



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO



NUMBER 029



1st SESSION



41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, April 23, 2012



Chair

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Monday, April 23, 2012

• (1535)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Marlene Sandoval): Good day.

[English]

Honourable members of the committee,

[Translation]

I see we have a quorum.

[English]

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, and cannot entertain points of order nor participate in debate.

[Translation]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair. As set out in Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the official opposition.

I am ready to receive nominations for the chairmanship.

[English]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): I'd like to nominate Marie-Claude Morin.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mylène Freeman that Marie-Claude Morin be elected chair of the committee.

[Translation]

Are there any other motions?

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

The Clerk: I declare the motion duly carried and Marie-Claude Morin duly elected chair of the committee. I invite her to take the chair.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP)): Good afternoon to you all. I would first like to say that I am very happy to be the chair of this committee and to work with you, particularly on this committee. I thank you for that motion.

Today we are holding the 29th hearing of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We must go in camera for the adoption of the report.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

• (1625)

The Chair: •

(Pause)

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We shall now resume the public hearing.

Good day and welcome to this 29th hearing of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Today, in the context of our study on the role and challenges of women employed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we welcome the Commissioner of the RCMP, Mr. Robert Paulson.

• (1630)

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): I have a point of order. I have given the clerk a motion that I'd like to read out today in relation to this:

That, in relation to the study of the role and challenges of women—

which is what we're talking about today—

employed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Committee schedule additional hearings and invite current and/or former female employees of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who are prepared to share their personal stories and commentary in this regard, and that the hearings be scheduled as soon as the Committee's work plan permits.

I consulted with the clerk last week, and I'll ask if she would now hand that out to the committee members.

This is a good week. It's National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, and I think it's very appropriate that we listen to the commissioner and have additional meetings with regard to this very important issue. Many of these women, who I think some of you have been hearing from as well as I have, are not looking for legal challenges and so on. They want an opportunity to be heard so that they have a chance to ensure that changes will come.

We know that Commissioner Paulson wants to see changes, and I think all of us do. I think it's really important and appropriate that the status of women committee show that kind of leadership and provide an opportunity for some of the women who want to share their personal stories to come before us, so that we can work with the government and the RCMP to ensure they all have the tools to make the necessary changes.

I would ask that the committee vote on this so that we can move this issue forward on behalf of the thousands of women and young women—especially given the fact that we're doing a study on the economic prospects of young women. When you have Deputy Commissioner Callens, whose 21-year-old daughter wants to join the RCMP, and he says there has to be change—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting you, Ms. Sgro. I understand very well why you wish to speak to this. However, that is not a point of order. This is not the appropriate time to table your motion. We will get back to your motion when you have the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: My understanding was that I was to table it as a point of order at the beginning, Madam Chair. So if that was misinformation, I apologize.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: That is fine, there is no problem.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): I think that is an extremely important point. When will we be able to reconsider that motion?

The Chair: Ms. Sgro will be able to table her motion when she has the floor, that is to say during the fourth round. We will hear from the government members and the official opposition. Then we will go back to the government side and then to the Liberals. At that point, Ms. Sgro will be able to table her motion. Is that agreeable to you?

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: I don't want to take away the time from the commissioner because he's here. I followed what I understood was exactly the process—that I table the motion at the beginning of the meeting. Now let's just make sure that it's tabled. I have introduced it.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Truppe, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to point out that we only have an hour with the commissioner. We could use this as committee business, and stick to asking questions. From my experience with this committee, going through a motion is going to take up a great deal of time that the commissioner could be using to answer some of the questions we all have, when we could just put it for our next meeting.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now hear from Mr. Paulson. Afterwards, the clerk will see what can be done regarding tabling your motion. We will get back to it at the end of the meeting.

Good afternoon, Mr. Paulson, and welcome to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I invite you to deliver your statement on the study of the role and challenges of women employed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. You have 10 minutes.

•(1635)

Commr Robert Paulson (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank you for having given me the opportunity to be here this afternoon. I look forward to answering your questions and to discussing things with you.

[*English*]

I haven't prepared any opening comments, as is my practice. Frankly, I'm more inclined to want to have a discussion with you and answer your questions this afternoon on what is a very important subject, not just for me and the RCMP, but for all Canadians.

I'm very happy to be here. Thank you for the invitation. However I can assist your understanding of this significant issue, I'll be pleased to help.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We shall now move to questions, and we will begin with the government side.

Ms. Truppe, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Commissioner Paulson, for coming today to the status of women committee. It's very important to have you here. We appreciate the opportunity, across this floor, to ask you questions .

I'd like to get right to the issue, as I'm certain it's on the minds of other committee members as well. Like all Canadians, we are extremely concerned about the troubling reports of sexual harassment within the force. Women should be able to work in any employment, regardless of their careers, in a harassment-free work environment.

In consultation with you, the Minister of Public Safety asked the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP to investigate allegations of systematic failures to deal appropriately with sexual harassment within the force. It is imperative that all members of the RCMP be free to face the daily and expected challenges of a day's work without harassment and without fear of mistreatment by co-workers and superiors.

In the context of allegations of harassment, in your view, what is the fundamental problem?

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you for the question.

It is a complex problem we face. I think in terms of identifying the fundamental problem, there are a number of aspects I would identify for the committee. One is that the nature of police work and the manner in which police officers exercise their duties vis-à-vis citizens requires the management of authorities and special powers. To put it in context, the RCMP—and policing in general, I might say—has historically been mostly a male-dominated profession. We have had one career span of women in the RCMP, most notably Bev Busson, who was a commissioner of the RCMP. She was in the first troop of women, and she finished her career as the commissioner.

Thirty-five years is a long time, but I think what's happened is that the RCMP hasn't kept pace with society in general and how society has moved to provide systems and processes that insist upon equality.

I use the analogy, and I hope it's an appropriate one, that the RCMP is a bit of an aquarium. The fundamental problem isn't the number, although I'm happy to talk about the number of women we have in the force today and what we're doing to increase that number, because I think it's relevant. I also think how many women we have in supervisory roles is relevant.

It's really more about the water in the aquarium. It's the culture of the organization that has not kept pace. Frankly, I think it's the filtration system for the water in the aquarium. We haven't been able to change our practices and our policies, or provide systems that would permit women to thrive in the organization and contribute to policing, which they must do.

For the RCMP to be a successful policing organization, we must have women contributing in a significant way. I think how the organization manages authority and power... I've said it publicly, and I'll say it again. I think the problem is bigger than simply the sexual harassment. It is the idea of harassment. The idea that we have a hierarchical organization overseeing men and women who have extraordinary powers in relation to their fellow citizens, which requires a fair degree of discipline.

I'll add just one more thing. The cases that have attracted, rightfully, the public's interest are cases in which supervisors and managers and leaders haven't act quickly enough in the first instance to address the transaction that's giving rise to what, over time, ends up being a significant problem. It's a fairly broad answer, but I think, fundamentally, that's what's going on.

● (1640)

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you. I appreciate that. I wasn't sure if you heard me.

You mentioned the number of women in supervisory roles. Just out of curiosity, how many women are on the force, and how many are in supervisory roles?

Commr Robert Paulson: Let me give you the precise facts.

I'll be referring to what we talk about as regular members, which are sworn police officers. Right now, just over 20% of regular members are women. We have almost 4,000 women and about 15,000 men.

The rank breakdowns would be a little tedious, but I'm happy to go through that for you. Essentially what you see at the constable and corporal levels is about 20% to 22% representation.

As you go up in the ranks, within the NCO levels you have a decrease in the number of supervisors and non-commissioned officers, say sergeant and staff sergeant.

Entering into the commissioned ranks, which are the executive ranks, you have about 12% representation at the inspector and superintendent levels, and then a decrease at the senior executive ranks.

By way of specific answers, right now there is one deputy commissioner, Line Carbonneau, who is one of six or seven deputy commissioners. I think we have about three assistant commissioners out of approximately 20 in the rank.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Okay, that's great.

When you appeared before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, you provided them with an explanation of how you intended to address these allegations. For the benefit of this committee, would you provide us with a description of your plans and how those plans are coming along?

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you.

I guess I can break it down into what I have done, what I'm doing, what I intend to do, and what others are doing. When I first was appointed, of course, it was at the height of the disclosures and controversy. My first steps were to centralize the process, recognizing that it—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Paulson, but Ms. Truppe's time has expired. I will however let you finish your answer.

[*English*]

Commr Robert Paulson: Okay. I centralized the whole process. I am able to oversee it from Ottawa. I had face-to-face direct meetings with my senior management team and my senior executive. I reduced it to writing, telling them what my expectations were of them, and what would happen if they didn't meet the expectations, trying to instill some accountability.

Right now, I am working with my partners in government at Public Safety and others to bring forward and recommend some changes to the RCMP regime for discipline, harassment, and grievances. I intend to pursue that process with a gender-based audit, which requires some explanation, sadly. I can maybe get to it if somebody else wants to know about it. Lastly, I'm providing all of the information to the CPC for their independent systemic review.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Truppe.

We shall now move to the official opposition.

Ms. Ashton, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much, Mr. Paulson, for being here today.

I wanted to start off by noting that I have the honour of representing a constituency in which, in fact, all of our communities are serviced by the RCMP. As somebody who is from northern Manitoba, I know from many of my peers the kind of evolution we've seen with respect to the force's connection with local communities, with aboriginal communities, and with the ongoing need to reflect the people the force serves, particularly in hiring aboriginal, first nations, and Métis officers. It is something that certainly isn't going unnoticed. We look forward to seeing much of the same and to continuing to move forward.

With respect to the issue that we're focusing on today, I would certainly like to note the fact—and you alluded to it—of the way it really shook the Canadian society at its core. We believe in and we have faith in the work of the RCMP, and we'd like to know that the officers putting their safety on the line are also able to work in a workplace where their safety is very much respected. However, when we heard the allegations, and certainly with the stories that have come forward by many women and the understanding that there are many others, this represents a real insecurity and a real concern in terms of where we're going.

I want to particularly note that for myself as a young woman, and for many of my peers who are either in the force or looking at potentially getting involved in the RCMP, this is definitely a dissuasion. I have heard that it's something that really affects their decision as to how long they might stay in this kind of a workplace. That's the wrong direction. We have made great gains in Canada, and certainly we have seen this with respect to the RCMP in terms of gender representation, but I believe this is a step back, which we need to learn from and learn from immediately, as soon as possible.

I want to go back to the initial comment you made with respect to the aquarium. I thought that was a very interesting analogy, and I appreciated that you raised it right off the bat. Many of us do think it's a question of culture, a male culture that has allowed for harassment—sexual, physical, mental, emotional—to take place as though it's the norm. I believe that, as we seek to tackle that, there is perhaps an intangible element to it. I would like to know, as you move forward—and you noted some of the steps you are taking—what exactly is being done to be able to change that culture?

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you for your comments and your question.

Culture changing has been central to the RCMP discussion for the past five or six years. Since the Brown task force people have been talking about culture change, so it's a perfectly legitimate question.

I think that a culture is a reflection of the actions of a group of people, so I concentrate on changing the actions of the employees of the RCMP. You do that through what I've talked about already—some of my leadership initiatives and the accountability exercises—but also through having a policy framework and a rule framework within the organization that gives strength to the ideas and the culture you're trying to shape. In other words, there needs to be a respectful workplace and a sense of fairness when it comes to decisions around transfers, promotions, recognition, or any of the things where people are compared one against another. That is absolutely vital to creating that culture of fairness.

I think the problem extends past the women-men issue, although one of the first steps is to recognize you have a problem, and I'm here to recognize that we have a problem with how women thrive within the organization. But it goes to other portions of our organization too. Having policies and functioning systems that people can rely upon, outside of the individual decision-maker, gives them the confidence to know.... It's almost like the rule of law in the organization. Our policies and our practices are being reviewed so that we can establish that sense of fairness.

• (1650)

Ms. Niki Ashton: On some of the specifics, you referenced the gender-based audit, which was also brought up at the public safety committee. Could you elaborate on what that entails?

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you.

My commanding officer in British Columbia was referred to just recently. Deputy Commissioner Callens did a sort of informal one. He had some of his staff interview 400 female members to put some information, facts, and scope around the problem.

This audit will examine our policies and practices on the engagement of women and the advancement of women. Retention is surprisingly not a problem with women in the RCMP. We have a greater retention rate for women than for men. So we've scoped out the retention issue, but we're going to put some science behind how we understand that. For example, how do our policies support women or disadvantage women with respect to promotions and transfers? If their choice is to raise a family, are they disadvantaged because they're not mobile? What are we doing about that?

Those are the kinds of specific policies that affect people and give them options to live productive lives as citizens, but also contribute as members of the RCMP. That audit will come back to me by August with data, conclusions, and recommendations.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paulson.

I will now give the floor to the government side.

Ms. James, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Commissioner Paulson, for being here today. We've certainly been looking forward to being able to address the questions we have.

When I think of the status of women and what we are trying to achieve on this committee, I think of three things: gender equality, respect for women, and encouraging and empowering young girls to succeed.

Having said that, I first want to say that I have the greatest respect for the RCMP and all law enforcement right across Canada. In fact, my father was a police officer in Toronto for a number of years. He retired when I was still in high school, so that was a long time ago.

When I think of what we're trying to achieve here, and then I hear about these allegations of sexual harassment, I have to tell you it's very troubling, not only because I'm a woman, but because I also sit on this committee and know what we're trying to achieve.

I know that you've gone on record and have been quoted as taking a very tough stance on sexual harassment. I've heard those comments before, so I'm going to ask you a couple of questions regarding that.

Can you explain to the committee why you feel that allegations of harassment and misconduct by those who serve in the RCMP need to be addressed in a very strong or affirmative manner? This is a very serious set of allegations, and this committee, especially, is very concerned about the outcome of those allegations and how they are resolved.

Thank you.

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you for that question as well.

I think they have to be addressed in a strong and affirmative, and I'll add, immediate manner. I think what happens in these matters of harassment—and again I'll take it outside sexual harassment to just any harassment. I can tell you that our statistics are quite interesting in terms of covering the complete span of possibilities: gender versus gender, men complaining against women, women complaining against women, women complaining against men. It's quite an interesting distribution.

What happens if it's not dealt with immediately and firmly is that people become invested in a relative position and then their whole personality and their being is invested in that complaint, and people are less inclined to want to come together and resolve it early. So being forceful, in the sense of having firm processes and policies to bring people together to resolve these things, or if required, to bring discipline to bear on the situation, is absolutely essential to minimize it and to demonstrate to others that there is, as I was talking about earlier, a fair, rule-based system of managing workplace conflict.

• (1655)

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

In your previous answers or discussion with my colleague, Ms. Truppe, you had mentioned that it is a male-dominated profession. I don't think anyone here is surprised by that comment. In a male-dominated line of work, I'm wondering what efforts you are going to make to be sure that those who witness harassment are able to report it and not have any issues with their colleagues within the force itself. I'm wondering what efforts you will make to be sure that people can and will report without any type of persecution thereafter.

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you.

It is a male-dominated profession historically, but less and less so. But to the point of your question, the way we ensure that is by demonstrating success in the process. I've described this problem as having two components. One is the process that responds to the complaints and manages the adjudicative process around the complaints. The other is the bottom-line conduct. Our members have to have faith in a system that will manage their complaints and bring some justice to the complaints in a formal process.

The other side of how I will address that is through this insistence on firm leadership by the people that I have in command in this

organization right now, to make sure that they are responsible for the workplace and to satisfy themselves, and have their subordinates satisfy them, that this workplace is respectful.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you very much.

Previously you appeared before the Standing Committee on Public Safety, and Ms. Truppe asked this question as well, but in that answer I didn't hear you mention that centralizing the oversight of all harassment complaints will help the situation. Did you just omit that, or do you really feel that centralizing is going to improve the situation? Could you elaborate on that, please?

Commr Robert Paulson: Centralizing the process was part of my accountability response to it. In other words, we have 15 divisions in the RCMP, and each has a commanding officer, and legal and policy requirements. To provide consistency and demonstrate to Canadians and to this committee and others just what the scope and the nature of the problem is, we had to have that centralized.

It was centralized oversight rather than managing each individual set of facts. That's given me and my people here at headquarters the ability to reach out and address the commanding officers who, say, have stats that are out of line, or are leaving things too long. That's giving me the accountability lever.

Ms. Roxanne James: I have just one more quick question. I think my time is running out.

[Translation]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left, Ms. James.

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: I have thirty seconds. In the past, this committee has tried to encourage women to get into trades or careers that are not typically a route that a woman would take. With these allegations that are in public right now, what would you tell the young women of tomorrow? What would encourage them to make a career in the RCMP? What can you tell us today that will make a difference and change the direction of the allegations that have occurred in the past?

Commr Robert Paulson: I think I would say that the nature of the work is very, very powerful. I would say to young women, young men, young Canadians, that if you want a career where you can immediately see the fruit of your efforts to contribute to the Canadian way of life, then you should join the RCMP.

These complaints and this problem we have, while disconcerting, shouldn't prevent people from coming into the organization.

• (1700)

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Paulson, unfortunately I must interrupt you, as Ms. James' time has expired. Thank you.

I would like to make a clarification concerning your motion. It would have been appropriate to table it in the beginning. This was an error on our part. It is simply that it was not a point of order, but rather a procedural matter.

Ms. Sgro, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Just to clarify, it has been tabled; I don't have to read it again.

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: I'll read it again just to make sure, even if it is part of my seven minutes.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I'll read it at the end. I might have a few questions here.

Commissioner Paulson, recognizing that a lot of what happened with these charges of sexual harassment and so on were prior to your taking on the role of commissioner, I've listened very carefully to all of your positive comments about the change you are going to see happen and so on and so forth. I have to say that I think what Deputy Commissioner Callens in B.C. has done by listening to hundreds of women and taking some very immediate action is to be applauded. I'd like to see more of that.

You're saying very sincerely all of the right things, but I do worry whether any action will happen without making the proper changes to modernize the RCMP. That means that work gets done at the federal level with federal politicians by changing the regulations so that you or others have the tools to take the necessary swift action you mentioned.

How confident are you that the modernization of the RCMP and those kinds of changes to federal regulations will happen?

Commr Robert Paulson: I'm a bit of a novice at putting estimates on that, but I have to say that since my appointment I have had expressions of support from all quarters of government, the bureaucracy, and the central agencies.

Frankly I feel very confident that we will be able to advance in this area in the very near term, and I think you're absolutely right that it is essential.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Chair, I'll read the motion again:

That, in relation to the study of the role and challenges of women employed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Committee schedule additional hearings and invite current and/or former female employees of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who are prepared to share their personal stories and commentary in this regard, and that the hearings be scheduled as soon as the Committee's work plan permits.

I can say, from talking to many very committed women in the RCMP, who very much want their careers to continue but most importantly are requiring changes to be made, that my intent today—and I hope it is the intent of our committee—is to help that along by providing an opportunity for some of these individuals.

My biggest concern is the sexual harassment. I recognize the challenges that women have for advancement in a male-dominated occupation, but it's the sexual harassment that I find the most

distressing. I think it's imperative that we provide an opportunity for the women, in a non-confrontational way, to come to the committee and speak about some of those issues, and that we make recommendations to assist the government in the modernization of the RCMP, which is clearly needed.

Catherine Galliford, being one of the top RCMP officers, who all of us continue to be very proud of, said in one of her comments to any woman thinking of joining the RCMP, and I quote:

Don't even think about it. No. Run like your hair is on fire. There are other police departments out there...Calgary...Edmonton...Toronto.... But do not join the RCMP.

That is such a terrible statement from someone who was clearly driven to her end in trying to deal with a variety of issues. It sends an awful statement to our young women.

We are doing a study about improving economic opportunities for girls. Deputy Commissioner Callens' daughter wants to join the RCMP, but he has indicated that unless he sees changes he would not recommend that for her.

All of these things together are very condemning. I hope that if we're able to pass this motion and have some of the women come before us on these issues, that you would look very seriously at recommendations that come out of this committee in moving this whole issue forward.

Madam Chair, is my time up? Do I still have time?

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You will have approximately two minutes and 15 seconds left.

The motion is now before the committee. Does the committee wish to debate the motion?

This will of course not encroach on your speaking time. Two minutes and 15 seconds will be reserved for you.

Does the committee wish to adopt the motion, or debate it?

Ms. Truppe, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Madam Chair, so we don't waste Commissioner Paulson's time, I wonder if we can defer that to our next meeting, maybe at the very beginning. I think we're meeting with the group in the first hour...maybe at the beginning of the second hour, if that is okay.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Is that this coming Wednesday?

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Yes.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I don't see the need for a lot of discussion and debate, but if the committee prefers to hold it off until then, these women have waited a long time, and if they have to wait until Wednesday, so be it. But I think it is imperative that, as the status of women committee, we be seen to show some true leadership on this issue. It doesn't have to be a partisan issue. This is an issue of the women of Canada and one of the most respected divisions of the RCMP that we all want to see move forward.

Without serious modernization at this level and some good recommendations going forward, I think the commissioner, with all his great words, intent, and desire, will have a very hard time achieving what he wants, which are the tools and modernization that are clearly needed.

Do you have any further comments, Commissioner?

Commr Robert Paulson: I think you're absolutely right. I assess the likelihood of the support of the people I've been working with since my appointment on getting these new regulations. I'm very excited by the speed with which people are coming to work on that, and I think it's absolutely essential to be moving forward on that.

I would like to make a comment about Catherine Galliford's comment about women running away as though their hair were on fire, because I don't think I can let that stand.

I know that Catherine Galliford has had a very challenging experience with the RCMP, and this is by no means meant to question that. But I think we need to have a full appreciation for all of the scope and the extent of the problem, because that is a very sweeping condemnation of an organization. I have had incredible experiences working with many women, both sworn officers and otherwise. In fact, I've had partners who have saved my bacon a couple of times, and who have loved the force as much as I do.

So I don't want it left hanging out there that there is a general sentiment that the force is not welcoming or a positive experience for women. This is a problem that we're all trying to fix, and I just want to put some context around it.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Do female members today have faith in the system?

Commr Robert Paulson: No. I don't think they have faith in the system completely, and that's why I'm so determined to bring their views and other views to providing a system that they will have faith in.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much.

Commr Robert Paulson: You're welcome.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I discussed this with the clerk, and if the committee is in agreement, we may amend the schedule of the Wednesday, April 25 hearing in order to discuss the motion. Does that suit you, Ms. Sgro? Fine.

Is the committee in agreement? Will someone ask for the vote? Very well. Ms. Sgro's motion will thus be discussed on Wednesday, April 25, two days from now. Thank you.

We are going to continue our round of questions with Ms. Smith.

You have five minutes at your disposal.

• (1710)

[*English*]

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Madam Clerk.

Welcome, Commissioner Paulson. We're very pleased to have you here, and congratulations on your appointment as commissioner of

the RCMP. It's a very important position. The RCMP has long been the Canadian flagship. It's recognized all over the world.

I'm extremely concerned about these troubling reports we hear in the media. I think concrete things have to be done to correct the matter.

It was really interesting hearing what your plan was, what you're doing right now, what has been done, and what's in the future.

The thing I'm worried about is that police officers are there to serve and protect. That doesn't mean to say that any police officer, woman or male, should be abused. I feel that the RCMP has a somewhat damaged image, and it's unfortunate. I'm very supportive of the RCMP. My own son is an RCMP officer. However, there is a culture that needs to change, as you have so aptly pointed out, right now.

I've talked to many women RCMP officers who are very supportive of the force and have had wonderful experiences in the force. I think it is right to talk about these incidents that happened. It is right to say that we need to change the culture. That's what has to be done.

Right here in Canada we have the international women in law enforcement conference. It's a big conference. It's an international conference sponsored right here in Canada, in St. John's. I think that's a good opportunity. We need to see the parade of nations. We need to see it filled with the red serge. We need to stand very tall. That's from September 9 to 13.

Now, from what I can find out, there are 17 countries registered and 275 attendees so far, and 154 from Canadian agencies—that doesn't mean RCMP—which is less than half. Only 75 at this point are from the RCMP, but there's lots of time. It's in September. I know that there's one male registered so far, which I find a little bit troubling, because to change the culture we have to be inclusive and include everybody in that.

As I understand it, there are 600 detachments in this country and roughly 20,000 police officers. Many members going right now, I understand, are funding it through their own pockets.

When we talk about the RCMP image today, we know how good that image is worldwide. You can go to any country, and people respect and honour the RCMP.

As a woman, as a Canadian, and as a member of Parliament, I would like to see what you're doing, which is very good in terms of correcting this problem and correcting it quickly. But also I see that something like the International Association of Women Police conference, and including not only women but men as well, could be a great way of bringing up the image of the RCMP. I know that there are many speakers, as you already know, at that conference. What an opportunity.

I'm going to ask whether you support that particular conference, because I understand that it has leading-edge police topics. I've seen all of the topics.

What are you going to do to make sure that RCMP officers, and not only women...? When I see that there are only 75, that worries me a little bit. But it's early. What can you do to make sure that this particular conference is supported? Because I think it's a great opportunity to build networks.

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you.

I agree with you. I suppose I can do more, but I've already had to talk to every commanding officer to insist that they have representation at that conference.

The RCMP is a diverse organization, and 75 people from the RCMP going to that conference could be seen by some of our internal bean counters as being excessive. But I have given direction.... Well, you have to....

Mrs. Joy Smith: Is 75 officers excessive?

Commr Robert Paulson: No, but it's a representative conference.

I'm with you.

What we have to do is make sure we have representation that mirrors the police community more broadly in Canada. That means one from every division where we are the provincial police force, one from our major detachments that can afford it, and the national perspective.

I am very supportive of that. I've already given instructions to support that conference. In fact, our new commanding officer, Tracy Hardy, in Newfoundland, who was appointed assistant commissioner just a month or so ago, will be hosting that, so I'm very excited about that.

• (1715)

Mrs. Joy Smith: I'm very excited to know that too and I think it's a tremendous opportunity. I'm really glad to hear the kinds of things you have brought forward. I think you're extremely concerned about it.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Smith, your time is up.

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: My time is up. Sorry, Commissioner. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Niki Ashton will now have the floor.

You have five minutes.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton: *Merci.*

I have a few questions, Commissioner, that I would like to get to. In the first piece, you referenced not looking at retention. However, from what I understand, attrition rates in recent years have not been made publicly available. While obviously you have some information at your disposal, publicly we don't have that same ability to see what patterns we are seeing in terms of attrition. Does the RCMP conduct exit surveys as women leave the force?

Commr Robert Paulson: We have a practice of doing exit interviews. Frankly, I don't know what our compliance with that is

across the board. I don't know that I can say we have a specific exit interview with respect to women departing the force. We have a general practice. When members retire from the force, they will be offered an exit interview either with a commanding officer or with a staffing representative.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Do you think that might be a measure that would immediately be helpful in fixing the problem, as you noted, especially if that survey was more formalized with a direct focus on the possible experiences of harassment that women have received?

Commr Robert Paulson: I think it would immediately be helpful in understanding the problem, certainly. Maybe I'll take your suggestion and make sure that's incorporated into our audit to make sure we are canvassing the views of those people who are leaving the force. Often they are a little more forthcoming than people who are sticking around.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay. I appreciate that.

Moving on, given the size of this real crisis, I would say, and what it means for having a force that truly reflects Canadians and ensures a safe and equal workplace, I'm wondering in terms of resources. We have been concerned in the recent past with respect to cuts across the board generally, but specifically with respect to the RCMP. We know there have been some ups and downs with respect to specific contracts and so on. We all want to see full resources attached to an effort to eradicate sexual harassment and harassment in the force. Do you feel the RCMP has adequate financial resources to undertake this massive effort?

Commr Robert Paulson: Yes. I have had absolutely no problem reallocating resources to achieve some of the things I have described. As we go forward with our increased regulations and authorities, there may be a requirement for some readjustment. I certainly wouldn't want it understood as a resource problem. It's a behaviour and a conduct problem. I think we have all the resources we need. It's just making sure they are doing the right thing and getting results.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I appreciate that and would hope that, through the proposal that was put forward by Ms. Sgro, we can be there to make sure that government is there to support an effort we would like to see implemented as soon as possible, and to support your efforts.

The final question is.... I was reading the documentation in terms of goals that the RCMP has made with respect to hiring. I have heard the numbers of 30% and 35%. Would you consider a goal of 50%, given that women are in fact half of the population?

Commr Robert Paulson: I did consider that. In fact, I was testing out my new authority as a new commissioner, and I said I wanted 50% admission into Depot. All the experts said that I was nuts because that is not available, and that I was just setting myself up for failure.

I think we have to get there. That's our real, long-term goal. Labour market availability won't support that. Even having increased into the 35%, I had my HR experts looking at me out of the corner of their eye. I agree with you. I think that ultimately we should be hoping for a 50/50 split on intake into the organization. That's what we're going to work toward.

• (1720)

Ms. Niki Ashton: People would definitely have said the same about women in politics a few years ago, and we've broken those barriers, so I'm very pleased to hear about that ultimate goal, and we hope it would become a reality as soon as possible. I think that's a tone that begins to change the water in the aquarium that you referenced.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now hear from Ms. Young.

You have five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Thank you.

Again, I'd like to echo all of my colleagues here to say welcome, and thank you for coming, Commissioner Paulson.

As a person growing up in Vancouver, I, like many of us here, grew up with the notion of respecting and honouring the RCMP for the commitment and service that you've given to Canadians over 100 years of service. Unfortunately, we are bumped up against a situation here that is very troubling and very discouraging to many of us watching this evolve and unfold.

I wanted to ask you, and give you some more time—because I know you ran out of time at the beginning of this—to detail out more for us on what your process for engagement and assessment is, which you outlined at the beginning.

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you.

I'll go back to the rules, or the response to complaints and so on.

What we've had, and what I've come to understand as one of the frailties and the weaknesses of the system, has been this confusion around our harassment policies—which are completely consistent with the Treasury Board's policies and so on—and also our code of conduct, and managers' and supervisors' confusion around how to manage the initial complaint of harassment, for example, because there seems to have been some mistaken belief that it was all to be managed as a conduct matter, as an offence.

As soon as we begin to treat it as an offence, people step back from the problem and go into this very legalistic and protracted adversarial system to try to get to the bottom of what's going on.

We're fixing that. We're combining those two streams, and we're putting the responsibility for leadership and supervision on as low a level as possible, so that front-line supervisors not only are expected but will have the authorities to manage the problem. If they don't—and that's where I've been criticized, perhaps, as being a little heavy-handed in some of my descriptions of what I expect out of my

supervisors—if supervisors aren't doing their jobs, then we have to get new supervisors.

That's the accountability and leadership program that we're putting around conduct. It includes harassment and a respectful workplace. That's what we're doing. We're working very closely with the independent review by the CPC, because I think they will provide us with some independent advice as to the scope and nature of the challenge in areas that perhaps we haven't considered already.

They're doing an exhaustive review, and other than giving them all of the information and opening up our books, I'm looking forward to taking advice on that.

As we've talked about, pursuing these legislative and regulatory changes will be absolutely essential to giving life to the idea that, really, the day-to-day conduct management should fall to the lowest level. But when things get to the point where everybody's outraged and people have had enough, we need to be able to fire some people within the framework of a fair and legally sound system, so that we can not only regain the public trust, but protect it.

Ms. Wai Young: Thank you, Commissioner Paulson.

In the interest of time, Chair, can you let me know how much time I have left?

The Chair: You have one minute.

• (1725)

Ms. Wai Young: One minute, excellent.

I really wanted to applaud you for taking this very firm and open stance with this very important issue. As a woman and as somebody who expects the highest standard of service and standards from the RCMP, I would hope that you would continue to press forward and to move very quickly on this.

I also wanted to ask you a little bit about your attrition rates, and I was very happy to hear that you are hoping to move towards a 50/50 split within the RCMP. How are you going to do that, given that you're only at 20% now, and you've been working at this for 40 years?

Commr Robert Paulson: I think, as one of your colleagues said, you just have to keep pushing. So I've raised it to 35%, and I think if we can achieve 35% for a couple of years, then we can raise it to 40%.

But as Deputy Commissioner Carbonneau, who I've asked to assist me in my analysis of this situation, has told me, you have to be careful. Women don't want to be raised up and put in charge of stuff if they haven't earned it, because of the judgments that attach to that. So it's a slow, baby steps, incremental process, I think. We have to make Canadian women understand the rewards that lie within a career in law enforcement in the RCMP—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paulson. I must stop you here.

There are about three minutes left for a last round of questions. I will now give the floor to Ms. Freeman.

[English]

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'd like to thank Commissioner Paulson for being here.

You talked a lot about the culture within the RCMP and it goes far beyond sexual harassment and other harassment, there are also attitudes.

[Translation]

What do you do in order to be better prepared? Do your officers receive ongoing training, so as to be able to intervene in cases of family violence on reserves, for instance? Indeed, we know that that is a problem. Aboriginal women are the victims of mistreatment in much larger numbers. They run a much greater risk of being victims of violence or even of being killed by someone close to them. What measures are you taking to change the culture and be able to make progress in these cases?

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you.

In my opinion, this is not a matter of training, as we are already quite advanced in that area. However, in order to change the culture, something else is needed. I think we need leadership, accountability, and we have to show people that the RCMP is not responsible for people. As we say in English,

[English]

you're in charge of issues. So when we change the RCMP culture so that people, no matter what their rank, are making principle-based decisions on the merits of the situation and not defending their pips and crowns and their rank by demonstrating to others that they are more powerful or more influential, then we will have changed the culture.

I think absolutely vital to the success of all of these initiatives is to change that mindset around being the boss, because that's a significant weakness.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: In the case of aboriginal women who

[Translation]

subject to more violence,

[English]

do you think that hiring more aboriginal people, or minorities that do suffer more violence, would have an effect in terms of changing the culture, changing the way the RCMP—

Commr Robert Paulson: There's absolutely no question that having a police force that is reflective of your society is essential.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: What practices are being put in place in order to achieve that?

Commr Robert Paulson: We have, for example, a number of initiatives with respect to aboriginals and aboriginal women, where we're trying to overcome the force's previous position of suggesting that if you get hired from northern Manitoba, say, you can't go back to northern Manitoba. So now we are allowing people from communities to be hired and brought right back to their communities, so we're busting through some regulations.

● (1730)

[Translation]

The Chair: The committee will end on that. I am so sorry, but your time is up, Ms. Freeman.

Mr. Paulson, thank you very much for having come here today to appear before the committee.

This concludes today's hearing. Our next hearing will take place on Wednesday, April 25, at the same time, and it will be divided into two parts. The first hour from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. is somewhat optional. You are not obliged to be present, but I think it will be very interesting. In order to avoid confusion, let me specify that the next meeting will take place at 1 Wellington Street. I look forward to seeing you on Wednesday.

Thank you again, Mr. Paulson, and have a nice evening.

The meeting is adjourned.

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