. They may be coming from theft from production facilities, as we saw at Para Ordnance many years ago, truck theft, as we saw just a few days ago in Peterborough—fortunately those guns were recovered—or primarily theft from legitimate gun owners, who keep safe stocks of firearms. They become targets for break and enters to be stolen and to be turned over to criminals at elevated prices to be used in all sorts of crime.

Diversion is the biggest thing that Parliament can focus on to address the gun crime issue. Again, the way you address that issue is by following up on the assault rifle ban with a handgun ban. There is simply no reason that I can think of that would justify the possession of handguns on the scale that we have in Canada by legitimate gun owners when the risk to our society is theft of those guns to be used in crime. It's a big problem and I see it everyday as a criminal defence lawyer; my client is in possession of guns that started out as being legitimately owned, but are now being used to carry, shoot and kill people on the streets of my city.

If not to go that far, Parliament could consider a cap on handgun ownership. It's one thing that you can argue for sport shooting purposes. People may have a pastime, they may enjoy it, they may wish to go to the shooting range and open fire with a handgun, and that's something to be considered. The value you put in that is one thing, but them having five, 10 or 20 handguns defies any rational argument when the risk is that those guns will be stolen in aggregate globally and then become crime guns on the street.

I've talked to weapon—

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Sir, please wrap it up in 10 seconds.

**Mr. Christian Pearce:** Sure.

I've spoken to weapons enforcement officers, and they highlight the issue with break and enters of legitimate gun owners who are targeted by organized crime for theft of their weapons to be turned into crime guns on the black market.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Loh, I now invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes, sir.

**Mr. Keith Loh (President, Port Coquitlam & District Hunting & Fishing Club):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the committee members for inviting me to speak on behalf of licensed gun owners and the members of my club.

My name is Keith Loh. I am the president of the Port Coquitlam & District Hunting & Fishing Club. We are a non-profit society and shooting range serving the metro Vancouver area, including the riding represented by Mr. McKinnon, who has given us his valuable time on this issue on more than one occasion.

Our range serves over 3,000 active members who engage in sport shooting, hunting, fishing and archery. We are one of the largest outdoor ranges in B.C., and we are a training centre for multiple law enforcement agencies, including the RCMP and the police forces of most of the cities in the Lower Mainland. Similarly, our

members are drawn from all the major urban centres. We are urban firearms owners who are in the same communities that are impacted by gang crime. I am a hunter and a competitive shooter.

Mesdames and messieurs, our members share concerns of what appears to be the growing incidence of open gang violence in our communities. Like all Canadians, we wonder why people turn to the gangster lifestyle, and we applaud constructive efforts to put a stop to gang violence and address the root causes that promote gang activity.

Where possible, we co-operate with the police. We vet our members, and we instruct them on the safe and legal use of firearms. We rely on the same licensing conventions that our government uses, which should prevent criminals from gaining access to firearms. When needed, we raise concerns with the chief firearms officer of B.C. and are bound to report illegality that we witness.

Our club has always had active and retired law enforcement officers serving as staff and on our volunteer board of directors. In short, we are a place where gangsters would probably want to be the furthest away from.

I would suggest to the committee that legal firearm owners are fully supportive of constructive efforts against gangs, against illegal trafficking and towards social changes that would deter those away from the gang lifestyle. However, recent efforts by the federal government appear to be aimed improperly at licensed gun owners, who are among the most vetted citizens in the country, targeting those who are fully outside against gangs.

Among the suggested changes were giving cities and provinces the ability to restrict firearms while ignoring the fact that gang members pass freely from one jurisdiction to the next and already disregard laws against illegally transporting firearms or owning them without a license.

You have likely heard that the vast majority of so-called crime guns are flooding through our borders from the United States and elsewhere. Somehow, despite all the background checks on Canadian owners and controls on how licensees buy and sell firearms legitimately, criminals are apparently able to get what they need to support their gang business through foreign sources. Perhaps the committee should ask why, even during COVID, strict border controls and a population that was largely locked down, guns from abroad continued to stream through our border and show up at crime scenes.

In the case of straw purchasing, the public should know that, for anyone desperate enough to use their licence to traffic in firearms, the government already has all the details needed to prosecute them. Indeed, in the case of restricted firearms, which include hand guns, the government has to approve every purchase. If the problem is domestic trafficking, if that was an issue, shouldn't we ask instead if the police have the resources to pursue investigations?

Finally, a gun buyback of legal firearms that were used safely and legally for sporting and hunting, such as by our members, punishes those who already have to pass screening and who already have to abide by laws against improper usage.

It is not clear what evidence the government has had that this will impact gangsters who, if they choose to, could smuggle those guns in or have them manufactured. The fact is, gangsters are not using the \$3,000 competition rifles that our members may lose in a buyback. All that will be accomplished is that our sport will be diminished at a cost to the public purse. A gun buyback could cost Canadians hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions, decreasing our wealth while our systems are already straining.

I ask the committee to think about how the money proposed for such ideas like the gun buyback could be better used towards stopping the smuggling of illegal firearms or how regions could use those funds instead to attack the source of urban violence by funding housing for our most vulnerable, to help mitigate drug abuse, or to properly fund our courts and policing. How much better would it be if we used our taxpayer dollars for the strengthening of our borders, putting money towards community programs that steer people away from the gang lifestyle and providing better access to mental health resources to those at risk? These are the measures I believe would unite Canadians, and I urge the committee to direct their efforts to exploring those areas.

Thank you.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now I will open the floor to questions.

Leading off in the first round, we have Ms. Dancho.

It's over to you for a six-minute slot.

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

I'm going to speak slowly given my connectivity issues.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their interesting testimony.

Unfortunately, as the witnesses and all committee members will know, we are dealing with a historic situation in our country. The federal government has just introduced emergency powers. For that reason I'm introducing and moving the following motion:

That the committee instruct the Chair to schedule any meetings required to hear from the Minister of Public Safety, officials, as well as CBSA, the RCMP, the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ottawa Police Service next week on February 23rd and 24th, and that if a requested witness or organization does not appear, the chair shall add a portion of committee business at the next available meeting to discuss the non-appearance of the witness or organization.

Mr. Clerk, I'm not sure if the translation came through, but I'm very happy to read it in French if required.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Wassim Bouanani):** That's good, Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** It came through.

Okay, so I'm formally introducing and moving this motion for debate and a vote.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. MacGregor, I see your hand up. Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you to Ms. Dancho for presenting this motion.

I've just had the clerk distribute an amendment to Ms. Dancho's motion that I'm proposing. It is there, I believe, in both official languages. It would make some slight changes: inserting the language "That, pursuant to the motion adopted on February 15th, 2022"—so that we have a base of reference—"the committee request that Chair, subject to the availability of the witnesses", and then giving the chair a few more options with the dates next week.

I don't want to confuse everyone by reading it out. Everyone should have a copy of the proposed amendment in front of them, so I'll leave it there. That's the amendment to the motion I'm now moving, Mr. Chair.

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

I see a hand up from Mr. McKinnon.

**Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate this motion and the amendment. I think they're important things to discuss. However, we do have witnesses before us at the moment. In respect of those witnesses, I therefore move that the debate be now adjourned.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Are you saying the debate be suspended or adjourned?

**Mr. Ron McKinnon:** It's a dilatory motion. I move the debate do now adjourn.

**The Chair:** Okay. Then we have to vote on the motion to adjourn.

Mr. Clerk.

**An hon. member:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** I see Ms. Damoff has her hand up. I'll recognize her.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** That was on the motion, Chair. My apologies, there are no points of order on a dilatory motion.

**The Chair:** Correct, so we will have to vote on the motion to adjourn.

Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, there's a point of order.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm a substitute here, and I'm pleased to be here.

For this motion, I was under the understanding that you can't adjourn the debate; you have to suspend. We need clarity on what the motion is. We're not sure.

**Mr. Ron McKinnon:** The motion is perfectly clear. The motion is that I move that this debate do now adjourn.

**The Chair:** A motion to adjourn debate is not debatable.

Mr. Clerk, I believe you have to call a vote on the motion to adjourn.

**The Clerk:** The question is that the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** Then the discussion on the motion and the proposed amendment continues.

Do I see other hands up?

Ms. Damoff.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you, Chair.

I believe right now we have Mr. MacGregor's amendment on the floor, and I'd like to amend his amendment. I'm assuming everyone has the amendment from Mr. MacGregor, so I'm just going to read the changes that would be made.

After the words "subject to availability of witnesses," it would read "schedule a meeting", as opposed to "schedule any meetings"; remove the word "required"; after the words "Ottawa Police Service", add the words "the week of February 21, 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter should any witnesses not be available that week"; and then remove the words "on either Wednesday, February 23 or Thursday, February 24".

I'd like to speak to that, if I could. Changing it to "the week of February 21", gives the chair the flexibility to ask these people, who are right now in the middle of an emergency, to come. Instead of being very specific on the dates, this would recognize that the committee wishes to have these witnesses come during a constituency week, which is not the norm.

As we all know, we've already passed a motion to have these witnesses appear, which the Liberals supported; we just didn't support the timing of that. However, I think we need to be able to give the chair flexibility. The reason for adding the words "as soon as possible thereafter should any witnesses not be available that week" is that it would still honour the spirit of the motion that Mr. MacGregor put forward that these witnesses appear as soon as possible.

I also think changing it to "a meeting" is sufficient, and should anyone not be able to appear next week, we would still be able to call them as soon as possible. If you recall, Mr. MacGregor's motion, which passed, asked for witnesses to come as soon as possible.

I think we all have confidence in our chair that he understands the motion and will fulfill the wishes of this committee. I think this just gives him the flexibility and also allows all of these folks—the RCMP, the OPP and the Ottawa Police Service—right now who are dealing with an emergency in our country. We have, just today, started debate on the motion to implement the Emergencies Act. It's extremely important that we build flexibility into this motion.

Thank you.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Dancho, I see your hand up.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate Ms. Damoff's remarks. It is true that it is not usual to have an emergency meeting, but many committees call emergency meetings. In fact, this committee right here called an emergency meeting—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** On a point of order, Chair, this does not call for an emergency meeting.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** May I continue, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** What I find interesting is that the Bloc initiated the study we have now and brought forward the committee much earlier than we were going to be meeting because of the serious situation of gun violence in Montreal. Now we have an unprecedented situation where the government has invoked emergency powers that have never been used before. It's a very serious matter and the Liberal government has argued they need these emergency powers because all existing laws and authority were not enough for them.

The purpose of Mr. MacGregor's NDP motion for this meeting was to get some answers as to why the existing powers and authorities of this country so failed that we needed to invoke emergency powers. At least, that's the argument that we're hearing from the Liberal government for invoking these unprecedented powers.

I cannot impress on committee members enough the critical and historic importance of getting these answers. Right now, we are debating this emergency power in the House of Commons and it will go around the clock, essentially, until Monday. That's how critical and important this is.

The amendment to the amendment, which Ms. Damoff just proposed seems to provide something along the line of what they said on Tuesday. My interpretation is that it's to provide an out so that these witnesses don't have to come and answer to the public at the public safety committee of Canada. I think it is critical that those witnesses come next week and answer as we continue to debate this historic and unprecedented power move by the Liberal government.

It is critical that we hear from these witnesses as soon as possible. I would like to hear from them today, in fact. I think all Canadians would like to hear answers for why the authorities in this country and the existing laws in this country were, as the Liberals have argued, not enough for them and they needed to invoke unprecedented emergency powers.

I'll be voting against this amendment.

**The Chair:** Mr. Chiang, I see your hand is up.

You have the floor.

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

This is an emergency and it's a public safety emergency. I don't think it's proper to have this motion now during this emergency. All the emergency services—the RCMP, the OPP, and the Ottawa Police Service—are engaged in this emergency that is going on in our country.

I believe we should hold off until this thing is over or whenever it is possible to get it done.

● (1135)

**The Chair:** Mr. McKinnon, I see your hand is up.

**Mr. Ron McKinnon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will support both amendments. However, I do feel that this motion itself is unnecessary.

Part and parcel of calling the emergency measures into effect is that there is a legislative requirement for a committee of parliamentarians to be struck to investigate precisely the rationale behind the call, whether there is in fact a need for it and so on.

This is going to be that committee's direct responsibility and purview. I don't see any reason why we should be spending time on this committee for something that is going to be done at great length in due course.

I think it does a grave disservice to our witnesses who are here to speak to us about this study at hand, which has to do with gun violence, guns and gangs, and so forth. They've prepared for it and we should have an opportunity to hear their testimony and their suggestions on how we can move forward on this very important issue.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lemire, I see your hand up.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to submit a thought to the committee. Obviously, our committee meetings are being held in a hybrid format, so it's possible for parliamentarians to attend virtually, but not all technical support staff can do that. Therefore, I want to make sure that when the time comes to issue invitations to appear, the safety of House staff at these meetings is taken into account. Obviously, these meetings are urgent and must be held next week.

With that in mind, I would ask that we reread the subamendment, so that we can clearly agree on the language.

Could we have a written version of Ms. Damoff's proposed subamendment so that we can debate it?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Zuberi, I see your hand up.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I would like to echo some of what's already been said about the Emergencies Act. There is clearly a very robust mechanism for review very soon after the act is no longer in force. With what we heard from one of our colleagues on this committee, Mr. Chiang, who was a police officer, and with my military background, I can imagine that when policing agencies are in the midst of an operation, it's not helpful for us as politicians to jump in and try to direct police forces on the ground that are involved in very serious and sensitive operations.

I think it is wholly appropriate, after these operations are conducted and concluded, that we have a review and that we examine what happened, why things happened as they did and why these trucks came to Ottawa and rolled in without the police stopping them beforehand. Those are very legitimate questions. However, we're in the midst of an operation right now. Police are doing their job. They're in uniform. I parked in the parliamentary precinct and had to go through two checkpoints. As I walked up the Hill, I was ID'd, and as I entered West Block, I was ID'd twice more. If we are going to ask these managers of the police and those who are directing these operations to come in, then the operations happening on the ground in real time will not be as effective.

My very strong suggestion to all of us on this committee is to let the police and agencies do their work on the ground at this moment in time, and we can grill them right after. That is our job. However, to grill them in the midst of this operation, I would suggest, is not helpful and would detract from their effectiveness, would make this more complicated and would be a harm to what's happening on the ground right now.

● (1140)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Noormohamed, I see your hand is up. Go ahead.

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

Like everyone on this committee, like all Canadians, I'd like to know why trucks were allowed to roll into the centre of Ottawa and hold the entire city hostage. I'd like to know why supplies could be brought in without any restriction. I'd like to understand why the Ottawa Police Service didn't do more. I'd like to understand why members of the official opposition thought this was perfectly acceptable and, in fact, chose to spend time with the very people who held the city hostage. All Canadians would like to know that. I would like to know that.

Like Mr. Zuberi and Mr. Chiang, I've had the benefit of working in the public safety world. I spent time in the department and I've spent time with officials whom I know are working hard to try to figure this out, including from the RCMP, from CSIS and from the CBSA. This is not the time to be asking them to drop the important work they should be doing to try to keep Canadians safe: clearing these blockades and moving these domestic terrorists out of the places where they are holding Canadians hostage. Certainly, afterwards we can talk. We should be taking all the time, effort and energy required to listen, to hear and to ask very, very difficult questions.

I recognize there may be folks who don't like the way this is somehow characterizing a small group of people who certainly do not reflect the vast majority of truckers in this country and do not reflect the very good people in this country who don't agree with what is going on in Ottawa. Unfortunately, a small group of miscreants has taken over the entire narrative of peaceful debate and peaceful protest in this country.

We have to ask difficult questions of the police services; that is our job. However, the time to do it is not during an active operation.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Lemire.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I would really like us to reread the subamendment. There seems to be some confusion, so I want to make sure we agree on the language we're debating right now.

[English]

**The Chair:** We will do that before the vote is called, but I think we should ask those who have comments to make them now. Then, before the vote is called, I will ask the clerk to be very clear on what we're voting for.

Mr. MacGregor, go ahead.

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

I'm going to try to play my role in the committee of making peace between the Liberals and Conservatives here. First of all, while I disagree with the Conservatives on the necessity of the use of the Emergencies Act, I do agree with them that there are questions, serious questions, that this committee needs answers to regarding the last two and a half weeks.

I don't believe that officials using an hour of their time to appear before our committee, especially with Zoom technology, will in any way impact the day-to-day ground operations going on in Ottawa.

They have deputies. They have commanders in the field to take care of that. They are very capable and professional organizations. But I do believe sincerely that, as per the wording of the motion that this committee adopted earlier this week, we do need to have answers about the coordination of various law enforcement agencies, the intelligence and all of the failures—let's be clear here, the failures—that led to the situation we now find ourselves in where the Emergencies Act is necessary.

Mr. Chair, I'll end by saying that I am open to supporting the sub-amendment to my amendment to Ms. Dancho's motion, but I guess I want some clarification from you or the clerk as per the original motion. When the clerk reads, "as soon as possible", what does that mean in a technical sense? It's my understanding that the clerk has now been authorized to schedule these meetings. He's probably working to get them done as soon as possible. Therefore, is the debate we're having today a moot point? I'd just like some clarification from the clerk on whether we've had any responses for next week, etc.

I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Colleagues, I'm looking at the time. It seems that this debate is going to go on for a few minutes longer, which will take us close to the top of the hour. If members of the committee agree, I think it might be courteous for me to thank the witnesses in this first hour for their testimony. This is just the way committees can operate.

With your concurrence, I think the witnesses from this first hour should be free to go.

Do I have consensus on that point?

• (1145)

**Mr. Ron McKinnon:** I have a point of order, please.

**The Chair:** Go ahead on your point of order, Mr. McKinnon.

**Mr. Ron McKinnon:** I would agree with that, except I would invite the chair to invite the witnesses to make a more fulsome submission in writing that they can share with the committee to make up for the fact that they weren't able to testify today.

I absolutely want to thank them both for being here today and regret that we were unable to hear directly from them further, but would look forward very eagerly to any written submissions that they might want to offer.

**The Chair:** Yes. I think that's a very good idea. I would invite them to do just that.

On the committee's behalf, I would like to thank them for appearing. At least we were able to hear their first opening remarks. It's unfortunate that the events didn't allow for a fuller discussion.

Thank you very much, witnesses. We appreciate your involvement here today.

May I ask members of the committee to put their hands down if they've already spoken and don't want to speak again? Otherwise, it's difficult to know what the order might be.



Ms. Damoff, your hand has been up for a while. Go ahead.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you very much, Chair, and just to Mr. MacGregor's point, I appreciate his trying to balance the red and the blue. I think we all appreciate that. I just want to be clear. My amendment—which is what we are supposed to be debating right now, rather than the full amendment—changes only the dates to the week of February 21 so that the chair is not restricted to two days next week. So it's still open to meeting next week, and I just want to clarify that this is not an emergency meeting. This motion is not being brought under Standing Order 106(4). It is a motion that will require the support of the committee.

So the amendment I brought forward was the week of February 21, requiring us to sit in a constituency week. I added to that “as soon as possible thereafter should any witnesses not be available that week”, specifically because none of us can see the future. None of us could foretell that the Ambassador Bridge was suddenly going to be blocked. None of us could have foretold that Ottawa would be under siege now for what has been three weeks.

We can't tell what will happen next week, and I think we need to give flexibility and honour Mr. MacGregor's initial amendment here, which said “as soon as possible”, that if, for some reason, any of these witnesses is unable to appear next week when it's scheduled, that they will appear as per Mr. MacGregor's initial motion which was “as soon as possible”. I think the committee has been very clear to the clerk and the chair that the committee wants this to happen sooner rather than later. I think that's been conveyed very clearly.

I don't think there's any reason to question the integrity of the chair or the clerk about it not happening as soon as possible, but none of us can know what will happen next week. If we schedule a meeting on Thursday next week and something happens... If we need to and we want to hear from these folks and if we say they can appear on only one day, that just quashes what was originally in Mr. MacGregor's amendment, because then we'd have to bring a new one forward.

So there was no nefarious reason for adding “as soon as possible thereafter”. It was to recognize that we're in an emergency right now. We can't anticipate what's going to happen in the future. We need to give the chair flexibility, and we need to honour the original motion, which was to hear from these folks.

We're starting to debate on the main motion, but I think in fairness to the chair and the clerk with regard to what we want to do, we need to give them flexibility next week to see when the best day for these folks to appear would be, and if something happens, then they will appear as soon as possible thereafter.

That's the intent of the amendment to Mr. MacGregor's amendment, so I really hope that colleagues will be able to support this and that we can move on to debate the rest of the motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Dancho, I saw your hand up but you've disappeared from my screen. Are you still there?

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Mr. Chair, I'll save my comments for the rest of the debate. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Okay, then I'll move to—

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. We have Mr. Van Popta in the room, and he would like to speak.

**The Chair:** Okay, Mr. Van Popta, go ahead. I can't see the hands up in the room, so I'll have to rely on the clerk as I have just done. Thank you.

Mr. Van Popta.

● (1150)

**Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC):** Good. Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Clerk, for alerting the chair to this.

I'm going to speak against Ms. Damoff's amendment, only because I think it takes away from the urgency of our having to have these meetings now. If it is “as soon as possible”, then it may end up being next week or the week after or the week after that, and, yes, that does not at all take away from the integrity of our clerk and our chair to make this happen ASAP but the point is that this is urgent. We need to do it now. The study will not be to look into the current operations but to come to a better understanding of how we got to this point in the first place, where the government feels that it needs to take upon itself this extraordinary power available under the Emergencies Act.

Also, we, committee members, have to plan our week as well and so I think it's very important for us to stick with the determined dates and make the meeting happen.

For those who are saying, well, you know, the officials, law enforcement people, may not have time to come to the committee, we're talking about one hour, and one of the earlier speakers also made the point that with Zoom technology it's just so much more readily accessible. Furthermore, I would note that the police authorities have daily briefings, so they certainly have the time to do that, to reach out to the public to keep them informed. Surely they have time to come before the public safety committee and explain to us what is going on.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Clerk, are there any other hands up in the room?

**The Clerk:** No, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. McKinnon, I see your hand is up.

**Mr. Ron McKinnon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to respond to Mr. Van Popta. The whole question about how we got to this point cannot do anything but talk about operational issues that are under way now, issues that have been under way for the last three weeks, issues that pertain to a clearly ongoing situation.

I think it's going to be difficult for law enforcement to speak to ongoing operations. I think it will be difficult for them to give us proper answers that might interfere with what they're doing going forward.

I don't think it's a matter so much as an hour of their time—although it never is going to be an hour of their time. It's always an hour of their time plus some time for their staff and them to prepare, and so on and so forth.

The question is their time needs to be better spent elsewhere. We will be dealing with this issue very strenuously as we go forward with a parliamentary committee devoted specifically to this. After we have a little bit of perspective in a day or two, or a week or two, we will be able to evaluate how we got to this point, what worked and what didn't in a much more fulsome way.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I don't see any other hands up.

Clerk, remind us of the subamendment. We'll vote on the subamendment, then the amendment and then the motion.

Please read to members of the committee the subamendment that will now be called to a vote.

**The Clerk:** I'll try my best, Mr. Chair.

It reads, “That, pursuant to the motion adopted on February 11, 2022, that the committee request that the Chair, subject to availability of witnesses, schedule a meeting to hear from the Minister of Public Safety, officials, as well as, as well as Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ottawa Police Service the week of February 21, or as soon as possible thereafter should any witnesses not be available that week.”

**The Chair:** For clarity, that is Ms. Damoff's subamendment.

**The Clerk:** That's correct.

Madam Damoff, is that good?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** On a point order, Chair, it's correct, except that the clerk read the entire motion, which is helpful for clarity, but my amendment is strictly to change the word “any” to “a”, removing the word “required”, and then adding the words “the week of February 21, or as soon as possible thereafter should any witnesses not be available that week.” It is then removing “on either Wednesday February 23 or Thursday, February 24”.

Is that clear for Monsieur Lemire? I know you had questions, through you, Chair.

• (1155)

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** On the motion, I'm seeking clarity. When the motion says, “should any witnesses not be available”, does it then get pushed back next week, or is it just that one particular witness that will get pushed back, and then we'll have a separate meeting after that?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Can I respond, Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead, Ms. Damoff.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** My intent was that it would only be the witnesses that were not available. If my Conservative friend feels we need to change that... But the intent was that if four of the five are available, they come next week. If the fifth is not available, then they come separately.

If you want to change that accordingly, that's fine.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** No, that's fine. We'll definitely rely on the honour of the member.

**The Chair:** Okay, are we ready, then, to call the question on the subamendment? Are members of the committee comfortable that what is in front of them is clear and well understood?

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Just on a point of information, the subamendment you read mentioned “February 11”. Was it in actuality February 15? I just have a question on that.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Yes, it was, sorry. That should read “February 15”. I fixed that afterwards. I'm sorry about that.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Clerk, do you have that change and have you noted it?

**The Clerk:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Okay. We are ready to call for a vote on the subamendment when you're ready, Mr. Clerk.

**The Clerk:** The question is on the subamendment moved by Ms. Damoff.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** The amendment to the amendment is agreed to.

Can we now move to the amendment?

Clerk, can I ask you, please, to remind members of the substance of the amendment that will be before them?

**The Clerk:** I'm going to read the motion with the amendment—

**The Chair:** The motion and the amendment?

**The Clerk:** That's correct, yes.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Okay.

**The Clerk:** It is:

That, pursuant to the motion adopted on February 15, 2022, the committee request that the Chair, subject to availability of witnesses, schedule a meeting to hear from the Minister of Public Safety, officials, as well as the Canada Border Services Agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ottawa Police Service the week of February 21st, or as soon as possible thereafter should any witnesses not be available that week.

**The Chair:** Okay. We're ready now for the roll call.

**The Clerk:** Ms. Damoff has raised her hand, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Damoff.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you, Chair.

I just want to again thank our NDP colleague for the amendments to this motion, for making them far more reasonable and respecting the situation that we are now in across our country. We will be supporting his amendment. It's something that is important for this committee to hear.

I do wish that we were hearing from these folks later, but as soon as we're finished this current study, we are commencing a study on IMVE. We will be able to hear from some of the players who have been involved in this challenge, this attack on our democracy, so I think it may be that we want to hear from these folks later during our study as to what happened, because we are right now in the midst of an emergency.

We will be supporting the NDP amendment. I thank my colleague for bringing it forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Clerk, can you proceed with the roll call on the amendment, please?

**The Clerk:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

The question is on the amendment moved by Mr. MacGregor.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** That's excellent.

I believe there's no necessity for a further vote, is there, Clerk?

**The Clerk:** A vote on the main motion as amended is required.

**The Chair:** But it's already been amended and voted on unanimously.

**The Clerk:** We voted on the amendment, yes. We need to go back and vote on the main motion now.

**The Chair:** As amended?

**The Clerk:** As amended, yes, sir.

**The Chair:** Okay, you can proceed.

**The Clerk:** Ms. Dancho has her hand up.

**The Chair:** Ms. Dancho, please go ahead.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you, Mr. Chair

Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

I want to make it very clear what we are voting on, colleagues.

We are voting on a motion that would call the Minister of Public Safety and various police forces in this country to committee. The spirit of this motion is that they come as soon as possible. We would like that to be next week.

I'm not clear. It seems, from subamendments moved by the Liberal members, that they don't find this situation urgent, that we could wait. In fact, I think a Liberal member said that this is not helpful. I would say what's not helpful is the Minister of Public Safety and police forces avoiding public scrutiny and accountability of how we got to such a point in our country that emergency powers had to be invoked.

Just to be clear to members of this committee, these emergency powers are now freezing the bank accounts of Canadians who donated to the protest. This is live; this is happening right now, and it is incumbent upon the members of this public safety committee of Canada to hear from the Minister of Public Safety and the police forces in this country as to how we got to this extreme point in our

country and in our history. That is the importance of this motion. That needs to be made extremely clear to those who are watching.

For that reason, obviously, Conservatives will be supporting this motion and look forward to having the opportunity to scrutinize and hold accountable the Minister of Public Safety for how we got to this point.

The last thing I will say is that he has failed to date to make a coherent argument for invoking these emergency powers, so I look forward to hearing him defend his position. Hopefully for him, he can do a better job than he's done thus far.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** I have—

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** I have a point of order.

I'd just like to know, if possible, what we're voting on, discussing and debating. There's been a lot thrown out, so we should just have that.

**The Chair:** We voting on the main motion as amended.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Could that be read out to us?

**The Chair:** Yes, after I deal with the five hands I see up, and there may be more in the room.

Clerk, I'll rely on you for that.

Go ahead, Mr. McKinnon.

**Mr. Ron McKinnon:** Thank you, Chair.

I just want to address Ms. Dancho's assertion that we seem to feel that this is not an important matter.

This is a critically important matter. The very fact that we have a legislated committee that will be set up in the very, very near future to deal with this matter underscores the urgency and importance of it.

My personal objection to dealing with this motion right now is that we also have other important things to deal with such as the witnesses we were unable to hear from today.

There are places that are much more properly tasked, I think, to deal with these questions. As well, as I mentioned before, is the issue of having law enforcement people speak to issues that are essentially ongoing. They are going to be necessarily constrained with what they say as long as these are live issues. Certainly I, as a Liberal—and I believe I speak for my colleagues as well—absolutely underscore that this is an important matter. It is an important thing to hear from these officials, but we just have to hear from them in the proper way.

I also take exception that the case has not been made for the invoking of the Emergencies Act. I think the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety did so very, very clearly when they announced the measures earlier this week. To say otherwise is disingenuous, and I take great exception to it. The matter is very clear: We will have a legislated, mandated committee to deal with this, and I must strenuously object to this motion.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Damoff, I see your hand up.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you, Chair.

I just want to say that I think the original motion that was brought to this committee was brought in good faith. I think it was brought because members of this committee wanted to hear from the agencies.

I am quite disappointed with the way our colleagues from the Conservative Party are turning this into a partisan issue. To say that the only place these folks can appear is at the public safety committee is just factually incorrect.

In fact, right now in the House of Commons there is a debate happening on the invocation of the Emergencies Act. There will be a special committee formed that will be reviewing what happened, so if we want to talk about bank accounts being frozen and the need to get to the bottom of that, quite frankly, that is what's being debated in the House right now and will be debated for quite some time.

I think members will recall that we had FINTRAC come at the request of Liberal members of the committee, and they provided extremely helpful information to the government on the gaps that exist in the financial system. I think it's been incredibly important, the measures that were brought in.

To see the Conservative Party say that we don't treat this as urgent, when we have just brought in legislation that will invoke the Emergencies Act, something that hasn't been used since it was created, is to see something that is simply not true. It's obvious that we are treating it urgently.

I am really disappointed by how partisan this has turned. I think it's unfortunate that we're not using our ability on this committee to do some digging to get to the bottom of where things are. I am really disappointed.

I think the initial motion was brought in good faith and it's unfortunate that it's been turned into a more partisan debate. I think it's incumbent on us to respond to some of these allegations, which simply don't reflect the facts of what our government is doing right now.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Clerk, I don't see hands in the room. Do you?

**The Clerk:** There's Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lawrence, go ahead.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Thank you very much.

I am pleased that we will be able to go over and start the conversation, reviewing it. I am hoping that we can count on the good faith of all members, and hopefully the police forces to get in front of us as soon as possible.

It's not because of anything that I want individually, but I am always mindful of who we are and who we represent. I represent the 120,000 people of Northumberland—Peterborough South and so I believe that those 120,000 folks more than deserve the opportunity of one hour of a police officer's time to explain to us exactly what is going on in our country.

We have the Emergencies Act and the honourable member, Ms. Damoff, certainly points out the fact that this will be discussed in the chamber, but I think we can actually add to that conversation and those discussions. Why would we wait until afterwards to discuss what went wrong when maybe we can help the government not do what is wrong in the first place? To me, it's much better to prevent the milk from being spilt than to start complaining about it.

While I think it's somewhat regretful that the member has said this is partisan in nature, I can assure her that my intentions and the intentions of all the members here are good. We want to make sure that this doesn't go the wrong way. This is potentially a very dangerous situation and we want to make sure that the lives of Canadians and police officers and those who are sworn to protect us are in the best possible position to make sure they succeed and that we can go forward in a united and prosperous Canada.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Noormohamed, I see your hand is up.

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

I want to just take a minute before I start.

Mr. Lawrence just spoke. I think we all share a desire to return to the Canada that is governed by peace, order and good government. Those are the principles that we believe in.

What I find disappointing about this is that.... Indeed, I think the motion was brought in good faith and I have a tremendous amount of respect for Ms. Dancho. I think it does, in fact, lead to a lot of questions that a lot of us ask, such as how we got to where we are. How did this situation devolve in Ottawa?

I note the specific reference to the OPS and the OPP, who do not, by the way, fall under the purview of the federal government. I noticed those specific references.

I think everyone, certainly the citizens of Ottawa, want to know what happened and how systems failed them so that we have ended up where we are. There's no question about that. I think you'd have to be blind not to realize what is going on outside Parliament Hill.

If we think about the question of how we ended up here.... I note that in Ms. Dancho's motion there is no mention of the Emergencies Act, so now we are conflating these issues. We are bringing together the two issues of how we ended up in a situation in Ottawa and this now being the committee that is going to investigate and ask questions of the Emergencies Act. So it seems, from what we have heard from our friends opposite.

I guess the question is.... If we are starting to look into what brought us here, I think there are going to be a lot of difficult questions that need to be answered about how members of the opposition thought it appropriate and reasonable to engage with folks who were holding the city of Ottawa hostage and encouraging them. That appears not to be the purview of this committee right now and perhaps is not something that Ms. Dancho would like to explore through this conversation. I do think these are questions around which Canadians deserve answers.

There is a parliamentary process in place to investigate, understand, articulate and think about what has happened with the invocation of the Emergencies Act. There is a debate going on at the House of Commons as we speak. Some of our colleagues here will be speaking in that debate over the course of the next several days.

If we start to think about what we, as a public safety and national security committee can do, we can create the conditions, room and space required to ask and answer difficult questions. If we think that officials from the police service are going to come and speak to us in a public setting and provide us privileged information that they would not provide to the public in their public briefings during an ongoing operation, we are either sadly mistaken or incredibly naive.

If we are going to have these conversations—and I want to be very clear that I am fully supportive of having these conversations—then we should do this once live operations in the city of Ottawa are over, especially because this specific motion refers to the Ottawa Police Service and the OPP.

On a personal level, I think that if the operations in Ottawa are over, that's a perfectly reasonable time to start having conversations about what happened in Ottawa.

Let's be clear. If this conversation is about what is happening in Ottawa, then let's limit it to that and be clear about that. Let's not make it something that it isn't or let's be honest about what this actually is and let's have a debate about that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1215)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Zuberi, I see your hand up.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** I'd like to just add to what's been said.

I appreciate how important it is for all of us to get together and bring in the witnesses we want to bring in concerning how and what has been going on in the streets of Ottawa.

I also want to know a number of things. For example, I want to know how a Three Percenter flag—a listed terror organization—has been allowed to fly in the streets of Ottawa. I want to know how

and why that was allowed to happen for two days. I want to know if those individuals have been identified and if their finances going to be seized. This is not okay.

I want to know why an arson was almost committed in an Ottawa building, as we saw on Twitter. How is it that the police only found out through Twitter? They said to direct message them on Twitter so they could investigate. It took a video of an act of arson to be posted online on Twitter for the police to get involved. I want to know how that happened.

I also recognize that police, RCMP and OPP are all working together right now to make sure that law and order is restored on Wellington and the downtown streets of Ottawa.

Essentially, I'm just adding that to the record. We want these answers. We do have to allow these authorities to do their job and then bring them in after that happens to ask these questions.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Clerk, are there any hands up in the room?

**The Clerk:** No, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. McKinnon, is that an old hand or a new hand you have up?

**Mr. Ron McKinnon:** Well, it's certainly an old hand, but it's also an old hand in this context, so....

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Chiang, I think I see a new hand with your name on it. Go ahead.

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

I just want to bring up the point that as a former police officer, being in a policing role for 28 years, I have been in operations like this in regard to protesters. I was also part of the public order unit for many years. I stood on the front line in situations like this. I have first-hand experience.

When there is an operation going on, an incident command officer takes charge of the whole thing. Their job is to work the incident at that point. They are so preoccupied with the safety of the citizens, with the safety of the officers on the front line, that to be able to come out and discuss matters of urgency or emergencies currently going on—that would be highly unlikely. When an operation is going on, I don't think they would discuss in public what they plan to do in terms of the operation.

It's about safety for the officers and safety for the citizens. For them to speak about something they plan to do in the future, about what's going to happen, or about the next step they're going to take—it would be highly unlikely that we'd get the full answer that as a committee we're looking for in terms of what's happening on the ground.

In my humble opinion, hopefully we can extend it, but if we want to bring them in next week, we won't get the full answer we're looking for in terms of that.

That's my opinion on this. Thank you.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I don't see any hands up.

If you don't see any hands up in the room, Clerk, then we can proceed to the vote on the motion as amended.

**The Clerk:** The question is on the motion, moved by Ms. Dancho, as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, members of the committee. That was an excellent exchange.

We will suspend the meeting so that sound checks can be done for our new witnesses.

Take five, and we'll come back and use the time remaining to the top of the hour for this next group of witnesses.

See you in five.

• (1220)

(Pause)

• (1225)

**The Chair:** I call this meeting back to order.

With us this second hour by video conference is Chief Inspector David Bertrand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bertrand now represents the Service des enquêtes criminelles of the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal.

[*English*]

From Wolverine Supplies, we have Matthew Hipwell, president.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Welcome to our witnesses.

Mr. Bertrand, I now invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Bertrand (Chief Inspector, Service des enquêtes criminelles, Service de police de la Ville de Montréal):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon.

Thank you for the invitation to share with you some of the efforts of the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal, or SPVM, has made to fight against gun violence.

The city of Montreal is one of Canada's large urban centres. It's often compared to other major North American cities such as Toronto.

In recent years, violent events involving firearms have tended to be on the rise, particularly so over the past year.

In Montreal, the number of events involving the discharge of a firearm has increased from 89 in 2020 to—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bertrand, the interpreters can't keep up with your pace of speaking. They're requesting that you please slow down. No one is going to give you a ticket, but please slow down.

**Mr. David Bertrand:** I'm sorry about that.

[*Translation*]

In Montreal, the number of events involving the discharge of a firearm increased from 89 in 2020 to 129 in 2021. In contrast, there were 32 in 2019. The number of murders by firearm increased from five in 2020 to 19 in 2021.

Nevertheless, Montreal remains a safe city, as the SPVM puts a lot of effort into ensuring the safety of Montreal residents.

The number of firearms arrests has also risen from 213 in 2019 to 308 in 2020, and 330 in 2021. It's important to understand that firearms investigations are complex and demanding for those who conduct them, particularly because of the legal requirements that must be met. Evidence relies heavily on investigative techniques, as few witnesses and victims cooperate in these types of investigations.

For example, the SPVM has set up various teams, including an anti-gun trafficking team, the ELTA, which has now become the EILTA, a team integrated with the Centaur strategy, the provincial strategy to combat firearms trafficking.

As for firearms seizure in Montreal, 1,017 weapons were seized in 2020, including 269 handguns. In 2021, although the total number of guns seized was slightly lower, at 963, 360 of them were handguns. It is this higher number that caught our eye as this is the most common type of weapon used in violent events. We're talking about a 34% increase for this type of weapon.

We have made several observations. Illegal firearms have become more accessible in recent years in particular. Even gun dealers sometimes do business in public, in broad daylight. We've also noted a stronger presence of firearms among youth. There is a sense of impunity, a strong gun culture, an all of these factors partly explain this gun craze emphasis on gun possession. Finally, shows of force are prized and advocated within crime groups. In short, and the increase we've seen in violent events involving firearms.

We also need to adapt to new realities, which include crime groups using social media to flaunt their lifestyle and challenge their opponents. It's important to focus on this usage.

To address gun violence in Montreal, the SPVM has a strategic plan that mobilizes police officers around short-, medium- and long-term action. The plan rests on two pillars: an integrated and concerted strategy, and a commitment from all stakeholders.

The plan is structured around five main thrusts. We want to ensure cooperation within our organization, but also with other police agencies. Combatting gun violence is a shared responsibility. The goal is to make people feel safer. Our constable force ensure an optimal street presence; our inspector force optimize the structure of investigations and partnership with other policing agencies; our intelligence force focus on making investigations—

• (1235)

[English]

**The Chair:** Sorry, sir, could you wrap up in 10 seconds, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. David Bertrand:** Yes, no problem.

In conclusion, we believe that stronger legislation to ban handguns is needed. We also support better control at the border and investigation of firearms smuggling tactics. In addition, we believe that discussions about minimum sentences in certain gun usage and possession situations should be brought back to the forefront.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Hipwell, you now have the floor for up to five minutes for your opening remarks. Please proceed when you're ready.

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell (President, Wolverine Supplies):** Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning.

My name is Matt Hipwell. I grew up in the firearms industry and lifestyle in rural Manitoba. As a youth, I was involved in various shooting sports. I was a member of Team Manitoba in the Canada Winter Games for the sport of biathlon. I spent a short stint in the Canadian Armed Forces reserves prior to joining the RCMP. I spent nearly 17 years in the RCMP, posted throughout Manitoba. During that time, it was front line policing, plain clothes drug enforcement, firearms training and use of force, and eight years with our emergency response teams. I feel I have a very diverse background in this sector, whether it be on the civilian side or the law enforcement side.

After leaving the RCMP, I joined the family business, Wolverine Supplies. I subsequently took an early retirement to move into the firearms industry, which supports and provides firearms to sports shooters, hunters, recreational shooters, law enforcement and the military across the country.

Historically, the government has spent billions of dollars on firearms legislation and regulations. However, in my opinion, we fail to get to the root cause. Mr. Bertrand touched on a few of those, with borders being one of them. We need to get to the root cause of the problem. When we want to solve a problem, using the analogy of building a house, we don't start with the roof and build down; we start with a strong foundation. I believe this is where we are lacking. We need to start at the bottom and work our way up.

This involves working with all partners. We often look at the law enforcement community only—if that—but there are the border and border services, the police and social services, whether they're child and family services. There are all of those different avenues that we need to be speaking with.

One partner that often gets overlooked is the industry. Our Canadian firearms industry is wide and diverse, just like our country is. There is a lot of expertise. There's a lot of knowledge across the country. This is overlooked when it comes to firearms regulations, licensing and so forth. We need to involve everyone, so that we can come up with the best common-sense solutions that will lead all Canadians to lead a safe lifestyle.

Currently, we have firearms regulations before Parliament. One is the order in council that prohibited over 1,500 types of firearms. As we've just heard, however, what has that stopped? Firearms violence has not stopped. It is still continuing. The legislation in place only affects the legal owners and the legal firearms that the government knows about and where they are. We need to get to a strategy that gets to the root. We need to look at the rationale, and we need to be consistent along that.

As was just spoken about, we have legislation that reduces sentences for violent offences. For example, under Bill C-5, some of the proposals are reducing mandatory minimum sentences for the offences of using a firearm or an imitation firearm, possession of a firearm while knowing it's unauthorized, possession of a weapon obtained by a crime and, one that leads back to our borders, importing or exporting knowing it's unauthorized. If we're reducing these mandatory minimum sentences, we are failing to hold people and individuals accountable for their actions. We need to get that accountability back and hold people accountable.

Along with this, I recently observed through CTV News an exposé on the homicide rates in Toronto. In Toronto this year, in 2022, there have been 12 victims, seven of whom were under the age of 25 and five of whom were under the age of 20. Out of the 17 people charged, 14 were under the age of 23 and eight were under the age of 20. This ties in with your social media and everything else being longer and longer.

We need to get to the root cause. Some of the legislation that's in place has been in place for years and has failed to reduce gun violence as it was originally intended.

• (1240)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. You have five seconds to give us your most important last thought.

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My most important last thought is to get to the root cause and to work together to have common-sense regulations that can be enforced and keep Canadians safe.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Colleagues, I'm looking at the clock. We're at 20 minutes until the end of the session. I think what would make sense is to go one round, and if we go one round with the full six minutes each, we'll be over the time by just a few minutes. That seems to make sense.

Are there any comments from the committee?

**Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC):** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, our thoughts are that perhaps we could have two rounds with these witnesses. We haven't had a lot of questioning today and I'm sure we'll be tight and we'll be short on our recommendations in our third hour.

Would that be at all possible to do two rounds and just take a little bit of the third hour?

**The Chair:** I'm in the hands of the committee.

The suggestion is made that we go the full two rounds, which would cut our deliberations on advice in half.

I don't see any hands up.... Ms. Damoff is not in agreement. Are there other opinions? We don't have an agreement so we'll take it through one round and then suspend briefly and move into the third hour.

Ms. Dancho, go ahead with—

**A voice:** Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes?

**The Clerk:** I'm sorry, it's Mr. Shipley.

**The Chair:** Okay, Mr. Shipley, it's all yours, go ahead for six minutes.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I'll start off with Mr. Hipwell.

Mr. Hipwell, this committee heard from Solomon Friedman, the foremost legal scholar and lawyer on firearms and firearms legislation, just this past February 10, that Canada needs a “top to bottom rethink of how we classify firearms”, and that we need two things in this classification system: (a) that it be evidenced-based and (b) that it be based upon function, not appearance.

Do you agree with Mr. Friedman's assessment?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** Yes, if we use opinions, you can't defend an opinion. It needs to be factual and common sense just as described by Mr. Friedman.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Thank you for that.

Based on that then, do you think the Liberal government's classification of assault guns is accurate?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** No, I do not, because again appearance and opinion come into the factor, and it needs to be factual and evidence-based. Moreover, keep it simple so that everyone can clearly understand what it is. It makes everyone's jobs easier and simpler—everyone from the police to the manufacturers, to the owners, to the government, to the court system—rather than having these interpretations and opinions brought in.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Mr. Hipwell, you have quite an extensive knowledge of firearms. In your opinion how easy is it for a criminal to modify a firearm if they were to illegally obtain one?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** That depends on many factors. It depends on what the firearm is, that individual's knowledge and the tools they have at their hand. As society changes and with the availability of technology through the Internet and simple Google searches, it makes some people become gunsmiths by Google, much as you hear of doctors by Google today.

● (1245)

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Sorry, maybe I'll be a little clearer on that. Excuse me, I'm not a gun owner, so I do not profess to be an expert in this whatsoever and that's why we're here, to try to learn.

Following up on that last question, we have heard a narrative that legally obtained high-capacity magazines are an issue in Canada. Could you tell me how easy it is for a criminal to modify magazines to make them high capacity?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** Just to pre-empt that, high-capacity magazines were banned back in 1993, which was one of the points of that CTV news broadcast, namely that high-capacity magazines are still readily available.

Getting back to modifications, it all depends on how that magazine was modified as to the ease and then, obviously, that is a criminal offence in itself for those parties. Some can be done easily, some cannot, much like many other tasks.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Thank you, Mr. Hipwell.

I'll now switch over to Chief Inspector Bertrand.

Mr. Bertrand, I'd first like to thank you for your service. How many of the smuggled firearms that you find in Montreal are smuggled across the U.S. border versus domestically sourced?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Bertrand:** According to our estimates, approximately 80% of the illegal weapons we seize have crossed the border from the United States.

[*English*]

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Thank you for that.

Do you think a handgun ban would be effective or enforceable in your city?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Bertrand:** We feel that is the right direction, yes. Basically, we want to ban the most widely used weapons. We often talk about sticking to the evidence and relying on the information we're given. Currently, the weapons most commonly used to commit crimes are handguns. So any ban in the future should target handguns.

[*English*]

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Thank you.



Mr. Chair, I'll give my remaining time over to Mr. Lawrence.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Thank you.

Mr. Hipwell, in your considerable experience in law enforcement and now in the firearms industry—you can just make this anecdotal if you don't have empirical evidence—what percentage of those firearms being used by criminals were legally obtained as opposed to ones that came across the border illegally?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** I don't have anything specific from my time in law enforcement, but listening to what my colleague just said about 80% being smuggled, it makes one wonder how a handgun ban would be effective if 80% of the firearms seized were smuggled illegally into the country to start with.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Of the individuals who you do business with, the firearms owners who you know of, are you aware of any—and if so, how many—who have been involved in any type of illegal firearms crimes, such as murder or other firearms-related offences?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** Off the top of my head, I'm not aware of any who I have personally dealt with.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Thank you.

In your estimation, would you say that the root causes of firearms crime would be illegal smuggling, criminal activity and gang violence, or would think it would be law-abiding firearms owners?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** I would say that the root cause is coming from the gang side, the criminal activity, not the legal firearms owner.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Do you believe that banning and otherwise regulating already highly regulated firearms owners will see any significant reduction in gun violence in Canada?

**The Chair:** Please give a 10-second response. Sorry. We're out of time.

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** Okay. I'm sorry about that.

Quite simply, no: History is starting to show that with the legislation that's already in place and how ineffective it's been. That's why I'm saying get to the root cause of the issues, not the objects that we're dealing with, like the border security and the gangs themselves as an organization.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Zuberi, it's over to you for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us today.

I would like to ask Mr. Bertrand a few questions.

In your testimony, you said there was a sense of impunity among people who misused firearms in Montreal. You were also quoted in an October 2021 article in the *Montreal Gazette*, where you said there was also a sense of impunity among youth in Montreal.

• (1250)

[*English*]

How do you explain that sense of impunity when it comes to firearms and the misuse of firearms?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Bertrand:** Yes, that's what we've been noticing for three years already: a strong sense of impunity and the trivialization of firearms usage. In other words, people no longer fear being seen with guns on social media or walking around with guns.

We are more and more regularly seeing people with crime backgrounds starting over and making a show of force on social media. We've had investigations into videos where six, seven, eight guns were on display and ultimately the investigation found that they were real guns. Obviously, there is a prevailing sense of impunity because people are no longer afraid to be seen with firearms.

In the past, when a crime was committed, the perpetrator would leave the gun at the scene. Remember, that was what people did in recent years. Why did they do it? To avoid being caught with the weapon after the crime was committed. Now what we are seeing more and more is people are not leaving the gun at the scene of the crime. The fear or dread of being caught with the gun after a crime is no longer there.

We also see it when we stop vehicles. Back then, this is a few years ago, when criminals were stopped, we would often find a single firearm inside the vehicle; now we often find two or three.

There is clearly a sense of impunity. As to where it comes from, there are several reasons for it. First, gun usage has been trivialized. People say that they use the gun to protect themselves. According to them, if they have a gun to protect themselves, it's no longer serious in the eyes of the law. It's a perceived notion in the community. When we talk about the sense of impunity, it's still a perceived notion among individuals walking around with a gun.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** I have a second question for you, then I will give the rest of my time to my colleague Mr. Noormohamed.

The October 2021 article also quotes your comments about gun prices. You stated that gun prices had nevertheless gone up in Montreal.

[*English*]

Can you explain this, please?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Bertrand:** We've tried to explain this phenomenon in several ways. Over the past few years, prices have tripled, and even quadrupled. Guns that were selling for \$1,500 five or six years ago are now selling for around \$5,000 or \$6,000. That's a huge increase. Consequently, because guns are now worth \$5,000, they are no longer left at the scene of a crime.

The traditional supply and demand system does not apply to firearms. Despite the fact that the supply is there, prices continue to rise. What happens is that a lot of intermediaries get involved in the resale of firearms, and each one profits from the transaction. As you know, we buy firearms the same way we buy drugs, to build cases. We then find that a great number of intermediaries are involved in each transaction. Each time, the sale puts the individual at risk, so they take a cut accordingly. That's what drives prices up.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you, Mr. Bertrand.

I am giving the rest of my time to my colleague Mr. Noormohamed.

[English]

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

I'll keep my questions very brief.

Mr. Hipwell, thank you for joining us. I'd like you to talk to us about the WK180, which you designed and built with Kodiak Defence. Gun enthusiasts have said this basically gives people access to the AR class platform, AR being the AR-15, but a non-restricted version. The big plus with the WK180C is access to many of the AR platform's aftermarket parts.

Why would you want to put into the hands of people a weapon that is effectively the non-restricted version of an AR-15-type semi-automatic, centrefire rifle?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** This rifle is a non-restricted platform. It conforms with the sport shooting market and with varmint hunters' and many shooters' requirements in Canada.

• (1255)

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** If this is something the average person likes.... I'm trying to understand. What is the motivation for creating a weapon that is functionally the same as the non-restricted version of an AR-15, which is probably the assault rifle most used thus far in mass shootings in the U.S.?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** That is in the U.S. You used U.S. statistics. We live in Canada.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** I'm aware of that. My question is, why would you want to create a weapon that is functionally the same as an AR-15 and provide a legal means for people to obtain it?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** The base platform for this firearm was already designed. It wasn't something new. It's based off a non-restricted firearm that is already in the Canadian market.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you very much. We're out of time; I'm sorry. I'm always apologizing for being out of time. That's the way it is.

Next up is either Ms. Michaud or Monsieur Lemire. I have both names on the list, so whoever wants to go next, you're up.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I will be speaking. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Bertrand.

First, I want to thank you for your testimony. I also want to thank the SPVM for the work they do on a daily basis. Having worked in the borough of Mercier—Hochelaga-Maisonneuve and lived in Montreal for 13 years, I can only commend your work, especially in the current situation.

I'd like to highlight the three requests you've made to the federal government in the current context: you have asked it to pass legislation banning handguns, to enhance monitoring at the border and investigations into firearms smuggling tactics, and to bring the issue of minimum sentences in certain gun usage and possession situations back to the forefront?

Is that correct?

**Mr. David Bertrand:** Yes, that's correct.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I felt it was important to reiterate the requests, so that they are well documented.

I would be especially interested in hearing about your work with other police forces. As chief inspector of the SPVM, do you feel that there is currently sufficient communication and cooperation between the various police forces, which include the Canada Border Services Agency and the RCMP, to combat gun trafficking?

**Mr. David Bertrand:** I would tell you that, at the moment, we are working very well together. We talk to each other on a daily basis. SPVM members on secondment are part of integrated teams including people from the Sûreté du Québec, the RCMP and the CBSA.

Communication is also excellent. We have set up forms for exchanging information. All those leading investigations can talk about their cases there. We also exchange expertise in the field as investigators share information. This happens on a daily basis. Information is flowing very smoothly between the various policing agencies.

At least that's the case in Quebec. As you know, Operation Centaur was launched a few months ago, and I can tell you it really works well.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** The government set up a Canada-U.S. bilateral task force in the spring of 2021. Are you satisfied with what it has done so far? What expertise or assistance is the task force providing to help with gun control? Is the task force helping you to improve how you investigate smuggling tactics?

**Mr. David Bertrand:** I'm not aware of the task force's work.

The tactics we are currently investigating are always shifting. As soon as we foil one, another crops up. They are using the same routes as they do with narcotics.

The most common tactic now is people acquire guns legally in the United States for 300 or 400 U.S. dollars and then ship them to Canada, most often by land. That's the main tactic

We try to thwart as many tactics as possible, but as you know, criminals innovate on a regular basis. We try to keep up with their inclinations as quickly as we can.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Have the measures for reporting illegally acquired firearms been successful? Do we need to go so far as to ban handguns?

**Mr. David Bertrand:** We think so.

We also want to look into the issue of firearm parts. I'm talking about ghost guns here. Some individuals are illegally importing gun frames from companies like Polymer80, and then modifying them with parts they get delivered through the Canadian postal service. For example, once the frame arrives, the trigger and top can be ordered as parts and they can finish assembling the gun. A ghost gun can therefore be built with three orders.

So we'd like better legislation to have more control over the purchase and circulation of these parts.

• (1300)

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I understand. These modified weapons are also more dangerous, since they can hold more bullets, as we know.

Last fall, you mentioned that investigations were getting tougher because of social media and the culture of violence that has become a way of life. People are no longer afraid of retaliation or prison, as you said earlier. Violence and guns have become a way to gain notoriety and fame in the community.

In your opinion, are social media a new recruitment tool for gangs? Do you have the resources to respond to this added complexity in your investigations?

**Mr. David Bertrand:** We believe that social media are indeed used for recruitment. Crime groups—I am talking about established groups—find that posting their actions on social media honours their colours. People want to protect their ego on social media, so any group threatened by another has to retaliate to maintain its credibility on social media. Social media are also used to pay tribute to group members who have died or are in prison. In short, social media are used to display the group's colours and demonstrate its credibility: unfortunately they have become a new battleground.

Do we have the resources available? We're constantly monitoring social media very closely. Unfortunately, we can't control all the information circulating on social media, but our monitoring allows us to learn more and gain insight into criminals who flaunt themselves in public.

On the other hand, again, we do face some legal hurdles. When we see guns on social media, the investigations that follow are complex and it takes time to lay charges, as we have to determine the location and timing of the intended action and demonstrate that an actual weapon was used.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** As we know, it attracts an audience that is getting younger and younger too.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Finally, for the last set of questions on this round, we have Mr. MacGregor.

You have six minutes, whenever you're ready.

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

Mr. Hipwell, maybe I'll start with you. As you're very well aware, under Canadian firearms law people are allowed to possess a large-capacity magazine that has been permanently altered. I know that the public safety minister's mandate letter mentions "requiring [a] permanent alteration of long-gun magazines so that they [could] never hold more than five rounds".

I guess it may be difficult for police officers from external visual inspection to determine whether a large-capacity magazine has been permanently altered, and since it is illegal to hold more than five rounds, wouldn't it make sense from a policy perspective just to ban large-capacity magazines outright so that there is never any question when law enforcement officers are involved in a tense situation?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** On the subject of high-capacity magazines, they were prohibited back in 1993. That's when the magazine capacity limits were brought into legislation, so they are prohibited and they have been since 1993.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I understand that, but I'm talking about the requirement that they're permanently altered so they can never hold more than five rounds. What I'm saying is that there might be some difficulty in determining whether such a magazine has been altered or not. It may raise questions like not knowing if you're dealing with someone who's got five rounds or 30 rounds, because that's going to make a huge difference in how a tense situation could be resolved.

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** It can be a factor, absolutely, in dealing with a situation. I'm trying to answer your question on if they're already at five rounds. What are you saying?

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Just a simple ban on large-capacity magazines, even if they've been permanently altered, so there is never a question as to whether it's holding five rounds or 30....

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** But that is already in place.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I understand that, but that may not be visually apparent to a law enforcement official who is confronting a tense situation.

• (1305)

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** I can tell from my past experience as a law enforcement officer whether it was one round, five rounds or 50 rounds. I didn't want to look at any of those. To say there's going to be something visual for a law enforcement officer to base his risk assessment on in the situation is not a very wise option.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I was just wondering about this because it does make a difference to how many potential victims there could be. I'll move on.

One of our previous witnesses in the first hour was Mr. Christian Pearce, who is a criminal defence lawyer. He has represented many clients who have been involved in firearms crimes. I know we've had a lot of conversations on the illegal firearms trade. These are smuggled weapons, and they were illegal to begin with, but there is also a very real problem with legal firearms that are being illegally diverted.

Criminal organizations in the past have targeted firearms shops, vendors and so on. What more can we be doing to ensure that legal firearms are not being illegally diverted into the hands of criminal organizations?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** That falls under the licensing aspects for private individuals, making sure that the licensing processes are in place and that these individuals are fully vetted and firearms owners get vetted daily.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Are you satisfied that we have enough security measures in place to protect the stock of legal firearms so that they are not as tempting a target to criminal organizations?

**Mr. Matthew Hipwell:** Yes, there are lots of deterrents in there, but it comes down to accountability. If we're going to water down offences and punishments for those who contravene the law, then we're losing part of that. If there's no deterrent and there are no repercussions, there's no accountability and we're losing out on a big part of that. Watering down the offences and taking away those mandatory minimums for these violent offences is not helping deter—

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I will note that there is no evidence showing that mandatory minimums decrease crime. Furthermore, there are relevant sections in the Criminal Code that allow judges to increase or decrease a sentence based on severity and aggravating factors.

Chief Inspector Bertrand, I'll move to you.

We have had other law enforcement officials talk at great length about the link between the illegal drug trade and the illegal firearms trade. Certainly Vancouver police have identified how the high profitability of the drug trade in Vancouver has led to an explosion of firearms use amongst gangs.

Can you, please, in the remaining 45 seconds, inform this committee a little bit more about Montreal's experience in this regard?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. David Bertrand:** Yes, there is still a connection between drug trafficking and firearms possession or trafficking. We must remember that the more money or drugs people have, the more protection they need. We've been seeing this recently with drug theft. People want to protect themselves, they don't want to be attacked, so they carry guns. People also use guns for intimidation and to protect their territory, of course.

As I was also saying, you must remember that they use the same routes. So, yes, there is still a connection between drug trafficking and firearms possession.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their testimony this morning. It's been very helpful. Your experience and insights help inform the committee. On behalf of the committee and all parliamentarians, thank you for the work you do and for sharing your insights with us.

Colleagues, we will now suspend the public portion of the meeting and reconvene to meet in camera. Please use the in camera link that was provided to you. I'll see you in a few minutes.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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