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Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

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•(1545)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC)):
I'd like to bring this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. This is meeting number 15, and today we are going to get a report from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on their management and operation.

I would like to welcome to the committee, from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Commissioner, Mr. William Elliott.

Welcome, sir. We are honoured to have you here this afternoon.

The usual practice of this committee is to allow you an opening statement of approximately 10 minutes, and then we'll have questions and comments for you for the remainder of our time here.

Welcome, sir, and when you're ready, you may begin.

[Translation]

Commr William Elliott (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am ready.

I welcome the opportunity to appear before this committee for the first time in my role as a Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of the committee, as I continue to become more familiar with the important work carried out by the women and men of the force, across the country and around the world.

[English]

I still have much to learn about the many roles and responsibilities of the RCMP, about policing more broadly, and the law enforcement challenges in communities served by the RCMP and by other Canadian police services.

It has been a little over six months since I took office as the twenty-second commissioner of the RCMP. In fact, it was seven months ago today that the Minister of Public Safety announced that I was being appointed commissioner.

On taking office, I indicated to the employees of the RCMP that my first priority was to support them. That continues to be the case. I also indicated that my first order of business was to meet with employees in order to gain a better understanding of them and the important work they do. I committed to visiting detachments, offices, and workplaces across the country as often as possible. Although I may never get to every one of our 750 or so detachments, and many, many other workplaces, including training facilities,

forensic laboratories, and divisional headquarters, hardly a week has gone by that I have not been out meeting with employees.

[Translation]

I have also met with provincial, territorial and municipal partners in contract policing and with both domestic and international partner police services and public safety agencies.

[English]

In the past two weeks, for example, I met with employees in our regional headquarters in Charlottetown and in detachments in both the East Prince region and Queens County in Prince Edward Island; in detachments in Sherwood Park and Leduc, Alberta; with the mayors of communities in the lower mainland of British Columbia; with members of the integrated homicide investigations team in British Columbia; with members serving in our detachment in Surrey, British Columbia, and at the Vancouver International Airport, and with those preparing to provide security for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games.

I also visited our detachment in Thunder Bay, Ontario, and met in Ottawa with employees who provide security for the Governor General, the Prime Minister, visiting heads of state, and foreign diplomats, and with members of our national capital region emergency response team.

My travels so far as commissioner have taken me to every province and territory, with the exception of New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Yukon. I have visited many of the divisions a number of times, and I intend to get to those divisions I have not yet visited within the next couple of months.

Next week I travel to Haiti to meet with Canadian police officers serving with the United Nations mission there. This includes not only members of the RCMP but police officers from other Canadian police services, including

[Translation]

the Service de police de la ville de Montréal, the Sûreté du Québec,

[English]

the Ontario Provincial Police, and officers from Durham, Ontario, Saguenay, Saint-Jérôme, and Rivière-du-Loup.

Without exception, what I find is that I meet with employees of the RCMP from coast to coast who are dedicated men and women doing tremendously important jobs, promoting the safety and security of Canadians and the communities we serve, often under very difficult and challenging circumstances. The diversity of our employees, their roles, their experience, their training, education, and skill sets are nothing short of extraordinary.

[Translation]

I am very proud to be associated with them and to lead a national institution that has such a long and distinguished record of service, dating back almost to Confederation.

[English]

These are challenging and difficult times for the RCMP. As proud as I am to be commissioner and as proud as all of the women and men of the RCMP are, and as good a police force as we are, we are also fully aware that there is an urgent need for us to change in order to address a variety of problems and to adapt to the increasingly complex and difficult environments in which we operate.

Many of the challenges we face are highlighted in the report of the Task Force on Governance and Cultural Change in the RCMP, released just before Christmas. The report calls for action to address a range of issues, including management accountability at all levels, internal discipline, workplace disclosure, ethics, and independent oversight and review.

I note that the task force entitled their report, *Rebuilding the Trust*. Like the members of the task force, I recognize that we must strengthen public trust in the RCMP, for we cannot provide effective policing services without the support of the people we serve.

As I have said, the RCMP has significant weaknesses, as the report highlights. We must address them, and we will address them.

• (1550)

[Translation]

The important work to do is already underway.

[English]

As the report recommends, we are establishing a full-time change management team. Assistant Commissioner Keith Clark, who has taken on the important role as the head of that team, is working with our senior executive committee and commanding officers to identify members of a core team to be drawn from across the force and across the country.

Their first deliverable will be a detailed action plan. The team will support our efforts to build a more modern, more efficient, more effective, and more accountable RCMP to better serve Canada and Canadians, and to be more responsive to the needs of our employees.

An important element of what I have just described is independent oversight and review. We are committed to working collaboratively to support the current mechanisms providing such oversight and review. Parliament and parliamentary committees, including this committee, obviously play an important role. We are also committed to supporting whatever new or enhanced review mechanisms are put in place, and we look forward to the government's decisions in this regard.

In many ways, the past six months have been incredibly short. Yet, looking back, much has happened. There have been many highs, including a number of notable operational successes. Unfortunately, there have also been far too many lows.

My brief tenure as commissioner has witnessed the tragic killing of two fine young members of the RCMP: Constable Christopher Worden and Constable Douglas Scott. The pain inflicted by their deaths on their families and on their communities, and on the RCMP, cannot be overstated. We have also experienced the most unfortunate and disturbing death of Robert Dziekanski at the airport in Vancouver, a death we deeply regret.

The past six months have brought significant changes for me personally. They have also witnessed the beginning of real and significant changes in the RCMP, including in the senior leadership of the force. We will continue to push forward to develop and implement a change management agenda.

As I said last August at the official ceremony marking the change of command of the RCMP from Commissioner Busson to me, "We must build on our strengths, recognize and address our weaknesses, and live up to the highest standards that we set for ourselves and that Canadians rightly expect of us."

I am confident that we can live up to this challenge and this commitment.

[Translation]

Thank you again for inviting me. I would be happy to respond to your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir, for that opening statement.

As per the usual practice of this committee, we will turn to the official opposition first.

Mr. Dosanjh, please.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Thank you, and thank you, Mr. Commissioner, for coming to visit us.

I'm going to ask you three questions. Let me preface my remarks by saying that I had the opportunity to be the attorney general in British Columbia for four and half years, and my responsibilities included policing at that time, among other things. I held the force in the highest regard, particularly the RCMP but all of the police forces in British Columbia—as is the case across the country. But that is not to say that there haven't been disappointments, and that's what I'm going to talk to you about.

You say there is now a mandate and responsibility to change the management practices. I'm using different language from what you have used. Let me take you back to an event that happened not in your time but before your time. We can't hold you responsible for it, but here's the question.

You remember the situation around the income trust debacle. I understand that the police officers and the police on the ground are independent operationally. Who, what, how, when, where, and whether or not they investigate, either something or someone, is a decision that they absolutely have the right to make, and I respect that.

But for some people, what happened during the income trust affair appeared to be a gross interference in an election, and right in the middle of an election. If you believe that was inappropriate—and I'd like to know whether you believe it was inappropriate—what steps have you taken to ensure that this kind of thing doesn't happen again? What protocols have been put in place to deal with politically sensitive issues, particularly in the middle of an election?

• (1555)

Commr William Elliott: Thank you.

From my review of some of the circumstance around that, it is my view that the RCMP does not have adequate policies, guidelines, or direction with respect to communications relating to criminal investigations. I am not aware that there were any policies or guidelines that were broken or not followed in the case you raise, but I think it in fact is an indication that the policies are inadequate and the practices are uneven. We are in the process of taking steps to clarify our policies and therefore to improve our practices.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Would you tell me, if you can, what steps have been taken so far?

Commr William Elliott: Other than to direct that we should review our policies and practices and that we should establish new ones to cover communications in the broadest context with respect to criminal investigations, we have not put in place any new policies. We have thoroughly reviewed the current policies and practices, and I've concluded as I've just indicated.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

Let me move to the next question, and that is with respect to the tasers. Our public safety minister, Mr. Day, ordered a review by Paul Kennedy of the Public Complaints Commission, and he made certain recommendations. Under your guidance, obviously the operational guidelines have been changed, but in the case of a change that he highly recommended, which was to reclassify tasers as an impact weapon, his particular recommendation has not been followed.

I would like to know what went on, in your deliberations on this issue, that led, when the first recommendation was made by Public Complaints Commissioner Kennedy, to that particular recommendation not being followed.

Commr William Elliott: Thank you.

You asked, I think, about both process and result. With respect to process, we have reviewed all of our policies, and we have certainly carefully considered the recommendations that came from the CPC. I note that those are interim recommendations, and that the work of the CPC continues. We have committed to both the minister and Mr. Kennedy that we will work closely in support of their ongoing efforts.

We agreed that some changes were necessary, but I guess there is a difference in views with respect to when it is appropriate to deploy a

conducted energy device. In addition to reviewing our own policies, we had a number of discussions with other jurisdictions, other levels of government, and other police forces. As I understand it, the recommendation that Mr. Kennedy made specifically with respect to the classification of the device is inconsistent not only with the way we currently treat those devices but also with the practices across the country.

Now, I don't suggest that because his recommendation is different from current practice it's not worth considering. We have undertaken to continue to work with not only Mr. Kennedy but also with other... and I note that a number of jurisdictions have been looking at this. In fact, I understand that the Province of New Brunswick has made some amendments to their policies that apply to provincially regulated police services. I think that happened today, in fact. I will carefully look at that as well.

But we continue to believe that the device, used appropriately, is one that promotes both officer safety and public safety. We continue to dialogue with Mr. Kennedy and his team. I would hope that by the time he makes his final report, we will build consensus with respect to what the appropriate policies and practices are.

• (1600)

The Chair: If you have more questions, Mr. Dosanjh, we'll have to come back to you in the next round.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Ménard, are you ready?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I want to thank you for appearing before us, Mr. Elliott, so soon after beginning to work in your new position. I really admire you for accepting such a big challenge, not only for the reasons that you mentioned, but also because, in my opinion, the evolution of modern criminality is creating exceptional challenges for police forces. I believe that in these circumstances, it is crucial to have the cooperation of your men. First, let me raise a sensitive issue.

You have had legal training. No doubt, you are aware of the decision handed down by Canada's Supreme Court in the Delisle case. Justice Bastarache, who was speaking for the majority, said the following:

I have had the benefit of reading the joint reasons of Cory and Iacobucci JJ. I accept their description of the facts and account of the judicial history. Like them, I believe that s. 2(d) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects RCMP members against any interference by management in the establishment of an employee association. However, this right exists independently of any legislative framework.

It was not because Delisle lost this case that the right to association was not recognized, quite the contrary. However, given the legislative framework in which he wanted to do this, namely an association with other public servants, the RCMP was able to prevent him from doing that.

The Supreme Court referred to the same principle again in 2007 in the case of Health Services and Support – Facilities Subsector Bargaining Association versus British Columbia. Once again, the principle developed in the Delisle case was quoted. And I quote:

The principle affirmed was clear: government measures that substantially interfere with the ability of individuals to associate with a view to promoting work-related interests violate the guarantee of freedom of association under s. 2(d) of the Charter.

In the Delisle decision, Justice L'Heureux-Dubé, who agreed with the majority but who wanted to give her own reasons, did, nonetheless, clearly state the following in paragraph 4:

[...] actions to discourage or prevent employee associations within the RCMP have a long history. The passage of the Charter with its guarantee of freedom of association, however, means that such actions are no longer lawful.

Mr. Elliott, do you recognize the fact that the RCMP is obliged by the Constitution to respect the rights of its members to form an independent association?

[English]

Commr William Elliott: I certainly recognize that we have an obligation to respect the charter rights of our employees and of citizens more broadly, and my understanding is that many believe the current provisions of the RCMP Act with respect to unionization are constitutional.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Can you reassure us, Mr. Elliott, that people who try to set up such an association will be certain that no reprisals, no measures meant to make their tasks more difficult and no disciplinary measures will be taken against them because they are pursuing such an objective, and that this will not negatively impact on their evaluation?

• (1605)

[English]

Commr William Elliott: I have several comments with respect to that. First of all, the RCMP does have a unique arrangement with respect to staff representation; that is the program referred to as the SRR program, the staff relations representative program. It's unique in many aspects, but regular and civilian members of the RCMP elect their representatives, and we deal extensively with those representatives.

Employees of the RCMP are also free to form, and in some instances have formed, associations. They have the right to do that. There are current provisions in the RCMP Act. I'm not in a position to debate the various legal arguments with respect to the interpretation or constitutionality of those provisions, but the provisions on their face indicate that regular and civilian members are not at liberty to form a union.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Regarding another matter, we noticed that the RCMP takes a great deal of time to carry out its investigations. I could cite the example of the Air India inquiry which went on for 15 years. In the Airbus investigation, the events took place in 1993, and already in 1995, the RCMP seemed to be giving very clear signals to the Swiss authorities regarding the objective of their searches. It was only in 2003 that the investigation was declared closed.

The Gomery Commission report was finished, I believe, in November 1995, but it was only on July 4, 2007, that a search warrant was issued within the framework of an investigation of one of the persons targeted by the Gomery investigation. These are the most striking cases. However, as you know, I practised criminal law for quite a few years in Montreal, both on the side of the Crown and on the side of the defence, and let me tell you that we used to say that the RCMP still rides on horseback whereas the other police forces drive around in cars. We had already noticed how extremely slow they are.

Are you aware of this problem? Have you any plan in sight to attack this most unfortunate problem?

[English]

The Chair: Time has expired, but you may give a brief response to that.

Commr William Elliott: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would indicate that investigations are often long and complex, and I don't think it's fair to judge the conduct of an investigation on the passage of time alone. I note that another parliamentary committee is looking into matters that took place some years ago, and I don't think anybody would take it kindly if it were suggested to them that that's in the past and it shouldn't be investigated. Some investigations are fast; some investigations are slow. Some investigations are complex; some are more straightforward.

I would say the RCMP has some of the finest investigators not only in Canada but in the world, and we're recognized by other police services internationally and domestically for that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Ms. Priddy, you are next.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Commissioner, for being here today.

I represent a constituency that will house Division E in British Columbia. We will have 2,500 staff relocated to Surrey and to my constituency, and I am very pleased to see that. We are well served by the RCMP in Surrey. I think it is the largest city still being served by the RCMP.

I'm glad you mentioned the issue of public confidence in your remarks; you would naturally, as a result of the report. In the province in which I reside, and from the letters coming in, I know there is a significant concern about a number of the incidents that have taken place in responses by the RCMP. I'm very disturbed to see people's faith in the RCMP dropping, because that is not healthy for anybody, the RCMP or our communities.

I would like to ask you about the Maher Arar case. I would like to first ask whether you have discovered who provided or leaked the information about Mr. Arar to the United States.

•(1610)

Commr William Elliott: I have no additional information on that. I think Mr. Justice O'Connor canvassed thoroughly the matters surrounding Mr. Arar. The commission he led certainly found that our policies were not adequate and that in fact the policies that were in place at the time were not followed. Steps have been taken to address that.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Let me continue down that line a little bit. Could you tell us the status of those Justice O'Connor recommendations? I don't mean the action on each one, but their status in terms of how quickly you have moved forward. Have some of them been already implemented? If so, could you give us an example, please?

Commr William Elliott: I would say with respect to the recommendations directed to the RCMP—because of course there were recommendations directed to others—that all of Justice O'Connor's recommendations have been actioned by the RCMP. I would say the bulk of them we have actually completed, although maybe it's a misnomer to say that they are completed, because he suggested we should put into place mechanisms to better manage investigations in relation to national security; that we should have more centralized systems; that we should review material for accuracy, for example, before decisions are taken with respect to sharing information with foreign governments. All of those practices we have put into place, and in a sense, our carrying out of those recommendations and obligations is ongoing.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Let me go back, if I may, to the first question and to your answer, which was that Justice O'Connor recognized there were a number, and you acknowledged that there were a number, of "communication problems", if you will—and I'm sorry I can't remember the exact phrasing you used—that were not in place or not used at the time Mr. Arar was sent back to Syria.

I'm asking about whether there will be any accountability for those individuals, or whether you are looking for the individuals who leaked that and whether there would be any accountability.

Commr William Elliott: I'm not looking for any individuals in issues relating to the circumstances around the information sharing canvassed by Mr. O'Connor, which were all dealt with before I was appointed commissioner.

Ms. Penny Priddy: As were many of the other issues that you will probably continue to see.

Let me ask, if I may, what is the single most important concrete example or thing that you could say to the public, I mean other than as a general answer, about what you believe needs to be done or what you are doing to rebuild the public confidence in the RCMP. I realize you have been out visiting across the country and talking to employees, and certainly I understand your first priority is to do that. But in terms of rebuilding the public confidence in the RCMP, can you give a couple of very specific examples of what you would be doing on that—not general ones about having everybody do their job well, etc.?

Commr William Elliott: I wish there was a simple answer about how to rebuild the public's confidence in the RCMP. I certainly think we need to be more proactive with respect to our communications. I think we need to be more upfront with respect to acknowledging the problems we have. I note that the media have recently, albeit on a

limited number of occasions, suggested that they are beginning to see that we are more forthcoming with respect to information. There was an unfortunate incident in the lower mainland recently where we proactively released information about an individual who was apprehended by members of the RCMP. He was innocent of any wrongdoing; it was a case of mistaken identity, and we came forward and released that information to the media. I think actually it wasn't the day that this incident happened; it was the next day. This is certainly an example of that.

I've also not just been meeting with members and employees of the RCMP, but, as I've indicated, with our contract partners and many others. Unfortunately, the task force report sets out a litany of issues that we need to address. Again, there are recommendations directed at the RCMP and recommendations directed to the government and others, but the ones within our authorities we are all addressing.

•(1615)

The Chair: We'll have to come back later on this.

We're now going to go to the other side. Mr. MacKenzie, please.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Commissioner, for being here. I think I'd like to start off by saying that I want to thank you for taking on this task. It's never an easy one, and as you already know, it's like being the president of General Motors; you're now responsible every time a tire goes flat, along with running the large organization that it is.

In terms of the position, the biggest question seemed to be about political interference, and I think it's an issue that you already knew before you got there, but it's one that's of most import, and I would trust that the lack of political interference is what you need to do your job. I'm wondering if you can tell us if that's the case, or if I'm dead wrong, then say so.

And perhaps partly mentioning what my colleague from the NDP said, I would suggest to you, sir, that if all of your people do a good job, the public's confidence will go up, along with seeing that there is a change. Part of this relates to what we've read and heard, that there is a problem in recruiting. I'm wondering if that is improving, the ability to recruit. It always seems to me it's easier to recruit when there's good news out there, and if that in fact is happening, could you tell us about it?

Commr William Elliott: Okay. Thank you.

With respect to the independence of the police, certainly I feel very strongly that this is a fundamental principle of a democratic society, and I said that seven months ago today, when it was announced I was being appointed commissioner. Certainly there have been no incidents over the last seven months, or six months and a bit, since I actually took office, in both cases, where I have been concerned with anyone attempting to unduly influence me or the RCMP.

With respect to your indication that when we all do a good job, trust in the RCMP will go up, I believe that's certainly true and a very important element. Unfortunately, the reality is we're an organization of some 28,000 employees. Some of them will make mistakes. No doubt many mistakes have been made over the time that I have been commissioner. I think when we make mistakes, we have to be honest about it and we have to address them. Some of that has to do with how we communicate, and it also has to do with how we deal with things like workplace disclosure and discipline, which are certainly areas that need improvement.

With respect to recruiting, I guess there's good news and bad news. We are actually having people apply to the RCMP in record numbers. We are accepting people into the RCMP, sending them to training in Regina and having them graduate in record numbers. That is in large part because we are investing a lot of time and effort in recruiting. During this past year, 2007, I think we sent just over 1,500 cadets to Depot, and not that long ago, half that number would have been a good year.

But we are in fact not keeping pace with our requirements. We have lots of people retiring, and we have been asked by provinces and territories and municipalities to increase our numbers. We have also been given additional responsibilities, particularly in the post-9/11 environment. We would actually like to have several hundred more a year, and that is a real priority for us, to bring those numbers up even further.

• (1620)

The Chair: You still have a couple of minutes.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: With respect to that, obviously what you're indicating is there is the ability to recruit, and there have been some enhancements with the training facility. Does that allow for the additional folks to get through the process in a timely fashion?

Commr William Elliott: Yes. The government has provided us with significant funding to expand our capacity at Depot, and we are actually in the position that we have the capability. We have both the physical facilities and the capacity with respect to instructors to put several hundred more candidates through a year. We are not actually meeting our recruiting targets, so we think we need to find new and imaginative ways to increase our recruiting and also to reduce the time within which we process applications.

There is great competition out there. While I was in British Columbia in the last couple of weeks, I met with the newly appointed chief of the Vancouver city police. They are actually bringing forward an incentive program on a pilot basis, I understand, initially for 90 days, in which they're telling their own employees that if they recruit someone to join the Vancouver police, the police department will give them a week's leave. It's tough out there, and there are lots of people competing for the same limited supply of individuals. There are demographic issues, obviously, and some forces are a lot more flexible than we have been to date with respect to the kinds of incentives they're willing to put into practice.

One other thing I will mention, and the task force report talks about this, is that we don't pay our cadets when they are in training. Many other police services do. We'd like to find a way to level that playing field as well. We think that would help.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Do you currently accept lateral entry into the organization?

Commr William Elliott: Yes, we do, but I agree with the task force that we should do more of that.

I think there are some current practices that are probably discouraging lateral entrants. I think our general practice is if someone who's a corporal or a sergeant in another force wants to come to the RCMP, we start them as a constable. I'm not sure that in today's marketplace that is a sustainable or wise practice.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to our five-minute round. Mr. Cullen, you're next.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Elliott.

I know we had some interaction when we were the government, on border issues, when you were the national security adviser to the Prime Minister. That was very much a staff/policy sort of role, and this is very much a line management job, although you have brought in a number two who's an experienced RCMP officer to handle some of the operational decisions.

I'm wondering, how do you see your role? Is it as an interim chairman and CEO, with the operating part of it delegated to your number two? Do you see your role as passing on the torch once you've set the RCMP in the direction that you and the government would like to see it embark on?

How have the RCMP officers responded to date to a civilian commissioner? I know there was a lot of chatter about how that would work.

Commr William Elliott: Thank you.

The questions touch on a number of things. I don't see myself as being appointed for a very short period of time or to try to bring about quick fixes. I intend to be the commissioner of the RCMP for a good long while.

I have asked Deputy Commissioner Bill Sweeney to come to Ottawa. We did that initially, saying it would be for eight months, and we have decided to make it an ongoing role. Certainly the fact that I don't have a background or training as a police officer I think means that I don't have some of the experience and skill sets of the 20 men and one woman who preceded me, but I like to believe that I bring other experience that is helpful in my role and to the force.

With respect to my reception, I am very encouraged by the reception I have received. At the beginning, I think you are right, there was some expression of disappointment that someone from inside had not been appointed. But I would say that right from the outset the response has been quite positive. I have often cited communication that went something like, "Even though I was disappointed"—actually, the language was stronger than that: "Even though I thought your appointment was a slap in the face to me as a long-serving member of the RCMP, and an insult to the organization, that decision is behind us and we're here to support you. Welcome to the RCMP." I felt that was a pretty encouraging message. Since then, the response I get is considerably more positive than that. In fact, I would say nobody has raised this issue with me for the last three months.

•(1625)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Good, and good luck to you with that.

I have two questions, one relating to recruitment and one relating to the morale in the RCMP generally. How do you find that? It sounds like there's a lot of interest in joining the RCMP. I know during our mandate, one of the issues constraining more recruitment was capacity issues at Depot in Regina. Is that infrastructure now in place? Is it coming into play? Is that a constraint?

I had another question relating to wiretapping techniques. I know there was some initiative around modernizing investigative techniques; in other words, to provide the same vehicles that you have today with respect to land line telephones to some of the technologies that of course the terrorists and criminals are using, i. e. cellphones and the Internet. Is that constraining your law enforcement efforts and activities to counter terrorism, the fact that you cannot sometimes use the techniques that you need to use because it is constrained by legislation?

Commr William Elliott: Mr. Chair, with respect to capacity at our training facility at Depot, there are still a number of building projects ongoing, but as I indicated in response to an earlier answer, we have expanded facilities that are able to take on larger numbers of recruits.

I was at Depot in Regina a couple of months or so ago. I opened a new 25-metre range, and we turned the sod.... I guess it was more than a couple of months ago, because the snow hadn't flown in Saskatchewan yet. We turned the sod on a new mess hall. We have put in place temporary accommodations for an expanded number of cadets; those are a sort of trailer. So building is ongoing, but we have already expanded our capacity.

I might also indicate that we have also expanded capacity with respect to our ability to provide diverse training to cadets. We do a lot of scenario-based training. A cadet, in the course of 24 weeks, will live through and work through over 100 scenarios. We've increased our physical infrastructure as well to enhance that kind of training.

On the matter of what you refer to as investigative techniques, I would say that it continues to be an impediment that many of the modern means of communication are either not interceptible or are difficult to intercept. We'll apply to a judge, get a warrant, and then we'll go to a service provider and find that there's no easy way for us to actually carry out the investigation that's been authorized by the court.

We are certainly supportive of legislative amendments that would see suppliers, when they're making changes to their equipment, provide for the ability to intercept when it is authorized.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to the Bloc Québécois. Who's going to be asking questions?

Ms. Thaï Thi Lac.

•(1630)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Elliott, for appearing before us.

Between 1994 and 1997, undercover agent Blundell was accused of sexual assault against four of his colleagues of the feminine gender. These assaults, which ranged from touching to complete intercourse, had taken place within the framework of police operations in Calgary. These incidents gave rise to several disciplinary procedures in court. The case is now closed. This is not what I want to speak to you about.

After these procedures, the commissioner asked Chief Superintendent Mr. Atkins, accompanied by Sergeant Harmes, Ms. Carole Piette and Mr. Emond Harnden, to carry out an administrative review of the disciplinary measures involving Sergeant Blundell. The group produced a lengthy 114-page report containing 11 recommendations.

Could you tell me what concrete measures have been implemented after these recommendations?

[*English*]

Commr William Elliott: I regret to say, Mr. Chair, I'm not in a position to provide a response to that question. I can, if it would be helpful, undertake to provide you with a response.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: Could you send us the details of these measures?

[*English*]

The Chair: Excuse me just a minute.

Would you be prepared, sir, to provide a written response in regard to that to the committee?

Commr William Elliott: Yes, I would certainly be prepared to do that.

[*Translation*]

I can send you some information.

[*English*]

The Chair: It can go to the clerk.

Go ahead, Ms. Thaï Thi Lac.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: Could you send us the details of the measures taken following each one of these recommendations?

Could you also send us your plan regarding priorities?

[*English*]

Commr William Elliott: As I indicated earlier, I'd be happy to provide a written response to the honourable member's question.

With respect to a priorities plan

[*Translation*]

If I understood the translation correctly,

[English]

there is a report on plans and priorities from the RCMP that will be tabled by the Minister of Public Safety. I'm not exactly sure on the timing of that report, but it is an annual report.

With respect to other priorities, when I hear the honourable member's question, what comes to mind, I guess, are our intentions with respect to change management. As I indicated in my opening remarks, we have tasked the assistant commissioner—who's been asked to head up this change management team we're establishing—to develop an action plan.

I'm not exactly sure what the timeframe would be for that plan, so if that's what the honourable member is looking for, we'd be happy to provide you with information on that in due course. But it will take some time for us to develop that plan.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: We heard about endless delays. We know that quite a few organizations are now asking job applicants to provide a certificate of good behaviour or some proof that they do not have a criminal record. Many people who requested fingerprinting from the RCMP for that purpose had to face very long delays. Some candidates were eliminated because of the length of the delays, and somebody else got the job. In this way, some organizations may be deprived of very competent applicants who, had they been able to provide this kind of document, could have gotten a job. It can take up to 18 months to get fingerprints.

Commr William Elliott: I understand what you are saying, but I do not understand the question.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Do you find that such delays are normal?

•(1635)

Commr William Elliott: Thank you very much.

I know that there are delays.

[English]

There is certainly a strain on our capacity to not only do the process of fingerprints but also to carry out other activities in relation to security clearances. We have taken steps to speed up the process and to move to automatic fingerprint identification.

Again, Mr. Chair, if specific information is desired, I'll have to undertake to get back to you with the details.

I would certainly say that it's not at all an ideal situation where there are lengthy delays, but there are capacity issues.

The Chair: Time has expired on that round.

For the government side, Mr. Norlock, please.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you very much, Commissioner, for coming this afternoon. I'm going to start by making a couple of statements and then soliciting a response to a few questions that I'll be posing to you.

First I want you to know that I was a proud member of the Ontario Provincial Police for over 30 years, and I'm even more fiercely proud of the men and women who go to work every day for the RCMP and do their job free of any political influence, probably not knowing a

lot about what goes on in this place, except that they know they have a job to do and they're going to go out and do the best job they can each and every day.

That's one of the challenges I've put on myself as a member of this government and as a member of this committee. Thank goodness we have the Brown report, which addresses many of the problems that I think are challenges to you and the RCMP every day.

My experience in a deployed police force is quite frankly that when changes occur at the top that are good, they rather quickly filter down to the bottom.

I also want to address one of the other issues that was brought up with regard to your not being a regular member of the RCMP and now being commissioner. I can recall again in my previous employ a commissioner who was not a member of the OPP and who did become commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police and who faced some of the same questions you are faced with. Quite frankly, he is looked upon as one of the best commissioners ever in the Ontario Provincial Police. So whether or not you look at that as a compliment, I can assure you that it was meant as that. He did bring about a lot of changes because he had a slightly different perspective, but he also realized that he had a duty to respect the fact that he needed the help of those who were members.

I have one other comment, and I apologize if I'm on my soapbox, but quite frankly I think it needs to be said. I only hope that never would an RCMP officer, no matter what the rank is, be influenced by a politician or by a person's standing in the community when it comes down to the exercise of his or her duty. That would be the death knell to all police officers and all police organizations in this country.

So it doesn't matter when you are assigned an investigation, if the evidence leads you into an investigation, you do it at that time and you do it irrespective of what's going on around you and you do it in the best and the most professional manner.

I'd like to go back to the Brown report. I know that you and the Minister of Public Safety are looking at that report. I am wondering if you could expand on any of the issues that are solely the responsibility of the RCMP, changes that you envisage taking or that you may be commencing that might be of assistance to the committee.

Commr William Elliott: Thank you very much.

In fact, others have brought Commissioner Silk to my attention, including serving and former members of the Ontario Provincial Police. I take heart in the fact that he is now much revered by past and serving members of the OPP. I also note that he brought in fundamental reforms and he was commissioner for 10 years.

With respect to the task force report and things that we are moving forward on, I guess I'd cite a few examples. A matter we've actually dealt with and on which we are now moving toward implementation predates a bit the task force report, although it was a subject of considerable discussion with the task force, and that is the RCMP's new backup policy. We are making amendments to our non-commissioned officer promotion process. We are expanding our efforts with respect to recruiting. We are actively engaged in identifying improvements to the internal governance structure of the RCMP. The report, of course, makes some big recommendations with respect to governance, but we are looking at how to better support decision-making within the force. We're engaged in work to do that and to better support and manage the work of our senior executive committee. We're also making changes to the structure of that committee and the individuals and some changes to the personnel on that committee. In fact, I made an announcement today with respect to the appointment of a new chief financial and administrative officer and a new chief human resources officer.

We are certainly looking very seriously at a number of other areas, including in relation to how we can best tap into senior NCOs. The task force recommends that we look at the model of the Canadian Forces. They have a chief warrant officer for the force who sits as a member of General Hillier's executive committee. I've met with General Hillier and with the force's chief warrant officer, and I expect we'll be making some changes with respect to that.

I guess the good news and the bad news is there are lots of things we're moving on.

• (1640)

The Chair: Ms. Barnes, you're next.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Thank you.

Commissioner, I wish you well. This country needs this confidence back. I know as a member from London, with "O" Division in London, there are good men and women working hard every day. I do acknowledge that.

I was quite proud, actually. I was at an international meeting of parliamentarians in Indonesia last spring and the RCMP was there working on sexual exploitation on the Internet with other countries. I think that's an important piece of work, and I'd like you to expand on how that's done, just for the record.

Commr William Elliott: Thank you very much.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I guess I'd like to refer back to my opening comments when I indicated I have lots to learn.

Certainly I can make some comments, but depending on the level of detail the committee is looking for, we may want to arrange—

Hon. Sue Barnes: Perhaps you can send that material on and I can ask some other questions.

Commr William Elliott: Okay, but we certainly have been very actively involved with other police forces, both in Canada and internationally, including working with Interpol. We've had some successes, and there's been recent media coverage of a number of prominent cases and charges that have been laid.

I might just comment, getting back to an earlier question, that in part we were able to conclude some investigations successfully

because of the cooperation of Internet service providers. That is not always the case, and that's an issue.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Okay.

When was multiple tasing allowed inside the RCMP? Did I read that it was in late summer? Do you have an idea of the dates? Perhaps you can send that in as well.

Commr William Elliott: I'd be happy to do that.

Hon. Sue Barnes: How often do you meet with the RCMP complaints commissioner? Is that a regular thing you would do, or is it just as needed, or...?

Commr William Elliott: I don't know that there is an established pattern. We certainly deal on an ongoing basis—if it's not a daily basis, I would suggest it's a weekly basis—with his staff and members of the RCMP. I think I have probably only dealt directly with Mr. Kennedy on two or three occasions since I became commissioner.

• (1645)

Hon. Sue Barnes: The last time Mr. Kennedy was at this committee he tabled a piece of draft potential legislation, because he felt that the RCMP complaints legislation could be improved. Have you had a chance to look at that?

Commr William Elliott: I guess the short answer is yes, and I would certainly agree that the current regime is inadequate. I note that Mr. O'Connor made recommendations with respect to review of the RCMP as well.

But the other comment I would make is that one of the key aspects of review and oversight is the notion of independence, and decisions with respect to what the regime should or will be will not be taken by the RCMP.

Hon. Sue Barnes: I hope we have you back, maybe on an every five- to six-month basis as you're getting in, because I think there's more information we'd like to hear.

Commr William Elliott: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll move over to the government side now.

Mr. Brown, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Commissioner Elliott, for being here today. Your visit is very useful for the committee, to see how things are developing now that you've been in the job for a little while.

You mentioned some of the lows you've had since you took over the role. One of them specifically was the deaths of Constables Warden and Scott. As you know, Constable Douglas Scott was from my riding, and I'm sure you recall that you and I attended the funeral on that very sad day.

There were some recommendations that came out of those two tragic occurrences specifically dealing with your officers working in remote communities in a work-alone situation. Can you tell us whether some of those recommendations and some of those suggestions have been implemented?

Commr William Elliott: As I indicated earlier, the RCMP has in fact adopted a new backup policy that has implications across the country, including financial implications with our contract partners. We're working on implementation.

We have made it mandatory that a number of situations require a response by more than one member of the RCMP—in the language of the policy, a multi-member response. Those include calls of violence or where violence is anticipated; a domestic dispute; an occurrence involving the use, display, or threatened use of a weapon; an occurrence involving a subject who poses a threat to himself/herself or others; areas where communications are known to be deficient; or any occurrence or situation where the member believes he or she requires a multiple-member response, based on the risk assessment.

Mr. Gord Brown: Thank you very much. As you know, that's something that's discussed quite widely in my riding in light of the fact that Constable Scott was from there.

Turning to the integrated border enforcement team—this is something that's once again quite important in my area along the St. Lawrence River—how would you describe the marine border surveillance capacity currently on the Great Lakes and along the St. Lawrence River?

I could get a lot more into border issues, but this is something I'm quite interested in.

Commr William Elliott: I've talked about our being more forthright. My forthright response is one word, and that is, it's inadequate.

Mr. Gord Brown: So you'd be looking at the government to look a little bit more into that, especially—

Commr William Elliott: I can give you a more elaborate answer if that would be helpful.

• (1650)

Mr. Gord Brown: Sure.

Commr William Elliott: I think it's better than it used to be, and certainly the advent of integrated border enforcement teams, where we have more men and women from the RCMP working in closer collaboration with other both domestic and U.S. law enforcement and public security agencies, has been a very positive step forward.

We've done a couple of pilots, including in the area of the seaway and the Thousand Islands, referred to as Shiprider. I was down in the fall with a number of individuals, including Mr. Wilkins, the U.S. ambassador, to meet with members of the U.S. Coast Guard and the RCMP, who were doing joint patrols, and that proved to be very effective.

We'd like to see that pilot lead to the creation of a number of significant enhancements. There are some impediments to doing that on an ongoing basis. We've been working with the Department of Justice and others to bring forward proposals with respect to how those impediments can be addressed.

Mr. Gord Brown: Thank you.

The Chair: Did I understand you were sharing your time? There are only 30 seconds left. Maybe you would want to do it in the next round.

Mr. Gord Brown: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Dosanjh, you have indicated you are sharing your time with Mr. Cullen.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Did I?

The Chair: Go ahead. That's what I have written down.

Hon. Roy Cullen: I asked you to put my name down. That's all.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I am a sharing kind of guy, but....

Mr. Commissioner, I have a couple of questions. One you can choose not to comment on and I will not hold it against you if you do. It is the issue of Deputy Commissioner George. As you know, some members of the Commons public accounts committee have expressed some surprise or disappointment that you have reinstated her. You obviously had your reasons.

Is there anything you would like to tell us to elaborate as to why you reinstated her, in view of all of the issues that arose in the context of the pension scandal? If you can't say, I understand, because I understand it may be an administrative issue.

Commr William Elliott: I did have the opportunity to appear before the public accounts committee to provide testimony on this specific question. I don't really have anything to say further than that.

In a nutshell, it was a disciplinary process instigated by my predecessor, Commissioner Busson. That process led to an investigative report, which was reviewed. Conclusions were taken with respect to the allegations that were the subject of the discipline. It was determined that there were not sufficient grounds or there were not grounds to proceed. Since the deputy commissioner had been suspended in relation to those allegations, there was no basis on which I would not reinstate her.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

You obviously are a career civil servant, or were, and now you are a commissioner for the RCMP, but you are in the position of a deputy to the public safety minister. You also recognize that you have an absolutely independent role as the commissioner.

I was the attorney general in British Columbia, and we had to go through the dance of maintaining that Chinese wall, and a real wall in terms of conflict for the deputy attorney general who would make decisions on the Criminal Code. How do you manage that relationship?

Commr William Elliott: As I've said on a number of occasions, including earlier today, the independence of the police is fundamental in a democratic society, but I think it's safe to say that the RCMP is independent with respect to some things but very dependent with respect to other things.

Certainly no one can or should tell us who to investigate or how to investigate, but our funding is provided by Parliament as far as our federal policing is concerned and the contribution to provincial policing, and by other levels of government. Earlier we touched on independent oversight and review, and as I indicated, the government will take decisions with respect to that.

I think the minister and all of the department, and I and the members of the RCMP, are aware of the fact that we need to be very independent in many areas. Frankly, I think we need to be more cooperative with the department on a number of issues than perhaps we've been in the past.

I've often said that independence—and I'm not sure whether this is a great analogy—is like a trump card and we should not hesitate to play the trump card, but you can't play the trump card if the hand doesn't call for trump. We're working to establish even closer relationships with the department in a number of very important areas. For example, the current contracts for provincial, territorial, and municipal policing all expire in 2012. The lead for the negotiation of new contracts is not the RCMP but the Department of Public Safety.

• (1655)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I have just one last question.

Have you ever been tasered, voluntarily or otherwise?

Commr William Elliott: I have not.

The Chair: Was that irrelevant? I don't know.

Mr. Mayes, you're next.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to tell you how thankful I am that you've taken on this task, Commissioner Elliott. It's going to be a tough one, and I'm sure you're up to it.

Just to give you a little history, first of all, I'm an MP from British Columbia, and the RCMP takes care of the policing in British Columbia and has contracts with the municipalities. I was a mayor for nine years of a small community of 16,000 people, and we went through that 15,000 threshold on those contracts. The way it works is that if the population in the community is under 5,000, you don't pay anything; if it's between 5,000 and 15,000, the municipality pays 70% and the federal government pays 30%; and then if it goes over the 15,000 threshold, it's a 90-10 split.

In our community the policing contract took 24% of our tax revenue, and even at that we were still understaffed in the local detachment. The morale was down in the detachment and there was fatigue, and this is just asking for problems, not only for your staff but also with how they respond if they're in a fatigue situation. I know these contracts are coming due in 2012, and I really believe something that needs to be addressed by the federal government and the RCMP is how we are paying for those RCMP costs. If municipalities cannot afford to pay for the full complement that they need to adequately police the community, then it's just going to cause problems.

Is there anything that you can see in the future, in what you're looking at as far as addressing some of these issues, where you'd be looking at the cost of paying for policing?

Commr William Elliott: Before I respond to that question, maybe I should, for the record, indicate that not only have I not been tasered, but I have never been pepper-sprayed, hit with a baton, or shot.

With respect to the costs and the implications of costs, that was a very major concern raised in the meeting I referred to that I had recently with mayors from the lower mainland of British Columbia. As I also indicated, the lead on contract negotiations is in fact with Public Safety Canada rather than the RCMP, but we are certainly very active participants with them.

I understand that policing is an increasingly costly activity. I talked about the increasing complexity of the environments in which we operate. Some of the questions touched on earlier, including some with respect to the exploitation of children, are indicative of the fact that the world has changed and in many ways has not changed for the better.

We are certainly interested in doing what we can to reduce costs. You may be interested to know that earlier this week our senior executive committee gave approval for a pilot project in the lower mainland to go forward. We're going to create a number of new positions called community safety officer positions. These will be unarmed—at least, they won't carry side arms—community safety officers who will work in support roles and will be less costly than regular members of the RCMP.

This is just an indication that we are open to finding new ways to deal with policing and the associated costs.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you.

That was a very good question, by the way. That's exactly the concern I had to deal with in my local community, which is approximately the same size as the community you were mayor of. They are being devastated, because they've gone over the 15,000 threshold. So I appreciate your raising that.

Unfortunately, you can't ask questions of the committee, but I'm sure you'd like to know whether the former Attorney General of British Columbia, who brought in tasers for the first time, was tasered before he did that.

Mr. Ujjal Dosanjh: Absolutely not.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Does anybody else have some questions?

Do you have a question, Mr. Cullen?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Elliott, I have a couple of questions.

The increased incidence of contraband tobacco is creating a lot of interest in many quarters. When we were the government, there was definitely an anti-smoking strategy, particularly with respect to youth. The kind of contraband that's going on now is different from what it was then, because the duties are now imposed at the plant, so the idea of just bringing tobacco back around through the back door is really, technically, and I think practically speaking, dealt with.

Our government always knew that once you ramp up the duties on cigarettes, you get to a point where people are interested in manufacturing these cigarettes, either offshore or in the United States, or maybe domestically here in Canada.

I know that dealing with illegal activities on reserves is a touchy point, but are you aware of the increase in contraband tobacco? What is the RCMP doing about it? Maybe you could talk specifically about the sensitivities around police action on reserves, if that's what's required.

Commr William Elliott: Certainly I'm very well aware of the problems associated with contraband tobacco. This is an area where part of the message I think we have to get across to Canadians is that they have to be cognizant of the fact that people who are dealing with contraband tobacco are often involved in other illegal activity. Certainly the activities of organized crime in relation to contraband tobacco and illicit drugs are a very, very serious concern.

We have been involved in a number of joint operations—no pun intended—and I just read recently a report about seizures and arrests that were made in January that involved thousands of cartons of cigarettes and thousands and hundreds of thousands of dollars of illegal drugs and cash. So we are having some success, including, by the way, in working with other partners, including aboriginal police forces.

The situation in places such as Akwesasne were certainly very much front and centre in the consideration that led to the pilot project that took place last summer, which I referred to earlier, one of the Shiprider pilots. We also did a pilot on the west coast of British Columbia. I think that was a very successful joint activity that reduced the illicit traffic across the border between Canada and the United States. But I would say we've only touched the tip of the iceberg.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Thank you. I have one final question.

I have a female constituent in my riding who alleges she is a victim of domestic violence perpetrated by a member of a police force. I say "alleges" because I don't know exactly where it is in the process. In fact, that's the reason for my question. She's quite frustrated with the police. In this case, it's the Toronto Police Service. She's really unable to get a lot of cooperation.

Within the RCMP, if one of your officers were to be accused of something like that or there were a tip-off or some complaint, when it's an RCMP officer himself or herself, how would you deal with that? What she is claiming to me is that there's a "circle the wagons" mentality and they're not really dealing with her complaint very well or very seriously. How do you deal with that in the RCMP?

• (1705)

Commr William Elliott: We take domestic violence very seriously. I'm sad to report that there have been a number of

incidents reported and a number of charges laid against members of the RCMP in the short time that I've been commissioner. I would certainly encourage your constituent to make her concerns known.

With respect to the RCMP, the CPC and Mr. Kennedy would be where you would take that complaint. There is a complaint mechanism in the province of Ontario that would be applicable. But certainly our policy is very clear. We expect higher standards of members and employees of the RCMP, and where they break the law, they will be investigated and charged and punished. Often, unfortunately, that also results in their discharge from the RCMP.

The Chair: Thank you.

Two more people have indicated they have questions.

Monsieur Ménard first, and then Ms. Priddy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Though many others have already asked you questions on this, I will also ask you a question on Taser guns.

There are two things that concern me. I was Minister of Public Safety when we began thinking about using Taser guns. At the time, we were told that this was a weapon which would save lives, since the police could use it before using firearms when there was a good reason for using those. Other people testified before the committee but told us that this was no longer how it was being used. The Taser gun can replace the nightstick very well and make arrests easier.

What is the policy on Taser guns? Does the RCMP consider the Taser gun a last-resort weapon, to be used just before a firearm would be?

Moreover, in the literature we read and the testimony we heard, it seems that most people who have died as a result of Taser gun use were suffering from excited delirium. Even though psychiatry books make no mention of excited delirium, it remains that Taser gun advocates prefer to cite excited delirium as the cause of death.

What are the symptoms of excited delirium? How can one recognize those symptoms before deciding what weapon to use, since one cannot order a medical examination before the person in question is arrested? One of the symptoms of excited delirium is extreme agitation, making the people suffering from it very difficult to subdue. If someone is suffering from delirium, then using a Taser gun would not be appropriate. I would like you to explain the RCMP's policy in those two cases.

Is the Taser gun genuinely a weapon of last resort, or rather of next-to-last resort, just before a firearm? According to RCMP Taser gun use protocol, or directives, should someone who is highly agitated not be subjected to a Taser gun jolt?

[*English*]

Commr William Elliott: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think the honourable member is correct when he states that the current policies—I think this is the case not only for the RCMP but other police services—are not based on the notion that the only time you would deploy a conducted energy device is in a situation where you would otherwise use a firearm. It is a device that, based on a threat assessment, officers might deploy where they would otherwise resort to other means of less than lethal force.

I don't purport to be an expert in the use of force, and there certainly are lots of people in the RCMP who are, but my understanding is that the only time a taser would be deployed, where the other choice would be to use a firearm, would be in cases where there is another officer right there who will use a firearm if the deployment of a taser is not effective to gain control of the individual.

With respect to excited delirium, I understand a number of qualified individuals have concluded that deaths resulted from excited delirium, and those include findings by coroners in a number of cases, as well as other medical practitioners. I would certainly agree our officers are not in a position to make a diagnosis with respect to excited delirium. I think there are some characteristics, which we have read about, that are or can be indicative of excited delirium.

I understand medical opinion suggests the best way to gain control of someone suffering from excited delirium is to deploy a conducted energy device and get the person restrained and get the person medical attention.

• (1710)

The Chair: Ms. Priddy, you indicated that you have some questions.

Ms. Penny Priddy: I think sometimes there has been an understanding, or at least an impression, that not having enough RCMP officers is a result of a lack of capacity. You had indicated earlier, and I was very pleased to hear it, that this is not about capacity, it is about the need or goal of recruiting more individuals. I'm pleased to hear that.

I don't wish to get into the mechanics of how people are hired and leave, but it leads to something else, and that is whether exit interviews are done when people leave the force. I'm not talking about people who are retiring; I'm talking about other people who leave, whether that is then looked at in terms of a piece of research to give the RCMP some ability to plan around recruiting, by looking at the reasons for people leaving. Do you have any idea how this would compare with other police forces? I assume you may have—I'm not sure, it's a very stressful job—a higher number of people leaving than you might see in a different kind of organization. Nevertheless, is there research you can look at about why people are leaving and plan from that? Is it possible, perhaps, to provide to us at another time the percentage of officers who leave who are not leaving as a result of retirement and how that might compare to other forces?

Commr William Elliott: If I could start by responding to the comments about capacity, I'd like to clarify: we don't have a capacity

issue at our training academy in Regina, known as Depot. I would not go so far as to suggest that there are not capacity issues that impact on our ability to actually attract and send people to Depot and have them become regular members of the RCMP. We have worked hard, for example, to reduce the amount of time it takes to process an application, but the new, better results still take about seven months. That's a lot longer than some other police forces, and there are capacity issues around that. I think we have to do a whole lot better.

With respect to our retention rates, we have done some work in this area, and I'm pleased to say that my understanding is that we actually have very good current statistics with respect to the number of people who stay until they're eligible for pensions. We do not, I don't believe, have a common practice to do exit interviews with respect to people who do depart early. I think this is certainly something we should look at. We have had work done by a number of people, including Professor Linda Duxbury, from Carleton University. She also provided material to the task force, and we're continuing to work with her to get a better understanding of ways that we can understand what motivates people of various backgrounds and demographics, with a view to trying to, if nothing else, keep our retention rates as good as they are.

We have challenges because other police forces and other entities actively recruit members of the RCMP. I've had a number of people who I know have been headhunted, people in senior positions in the RCMP, and unfortunately, we've had a number of people leave. We had one recently go to the nuclear industry. In Ontario we've had officers hired for the diamond industry. There's a lot of competition out there, and although we pay our police officers pretty well compared to other police forces, we don't pay them as well as the diamond industry does, I can tell you that.

• (1715)

Ms. Penny Priddy: I would like to pursue that. I would be interested, if you are going to do more research in that area, to hear back about the comparisons, perhaps at your next visit. Are people leaving for wages, are they leaving for other great jobs, are they leaving because they're burned out, and what does that look like? Surely that, of course, helps you plan some of your priorities as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other questions?

Sir, I'd like to thank you very much for coming before the committee. I think it's been a very good session. It was good to have you come here.

There's no other business, so we will adjourn this meeting.

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