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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE NDP LEADER

April 23, 2023

Mr. Jagmeet Singh, M.P.
Leader, New Democratic Party
House of Commons
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Re: What happened to the NDP's commitment to banning assault-style weapons?

Mr. Singh,

On Tuesday, April 25th, Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino [will testify](#) before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU) as part of the special sessions aimed studying the true impacts of amendments (G-4 and G-46) that were withdrawn last February after a storm of protest from gun owners and gun lobby advocates.

The Minister has stated both [publicly](#) and in meetings with stakeholders that he is determined to work with his parliamentary colleagues to craft clear new amendments consistent with the Liberal Party's three successive elections promises to keep assault-style weapons off our streets – [and not](#) firearms that are reasonably used for hunting. The Liberals, NDP and Bloc Québécois have undoubtedly been negotiating behind the scenes in order to find a consensus on what new amendments could be tabled to this effect.

However, at this stage in late April, more than two months after the initial amendments were withdrawn, it is extremely concerning that there is still no official word regarding the introduction and content of new measures. There are only eight weeks of sitting days left before the summer break, and SECU need to examine numerous other amendments to C-21 in addition to those banning assault weapons. Time is running out if the bill is to pass in the House of Commons before the summer and not face an onslaught of gun lobby-backed protests across the country.

While it's obvious that the Liberals, backed by a [determined](#) Prime Minister and [tireless](#) Public Safety Minister, are working to correct mistakes of the past and draft new amendments to ban assault weapons, and that the Bloc Québécois, through its competent Public Safety Critic Kristina Michaud, is helping with [smart](#) and [constructive](#) proposals, we have yet to see or hear any helpful contribution from the NDP. With two out of three parties in these negotiations clearly eager to ban assault weapons, we can only surmise that any blame for an eventual failure to come up with new and improved amendments will fall on the NDP.

Not only has the NDP failed to show any signs of support to finding a new legislative solution, it has reinforced [the disinformation](#) that was at the core of the unfounded fear and confusion that lead to the withdrawal of the amendments and sidestepped its way out of every opportunity to reiterate its previous support to ban assault weapons.

Reinforcing the disinformation

Indeed, from the outset, Conservative MPs monopolized the communication void left open by the Liberals to falsely [claim](#) that the amendments were basically banning hunting rifles, mirroring the gun lobby's usual tactic of [exaggerating or outright lying](#) about what guns are affected, even [pointing to](#) models that were explicitly excluded. Turns out practically all the models that were showcased by both the Conservatives and pro-gun groups would [not have been affected](#) by the proposed amendments, a fact largely ignored by the media but [validated](#) by the RCMP.

But instead of correcting the disinformation in order to provide constituents and indigenous and hunting organizations with the facts, like their bloquiste counterparts [were doing](#), the NDP amplified the disinformation. Numerous NDP MPs (ex: [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), presumably representing the party's position, repeated the false claim that the amendments dramatically expanded the definition of prohibited firearms to cover hunting rifles.

No word about banning assault weapons

Yet throughout the entire debate that followed the introduction of the amendments, the NDP barely said a word about the critical goal of banning the private ownership of assault weapons in Canada, a measure generally supported by [80% of Canadians](#) with, ironically, the highest support among NDP voters according to [some polls](#). While you [said](#) you support the goals of PolySeSouvient, you never specified support for our top priority: banning assault weapons.

Indeed, when you [announced](#) the NDP's support for the Mass Casualty Commission's [final report](#), your statement distorted its recommendation regarding assault weapons (which essentially mirrors the withdrawn amendments) by saying the report "highlights the urgent need for stronger gun control measures, as well as *better tracking and reporting of assault weapons*" – substituting "prohibiting" with "tracking and reporting". Why would you do that?

In addition, during the special hearings on the G-4 and G-46 amendments, the NDP Public Safety Critic seemed solely [concerned](#) about the process – how they tabled, misunderstood and withdrawn – but asked no meaningful questions of witnesses regarding neither the substance of the amendments nor how they could be improved.

Only vague fence-sitting

Such disingenuous, vague and noncommittal positioning has tainted the NDP's stance on gun control since Jack Layton became leader in 2003. Contrary to its historical support for gun control, indeed the strongest of all parties throughout the 1990s, the NDP has since mostly [sat on the fence](#), never clearly siding with one camp or the other until forced to vote. And while generally voting in favour of gun control, the party undermined the inclusion of effective measures in the lead-up to those votes.

When asked if the NDP supported the 2020 Orders in Council prohibiting some 1,500 models of assault weapons in the wake of the Nova Scotia massacre, you [deflected by raising more questions](#).

Such ambiguous positions has earned the party criticism from various commentators in the course of the last election campaign, from a [gun control expert](#) saying the NDP "largely avoids the gun control issue", to a [prominent political commentator](#) asking "is it my imagination, or are the NDP being quiet on the CPC gun issue?", to [members of the general public](#) pointing to the party's "imprecise wording regarding assault weapons."

Pushing to annihilate the freeze on handgun purchases

The most recent inexcusable move of the NDP was [to push](#), throughout the parliamentary hearings on Bill C-21 so far, for the exemption of “practical shooters” from the freeze on new handgun purchases, drawing [accolades](#) from the gun lobby. Bill C-21 already exempts “Olympic” shooting competitors, which groups like ours deem problematic. Yet instead of tightening up this exemption, the NDP Public Safety Critic at the time, Alistair MacGregor, repeatedly argued in favour of exempting the International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC), which [acts out](#) hostage taking and self-defence scenarios.

Exempting IPSC could render the freeze on new handgun purchases meaningless, as IPSC can certify any shooting “sport” that it chooses. Since the vast majority of handgun owners got their license as target shooters, and since every gun club could decide to offer IPSC events and competition, it follows that most if not all gun club members could be exempt. Indeed, [IPSC-BC said](#) that should they be granted such an exception, “we will become the gateway to handgun ownership in Canada and can expect a huge increase in membership.”

Siding with the gun lobby, underhandedly pushing to cancel the handgun freeze, sitting on the fence regarding assault weapons. NOT helpful. What if the NDP is trying to bargain with the Liberals by requiring a broader exemption to the handgun freeze in exchange for its support for a new definition banning assault weapons?

What happened to your last two election promises?

And yet, the NDP plainly supported a ban on assault-style weapons in the last two elections. In [2019](#), the party stated: “We support a ban on military-style assault weapons.” And in [2021](#), it promised to “eliminate banned assault weapons by requiring those who currently own these weapons to participate in a federal buy-back program” and to “expand the definition of prohibited weapons to include new models of assault weapons.”

NDP voters trust you to follow through on your promises, but time and time again your party is either missing in action when it counts, or it’s discretely undermining progress. At this critical juncture, we feel it’s time to call the party out on its detrimental approach with respect to assault weapons. The fight to ban civilian ownership of military-style weapons is at a crossroads in Canada and the NDP is in a position to make or break this measure.

We are therefore asking you to take a clear stand on whether or not you are cooperating in good faith – without negotiating away any other gun control advances – to ensure once and for all the prohibition of assault-style weapons in Canada.

[Signatures removed for publication]

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