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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good morning. We're at the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

On the motion of privilege relating to the free movement of members within the precinct, we have a number of guests today.

Go ahead and start. We'll take your opening statement and you can introduce any guests that you have with you. Then we'll move on to others.

Mr. Vickers, I understand you don't have an opening statement today. You've been to visit us already.

All right: we're ready to go.

Commissioner Bob Paulson (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With me today is Deputy Commissioner Mike Cabana, who heads our federal policing business line, and Assistant Commissioner Gilles Michaud, who is the commanding officer of national division, which has the oversight and responsibility for a number of things, including security on Parliament Hill.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the RCMP's role in ensuring the safety and security of the parliamentary precinct and the related issue of parliamentary privilege. Without reservation, I can tell you that members of the RCMP employed in the security and safety of the parliamentary precinct understand and respect parliamentary privilege.

The RCMP has a number of measures in place to ensure that members permanently posted to Parliament Hill, as well as short-term postings, including our reservists, are provided with the necessary information on parliamentary privilege. We reinforce this message on an ongoing basis.

Let me begin this morning by providing the committee with a general overview of the RCMP's role on Parliament Hill and how we work with our security partners: the House of Commons security services, the Senate protective services, and the Ottawa Police Service. The focus of our collective security operations is deterrence, detection, and response. Ensuring the safety of the parliamentary precinct is a shared responsibility. The RCMP is responsible for securing the grounds of Parliament Hill as well as the security of the Prime Minister and visiting dignitaries while outside the buildings.

There are some unique security challenges here. The grounds measure over 950,000 square feet and are home to over 400 parliamentarians, 4,000 staff, and 1.5 million visitors annually. Parliament Hill is also a preferred site for small protests and large-scale demonstrations, making its physical structure and occupants vulnerable to threats. On average there are approximately 300 demonstrations or special events per year. RCMP officers respond to anywhere between 450 and 500 occurrences annually.

The RCMP is faced with competing security priorities, as evidenced by the events of September 25 and 26, to which I will turn in a moment. On any given day, RCMP members are responsible for screening vehicles at the vehicle screening facility, monitoring access points, responding to calls for service, patrolling the extensive grounds, and managing visits by high-ranking foreign dignitaries. Permit me to stress here, though, that we don't arrange these visits, we simply secure them.

The RCMP must be responsive to the threat and risk environment, with the ultimate objective, in collaboration with our partners, of ensuring the safety and security of parliamentarians, staff, and the general public. However, we also understand and appreciate that our actions must be carried out in a fashion that does not obstruct parliamentary business and is respectful of the privilege.

We make and take every measure possible to ensure that our security operations do not impede parliamentarians. But frankly speaking, it's not reasonable to expect that with all of the activities going on on the Hill there won't be the odd inconvenient delay: construction, crowds, traffic control devices such as stop signs, and, yes, the occasional visiting head of state in a motorcade. So in the rare instance where purely unimpeded access to the Hill is not possible, we make every effort to ensure that any delays are as short as possible.

In 2012 an RCMP colleague appeared before this committee on the same issue. Based on the issues that were brought forward to the RCMP's attention then, we implemented a number of measures, including distribution of two booklets to all RCMP members posted on Parliament Hill, which include photos of members of Parliament and the Senate; ensuring that newly assigned members to Parliament Hill are thoroughly briefed on parliamentary privilege and parliamentarians' right of unimpeded access to the precinct, and members are regularly reminded of the importance of these issues; facilitating the rapid identification and access of parliamentarians through security checkpoints; requiring operational planning and briefings for major events and demonstrations to reaffirm that once parliamentarians have been granted access through security checkpoints they have unimpeded access to the parliamentary buildings; and ensuring the prompt dismantling of security perimeters established for major events and demonstrations at the conclusion of each special event or visit.

These measures are in addition to the work between the RCMP, the House of Commons security services, and Senate security through the master security planning office and the development of the "Parliamentary Precinct Master Security Plan". This document, developed in 2009, guides the long-term direction of security needs for the precinct.

• (1105)

Despite our best efforts, unfortunately, parliamentarians have experienced delays in accessing Parliament Hill.

As you are aware, on September 25 and 26 respectively, the member of Parliament for Acadie—Bathurst—who, I see, is here today—and the Speaker of the House were delayed in accessing the grounds due to security measures related to the motorcades for the President of Germany. These delays, short as they were, arose from the execution of our duty to facilitate the safe movement of fast-moving vehicles and pedestrians.

In short, we must ensure the safety of all people in the vicinity, and these delays were not intentionally aimed at preventing members of Parliament from accessing the Hill in an unfettered manner. We, I, take these incidents very seriously, so I asked my officials to gather all the relevant information so that I could inform myself, and ultimately, inform our way forward. I would like to share with you what happened.

The incident involving the member of Parliament for Acadie—Bathurst took place on Bank Street north at Wellington Street. As part of the security measures for motorcades arriving on the Hill, members of the RCMP and Ottawa Police Service are required to block off access to streets. Due to these security measures, the parliamentary bus was prevented from accessing the Hill, and members of Parliament decided to gain access on foot. Given that the motorcade was arriving at the pre-selected gate, the officers' duties were to keep the street clear to allow continued movement of the motorcade. This helps ensure the safety and security of the visiting dignitary as well as the safety of pedestrians. Once the motorcade had passed, as per our standard operating procedures the officers promptly stood down, and the member of Parliament for Acadie—Bathurst was escorted across the street. The situation unfolded and was resolved in approximately 70 seconds.

With your permission, Mr. Chair, I'd like to play the video of this incident, and then I can use some still photographs to see the key moments of this event.

The Chair: Certainly.

[Video Presentation]

Commr Bob Paulson: You'll see a motorcycle going across at a fairly good rate of speed. You'll see in the top right of the picture three individuals approaching to cross the street. You'll see in the middle of the street our officer moving towards them in a yellow protective vest and having an engagement with the individuals who come to that side of the street, and you'll see the arrival of the motorcade. The motorcade is fairly lengthy, but at the conclusion of the motorcade the member is then escorted across the street and on his way, so the total elapsed time was quite short.

If I can refer now to these displays, they will illustrate the movement of the motorcade and the member of Parliament. The first, at 11:03:34 a.m. shows the motorcade at the corner of Bank and Wellington streets turning on to Bank Street. This is a representation of the motorcade turning on to this street here. These are the actual photographs with the time stamps, and we just saw the individuals and the engagement of our officer. As you saw in the video, three outrider motorbikes had already turned north on Bank and passed the entrance to the Hill. The member for Acadie—Bathurst, as indicated by the red arrow, is interacting with the RCMP and OPS members as they attempt to cross toward Lower Drive, the intended motorcade route.

The second picture, at 11:03:52 a.m. shows that the motorcade has begun to complete the turn onto Lower Drive and enter Parliament Hill. The member is now waiting with the police personnel here. This is not a real picture of the events as they transpired; it's an overview of the geography, and these are the video stills. You can see the motorcade represented here and you can see the motorcade represented in the top photo.

In the third, at 11:04:44 a.m. the motorcade has just entered through the Bank Street gate and is driving toward Centre Block. A police officer is seen escorting the member for Acadie—Bathurst across Bank Street and onto the Hill. The time stamp is at 11:04:44, and we were talking right there.

I would now like to walk you through the incident involving the Speaker of the House the following day. The Speaker of the House arrived at the vehicle screening facility at almost exactly the same moment that the motorcade carrying the President of Germany was scheduled to move away from the Centre Block. Security procedures to ensure that Lower Drive was clear of other traffic were already in motion. The Speaker of the House was immediately informed of this situation. I'm advised that the Speaker expressed some displeasure with the delay. The time between the motorcade beginning its departure from Centre Block and the restoration of access at the vehicle screening facility was approximately two minutes and two seconds.

With your permission again, Mr. Chair, I will play a video of this incident.

[Video Presentation]

Commr Bob Paulson: The video is a compilation of two different security camera angles. The feeds have been synchronized to create a composite picture of the event. You can see the vehicle approaching at 10:06:26 and pulling into the screening device momentarily. The officer approaches the vehicle and has a conversation with the driver and the Speaker to advise them that the motorcade was departing Centre Block. At this time, although the audio is not present in this rendition, there is a representation of the radio communications between the officer and the command post advising the latter that it was indeed the Speaker who had arrived and that the Speaker was being delayed.

• (1110)

As you look to the left in the picture, you will see the motorcade beginning to depart the Hill. Compounded with this set of facts is the construction that is moved slightly closer to the road. The motorcade is approaching the vehicle screening device. Just now it is departing the grounds. As soon as the last vehicle passes the vehicle screening device, the Speaker will be on his way.

[Translation]

We do strive to ensure parliamentarians are not prevented from accessing the grounds or the buildings. It is unfortunate that these incidents happened at all, but all the more so given that both the Speaker of the House and the member of Parliament for Acadie-Bathurst were dealing with time-sensitive situations.

• (1115)

[English]

We do make all efforts to ensure Parliamentarians are not impeded in gaining access to the grounds or the buildings. It is unfortunate and regrettable that these incidents happened at all, but especially given that both the Speaker of the House and the member of Parliament for Acadie—Bathurst were dealing with time-sensitive situations.

It's our assessment based on a review of all the information gathered that the actions of RCMP members on both the 25th and 26th were guided by the need to ensure the safety of parliamentarians and the visiting dignitary. That said, the RCMP fully recognizes and respects the importance of privilege and of not impeding parliamentarians.

I have mentioned a number of measures we have supported and will continue to support, but I and we are also exploring additional measures to mitigate any interference with parliamentary privilege.

Thank you again for inviting me to participate in this committee. Thank you for your forbearance of these videos and pictures. When it's time, my colleagues and I will be happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner, for a very detailed presentation.

Chief Bordeleau, would you like to go next?

[Translation]

Chief Charles Bordeleau (Chief of Police, Ottawa Police Service): Yes, that's it.

Good morning, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Today with me is Inspector Murray Knowles of the Ottawa Police Service emergency operations division for public safety. He oversees major events and our traffic escort unit.

Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I'm pleased to be here to answer questions related to the Ottawa Police Service's role in working with the RCMP and other security partners to ensure the safety and security of the parliamentary precinct.

Our traffic enforcement and escort officers are often called upon to carry out duties in the area of the parliamentary precinct. They are aware of and respect the parliamentary privileges of members of the House of Commons and senators.

The duties of the Ottawa Police officers include protecting the safety and security of individuals along the motorcade routes. These include members of the general public, pedestrians, motorists, and members of the motorcade. There are always risks involved in motorcades. Vehicles are moving quickly through populated areas, often carrying heads of state and other dignitaries. We minimize the risks through constant training and practice, including communication and cooperation with our security partners. I think that the opening statement provided by Commissioner Paulson has given you a clear and concise overview of our collective security operations.

Before closing, I want to add that our service has reviewed the video of the event on 25 September, spoken with the officers involved, and considered the operational plan. We are satisfied that any delay caused by Ottawa Police Service members during the time period in question was done in order to ensure the safety of pedestrians and motorists in the vicinity of the motorcade and in the motorcade itself.

I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.

[Translation]

I thank you once again for giving me this opportunity to make a presentation before the committee.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Vickers, you don't have a statement, so let's go to questions by members.

Mr. Lukiwski, you can start at seven minutes, if you would, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you very much.

And thank you all, gentlemen, for being here.

Let me first say, and I believe I'm speaking on behalf of all of my colleagues, that we absolutely appreciate the great work you do not only in the protection of parliamentarians, but for all Canadians. I direct my comments here to Commissioner Paulson. And certainly, Chief Bordeleau, we appreciate every effort that the municipal police forces make to protect our citizens.

In support of full disclosure I have to say that I have a very long history with the RCMP and am an unabashed supporter of the RCMP. Not only have many current and former friends of mine served the force, but it's very personal with me. My mother's first husband was an RCMP officer who was killed on duty at depot while doing guard duty. I know the challenges you face on a daily basis, and I absolutely appreciate all that you do to protect the safety and security of every Canadian.

Having said that, let me note that we're here to deal with an issue that has been in front of this committee before, and that is to try to ensure balancing the safety and security aspect of your operational duties with the privileges of parliamentarians. This is not to say that we are a privileged lot, but as my colleague, the member from Acadie—Bathurst, said when he first raised the question of privilege, in effect, because that day happened to be a time when votes were occurring in Parliament, if any member were impeded from attending votes, he in fact would be disenfranchising anywhere from 80,000 to 120,000 people. That's something that we take very seriously; I know all of my colleagues do.

You mentioned in your report that it would be unreasonable to think that there will not from time to time be incidents that cause delays, but you also mentioned at the end of your report, Commissioner Paulson, that you're working now to try to mitigate some of these issues and even improve the protocol you have now in place.

Could you give us a sense of some of the issues you're examining right now that could give us some comfort that the situation we've seen now twice in three years will perhaps not happen again?

• (1120)

Commr Bob Paulson: Thank you for the question, and thank you for your comments in prefacing it.

I'll give you a short answer and then I'll invite my colleague Gilles Michaud to talk a little bit more about this.

As I said in my comments, this whole security undertaking is a shared responsibility. We need to communicate in advance the kinds of events that will or could reasonably be seen to risk presenting situations such as the unfortunate ones we're talking about today; these need not just to be communicated to our partners in the security business but to be disseminated to parliamentarians and senators and people who make their living on the Hill.

That's one of the key factors we're trying to achieve. There has been some measure of work done on it. The Sergeant-at-Arms, the security services of both the Senate and the House of Commons, and the RCMP have been working to get to a place in which we have a good sense of upcoming events.

I'll invite Assistant Commissioner Michaud to add to that.

Assistant Commissioner Gilles Michaud (Assistant Commissioner, Commanding Officer, National Division, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, sir.

Basically, following the events of September 25 and 26 and considering the impact they had on some members of Parliament, we had a conversation, a discussion, and a meeting with House of Commons security, with Mr. McDonnell, to look at what could be

done to mitigate and minimize the delays that were encountered on those days.

Among some of the issues we've been discussing, both with the House of Commons security and internally in the RCMP, is the possibility that every time there is a big motorcade coming to the Hill that might impede traffic on the Hill, instead of using the Bank Street entrance, we'd use the Elgin Street entrance. That would be the norm for the big motorcades. We did not have that in the past; it was the other way around. That's an example.

As well, the other piece is to ensure that any last-minute changes to the motorcade movements are communicated to House of Commons security. We always have an advance vehicle that shows up on the Hill five minutes ahead of time. That vehicle would be in direct contact with the House of Commons security superintendent, who is in charge of the visit on the Hill, to ensure that they can communicate any types of last-minute changes to motorcade movements, and as well, in return, receive information on any changes of activities that may be occurring on the Hill and would impede access on the Hill, either for the motorcade or members of Parliament.

Those are two examples of things that we are looking at right now to minimize the impact as it was felt on September 25 and 26.

On that as well, we can tell you that for the Elgin Street entrance, there was the Rolling Rampage event on the Hill a couple of weeks ago, and that's exactly what we did. With the assistance of House of Commons security and Senate security, we had folks at the entry points at that time. It was a planned event, so we could plan accordingly. I think the flow of traffic on the Hill was not disturbed because of the event itself. There was a motorcade for the President of Finland that came to Parliament Hill on that day and things worked out fairly well.

The Chair: You have one minute left. I'm sorry.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I guess my question.... I'll turn it over. I know we'll have other questions from all the members here.

Here's my immediate question. How confident are you—and I've asked this both of members of the RCMP and the municipal force—that your members are visually aware of all members of Parliament? In other words, do you believe that if a member of Parliament approached them, they would be able to recognize that member of Parliament by visual identification methods, or do they need perhaps further training or other aids to help them in that regard?

A/Commr Gilles Michaud: Like the commissioner said....

Commr Bob Paulson: Like the commissioner said....

Voices: Oh, oh!

Commr Bob Paulson: We do have the book of photos, but I don't know how reasonable it is to expect our members to have committed to memory.... I think that, as I said, it's a shared responsibility, and members of Parliament are identifying themselves. Certainly in this case, the member identified himself. That, if the member doesn't recognize him, should alert the member to kick into his mode of respecting the privilege.

I don't think it's reasonable to think that every member on the Hill knows every member of Parliament, but they're sure trying. We have, as I say, photos of all parliamentarians in their possession, and they're briefed regularly, particularly in advance, so that members who would identify themselves as a member of Parliament, if they weren't recognized, could be easily confirmed.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): If you don't mind, Chair, I'd like to give Mr. Godin a few moments of my time before I begin. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank our witnesses for being here with us today to discuss the event that occurred

While looking at the video, I felt that I looked like a person with no common sense. In the video you showed us, I seem to approach the RCMP officer at the same time as the motorcade was arriving. And yet, I have no suicidal instincts. It would have been crazy for me to do that. In fact, even though I hate to do it, I have reasons to challenge the video. I think it has been speeded up.

I will describe the event. After all, I am the one who lived through it. I got off the shuttle bus and one of my colleagues was behind me. When I arrived at the corner of Bank street, the officer was already there. I approached him and I had time to tell him that I wanted to go up the Hill. As I was saying this to him, the cars in the motorcade carrying the President of Germany had not yet arrived. So I had time to say that to him, and he had time to reply this:

[English]

“I don't care.”

[Translation]

He was not polite with me. I told him that we had to go and vote. However, if you look at the video, you will see that I seem not to have had time to make these two comments. That is what is bothering me today. I then told him that we had to go up to the Hill, to Parliament, to go and vote, and that I had parliamentary privilege allowing me to do so, and the officer had time to reply as follows:

[English]

“I don't care if you have a vote.”

[Translation]

I said to him: “a vote could cause the government to fall, and you don't care?”

He was speaking English. And then he answered this:

[English]

“I don't care about the Parliament. I don't care about the vote and I don't care. I'm following strict orders from my superior and get on the sidewalk.”

[Translation]

According to what you see on the video, I would not have had time to have this discussion with him. The way things look there is causing a problem for me.

In addition, with all due respect for the RCMP, I wonder if officers should really treat a citizen, or a member of Parliament, in this way. I told the officer I was a member of Parliament, but that fact did not count for him. He replied:

[English]

“I don't care.”

[Translation]

It's not about identity. That aspect is bothering me.

Also, all the time we were speaking, we could not see the motorcade. We had time to talk to each other. We did not have this conversation after the motorcade arrived. And yet, the video gives the impression that all of this happened at the same time, while we were talking. That would mean that I did not have that conversation with the officer.

Commr Bob Paulson: First of all, it is unacceptable that one of our officers treat any citizen, especially a parliamentarian, in the way you have described. There is no excuse for that. That is not at all the way in which we want to engage with our citizens. The video is the video. As far as I am concerned, there would have been a lot of time for you to speak to each other. There is no audio with this video. We can't determine what you said, or what the officer said.

I met with the officer and I asked him what happened. He assured me that he had acted professionally, and this is what he said.

[English]

Sir, I do not dispute what you say took place. I wasn't there. I don't have any audio evidence. I can tell you that I emphasize the importance of professionalism and respect, not just for members of Parliament but for all Canadians. That's not how we engage with people that we serve. I can assure you that I barely have the technical ability to press play on this video. The video, it seems to me, as it's represented certainly doesn't seem speeded up to me. I don't think there is any lost opportunity for you to have had that conversation with that officer.

We don't put the video forward to discredit you or your version of what you said took place. I'm prepared to accept what you say took place. We're here to try to figure out how to fix this.

• (1130)

Mr. David Christopherson: How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: I'll be lenient. There are about four minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your allowing Mr. Godin to clarify things from his perspective.

First of all, thank you for coming. We appreciate it. I think I can safely say that Mr. Lukiwski's comments about the respect that we all have are shared by everyone—and that's full stop.

If I may, like a number of other members, I've had some experience with policing on the civilian side, having been the former Solicitor General of Ontario, where I was the civilian head of the OPP responsible for all policing in Ontario, but also now as a ten-year veteran of this place as a member of Parliament. So I understand the responsibilities.

In many ways you're in a no-win situation, and that needs to be said. When you do everything right, nobody says boo. One thing goes wrong, and all hell breaks loose. So it's a tough role. But given the way we structure our society and the authority, privileges, and rights that we give police officers, and talking about the rights of parliamentarians, it is appropriate that we are spending this serious time here.

I want to underscore—and I've mentioned this every time and just want to reiterate it—that this could easily be seen by much of the public, who say, “Oh, there they go, a bunch of MPs. They think they're so important. One of them gets delayed for a minute and oh boy, they have to spend all this time and effort...”. I accept that could be the view. But having said that, it's not about that for those of us who are here—and I see the commissioner nodding his head in agreement.

I want to put this on the record. Remember, we forget there's no guarantee that we keep democracy in Canada. There's nothing etched in stone in the universe that says that Canada remains a democracy forever, don't worry about it. We have to be on guard for our democracy, and this is part of that.

As far back as April 12, 1733, in the British House of Commons they resolved: “That the assaulting, insulting or menacing any member of this House, in his coming to or going from the House...is a high infringement of the privilege of this House, a most outrageous and dangerous violation of the rights of Parliament and an high crime and misdemeanor.” Further, in 1780 they said, “That it is a gross breach of the privilege of this House for any person to obstruct and insult the members of this House in the coming to, or going from, the House...”.

There are others, but I want to jump to one of the most recent, which was just in 2004. Again, it was resolved that “'Members of Parliament are entitled to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed', and it was further stated “that the breach of this privilege was not only unacceptable, but a contempt of Parliament.” So this is serious stuff.

There are two issues that I see in this.

One is the issue—and there some dispute as to the facts—of “I don't care”. We really have no way of knowing this with 100% certainty. Individual and honourable people have their views; however, if that or anything like it was said, that's more akin to a police state than a democracy. That's a huge problem.

I heard you address it, Commissioner, in terms of talking to the officer. You and the chief and the others here have to deal with that in how you instruct and lead your individual officers. But understand, that is huge. It's one thing to say “I'm sorry, I have to delay you for a moment.” But if anything like that happened, that's a real attitudinal problem and it's unacceptable in a Canadian democracy.

Again, having said that, the responsibility to ensure that guests to this country are safe is of paramount importance to all Canadians.

The planning of it, it seems to me, is the second piece of this. That's where I'm going to look at you, Sergeant-at-Arms Vickers. When you're having the master plan discussions about how motorcades are going to happen, it seems to me—and I'll give you an opportunity to respond—that it's your role to say, as much as the police services directly are looking at the physical protection of our guests and their entourage, that it's of almost equal importance.... I can't say it's equal, because one is life and death and one isn't, but from a planning perspective in terms of importance, sir, I think it's up to you to make sure it is understood that if the House is sitting, in particular if there might be votes, that the plan reflects access for the members away from the motorcade, or that the motorcade parade be adjusted. The priority has to be members getting to the Hill.

To me, the way we keep things flowing properly is in the planning.

● (1135)

I know that you do serious planning on these things, but my sense is that access is an afterthought. What we need is for that to be boosted, so that when you're talking about the president or prime minister or ambassador who is going to be here and the security needed around them, there is an equal discussion about getting members to the Hill, and that's where the Sergeant-at-Arms....

It seems to me that if you're not getting satisfactory responses from the other police services you're working with, then you should be coming back to us saying, “MPs, under the current plan I cannot guarantee your access to the Hill.” That's your trump card, if you will. It seems to me that if it's done in the planning, if we ensure that the one access is separate from the other, we will avoid the possibility of these kinds of incidents—and that's done in the planning.

At this point I could perhaps leave that with the commissioner and particularly the Segeant-at-Arms. Sir, I hadn't talked to you about this ahead of time, but as I've been thinking it through, it seems to me that as we back it up and look at the responsibilities, it's at that planning stage that somebody has to take responsibility for making sure that the constitutional right of members of Parliament is honoured. It's in the planning, and you're our guy.

I would maybe give you an opportunity, if you wish, Sergeant-at-Arms, to give us your thoughts on my comments.

Mr. Kevin Vickers (Sergeant-at-Arms, House of Commons): Mr. Christopherson, I couldn't agree more with your comments about the importance of planning. I know that in our debriefing since this incident, in going forward we're going to redouble our efforts to make sure that parliamentary privilege is known everywhere and discussed throughout the planning process. I also know that Assistant Commissioner Michaud and Patrick McDonnell, our director general of security, have already addressed that. In our operational plans there shall be a dedicated paragraph that focuses on nothing other than parliamentary privilege.

Having said that, and I have no doubt Deputy Commissioner Cabana, who is here, and Assistant Commissioner Michaud, will agree that in all our conversations, and especially in all our planning meetings on the master security plan, that it's the *c'est une pierre angulaire*, the cornerstone, of everything we do, so that we talk about parliamentary privilege. In this particular case, somehow—and I, as Sergeant-at-Arms, when I hear the discussion today—I feel...I'm not saying failing, but that I'm going to have to really double down to educate the importance....

The incident with Mr. Godin at the street corner, to me, is unacceptable. But that incident happened long before the green buses with members of Parliament on board were stopped, I believe at 10:04 to 11:13, and that's where the serious breach of privilege occurred. Going forward, to answer your question, I completely agree with you. I accept your thoughts on this that as Sergeant-at-Arms, it's paramount for me to redouble my efforts with our friends, the RCMP and Ottawa City Police, to ensure that these types of incidents stop and do not continue to happen.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to stop you there.

Mr. Lamoureux, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As has been talked about by Tom, I generally do appreciate the fine work, whether it's by RCMP or municipal law enforcement officers who provide services not only for our precinct but also to the population as a whole. Having said that, I also believe that all the gentlemen here understand the importance of privilege of access and why it is in fact justified and why it is that you're here today.

I was somewhat intrigued, Mr. Vickers, by your last answer on the green bus incident. I'd be interested in knowing, in particular from you, Mr. Paulson, if you and Mr. Vickers have had an opportunity discuss that. But before that, there was a fairly serious allegation, and I want to make sure that we're perfectly clear on this, that the video that we saw as members of Parliament just moments ago was in fact accurate, that it was not sped up in any fashion.

• (1140)

Commr Bob Paulson: It was not sped up in any fashion, no.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Okay.

You mentioned that you had talked to the RCMP officer in question. Can you give us some sort of context in which that RCMP officer would have said how the discussion went?

Commr Bob Paulson: He came to my office, we had a discussion, and I put what I understood Mr. Godin to have experienced to the officer. He assured me, without denying specifically that he had said "I don't care", that he couldn't imagine that he said he didn't care and that he treated people with respect, but that it was a safety issue. I imparted to him the importance not only of privilege but also of the respectful engagement with members of the public, and particularly parliamentarians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: So you're in the awkward position that he tells you that he didn't say that. Did he say specifically that he did not say that?

Commr Bob Paulson: He said he couldn't remember saying that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Okay.

If you were that RCMP officer—and we're talking about that specific incident, then I want to go on to the green bus—what would you have done differently?

Commr Bob Paulson: I certainly would have conducted myself respectfully with the member of Parliament. I think that the motorcycles, having started darting across.... You saw the motorcycles and I think, as Mr. Godin pointed out, there was a momentary lapse between the motorcycles and the arrival of the substantive motorcade. I think the motorcade had arrived. I would have been very respectful and explained why this wasn't possible, that it was only going to be for a moment, and I would apologize for the inconvenience.

It's a bit risky for me to substitute my decision-making for that officer. He assures me that he was not disrespectful. My judgement is that we need to reinforce with all of our members the need for understanding privilege. It's not lost on us, sir, the importance of this privilege and how it has to be defended. That has to be imparted to the officer. The respectful engagement with members of Parliament is absolute.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: In terms of the green bus incident, can you give us some insight into what took place with it? That's one question.

Just in case we do run out of time, the other thing I'm interested in is to what degree and how often we have representatives from the RCMP in discussion with Mr. Vickers or Mr. McDonnell?

Commr Bob Paulson: I'm going to pass your first question off to Chief Bordeleau, who has information on the green bus. I don't.

I can say quickly to your other question that, other than encountering Mr. Vickers from time to time at social events, it is primarily Deputy Cabana and Assistant Commissioner Michaud who would have the lion's share of engagement with Mr. Vickers and his staff.

Chief Charles Bordeleau: Mr. Chair, at 10:51 a.m., one of our motorcycle officers did stop a green bus. The purpose of that was to start the process of flushing out the street to ensure the safe arrival of the motorcade. That street the bus was on was flushed to prevent oncoming traffic from facing the motorcade. That was the first phase to flushing out the street, removing the oncoming traffic. The second phase was the vehicles and motorcycles pushing out traffic that was going in the same direction as the motorcade. That process started approximately 10 minutes before the arrival of the motorcade. That's what you see on a video, which I reviewed. You see the Ottawa Police Service officer stopping all vehicular traffic on that street where the green bus was. There were a couple of other vehicles behind it as well, preventing oncoming traffic. That happened at 10:51 a.m.

• (1145)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: So there are time protocols that are put into place and as far as you can tell that protocol was met?

Chief Charles Bordeleau: Absolutely. You can't flush out a street in a matter of two minutes. It takes a while to do it safely and securely. On the video you see the oncoming vehicle traffic stop. Then you see vehicle traffic that is flowing with the motorcade ahead of time. That eventually disappears, it gets flushed out. The last piece is pedestrians. You see some joggers and cyclists, and then you see the members walking across the street. That's the last phase to fully secure the perimeter to allow the free-flowing movement of the motorcade.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: To deal with that specific issue, it's more the changing of the time protocols than it is any fault of any particular officer wanting to tie up things.

Chief Charles Bordeleau: From a logistics perspective, I would suggest a 10-minute window is problematic, depending on how big the streets are and the perimeter. In that area, they allow themselves about 10 minutes to secure and close down the streets, because they have traffic on Wellington that has to be stopped, as well as other vehicles along Bank Street coming across directly. All those pieces have to fall into place, and we can't do it safely in one instant. It has to be phased in.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're at four-minute rounds now, Mr. Opitz.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all of you for being here, because the accessibility that all Canadians have to the Hill and the safety with which they can access the Hill is remarkable in the world. I'd like to thank all of you for doing that. I know that's something Canadians enjoy. All of you on the job are making that possible.

I have a couple of things. I understand from a military perspective how you guys work together. I was at World Youth Day 2002 as an operations officer, coordinating among military, RCMP, metro police, OPP, and other police forces. Coordination was a massive undertaking. Some of the things we did there...and I've taken away from my military time are things like rules of engagement cards, soldier cards, little *aides-mémoire* that you can use. Perhaps posting, in a case where your officers are concerned.... You've counselled them now, although on the video the tone and intent is impossible to discern. I'm sure that's the first and last time he's going to want to talk to his commissioner in such a fashion. I'm pretty sure he's been illuminated as to what the issues are.

I would recommend that you look at creating some of these types of mnemonics, or in fact posting a parliamentary officer with the RCMP, because he does have the visual memory to understand who's a member of Parliament, as among the types of things you could put in place.

How do you do coordinate your SOPs? Perhaps I'll start with the Sergeant-at-Arms.

Mr. Kevin Vickers: Following Mr. Christopherson, we do have a whole series of advance meetings before each visit. For the House of Commons, in collaboration with our security partners, we do up what's called an ops order for every visit, which outlines step-by-step how the visit is to unfold.

Mr. Ted Opitz: How do you deal with new officers on the Hill? How are they briefed when they arrive?

Commr Bob Paulson: I'll hand it over to Assistant Commissioner Michaud.

A/Commr Gilles Michaud: All new police officers who are affected on Parliament Hill.... We have different types of police officers. We have those who are posted permanently on Parliament Hill. As soon as they come for their first day on the job, we have SOPs in place; parliamentary privilege is part of our SOPs. They need to read through them, and then they get exposed to the booklets so they can facilitate identification.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Are all the SOPs in alignment with all the different agencies: parliamentary, Ottawa police, RCMP?

• (1150)

A/Commr Gilles Michaud: I couldn't say if they are in sync. When we have events that we need to coordinate, they are definitely in sync. I'm talking about the ongoing SOPs for us, but I would imagine that these are discussed as well through the MSP office meetings. If there's any divergence, corrections would be brought at that level.

As for the other types of members, we have ones who are assigned for a shift, a couple of shifts, or a specific event. Before the beginning of their shifts, these members will be briefed accordingly, depending on the nature of the duties they have to accomplish. They won't necessarily go through all the SOPs, but they will be briefed on expectations during the event.

Mr. Ted Opitz: When you do ops orders, those are done at a command level. How are they pushed down to the troops?

A/Commr Gilles Michaud: It's through the SOPs.

Mr. Ted Opitz: So the command structure takes over and leaders at all levels are briefed downwards, and then finally it goes to the placement on the street.

A/Commr Gilles Michaud: Yes.

Commr Bob Paulson: I think it's important to add that the amount of coordination that goes into each one of these events is significant, in the sense that our ops centre is activated. We'll have members of the House of Commons and Senate security forces sitting with us, having been briefed all the way up to the event. Then on the execution of the event, we have abilities to de-conflict and react, and everybody's in radio contact.

Mr. Ted Opitz: You said there's an LO from each organization in the room.

Commr Bob Paulson: That's right.

The Chair: We'll go to Madam Latendresse, for four minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here and for helping us to better understand what happened on September 25 and 26.

I would like to mention one thing. I think the problem was sufficiently well described by my colleague a bit earlier. Basically, it may have been more of a problem related to the events that were taking place on Parliament Hill and in Centre Block. It can become an issue when an event occurs at the same time as a vote, or when the opening of the House is delayed.

Even if there was only a two-minute interval, we can see in the video that it is 10:07. The Speaker of the House was supposed to be there early to commence House business, and he was unable to do so. So it is a broader issue, and we can't simply say that no one should bear 100% of the blame. If we think about what happened to Mr. Godin, the officer who stopped him did not think he was doing anything wrong, naturally. He had to ensure people's safety. No one here is trying to say that all of the blame should be placed on any one person's shoulders.

However, certain steps could be taken. There are several options. As we were saying earlier when we were speaking with Mr. Vickers, certain specific measures could be taken when these visits are planned, if they are to take place on a weekday, while the House is sitting, in order to avoid interfering with the votes.

Earlier, we talked about Elgin Street and the possibility of having the motorcades go through there. That could be one idea. Currently, we are in the building at 1 Wellington Street. If there were a vote called and we had to return to Centre Block and if something happened again, there could be an issue. We really need an overall vision of this problem, in order to better protect parliamentary privilege exercised in the course of our legislative duties, when events involving foreign dignitaries are planned.

Do you have any comments to make?

Commr Bob Paulson: I agree with you completely.

I think we've already talked about the planning process. The decisions have to be taken at that level. First of all, we have to organize the arrival of the dignitaries, and secondly think about other ways of letting the members in. We have not done enough in that regard.

Do you have any comments to make, Deputy Commissioner?

Deputy Commissioner Mike Cabana (Deputy Commissioner, Federal Policing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you for your comments.

Yes indeed, it is not that there is a misunderstanding about the importance of parliamentary privilege as such, but it is, rather, a matter of coordination among the various organizations. Mr. Michaud and Mr. McDonnell have already done a great deal of work, especially since those incidents.

We have all the ingredients to put other processes in place that will allow us to better coordinate everything so as to minimize such issues in the future.

• (1155)

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Let's go back to Mr. Godin's case. Several members were waiting for quite a long time in the shuttle buses, and the driver told them that he did not think he could get through and that they should try to go up to the House on foot. Even if there was only a brief delay, it could have been problematic if they had not been able to make it to the House on time to vote.

And so we must find a solution to prevent a recurrence of this type of situation. I have been sitting on this committee for a number of years now, and it seems that these situations occur a little too regularly. We sit down, we say that we really have to find solutions, and then it happens again. I'm afraid that there might be an instance where a lot of members will be deprived of their right to vote because of this. We really have to find a solution to resolve this problem.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacKenzie, for four minutes, please.

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

Thank you, panel members, for being here today.

I think most Canadians watching this would question what a 70-second delay means when you look at all of the things taken into totality here. I respect Mr. Godin's position here that he was delayed in getting to the Hill, but there is also the issue of his safety.

There was also the issue of safety with the motorcade. I think most of us around here have been in foreign countries as part of a motorcade. I've often felt pretty fortunate not to have run over somebody the way those motorcades operate. I think the expertise and the professionalism that we see here stand out.

I think, with all due respect, that you do an excellent job, and from time to time there will be issues that develop, such as those Mr. Godin and the Speaker ran into.

I think as we work through these—and obviously you have—just the little thing about changing the gate will make a tremendous difference and, obviously, make the task at hand a whole lot simpler for the people who have to provide that security.

As we find these things, I think Canadians would watch this and say, “Well, didn't they do a pretty good job? Nobody got hurt. The motorcade got through. Mr. Godin did get to the vote on time”. The Speaker may have been a little late. I was looking at the times here, and I don't want to be critical of the Speaker, but he might have been a little late just getting to the first gate. So his delay was exasperating, and I'm not going to report that to the Speaker.

The other part I noticed in this was the construction going on at West Block. Mr. Godin in some circumstances would have been able to walk up the Hill on one side, but with the construction now that sidewalk is not available to go up. That's obviously part of the whole issue here. Mr. Godin could not have avoided the motorcade by going up the Hill on the West Block side.

I think there was the construction, and it's fair to say, as my colleague said, that the officer who had the opportunity to meet first-hand with the commissioner will probably be more respectful if that's a possibility. I'm not saying he was disrespectful, but certainly that goes through the moccasin telegraph. Everybody knows that the Hill and the parliamentarians are somewhat sacrosanct.

I really don't have any questions. I do respect Mr. Godin's position, but I'm satisfied that from time to time things just don't fall together the way everyone would hope they would. Certainly there are a variety of things here, including the construction on the Hill, that make traffic very difficult. But again, having that entrance now moved to Elgin Street eliminates the West Block construction.

The other part is when you look up here at Centre Block, you can't even go around the Centre Block and come out the other side. Maybe in normal circumstances a motorcade would go around behind and come out at Elgin Street, but now there is no opportunity for that. They'll have to come down and either circle or go down the Hill or go out Elgin Street.

I wish I knew the magic formula. I'm satisfied that the professionalism of all of the organizations here, including Mr. Vickers' people on the Hill, has gone a long way to eliminating those issues.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacKenzie.

I have no speakers left on the list, but I'll take a couple of quick questions.

Mr. Godin, try to keep it to two minutes or less and we'll try to see if anybody else who hasn't asked a question would still like to.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Those are going to be very short.

[Translation]

First of all, I want to say that I am disappointed with the situation. Now we're dealing with an officer who says he was respectful and with a member of Parliament who is made to look as if he lied. I find this unfortunate, because you are never going to know the truth, finally.

I want to say for the record that as the member for Acadie—Bathurst for the past 17 years, I have enjoyed the respect of all my fellow citizens. I did not have a career in politics by telling lies and by inventing situations that did not happen. I want my comments to be recorded, because my reputation is at stake, which is worse than an issue crossing Bank Street. I find it very unfortunate that it has come to this.

I know my privileges. I know the privileges members have. I know how things are supposed to work. When I put my question in the House of Commons, all of my colleagues supported me regarding this situation. Today, I find it sad that there are two different versions of events, on the video and on what happened between the officer and me.

I have a lot of respect for the RCMP. I have a lot of respect for the municipal police and for our authorities. I did not get into politics because I had no respect for all of that. My work is to make

legislation with my colleagues and to vote on legislation. And so I want my comments to be recorded. I find this part sad.

Moreover, as I said, I am challenging this. A conversation took place. Two evenings later, there were other votes in the House of Commons and as the Prime Minister was leaving, an RCMP officer with whom I was speaking told me that I should not go on. I could accept that because I did not want to get hit by a car.

That is why I am telling you sincerely that when I look at the video—and compare it to how things happened—it looks as though, while speaking to the officer, I wanted to leap in front of the car that was going by in front of me. And yet, I have no desire to commit suicide!

It is really unfortunate that things have taken this turn. That is why I am challenging the video. Something happened, otherwise we would not all be here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Paulson.

Commr Bob Paulson: May I make a comment, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You certainly may, sure. Go ahead.

Commr Bob Paulson: I would just say, Mr. Godin, that no one in the RCMP, and certainly not me, is here to call into question your reputation or your integrity at all. The very fact that we are engaged in this discussion at all is something that I feel sorry about. I do not want your leaving here thinking that the RCMP has taken any swipe at your reputation. You say you have great respect for the police and RCMP, and I have great respect for you and parliamentarians. I don't want it left that you should go on thinking that there's any question of your integrity or your reputation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson, you have a quick two minutes, and we'll wrap it up.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

If I may, I have a follow-up.

In your comments, Sergeant-at-Arms Vickers, I think I heard you acknowledge that there could be a strengthening of the priority of access in the development of the master security plan.

Commissioner, please correct me if I'm wrong, but I think I saw you nodding. Your comments were suggesting that perhaps, had things been looked at differently, we could have, from a planning perspective, avoided the two paths interconnecting. That is my point. If the access for the members on that day had been different than the access the motorcade made, we would have avoided the whole thing. I see you nodding again, Commissioner, and I appreciate that. With the Sergeant-at-Arms agreeing to this, then it would seem to me that maybe we've come a long way here. Before it was, we need to impart the importance of access—and really it's a different approach now. This time, rather than just saying this is important as a stand-alone, if we looked at it as part of the planning, we could say, okay, the priority is the security of our guests. Alongside that we need to deal with the access of the members by asking if there is any point where these might clash or if there is any way we can mitigate the opportunities for that. As you said, Chief, from time to time things will happen. Officers need to step in, and we all respect that. If we plan it ahead of time, we can lessen the opportunity for a situation like that to arise because good planning had gone into it.

I, for one, Mr. Chair, am pleased that this kind of slightly different approach in prioritizing right from the planning perspective may go a long way to avoiding this, recognizing that in policing, things happen. We deal with those as best we can, but planning is the key.

Thanks.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

I'll call this to an end and thank our guests today.

It is like groundhog day. This committee has addressed this twice while I've been chair.

Monsieur Godin, you sat on the committee one of the last times we did this. At least I've heard a little bit of different news. It's not my intent simply to have this committee write another report and say that we looked at it. I'd really like to come to more of a solution.

We recognize from Mr. MacKenzie's statements today that construction was playing a role in why some of this happened. The twain would not have met if that hadn't been the case. I thank Mr. Christopherson and Mr. MacKenzie for those comments.

We'll suspend for a couple of minutes while we allow our guests to leave and thank them for being here.

We'll then go in camera and talk about how to write this report.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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