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Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1100)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 31 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. I am in Treaty 1 territory and also the homeland of the Métis people. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, June 23, 2022, the committee is commencing its study of allegations of political interference in the 2020 Nova Scotia mass murder investigation.

With us today on the first panel is the Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of Emergency Preparedness, and Mr. Rob Stewart, deputy minister of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Welcome to all.

I now invite Minister Blair to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Minister, whenever you're ready, the floor is yours.

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Emergency Preparedness): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Colleagues, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I'd also like to acknowledge that I'm speaking to you today from the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

On April 18 and 19 of 2020, an unthinkable tragedy unfolded in Nova Scotia. All Canadians were shaken by these horrific deaths and mourned alongside the affected communities. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my support for and condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in these violent attacks and our commitment to ensure that they get the answers they need.

We know that Canadians deserve a full accounting of what happened over those 13 hours on April 18 and 19 in 2020. That is why we established an independent inquiry, the Mass Casualty Commission, which is mandated to look into some of the most pressing questions that were raised into how this occurred and how future tragedies can be prevented. We are all looking forward to the inquiry's fact-based findings, which I understand are due to be released later this year.

As the commission conducts its work, I remain committed to the fundamental principle of operational independence for law enforcement in this country. I want to make it very clear: At no point did I direct the RCMP in any operational matter, including on public communications. I did not ask them to release any specific information, nor did I receive a promise for them to do so. As you will find in all of my public statements from that time, I confirmed that identifying the weapons used was a decision wholly within the purview of the RCMP.

What I would like to emphasize for you all today, however, is that during the years I've had the honour to serve as Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, one of my top priorities has been addressing gun violence in Canada. This was a key item in my mandate letter, which directed me to keep our communities safe by implementing new gun control measures, including a ban on assault-style firearms. Work on this issue had been under way for quite some time. We first made a commitment to get assault-style weapons off our streets in the very first Speech from the Throne in 2015. We repeated that commitment in both our platform and our throne speech in 2019. As part of that work, while I was Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, I supported Minister Goodale in public consultations on reducing violent crime that involved both handguns and assault-style weapons.

Just within these few years, we have seen far too many examples of the kinds of harms these firearms can cause, such as at the shooting at the Quebec City mosque. Another gunman killed two police officers and two civilians in Fredericton. Within our neighbour to the south, the AR-15 alone has been used in mass shootings at the Pulse nightclub; in Sutherland Springs; at Stoneman Douglas High School; and, perhaps most tragically, at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

From the outset, we understood the importance of preventing assault-style firearms from getting into the hands of people who do Canadians harm. The tragedy that occurred in Nova Scotia only deepened our resolve to move forward with this critically important work. That is why on May 1, 2020, we announced an OIC prohibiting over 1,500 models of assault-style firearms and their variants. Firearms affected by this order in council cannot be legally used, sold or imported into Canada. We created a time-limited amnesty order to give law-abiding gun owners time to come into compliance.

The OIC on May 1 was the result of many years of hard work on the part of government, including public servants, and was developed based on public consultations that were open to all Canadians. Let me be very clear: These are weapons designed for the battlefield, intended to kill the maximum number of people in the least amount of time. They have no place in Canada.

The measure is, and continues to be, an incredibly important part of our overall approach to combatting gun violence, but it is not the only step we have taken. We have introduced expanded background checks and enhanced screening for those seeking a firearms licence, and we've made significant investments in helping provinces and territories tackle gang violence. Earlier this year, my colleague Minister Mendicino tabled further relevant legislation that I believe will be coming before this committee in short order. Combatting gun violence is a complex and continual process, an issue that requires a multi-faceted approach, and we will continue to keep Canadians safe by implementing stronger gun controls.

Mr. Chair, I would conclude, if I may, by reiterating that at no time have I ever interfered operationally or given operational direction to the RCMP in my role as the Minister of Public Safety.

I thank you all. I look forward to the questions that you may have.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. You won't have to wait long for those questions, because they're going to start right now.

Opening up this first round, I would now call on Ms. Dancho.

You have six minutes, Ms. Dancho. The floor is yours whenever you're ready to take it.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being with us today.

You or someone from your office was in daily contact with Commissioner Lucki in the immediate days following the Nova Scotia attacks on April 18 and 19. Correct?

Hon. Bill Blair: I was not in contact with her on a daily basis, but frequently in the days afterward I was briefed by Commissioner Lucki.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: As well, your chief of staff and your deputy minister were in relatively daily contact with Commissioner Lucki in some capacity...?

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, I assume so.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Would you be comfortable tabling for the committee your calendar, your deputy minister's calendar and your chief of staff's calendar and phone logs that are relevant to your communication with Commissioner Lucki prior to our next committee meeting, specifically from the dates of April 18 to April 28 and including April 28? That would be for the reason of full transparency of your communications and your office's communications with her.

Hon. Bill Blair: I actually have a timeline with me, and I'm quite comfortable sharing that and when I personally had conversations. There are a number of different things in that timeline—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Minister, does that include the communication from your deputy minister and from your chief of staff with Commissioner Lucki as well?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, I'm more than happy to provide you with a timeline of all my communications on this matter, with Commissioner Lucki and with others.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Does that include the deputy minister's communications and the chief of staff Zita Astravas's communications?

Hon. Bill Blair: I don't know if the deputy minister has that information available, so I don't want to make a commitment to it, but that's a question certainly you can pose to him.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Certainly there would be phone logs of all of the calls they made. Can you commit to tabling those with the committee before our next meeting: yours, the deputy minister's and the chief of staff Zita Astravas's?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, I don't have direct access to those logs, but if they exist, I think it's very important—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: If they exist, do you commit to it?

Hon. Bill Blair: If I may, I think it's very important that this committee have all the information that it requires to make an accurate assessment of what transpired.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Great. Thank you very much.

Moving on, in a June 28, 2020, Globe and Mail article, you were quoted confirming that you spoke to the RCMP about the upcoming OIC ban.

When was Commissioner Lucki informed of the May 1 announcement date?

Hon. Bill Blair: Commissioner Lucki had been working with us. Commissioner Lucki, as the commissioner of the RCMP, is responsible for the Canadian firearms program. The Canadian firearms program was integral in the work that we had—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Blair, when was she informed of the May 1 date of that announcement?

Hon. Bill Blair: That's a question that would have to be posed to—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: When was the May 1 date determined for that announcement? Was it before or after the Nova Scotia attacks?

Hon. Bill Blair: The date of release was determined after the Nova Scotia shooting.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

You're aware of the email sent by Commissioner Lucki on April 23, four days after the attacks, to your chief of staff Zita Astravas, containing information that your government had requested concerning weapons used in the attacks, correct?

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, I'm aware of it.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You're also aware that the commissioner's email contained a strong warning that the information must not be shared beyond you and the Prime Minister because it could jeopardize the active investigation, correct?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm not only aware of it, but I respected that throughout.

• (1110)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You are aware of the meeting that the commissioner called for her and her Nova Scotia officials immediately following the Nova Scotia press conference on April 28.

Hon. Bill Blair: I was not aware of that. I've subsequently become aware of it through media reports.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You're aware that during that meeting the commissioner reprimanded her Nova Scotia deputies for not sharing the information she warned you not to share, correct?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm not aware of that. I was not a party to that conversation, and I've only read media reports. I've not discussed that in any way with the commissioner.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Your office obtained assurances from Commissioner Lucki that the type of weapons used in the shooting would be released to the public at the April 28 press conference, correct?

Hon. Bill Blair: No, that's incorrect.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So it was not assured. You had no idea that was Commissioner Lucki's expectation at that press conference.

Hon. Bill Blair: Let me be very clear. At no time did I ask Commissioner Lucki to reveal that information. At no time did I direct her in any way on communications. She did not make any promise to me.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Minister, you're miscommunicating a bit.

I'm not asking if you had asked her, but I'm asking if you were aware of the commissioner's expectation that on that April 28 press conference that information would be released.

Were you aware that was Commissioner Lucki's expectation?

Hon. Bill Blair: No, I was not.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You were not aware.

Following the meeting and the press conference, in a late-night email from Commissioner Lucki to your chief of staff and your deputy minister on April 28, she said, without any context whatsoever, that the press conference was, to quote Commissioner Lucki, "not the execution I was expecting". Again, she said in her email, without further context, that the press conference was "not the execution I was expecting." That's in reference to the media questions on the types of weapons used.

The lack of context provided in Commissioner Lucki's—

Hon. Bill Blair: I can't comment on the context of that. I wasn't aware of it, and I have no knowledge of what the commissioner was referring to.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: It seems that your deputy minister and your chief of staff were fully aware of the expectation of Commissioner Lucki of that press conference.

To the deputy minister, were you aware of the context of this email, because it was not listed in the email and it was written that you would have been aware?

Hon. Bill Blair: I have no idea—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That question is to the deputy minister, please. Thank you.

Were you aware of the context of the email?

Mr. Rob Stewart (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Not in the sense that you are posing the question. I was aware that the commissioner expected there to be full disclosure of what the RCMP knew for the sake of the public.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's what I'm asking. So you were aware of the context of the email—the context of the email being that the commissioner's expectation of the April 28 press conference was that that information on the weapons would be released.

Thank you for confirming that you were aware of the context.

Hon. Bill Blair: Ms. Dancho, if I may, that's simply not correct. I don't believe there's anything in that email that makes reference to any information about firearms.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I would just read it again.

There is no context in this email, but Commissioner Lucki said, in reference to the press conference, that it was not the execution she was expecting. She then went on to provide comment from media and from Darren Campbell, when he was asked about the weapons used.

I appreciate that you were aware of the context of that email—even though it was not listed—which would mean that you were aware a bit earlier in the day.

Mr. Rob Stewart: I'd like to just make sure you're clear on my point here.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Please go ahead.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds to be clear.

Mr. Rob Stewart: To the best of my recollection, the commissioner had provided some assurance that the RCMP would provide the public with a full story of what had happened and what they knew. That was what I understood.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Of the weapons used—

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up.

Now I will move to Mr. Noormohamed.

Sir, you have the next slot for six minutes. The floor is yours.

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

Thank you, Minister and Deputy, for joining us today.

Minister, perhaps you could take a minute and describe the nature of the relationship between the Minister of Public Safety and the commissioner of the RCMP and how that relationship actually works operationally, how it is supposed to work and how it worked in this particular situation.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thanks very much. I think it's an important question and I appreciate it.

As Minister of Public Safety, I am responsible for a number of different agencies and departments that report to Public Safety and to the Minister of Public Safety. In that reporting relationship, I think there's a very clear and important line of delineation. Under no circumstances can the minister offer or direct operational activities of the RCMP in any way. The minister cannot tell them, for example, who to investigate, what to investigate, what charges should be laid or any aspect of their operational duties. It's a line that I'm quite familiar with. I spent many years as a police chief and I understand the difference between governance and the management and operation of a police service. It's a line I have always respected and continued to respect throughout my entire tenure as the Minister of Public Safety.

The RCMP have a responsibility to be accountable to the people of Canada through the Government of Canada. As the Minister of Public Safety, I am regularly and routinely briefed by the RCMP commissioner on matters of significant national concern, but at no time am I able—nor would I ever—give her any operational direction on any investigative matter. That includes information that would be communicated with the public. Those are decisions are quite appropriately made independently by the police of jurisdiction—in this case, the RCMP—and they are not something that I would ever interfere with.

• (1115)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Just to further clarify, in this situation, during this awful tragedy, was there a time when the commissioner of the RCMP sought your direction or was she also very clear about that line? How would you have handled this had she even asked you for direction?

Hon. Bill Blair: No. The commissioner did not seek, and has never in my experience in the over two years I've worked with her as the public safety minister sought, my direction on any operational matter.

In the aftermath of this tragic event, the commissioner was providing the Government of Canada, through me, very comprehensive briefings on what had transpired. She was providing us with information about the sequence of events, the number of casualties and some of the challenges they were facing. At the same time, she was very clear on what information was classified and not to be released. I respected that at all times. I think you'll see that I spoke publicly a number of times and was asked very explicit questions about the investigation and certain aspects of the communication. I was clear in every one of those communications that this was an operational matter for the RCMP and that I would not, in any way, interfere.

I think the commissioner is well aware of her responsibilities and her job. It's an awareness that I also possess. I think the two of us had, and continue to have, a very respectful relationship in how we have worked together, understanding where that very bright line is between the role of government and the role of our operational manager—the commissioner of the RCMP.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Speaking very briefly about the briefings you received, was anything out of the ordinary or abnormal—of course, the entire tragedy and horrific incident was abnormal—about the briefings you received, or were these the types of

briefings that, in an incident like this, would be part of the normal course of the commissioner's briefings to the minister?

Hon. Bill Blair: This was an extraordinary event, to be very clear. It was without precedent in the number of casualties and the horrific impact it had on that community. A number of concerns were being expressed from within the victims' families, by my counterparts in the province of Nova Scotia, by the media and by the community about the lack of information people were receiving about what had transpired. A number of very important questions were arising. I know that this was one of the challenges the commissioner had, on the one hand ensuring and protecting the integrity of their ongoing criminal investigation, and on the other hand ensuring that people's questions were answered.

I heard from many of my colleagues on both sides of the House expressing real concern, and understandable concern, about the lack of information and how desperately the families needed that information. So almost from the outset, and this is somewhat unique, there was a discussion taking place within my department, between myself and the deputy minister, as well as my counterpart in the province of Nova Scotia, to review the shootings and to propose terms of reference on a number of matters for a broad review of the mass shooting that had taken place, including the response of the police and steps taken to inform and support affected citizens.

I have that information with me today. I'm happy to share the proposed terms of reference that were developed on April 27. In the very earliest days and hours of this event, we recognized the importance of more fulsome and effective communications with the people impacted by this tragedy.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Minister, with 30 seconds left, I have one very brief question for you.

A lot has been made about timeline and the speed with which an OIC was issued to ban particular weapons after this tragedy. Can you tell this committee very quickly when the work actually started on this and whether or not this tragedy was actually the catalyst or whether this work had been done long before to put those rules into place?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Bill Blair: Very quickly, the list that we produced in the OIC, which contained over 1,500 military-style assault weapons, was a list that took several months to compile. We worked very closely and consulted with the Canadian firearms program to compile that list.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now turn to Madame Michaud for a six-minute slot.

Madame Michaud, it's good to see you, as always. The floor is yours.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

To the Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Deputy Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, thank you for being with us today.

I want to extend my condolences to the loved ones and families of the victims. Although the mass shooting took place in 2020, I think that hearing about it again, given the Mass Casualty Commission and everything that is published daily in the media, reopens wounds that weren't quite closed. So I think a lot about these people, and out of respect for them, I think it's important to be transparent, to give them as much information as possible and to answer their questions to the greatest extent possible. The fact that there are allegations of political interference is quite serious. These people therefore deserve to have their questions answered.

I'll get right to the point.

Minister, you said some interesting things earlier in response to questions from my Conservative colleagues. According to the report on the mass shooting and to the account by Superintendent Darren Campbell, at a meeting on April 28, 2020, RCMP commissioner Brenda Lucki allegedly said she promised you and the Prime Minister that she would release information about the weapons used in the mass shooting, even if it could compromise the investigation. As Mr. Campbell stated, she knew that you would issue a regulation two days later and revealing the weapons used would help your government.

Did you actually have these conversations with Ms. Lucki, during which you would have asked her to publicly disclose the type of weapons used?

• (1120)

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you for the question.

No, I did not. I did not ask her to release that information. It wasn't required. The list of weapons that were being prohibited by the order in council that we brought forward on May 1 had taken months to prepare. I did not ask the commissioner to release that information, and nor did she promise me that she would.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: You already gave us this answer in the House. We've also read it in the media.

One thing is troubling me, though. According to the other version, the RCMP version, and based on what we can understand from Ms. Lucki's emails and Mr. Campbell's testimony, this is not the case.

How do you explain the different versions? Essentially, who is telling the truth?

What were the discussions about the regulations enacted a few days later?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: There's only one set of facts. I did not ask the commissioner to reveal that information. She did not promise me that she would.

You're also referring to a conversation that the commissioner had with her subordinates in Nova Scotia, and there's some information that's come forward with that. I was not a party to that discussion and have no knowledge of that discussion. Those questions about that discussion are better put to the participants.

However, I can say unequivocally and with absolute certainty that I did not direct the RCMP commissioner to reveal that information, nor did she promise me that she would do so. In fact, every time I was asked in every media event.... There are many recorded media interviews with me when questions were put to me, including the day we announced the order in council. I was very explicit that day that we were not going to release that information. The decision on when it should be released is entirely up to the RCMP. Subsequently, in the House—and if you go through Hansard you'll see it—many times members of the Conservative Party asked me about information related to that. I said the RCMP is conducting their investigation, and when they're concluded they'll release the information as they see fit.

As I was doing then, I continue to strongly defend the operational independence of the RCMP in making operational decisions regarding their investigations.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Earlier, in response to a question from my colleague, you said that the release date for the regulations, May 1, 2020, was chosen after the Portapique mass shooting.

Did that influence the decisions you made, including what ended up in the regulations? Quite honestly, I get the impression they were drafted on the back of a napkin. They do include the very weapons used in mass murders, but similar models are still on the market and aren't on this list.

After the Portapique mass shooting, what discussions followed about the regulations, which were enacted on May 1, 2020, and about their content?

Did they influence your decisions and policy action on gun control?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: I think it's important to remind us all that this is a commitment we made. Frankly, the banning and prohibition of assault-style weapons is something I have worked on for many years. We actually campaigned on it in the 2019 election, as you may recall. It was in the throne speech when we became the government. It was also in my mandate letter that we would ban these assault-style weapons. We went right to work. In fact, the work had actually begun in 2019, when I did cross-country consultations and we did surveys and other things to talk about what weapons should be prohibited.

As to the compiling of the list, that's a very interesting characterization. You suggest it was done on the back of a napkin—but it took several months of very hard work to compile that list of over 1,500 weapons. Very clear criteria were established for which weapons would make that list, and that list was compiled over many months.

Let me also be clear, Ms. Michaud, that the terrible tragedy that took place in Nova Scotia, the worst mass casualty shooting event in our country's history, was for me very impactful. All of the work that we had been doing for months and years leading up to that moment certainly had the effect of deepening my resolve to move forward as quickly as possible to keep the promise that we had made to Canadians. We made that to Canadians some time before.

I remind myself that we're not alone in this. For example—

• (1125)

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Bill Blair: —the leader of the NDP, on April 20, urged us to take some action in response to this terrible tragedy. That action was well entrained and we're working very hard on it going forward. Certainly, the terrible events of that event were highly motivating for me to get the job done and to keep—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I would now like to invite Mr. MacGregor to begin his six-minute slot.

Mr. MacGregor, whenever you're ready, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the committee, Minister Blair.

I'd also like to echo my colleague Madame Michaud's comment that our thoughts are with the families in Nova Scotia. I truly want our committee's work today to be respectful of the commission's process and to not really interfere with the important work the commission is doing.

Minister Blair, my first question for you is, do you believe that handwritten notes, especially as they're written during the course of a certain action, are something you can put a lot of stock in? Do you use them personally?

Hon. Bill Blair: Actually, in confidential briefings I don't personally take notes, but I have previously as a police officer maintained a memo book, for example, which is an *aide-mémoire*. If it's done contemporaneously with events, it can provide good evidence.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Good, because I guess the reason we're here today is from what has come to light from the handwritten notes of Superintendent Darren Campbell, which make specific reference to the commissioner having said that she had made a promise and that this was tied to impending gun control legislation.

Now you have very clearly stated on the record that no such promise was made and no direction was given. Why, then, do you think, in your opinion, Superintendent Campbell would have written that specifically in his notes, written during or shortly after a conference call with the commissioner?

Hon. Bill Blair: I think that's a question better put to the participants in that conversation. I was not a party to it. I had no knowledge of that conversation. I can tell you, and I'll repeat very clearly, I hope for all of you, that at no time did I give that operational di-

rection to the RCMP commissioner to release that information, nor did she promise me that she would. But, with respect to the conversation she had with her team in Nova Scotia, that's a question that.... I was not a party to those conversations. It's a question best put to those who were a party to it.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay, we'll leave it at that.

In response to previous questions on this topic, the Prime Minister publicly stated that his government did not put any undue influence or pressure on the RCMP. But that was kind of an evasive answer to the question because, while he makes specific reference to undue influence or pressure, it may leave it open to other types of influence and pressure.

How would you interpret the Prime Minister's answer to those specific questions?

Hon. Bill Blair: With respect, I'm not really feeling that it's appropriate for me to start interpreting that, but let me explain the conversations that were taking place in the immediate aftermath of this terrible tragedy. We were hearing from people right across the country. Most importantly, we were hearing from the families of the victims that there was a great deal of questions and concerns about what had taken place.

I do have notes from the proposed terms of reference for what became the Mass Casualty Commission, where we talked about the need to deal with the absence of red flags prior to the event; the police actions, taking into account the COVID environment; communications with the public during and after the event; policies with respect to the disposal of RCMP kit and vehicles; training and RCMP preparedness for active shooter complaints and, very importantly, support for the families and the victims.

• (1130)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry, but my time is running out shortly and I do want to change tack here. I don't want to repeat many of the questions that were asked.

Mr. Noormohamed asked you to carefully explain the relationship between the Minister of Public Safety and the RCMP. You gave a very clear answer. The problem is, Minister, that other governments—previous governments, both Conservative and Liberal—have had ministers who have given operational direction to the RCMP. We saw it with the Chrétien government back in the 1990s with the APEC summit. Direction was also given back in the 1950s by the Diefenbaker government with an incident in Newfoundland.

I think the problem, Minister, lies with the interpretation of the RCMP Act, specifically subsection 5(1), which provides basically for the appointment of the commissioner, “who, under the direction of the Minister, has control and management of the Force”.

I'm paraphrasing that, but it basically leaves it quite vague. Would you agree that's quite a vague statement in the act that governs the RCMP?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'll explain that I think it's crystal clear. The Minister of Public Safety has the ability—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: You say that despite the fact that other governments have overstepped their bounds.

Hon. Bill Blair: I can just tell you that for me, when I was Minister of Public Safety, it was a very bright line. The Minister of Public Safety has the ability to issue ministerial directives with respect to certain policy matters for the RCMP, but the line between having government or a politician direct the investigation or any of the operational activities of the RCMP, for me, is a bright line and one I have never crossed.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I don't doubt that you find it crystal clear, but I'm trying to find ways so that we don't again get into this kind of situation in the future. So, Minister, my question for you is how can we possibly amend this section of the act to make it crystal clear for successors in other governments so that we don't have meetings in the future where we're questioning a minister of public safety for alleged interference in ongoing RCMP investigations? Are there amendments that you think could be used to strengthen this act so it is crystal clear for everyone who holds that office?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. MacGregor, I would just point out to you that, in my experience as the public safety minister, there were a number of instances where some of my colleagues in the House were insisting that the police be directed in their activities in response to blockades, investigations and other matters.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Bill Blair: At all times I have maintained the principle that we will never interfere with the operations of the RCMP.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now move to a second round of questions, beginning with Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Ellis, welcome to the committee. I'm glad you're here this morning. You have five minutes for this round. The floor is yours.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a great pleasure to be here representing the great people of Cumberland—Colchester, of course, where this unfortunate incident took place for the most part.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I'll start with a quote: "Nova Scotians told us they needed this process to be independent, thorough and transparent, and we agree."

Minister Blair, do you know who said that, sir?

Hon. Bill Blair: I suspect it was me.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: It was you. That's very correct, sir.

Hon. Bill Blair: By the way, I believe that.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Great. Oddly enough, though, sir, from the very beginning you did not want an inquiry. Is that true?

Hon. Bill Blair: No, let me be very clear. Thank you for the opportunity to clarify that concern—

Mr. Stephen Ellis: I don't really need any clarification, sir. I just need a simple yes or no.

Hon. Bill Blair: In fact, in the immediate days following the shooting, I reached out to the Province of Nova Scotia. I had proposed terms of reference to conduct a broad review of the mass shooting in Nova Scotia, and—

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Yes, sir. We understand that. Thank you.

I know that we're tight on time, so let's get to the matter. You wanted a review, not an inquiry. Then when the inquiry came around, you took the opportunity, sir, to actually appoint some very interesting commissioners—oddly enough, Mr. MacDonald, first cousin to one of the individuals who was shot, and a well-known Liberal, who stayed charges against Gerry Regan; Ms. Fitch, whose father was a Mountie, a five-year chief of police who was on a board of the RCMP; and Ms. Stanton, who actually wrote a book in 2021, released before the commission's start, to change the way public inquiries are held.

Is that not political interference from the very beginning, sir?

Hon. Bill Blair: Absolutely not, sir. In fact, I spoke to the attorney general in Nova Scotia, and he recommended former Chief Justice MacDonald as the commission chair. Chief Fitch had been the chief in Fredericton—

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Yes—

Hon. Bill Blair: —when two of her officers and two citizens were killed in another mass shooting in that location—

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you, sir. Those facts are well known. I really appreciate that.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): On a point of order, Chair, can we allow the minister to answer the question asked of him?

The Chair: Yes. I think we have to have a little smoother flow here.

Minister, you have the floor.

• (1135)

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you.

We worked very carefully to ensure that when we established initially what was to be a review, but we heard very clearly from the families that they were very concerned about the ability of the commission of inquiry to subpoena witnesses, in response to that we did declare a public inquiry to give them those tools. But from the very beginning, in the immediate days following, it was very clear to us....

I'll happily provide the committee with the proposed terms of reference that were developed on April 27, 2020, only a week after this terrible tragic event, recognizing that the people of Nova Scotia, the people of your community, needed answers. We wanted to make sure they got those answers as quickly as possible.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you, sir. It's obvious that we see the choices made politically somewhat differently. I would suggest to you, sir, that the members of the families who are affected, the grieving families of people like Lisa McCully and Greg and Jamie Blair and Kristen Beaton and Heather O'Brien, see this very, very differently from what you do, sir.

One of the other things that I think is important is that quite clearly, with the back-and-forth we've had now with our NDP member, our Bloc member and our team here as well, sir, someone is not telling the truth here. That's the unusual thing. There's a conflicting level of evidence that my Bloc colleague clearly pointed out. There's a contrary nature to what was said through the notes of Mr. Campbell, who you said is also an exemplary officer.

That being said, sir, who from the PMO was your staff communicating with in the days following the attacks?

Hon. Bill Blair: Sorry. Who...?

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Who from the PMO was your staff, or you, communicating with during the days after the attack?

Hon. Bill Blair: I don't know. I can tell you that there were regular briefings taking place between the RCMP, and I was also briefing my cabinet colleagues on the events—

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Did you speak directly to the Prime Minister, sir?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, I was briefing the entire cabinet on the events—

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Did you speak directly to the Prime Minister, sir? I think it's a pretty simple question.

Hon. Bill Blair: And I've just said that I was speaking to the entire cabinet on that matter.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Did you speak directly to the Prime Minister, sir? Please answer a simple yes or no.

Hon. Bill Blair: The Prime Minister is president in the cabinet. He's the head of our government.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Did you have a direct conversation with him, sir?

Hon. Bill Blair: Not a separate conversation on these events; it was in the context of a cabinet discussion.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Very good, sir.

Mr. Stewart, do you remember any meetings with the Prime Minister that you, the chief of staff or the minister may have had?

Mr. Rob Stewart: I did not attend any meetings with the Prime Minister, and I'm not sure.... I'd have to check my schedule. As Ms. Dancho has asked, we will give you the schedules.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Sir, obviously you were present at multiple briefings during all of this. Someone's not telling the truth again, sir. Do you have an opinion on that?

Mr. Rob Stewart: You're asking me?

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Yes, sir.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, please.

Mr. Rob Stewart: I don't believe that to be the case.

I'm sorry, I think this answer will take more than 10 seconds.

There was a great deal of desire to have the RCMP tell the public what happened, because in the days following the tragic event the story was very unclear. There was a great deal of desire for that to be the case, and that—in the commissioner's mind, I believe—included the guns.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now call upon Mr. Hardie to take his five-minute slot.

Whenever you're ready, Mr. Hardie, the floor is yours.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's almost impossible to get your mind around what happened in Nova Scotia and the impact on the families and on the force.

I spent a short time as the director of communication for the Vancouver police department, and I know full well that the police quite often have seconds—milliseconds—to make a decision, and everybody else has the rest of time to second-guess what they decided to do.

In your case, Minister Blair, you had a mandate letter from December 13, 2019, directing you to implement the government's firearms policy. First on the list was to deal with military-style assault weapons. Does this item in your mandate reflect the will of Canadians, do you think, as expressed in the 2019 election?

Hon. Bill Blair: I believe there is overwhelming support for the prohibition of assault-style weapons. I also understand...because I've heard very clearly from those representing the gun industry, for example, who have been strongly opposed to it.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Would releasing the specific details of the weapons used in the Nova Scotia shootings have been necessary to justify the ban to Canadians?

• (1140)

Hon. Bill Blair: I don't think it's in any way relevant, to be frank.

There are many documented instances where this style of weapons has been used in mass shootings in Canada and around the world. I personally believe that there is no place in a civil and safe society for such weapons. They were designed for military use and not for recreational use, and there have just been far too many tragedies where they have been used.

I still do not have all the particulars on what weapons were used, and in what circumstances, in the Nova Scotia shooting, but I also believe that a mass shooting was symptomatic of a greater problem.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Basically, the release of the information, as was alleged that somebody asked for, really wasn't necessary in the context of the OIC's coming up.

Five days after the shooting, Superintendent Campbell disclosed at a news conference that the gunman had two semi-automatic handguns and two semi-automatic rifles—although the government had received a briefing document dated that same day that provided many more details.

In your opinion, for purposes of informing the public, was Superintendent Campbell's disclosure sufficient to give the media and Canadians the essential information about the weapons used?

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes. In fact, it was more than sufficient, and I certainly didn't require or seek to have more released.

By that time, and when we brought forward the order in council, I was aware of what weapons were used, but the RCMP had been very clear, as had Superintendent Campbell.

I'd also comment that I watched the press conference by Superintendent Campbell on April 24, and, quite frankly, I thought that his delivery and the information shared in that press conference was outstanding. I was particularly respectful of the fact that he stood and answered every question that was put to him. I also heard later that morning from the attorney general in Nova Scotia who was equally relieved by the information that the superintendent shared on April 24.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I will be asking the commissioner about preparation for these briefings that Superintendent Campbell conducted, but were you privy to any details or preparation for the superintendent's April 24 or April 28 media briefings?

Hon. Bill Blair: No, I was not.

I was receiving information from the RCMP commissioner on what had transpired, but I was not involved in any of the briefings with the Nova Scotia officers or detachment on their response, and I had no information on what was being told to them or what they were going to say.

The information that I was receiving was also relevant to briefings that were being provided. As I alluded to earlier, there was a Prime Minister's briefing on the Nova Scotia tragedy that took place on Thursday, April 23, and it was based on information that the commissioner had shared with us.

Mr. Ken Hardie: After the shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, the Prime Minister of New Zealand acted very quickly to institute a ban. It's very clear from your earlier testimony that the work to do so in Canada had been under way, given what had been promised in the 2015 election, the 2019 election, your mandate letter, etc. The tracks were already laid toward a ban.

You mentioned earlier today that the incident in Nova Scotia accelerated the release of the OIC and the ban. What response did you get from the Canadian public when that announcement was made on May 1?

Hon. Bill Blair: It was overwhelmingly positive.

The Chair: Mr. Hardie, you're out of time, but I want to give the minister 15 seconds to answer that question.

Hon. Bill Blair: There was a very strong response from the medical community, police chief associations across the country and the Canadian Police Association, which is the police union. There was strong support for the OIC that was brought forward prohibiting those assault weapons.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Madame Michaud, I now turn to you. You have two and a half minutes in this round, whenever you're ready.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, the director of strategic communications in Halifax, Lia Scanlan, said that government officials, including you, when you were the Minister of Public Safety, and Prime Minister Trudeau, were evaluating what they could and could not say. Now, this is a mass shooting, a tragedy where—I think you'll agree with me—the police are in the best position to determine what to say.

One of the things you talked about was transparency and independence of the national police force, and as Mr. Hardie was saying earlier, police officers often only have a few minutes, a few seconds, before they make a decision. Obviously, they are in the best position to explain the decisions they made.

Hearing that the government wanted to control the message gives the impression that, instead of thinking about the victims, they were thinking about their political agenda.

I wonder if you are aware of the public's perception.

• (1145)

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: First of all, I have never ever met or had a conversation with that individual. At no time have I ever given her, nor did my government give her, any direction on what she could or could not say. I have no understanding of that and no facts upon which to make a determination as to why that would be said, because it's simply not true.

As well, I think it's important to understand the context that the deputy minister referred to. There was, in the immediate days following this shooting, a tremendous amount of public concern about what had taken place and a great need, among the families, the community, Nova Scotians and people right across Canada, to understand what had happened and why it had happened. It was very important for information that could be shared to be shared with the public.

I had a number of conversations with my counterpart in Nova Scotia, and we were hearing from the families. I was hearing from a number of my counterparts too. In fact, the member for West Nova rose in the House, and another member, Mr. Barrett, rose in the House, expressing very real concern that the RCMP was not being forthcoming with information and urging us to make information public. In response to those questions in the House, I answered that it is the decision of the RCMP and that only the RCMP could determine what information would be released. I understood, as I understand now, their very sincere concern that more information needed to be shared.

The Chair: Thank you. We're out of time.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I now move to Mr. MacGregor.

Sir, you have a two-and-a-half-minute slot. Whenever you're ready, the clock will go.

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

Minister Blair, I want to return to the subject of what I view as the vagueness of the RCMP Act, specifically subsection 5(1). Now, in my previous exchange with you, I cited two examples: the Diefenbaker government with the situation in Newfoundland, and the Chrétien government in the 1990s with the APEC summit. While I appreciate that for you this subsection is crystal clear, those are two very clear and demonstrated cases where the government of the day did give operational directives to the RCMP.

I think what's being alleged here, if we look at Superintendent Campbell's notes, is not so much operational directives but more a communication directive. You've been very clear in saying that the line for what a minister can say to the RCMP when it comes to operational matters is very clear. I think there's a bit of wiggle room here, a bit of a different interpretation.

My interest going forward is how we prevent this from happening again. Law professor Kent Roach has suggested in the media that there should be a legislative requirement for ministerial directives to be made public and openly available so that any kind of directive given by the minister to the RCMP is there, it's open and people can read into it what they will. It would help satisfy the public's need to know whenever a minister is giving a directive under subsection 5(1).

Minister, would you support such a requirement, and if not, can you explain why?

Hon. Bill Blair: In my experience, I use the ministerial directives fairly sparingly, but I do recall—and I just confirmed the with the deputy minister—that I issued a ministerial directive to the RCMP to improve their compliance with ATI requests. I believe that was made public.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Would you support a legislative requirement to do so?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, in my experience, I believe in transparency and I did do my very best to try to be as open and transparent as possible, recognizing that in the course of their investiga-

tions, if the police—the RCMP in this case—believe that the disclosure of certain information could be detrimental to their investigation, it's entirely up to them to make the determination of when and if that information should be released. Under no circumstances—

Hon. Bill Blair: I consider those types of communications to be operational in their nature as well and therefore it's something I would not interfere with.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I now move to Mr. Lloyd.

Sir, you have five minutes in this round. The floor is yours.

• (1150)

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Minister.

My questions are going to be for the deputy minister. In response to earlier questions by my colleague regarding the April 28 email from Commissioner Lucki to you and the chief of staff and the public safety minister, you said that in response to her line that this was “not the execution that I was expecting”, you understood that to mean that she was expecting the nature of the firearms to be disclosed at the press conference earlier that day. Is that correct?

Mr. Rob Stewart: No.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Can you please clarify what you said earlier to my colleague?

Mr. Rob Stewart: I said that my understanding and recollection is that the commissioner, following the event and including the press conferences of April 24 and April 28, was making a promise in the general sense to the minister that information—the full amount of information that she thought appropriate—would be disclosed.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You believe that she believed she was making a promise to the minister to disclose this information?

Mr. Rob Stewart: I think she had a conversation—not with me in the room, but I talk to her periodically. I think she was making a commitment that, as the investigation proceeded they would—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: This was a meeting with the commissioner and the minister, but you were not in the room?

Mr. Rob Stewart: Correct.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Was the minister in the room?

Mr. Rob Stewart: To be honest, I don't know when the commissioner and the minister talk.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You were aware of a meeting that took place and the minister would have been in that meeting.

Mr. Rob Stewart: I believe there were a number of conversations, as the minister has said.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You were not involved in these conversations.

Mr. Rob Stewart: In the aftermath of that event there was.... I don't recall. The schedules will obviously tell you the truth here—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I just find it very interesting that as the deputy minister in a case like this, you were not involved in all conversations taking place between the commissioner and the minister on this matter.

Mr. Rob Stewart: The heads of these organizations, including Brenda Lucki and the heads of CSIS and CBSA, are independently accountable to the minister. I'm not in every conversation.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I understand.

You had said earlier in the meeting that when she sent that email, you were aware that it was regarding information about the guns. Was that the execution she was talking about?

Mr. Rob Stewart: No, I don't—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You had no idea what the email was about.

Mr. Rob Stewart: I think the commitment was that the situation and what was happening with the investigation would be fulsome and forthcoming.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: When you got an email like that and you didn't really understand exactly what she's talking about, did you send a follow-up to ask, "What are you talking about, Commissioner? What execution are you referencing?"

Mr. Rob Stewart: No.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You didn't send any follow-up email?

Mr. Rob Stewart: No.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Are you aware of any meetings with the minister's chief of staff and the commissioner of the RCMP prior to the press conference to discuss whether or not information about the firearms would be disclosed?

Mr. Rob Stewart: No, I'm not aware.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You weren't in any of those meetings.

Mr. Rob Stewart: No.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay.

The RCMP commissioner—and you would agree—had an expectation, as you had said earlier, that the firearms would be disclosed at the press conference.

Mr. Rob Stewart: You keep saying it that way and that's not what I'm saying.

What I'm saying is that there was an expectation on her part that there would be a full disclosure, and in her mind the guns would be included. That's what that email reveals.

I don't believe it's a result. And I agree with the minister: I was never witness to any commitment or promise made that information would be provided about the guns.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: But you said earlier that you believed that the commissioner believed that she was making a promise.

Mr. Rob Stewart: It was to be fulsome about the investigation. What that meant is a question you will have to ask her.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Yes. That's something that we'll definitely be asking.

Were you aware of the April 23 email from the commissioner to the minister's chief of staff saying that the information about the firearms used should not be disseminated beyond the Prime Minister's Office and the minister's office?

Mr. Rob Stewart: Yes, I was.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Were you aware of any reason that directive would have changed in the five days following? Was there any discussion about why the minister believed that that should be the case and why that might have changed?

Mr. Rob Stewart: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: The commissioner appears to have made a complete 180 turn from what she said on April 23, that the information should not be disseminated, as five days later, based on the witness testimonies of Lia Scanlan and Superintendent Campbell, she was quite upset that the information was not revealed, and you're not aware of any conversations that took place in those five days with either you or the minister's office regarding why the decision would have been made to reverse that decision?

Mr. Rob Stewart: That's correct.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I'll cede the rest of my time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to Mr. Anandasangaree, who will take us through to the end of this round of questioning.

The floor is yours, sir. You have five minutes starting now.

• (1155)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister. It's good to see you, and my deepest condolences to the families impacted by this tragedy.

Minister, I want to just get on the record a couple of very important facts.

Would you be the first Minister of Public Safety who has had a very long and distinguished career in policing?

Hon. Bill Blair: I believe so.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Could you give us a sense of what you did prior to becoming Minister of Public Safety?

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, sir. I was a police officer for 39 years in Toronto, and from 2005 to 2015, I was the chief of police in the city of Toronto.

I also served as the president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and a vice-president of the Major Cities Chiefs Association. I also served on the board of the Police Executive Research Forum and on the executive board of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: In that context, have you come across the issue of operational independence; and if so, could you give us a sense of how important that is to you as a principle of policing, especially in the context of the democratic space in which we operate in Canada?

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, thank you very much.

I think it's a very important principle of policing. As a police chief, I was governed by a police services board, and I think that's a very important relationship in governance. I think police services and police chiefs must be accountable to a governance authority and, in my case, as a police chief, it was my police services board, but there was always a very clear understanding between the police chief and those who governed us as to where that bright line was.

They dealt with issues of policy and issues of directives with respect to certain matters but not with operational matters, and it is a line that I think is a critically important one in Canadian society in how the police operate independently, but in their independence, they are not without accountability. They are accountable, and the RCMP is accountable to the people of Canada through the Government of Canada and the Minister of Public Safety.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Minister, I want to quote you from back in 2012, and this is with respect to the shooting on Danzig in my community 10 years ago last week, as you're aware. You were quoted as saying the following:

I've been a cop for 35 years, and this is the worst incident of gun violence, in my memory, anywhere in North America. It's very shocking. A lot of innocent people were injured tonight.

In this context, would it be safe to say that the issue of gun violence and guns on our streets was something that you've thought about for many years?

Hon. Bill Blair: Prior to becoming the chief of police, I was the head of the detective branch involved in very many gun and gang investigations. I had also been responsible for uniform policing in the city for a number of years. When I became the chief, it was what they called the "summer of the gun".

Dealing with gun violence was a very important part of my mandate, and I did everything in my power to reduce gun violence and to keep the people of my city safe, and, frankly, I brought much of that experience and motivation. If I may, December 2012 was also the Sandy Hook shooting in which 26 people died, 20 of them ages six and seven, and, for me, that was perhaps a moment that forever steeled my resolve to do everything possible to keep our communities safe and ban weapons that were the weapon of choice for people who would commit such terrible atrocities.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Would it be inaccurate for me to say that, when you sought the nomination in 2014, ran in 2015, again in 2019 and again in 2021, the issue of gun violence was one of the top priorities for you and, given the opportunity, that you would ensure that many guns would be off our streets?

Hon. Bill Blair: Personally and politically, it is something that motivated me to continue in public service beyond my career in policing and to come to Ottawa. Strengthening gun control and keeping people safe I think is the highest of callings.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Minister, in conclusion, what do you have to say to this committee when this allegation of political interference is before you?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, I'll reiterate that at no time did I cross that line. I did not direct the commissioner of the RCMP, and I did not have any private conversation with her in which that was done. The commissioner did not promise me that she would do this.

I think the commissioner understood her job, and her job was to serve the people of Canada and the people of Nova Scotia, to give them information that they desperately needed and wanted with respect to the terrible tragedy that had taken place there. I believe the commissioner was highly motivated to do so and was working with her people in order to make sure that information was provided to the people who had been impacted by this terrible tragedy.

For me, I want to be very clear. I did not direct the RCMP. I did not direct them in their operations or in their communications and throughout. There were a number of questions—

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Bill Blair: —put to me in the House and in the media in which I was asked...and in every single case, I reiterated my commitment that the responsibility for disclosure of that information lies solely with the RCMP, and—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Bill Blair: —at no time did I interfere with that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we're out of time. That's always the big challenge and the curse of these meetings: We always run out of time. We've run out of time for this section and for this panel.

Deputy and Minister, thank you very much for the generosity of your time.

Members, thank you for keeping within your time limits.

We will now suspend for a change of technology. It should take about five minutes and no more, so we'll see you all in five.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues. We're ready to call the meeting back to order.

Our second panel witnesses are from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police: Commissioner Brenda Lucki; and deputy commissioner Brian Brennan, contract and indigenous policing. They have requested that they split their time.

Commissioner Lucki, you will have seven and a half minutes, and then deputy commissioner, you will have two and a half minutes. Welcome to all of you.

I now invite you, Commissioner Lucki, to begin your opening statement.

The floor is yours.

Commissioner Brenda Lucki (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Good afternoon.

I can't imagine what Nova Scotians went through during that 12-hour rampage and I recognize that there is a lot of healing required to move forward.

Each and every day, my employees do the best they can with the circumstances they are faced with, but, of course, we can always do better. That's why the Mass Casualty Commission was created: "to provide meaningful recommendations to keep communities safe in the future."

Thanks for the opportunity to speak on some of these important issues that were raised by this incident.

Let me begin and let me be clear: I did not interfere in the investigation around this tragedy; nor did I experience political interference. Specifically, I was not directed to publicly release information about weapons used by the perpetrator to help advance pending gun control legislation.

Was there pressure for information from the federal government about this incident? Yes. This wasn't surprising, as we were dealing with the biggest mass shooting incident in our country. It was my responsibility to keep relevant officials apprised of the evolving situation while maintaining the integrity of the operation.

Were the requests for information and updates political interference? No. In my dealings with Minister Blair, he was very conscious of this and has never sought to interfere in the investigation.

I understand that some RCMP employees may have different perspectives based on the meeting of April 28. However, I was the only RCMP official dealing with the minister, other senior government officials and occasionally with the Prime Minister. I am the only one who can speak to the nature of these requests, exchanges of information and my intentions during that meeting.

The integrity of a police investigation is critical. As someone with over 35 years in policing, that's something I would never seek to influence or jeopardize, nor would I allow RCMP investigations to be dictated or influenced by government officials.

I am accountable to the minister from an administrative perspective, but the RCMP is operationally independent. The basis for this principle is to prevent direct and specific political control of police operational activity, with the sole responsibility for operational decision-making resting in the hands of police officers.

Keeping the government informed through timely and accurate information sharing is not interference. It's standard procedure, and these situational updates are provided without compromising the operational integrity of an investigation.

I did provide information on April 23 about the types of weapons found in the perpetrator's possession—information that was to be shared with the minister and the Prime Minister—noting that it wasn't to be disseminated any further as there was an active investi-

gation. Additional information was shared as well, but government officials were advised that any information received couldn't be shared with the media until first released by RCMP. This included such information as the number and names of the deceased, replica police uniforms and vehicle information, the incident at the fire hall, the background of the perpetrator and the weapons used and seized.

In the lead-up to the Nova Scotia press conference scheduled for April 28, I provided information to the government on what would be released. At that time, I was asked if the information about the weapons would be included. When my communications team told me that it would be, I relayed this information back to Minister Blair's chief of staff and the deputy minister of public safety.

Regarding my use of the word "promise" during the meeting I had with my team following that press conference, at that time and in that context, I was trying to convey that I had confirmed to the minister that the information about the weapons would be released during the press conference—a confirmation that was made based on information that I had been provided.

Due to a miscommunication, this was not the case, and I felt I had misinformed the minister and, by extension, the Prime Minister. These were difficult, dynamic and demanding circumstances, and everybody was doing their best to provide as much information to the government, the public and the media about this appalling event.

This all took place just over a month after COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic. The pandemic fundamentally changed how we managed this incident.

● (1210)

The unfortunate reality is that the information flow from Nova Scotia colleagues into my office in the hours and days following the shooting wasn't what it should have been. It was for this reason that I called the meeting to express my disappointment and frustration and to outline expectations. Once I was informed during that meeting of the miscommunication and that releasing the information would jeopardize the ongoing investigation, I considered the matter closed and did not pursue it further. This was clearly articulated back to the minister. In fact, to support my assertion on non-interference, this information was not released until several months later.

On the matter of the April 28 meeting itself, it needed to happen. It was essential that I had more timely and accurate information, and it was important that my team understood my expectations going forward. It wasn't helped by the fact that it was a teleconference. I had no visual cues for how my words affected those on the call. In the early days of the pandemic, we didn't have access to the on-screen platforms we do now.

The timing of the meeting itself was not ideal, and I should have been more sensitive to those in attendance—people who had been operating in a high-stress and very emotionally charged environment and had just completed a significant press conference. Given this context, I regret the timing and how I framed the conversation, but the discussion was still necessary.

It wasn't brought to my attention until a year later that there were concerns of political interference stemming from that meeting and that my approach and interactions with my team were in question. Had I known my words and approach had such an effect, I would have definitely made things right sooner. This is who I am.

Let me be clear. I did not interfere in the investigation, I did not receive direction and I was not influenced by government officials regarding the public release of information and, more importantly, on the direction of the investigation. I ensured that operational independence was maintained in all my interactions with government, as I do today.

In closing, I will note that the RCMP is committed to supporting the important work of the Mass Casualty Commission. Any time we have a mechanism to review and improve how we operate is critical.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner.

Now I turn to the deputy commissioner, Mr. Brennan, who has two and a half minutes to complete his opening remarks.

The floor is yours, sir.

Deputy Commissioner Brian Brennan (Deputy Commissioner, Contract and Indigenous Policing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

As stated, my name is Brian Brennan and I am the deputy commissioner of contract and indigenous policing. In this capacity, I am responsible for the RCMP's contract and indigenous policing program, which includes overseeing delivery of local policing services in Canada's three territories and in all provinces except for Ontario and Quebec. I am posted here in Ottawa.

For context, prior to starting this position as deputy commissioner, I was the commanding officer in Nova Scotia, which we refer to as H Division. As deputy commissioner, it is my responsibility to keep abreast of, and when appropriate provide guidance related to, serious or significant situations occurring on the ground across our divisions to ensure a uniform level of service and consistent responses to operational issues that arise as a result of our frontline policing responsibilities. Across the RCMP, six divisional commanding officers are direct reports to me, including the four commanding officers in the Atlantic provinces.

In the context of the mass casualty event in 2020, this meant I was supporting H Division by working with national headquarters business lines to ensure that operational requests in support of the division were actioned, and by providing briefing updates to the senior executive committee and other commanding officers. I was in regular contact with the commissioner, the commanding officer of

Nova Scotia and her team to gather information and to support their response, including efforts to provide support and resources to the division from other parts of the RCMP across the country.

My focus was on policing operations rather than public communications. Understandably, there were many questions about what was happening on the ground and what information was available to share from the division. The commissioner required timely and regular updates on the evolving situation to support her work and exercise her responsibilities as commissioner. This was appropriate and expected.

With that, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have on this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Commissioner.

The time for questions has arrived. We will start this round with Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Dancho, you have six minutes. Take the floor.

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

Thank you to the commissioner and deputy commissioner for being here today.

Commissioner Lucki, in an April 28 email from you, you said that you provided to government information that would be released to the public. Correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: On what date?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: On April 28 there were several emails from you. I'm thinking of two in particular.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, there were several versions of speaking notes that were being used by the people on the ground in Nova Scotia. That was one of many versions.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay. In one of the emails from you on April 28, you confirmed that the information about the weapons would be released in a press conference. Correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That would have been the early morning of April 28.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I believe so.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay. Thank you.

Deputy Minister Stewart, who appeared just before you, informed the committee earlier of a conversation in which this promise that you mentioned in your opening remarks happened. It was during a discussion with the minister. The deputy minister was not there, but he was aware of this discussion. You mentioned this in your opening remarks. Correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: It wasn't a promise; it was a confirmation, because I was asked if that information would be included in the media release. I verified through my comms people, who verified with the people on the ground, and at that point they advised that it was, in fact, going to be part of that big media event on April 28.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Just to be clear, the minister asked you if the weapons used in the attack would be mentioned in the press conference.

Commr Brenda Lucki: He was speaking of the weapons in the incident. That would mostly include the weapons seized, because the weapons used were still under forensics. So it was more involved with the weapons seized.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Just to confirm, the Minister of Public Safety at the time, Bill Blair, specifically asked you if weapons used during the attack would be mentioned in the press conference of April 28.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, in the sense that it was any of the weapons involved in the incident. Some were seized and not used and some were used.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You made a promise to him that this information would be released in the April 28 press conference. Correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I confirmed, in fact, that they were going to be part of the media event.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So with regard to Darren Campbell's account of the meeting that you had called following that press conference—again, that meeting happened immediately or within two hours after—where he wrote in his notes that you had made a promise to Minister Blair that this information about the weapons would be released, he was accurate in this, given what you're saying.

Commr Brenda Lucki: That's what he wrote, but as I said in my notes, in the context.... The word "promise" that I used was in the context of confirming the answer to his question.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: But you used the word "promise". Correct? It's a very specific word.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I don't recollect that. I may have—I'm not going to question Superintendent Campbell's recollection—but it was in the context of confirming the information that was asked of me.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You said to the RCMP officials, in that infamous April 28 meeting, that you promised Minister Blair that the information about the weapons would be released, just in sum. Correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I was referring to the confirmation of the question.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Campbell also mentioned in his notes, as you're aware, that you tied that to the forthcoming gun policy. Correct?

• (1220)

Commr Brenda Lucki: It was when we were speaking of many different flows of information through the last 10 days. There were

a lot of issues with the flow of information. The weapons were but one part of my frustration with, and why the meeting was called—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Commissioner Lucki, did you...? According to Darren Campbell's notes and the letter to you from Ms. Scanlan from a year later, both of them said in their remarks that you tied that promise to the forthcoming Liberal gun policy—or OIC, pardon me.

Commr Brenda Lucki: No—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Is that correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: —what I did recall mentioning was that the reason why the weapons were so important, and why they asked if they were going to be included, was tied to the minister's mandate letter.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So you did connect the two.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, I did.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay.

Ms. Scanlan also mentioned that you said in the meeting that there was pressure from Minister Blair on you. Is that correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No. I don't recall saying that.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So she is incorrect in what she wrote to you.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I cannot tell you if she is incorrect or not. That's her recollection.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So you did not feel pressure in that meeting when you spoke to Minister Blair and you promised him that you would get that information released about the weapons used.

Commr Brenda Lucki: First of all, I didn't promise him. I confirmed the answer to his question. Second of all, in regard to the second part of your question, there was a lot of pressure, and it wasn't just from the minister's office. It was from the various downtown offices. The most pressure was probably from the media. There was a lot of pressure internally to get communications out, because we had lost a member. There was a lot of communications. I was going in front of the media quite a bit.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So you confirmed to Minister Blair, when he asked you if the weapons information would be released in that press conference, that, yes, it would be. Correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's one of the reasons you were so angry with your deputies in Nova Scotia in that meeting, correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I wasn't angry.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You weren't angry at all?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Not at all. I was disappointed. I felt let down, but I wasn't angry or upset. It's not part of my DNA.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Darren Campbell said that you specifically said you promised. You're saying, "Maybe I did, but I definitely said I confirmed to the minister...."

Commr Brenda Lucki: I may have said that, but it wasn't the context. If Darren Campbell put that in his notes, I'm not going to question his notes. What I'm saying, though, is my intention was not.... It wasn't a promise in the traditional sense. It was confirming the answer to a question.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Commissioner, on April 23 you said that the information about the weapons should not be released because it was related to an active investigation. Why did you change your mind three or four days later? To me, it seems like this conversation with Minister Blair changed your mind.

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, not at all. It wasn't all about the investigation either. It was the fact that—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Pardon me. On the weapons specifically, you said not to share it, and then four or five days later, you were reprimanding your deputies for not sharing it.

Commr Brenda Lucki: No. It wasn't specifically about the weapons, whether to share or not to share.... In that email, yes, but it was also about the protocol that they had in place on the ground, because nothing was to be released by anybody in government until the RCMP released it in the media.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds to finish your answer, Commissioner.

Commr Brenda Lucki: —and secondly, we had protocol with the families.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Did the minister influence your demeanour in that meeting with your deputies? Did the minister influence your demeanour?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, he did not.

The Chair: We're out of time.

Thank you very much.

We now turn to Ms. Damoff.

You have six minutes in this round, Ms. Damoff. Go ahead whenever you're ready.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

I, too, would like to follow up on the comments made by a number of my colleagues recognizing how triggering this meeting can be, not only to those from Nova Scotia but also to all Canadians who have lived through gun violence. I want to recognize that. In particular, to our colleague across the way, MP Ellis, and those in Nova Scotia, my condolences.

Commissioner, I recall after that shooting—and you mentioned this in your remarks—the pressure from the media. I recall pressure from Canadians. Opposition party MP Barrett asked a question during question period about when this information was going to come out.

It sounds like you had a number of conversations with Minister Blair about what would be said in that press conference. Was that a normal thing that would transpire between you and the minister, especially with a national tragedy such as what happened in Nova Scotia? Would it be normal to relay to him what he could expect to see at the press conference?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes. Many times we provide the speaking notes beforehand, but because there were so many details, and they were changing—they were adding and subtracting and adding and subtracting—we didn't have a final version.

It wasn't necessarily with Minister Blair at that point. It would have been with his staff going back and forth. I would provide one. I only gave one copy because, like I said, it was so dynamic, but that's normal practice.

• (1225)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Were those conversations only related to the guns that were used, or were they...? I recall Canadians being quite upset about the communications by the Nova Scotia RCMP at the time and the lack of information that was provided, so was that conversation only about guns or was it a broader conversation that you had?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, all of the conversations were about several things. The number of deceased was always changing. Where the deceased were located, the background of the perpetrator, the replica uniforms and the replica cars were others. There were so many different points.

What was getting frustrating was that the media was reporting everything before we did. With regard to the number of deceased, for example, I remember looking up on a screen and seeing 22 faces on a screen, and we were reporting different numbers. We needed to get in front of it, because this wasn't a normal type of investigation, in the sense that the perpetrator was deceased.

Usually the information is more forthcoming, but my heart goes out to them. They didn't have the capacity on the ground. It's a small division. They don't have a big communications centre. I should have mentioned this. They were doing the best they could with what they had, and we were trying to get a team on the ground to assist them, but because of COVID, non-operational people were not allowed into the province.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's right. There was a ban on travel into the province at the time, wasn't there?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, there was.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Commissioner, one of the weapons that was banned in the order in council was the AR-15, and when Minister Blair appeared earlier, he talked about how the Sandy Hook shooting in the United States with an AR-15, in particular, impacted him.

My colleague Mr. Hardie mentioned the Christchurch shooting in New Zealand.

Marine core combat veteran Dr. Kyleanne Hunter testified before the U.S. Congress recently and explained the difference between an AR-15 and other types of weapons. She said, “It was designed to kill someone wearing a military helmet.... What that does to a civilian wearing nothing...is liquify organs.” That really struck me at to why in both 2015 and 2019 we promised to ban weapons like the AR-15, and also why it was in the minister's mandate and why we took action in the order in council.

Commissioner, you have far more experience than I do, is that an accurate description of an AR-15?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I would like to say that I do have that kind of experience, but I don't. I have subject matter experts who assist me in the firearms regulations. Specifically, we have a lab with a full inventory of weapons, and the experts are far more adept at that than I am.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Given that she was in the marines, I'm going to suggest that she probably does have a fair amount of experience to be able to say that.

On that note, was the RCMP involved in discussions with the minister's office about what weapons to include in that order in council? How long had those conversations been going on?

Commr Brenda Lucki: We are always involved with anything with policy or legislation that affects policing as is the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. It was the same type of process when we were dealing with the cannabis legislation as well. Of course, within the RCMP we have many subject matter experts who came to the table and briefed the minister regularly when they were looking at legislative policy and policy changes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: How long had that been going on, Commissioner? The announcement had been made, and it seems to be a suggestion that the decision to do this was as a result of the—

Commr Brenda Lucki: For months.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Months?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Months and years, probably since I got in the chair.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think Minister Goodale was actually involved in some of that.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I only have four seconds left, so I will turn it back to the Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

I will turn it over to Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Michaud, you have six minutes in this round. Take it away.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Lucki and Mr. Brennan, thank you for being with us today. We greatly appreciate it.

As I mentioned earlier, this is a sensitive topic for many, and I think that those who want answers to their questions deserve to

have them, or at least get some clarification about what happened. Allegations of political interference are always a serious matter. This means that we are trying to truly understand what happened, based on different accounts.

There is a lot of talk about the notes that Mr. Campbell took. I will refer to those as well, because there are some things in there that raise important questions. And I would like to hear your comments on that, Ms. Lucki.

Ms. Lucki, in a statement you issued, you assured us that you would never take any action or make any decisions that would compromise an investigation.

Do you consider publicly disclosing the type of weapons used before the investigation is complete, such as in this case, to be the kind of thing that can compromise an investigation?

• (1230)

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: I'm a bit confused because there was no inquiry at the point when we were discussing that in a media release. Is that what you are referring to?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: What I mean is that it seems as though political pressure was applied to reveal the weapons that were used. What we're hearing from the Nova Scotia RCMP is that public disclosure could compromise the investigation.

Do you agree that this could have or would have compromised the investigation?

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: That's very difficult to say because there was no inquiry called at the time that we were talking about the release of the types of weapons that were seized. It wasn't until months later that this was released, and it wasn't released by ourselves.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: At this stage, hypothetically speaking, do you consider that revealing this type of information could compromise an investigation?

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: It's hard to be hypothetical because it depends on what they're looking at in the inquiry. If they're not looking at weapons, then it might not compromise anything.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: The minister just told us that he never made you promise to reveal the weapons used.

You just said the same thing, that you were not pressured by the minister or the Prime Minister. However, you did mention that the government had exerted pressure to obtain certain information.

Can you tell us what that information was? What kind of conversations did you have with the government that lead you to believe you were pressured?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: First of all, there was pressure for every single bit of information related to this incident: the number of deceased, where the deceased were located, who the deceased were, the background of the deceased, the perpetrator, the background of the perpetrator, the perpetrator's common-law spouse, the fire hall incident, the types of vehicles that the perpetrator had, the replica uniforms. It went on and on, and it was relentless, especially from the media. I and the minister and the Prime Minister were going in front of the media in the first three days quite often. To have as much up-to-date information as we could was important.

It was about me providing situational awareness, and most of it was done on my volition to them in regard to this being the normal practice of giving situational awareness to events such as.... Well, there was no event such as this.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: So you're saying that the government simply sought information, just like the rest of the public, and that pressure was not necessarily applied to obtain information in a privileged way, before the public knew about it, for example.

Correct?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, there is never.... Much of the information that I provide is a heads-up. I like to give government officials a heads-up before things are released in the media, and normally they will be released shortly thereafter.

I am only the messenger in all of this. I am not the keeper of any information. I always have to go back to either my deputy of contract policing or my deputy of federal policing, or I need to go to the commanding officer of the division and say, "I have a question. Can you tell me something about it?" Then I see if they give me the reply, and then I'm repeating their reply. It's much the same with any of the media that I do.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: You say you are simply the messenger in this type of situation. However, as the commissioner of the RCMP, I assume you still give instructions to your employees.

I will quote from Mr. Campbell's notes to provide some context.

On the subject of that notable meeting, he said:

[English]

The commissioner was obviously upset. She did not raise her voice but her choice of words was indicative of her overall dissatisfaction with our work.

The Commissioner accused us (me) of disrespecting her by not following her instructions.

[Translation]

He also said:

• (1235)

[English]

The commissioner said she told Comms to tell us at H Division to include specific info about the firearms used by [the killer].

[Translation]

You had issued instructions, which presumably were not followed. You were angry or upset about it. You linked it to the conversation you had with the government regarding the promise, or not, to give information about the type of weapons used.

Do you confirm what is in the notes?

Perhaps you were upset about something else, like what you said earlier, or other things discussed at that meeting?

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Madame Michaud, but we're out of time. But I want to give the commissioner 15 seconds to answer that question.

Go ahead, Commissioner.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I want to stress that I was not upset. First of all, upset and anger are not part of my DNA. I'm a fairly calm police officer.

I always spoke in terms of how I felt. I felt disappointed and I felt frustrated with the flow of information over that past 10 days. Using the weapons as an example was but one example of the lack of flow of information back and forth between the ground and national headquarters.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, I now turn to you for your six minutes of questioning.

The floor is yours.

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

Thank you to the commissioner and deputy commissioner for joining our committee today and helping walk us through the series of events from April 2020.

Commissioner, you stated that in your mind it wasn't a promise but a confirmation and that the information would be released at the press conference.

I know that there was a lot of pressure. There was a lot of pressure from the public. There was a lot of pressure from the federal government in trying to get this kind of information.

I guess for some people, when they see the Minister of Public Safety asking you, as commissioner of the RCMP, whether or not the information on the firearms would be released at a press conference, because of the very nature of the relationship that the minister has with the commissioner of the RCMP, some people might perceive that to be undue influence in the very posing of the question.

Do you see how that could be perceived by some members of the public?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Anything's possible. There were also a lot of questions about when the names of the deceased were going to be released and when the information about the fire hall incident was going to be released. They could not talk about anything until we spoke about it at the media events, so of course anything that we hadn't spoken about to date was of interest.

I really pride myself on giving accurate and timely information. To not give that information when I'm briefing the minister or, by extension, the Prime Minister, is not something I like to do. I like to be accurate and timely.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Commissioner, did you get a sense that when the question was posed to you, this was information the minister and his chief of staff did really want to see released to the public? In the asking of the question, could you infer that this was a result they actually wanted to see happen at the new conference given by the RCMP?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I didn't think at all. It was a question; I provided an answer.

The minister is very conscious of... First of all, he has an appetite for questions. He's a former police officer, so the who, what, where, why, when and how is almost part of his DNA. Any time there's an event, he will ask those questions.

I provide the answers I can, but I'm always going back to the source because I often don't know what the answers to those questions are. I wouldn't infer anything from what he said. It was a simple question that I was going to provide a response to.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Just hypothetically, if the minister had asked for this information to be released through the RCMP, do you think that would be regarded as an operational directive or more of a communications directive?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I think it could be a little bit of both. The thing is, if information could be released, then I would say, "Yes, it can be released" and I will ask them to do that. I will check and see if they can actually do that or if they cannot.

The question is not interference. It's what happens with it. If I feel that the question is forcing me to do something that I don't want to do, to me that's interference. Asking me to do something in the investigation is interference. Asking me to arrest somebody, not arrest somebody, sanction somebody or not sanction somebody is interference. Asking questions is not interference.

• (1240)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I understand.

I guess if you, as commissioner, were presented with a directive that you felt was operational interference...what tools does a commissioner have at his or her disposal if the government of the day is asking that?

Commissioner, we have examples from the past. In the previous hour, I cited how the Diefenbaker government directed the RCMP to send forces to Newfoundland. The Liberal government under Jean Chrétien, during the 1997 APEC summit, tried to give direc-

tional information to the RCMP about the president of Indonesia's visit.

What tools does the RCMP commissioner have at his or her disposal if the government of the day is very intent on micromanaging those types of affairs?

Commr Brenda Lucki: First of all, as commissioner, I have no qualms about saying, "We are entering an area of direction". I'm prepared to leave a meeting. Also, like I said, any of the information that I'm providing is not my information. I go back to the team that holds the information and we have a discussion if need be. If somebody says that we cannot release that information because of A, B and C, then that's it—I don't even ask any more.

That's the beauty of the way we do it. It's not my information to release, nor was any of this information for me to release.

I've had a lot of discussions about this, obviously, since it's come to light. Sometimes I think it's time for all three governments to have a conversation. Whoever the government in power is, we should make sure this is very clear and that people are signing off on this, so that we're not having this discussion at the next SECU appearance.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

On that subject of clarity, I just wanted to nail down on that because the section of the RCMP act that deals with this simply says, "under the direction of the Minister, [the commissioner] has the control and management of the Force". Some people complain that it's far too vague and very open to interpretation.

Do you feel that we, as legislators, could be looking at that to shore it up, so that we are not in situations like this in the future?

The Chair: You're out of time, Mr. MacGregor, but I want to give the commissioner 15 seconds to answer that question.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Anything that prevents me from coming back to this committee to answer these questions would be welcome.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner.

We now move into the second round of questions, and we'll be led off by Mr. Lloyd.

Sir, you have five minutes, whenever you're ready.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Commissioner.

Would it be fair to say, Commissioner, that you believe this entire saga has been the result of a miscommunication, that you were mistakenly told that the information about the guns would be revealed and that this led to the meeting where you were unhappy about the information not being revealed? Would you say the miscommunication is the heart of the issue?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, I think miscommunication is at the heart of many issues.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay, but in this issue in particular, there was a miscommunication.

Now, as to the meeting you had with Minister Blair when you gave him the confirmation that the information about the firearms would be included, how many people were in attendance at that meeting?

Commr Brenda Lucki: It wasn't a meeting. It was just a question, I think, from his chief of staff saying—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Was it an email?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Normally my calendar tells me everything I do each and every day. Unfortunately, I was by myself. Because of COVID, everybody was working from home.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Earlier you said that the minister asked if the guns would be included. You said that earlier.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I said the minister's office.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: It was the minister's office. Who was it in the minister's office?

Commr Brenda Lucki: It would be the chief of staff.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: So the chief of staff, not the minister, asked you if the guns would be included.

Commr Brenda Lucki: At that point in time, I wasn't talking very often to the minister. It was more with his office.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: The deputy minister earlier today said that you had a meeting with the minister during this time period. He was not in attendance at the meeting. Did you have a physical meeting or a teleconference call with the minister between April 23 and April 28?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I don't have that in my records. I know that I was speaking with that office fairly regularly about this event, as there were a couple of other things going on as well outside of the event.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: The minister said you guys were meeting on an almost daily basis in the wake of this.

Commr Brenda Lucki: The first three to five days, yes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: So you weren't meeting on a daily basis between the 23rd and the 28th, or even semidaily.

Commr Brenda Lucki: We didn't physically meet very often because of COVID.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: So it was over the phone and you would have had no way to tell who else could have been in the meeting.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Were you aware of departmental staff or political staff?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No. Anytime I was talking to the minister, it could have been just him and his chief of staff. I had no way of knowing for sure.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay.

Commr Brenda Lucki: We didn't have MS Teams or video then.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: So when you sent the email on April 23 and said that the information about the firearms should not be dissemi-

nated beyond the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety, you had every reason to believe that the Minister of Public Safety understood the direction from your email that the information should not be shared beyond the Minister of Public Safety and the Prime Minister's Office.

• (1245)

Commr Brenda Lucki: You would have to ask him if he understood, but it was pretty clear, I think.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: But you can confirm that that information was relayed to the minister; the minister was told.

Commr Brenda Lucki: The information was never released.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That should have ended the conversation right there. Why, five days later, were you being asked by the minister's office if this information would be included, if you had just told them five days before that this information should not be included because it would impact an active investigation? What changed? How would it have been appropriate in any way for the minister or the minister's office to ask even the most benign question about whether this information was going to be included? What would make them believe that that was appropriate in any way, given your previous direction?

Commr Brenda Lucki: It wasn't just about weapons. Questions were asked about when the names of the deceased were going to be released.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You were asked specifically about whether the guns would be included. You said that in your testimony. You were asked specifically about the guns.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I'm sorry?

The Chair: Who has a point of order?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'm stopping my time. Is there a point of order?

Hon. Greg Fergus: It's Greg Fergus.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: As per section 18 of our Standing Orders, it is important to grant witnesses enough time to at least answer the questions posed by members.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, that's my job, and I will do the best I can to ensure—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thanks, Chair Fergus.

The Chair: —that there's the proper toing and froing.

We'll go back to you for an answer, Commissioner.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I think I need the question repeated.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you. I had about three minutes and 30 seconds on my time.

The Chair: I saved your time, Mr. Lloyd; don't worry.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, you said specifically in your testimony that the minister's office asked if information about the guns would be included. You specifically said that. Is that correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay. What would have made them think that was an appropriate thing to ask, given that five days earlier you said this information should not be disseminated beyond the Prime Minister and the Public Safety Minister's office? Was there a meeting you had in those previous five days where you said that, actually, it wouldn't be a big deal if the information was released?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, it's because things changed hourly.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: What changed?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Everything was changing hourly. Those weapons were seized. Things changed so that we could release certain points of information. We were continually adding information at each and every press conference we did, so to ask if they were going to be part and parcel of another media release was not unusual.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: But what changed? What changed about the guns in particular between those five days? Was there no active investigation anymore into where the guns came from?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, I was assuming that eventually that would be part of a media release, so it was not an unusual request to be asking that question, because I was given the information, thinking that, in a couple of days, that would be part of a future media release. I was simply giving them the heads-up.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Were there any discussions about the upcoming—

The Chair: Thank you. We're out of time.

I now move to Mr. Noormohamed.

You have five minutes in this round, sir. Go ahead whenever you're ready.

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

Thank you, Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, for being with us today.

Commissioner, I think there have been a lot of assumptions made and a lot of aspersions cast. I just want to clarify a few things, and you might help me.

Can you speak very briefly about your understanding of the role of the Minister of Public Safety and the role of the commissioner, what the lines are and what lines should not be crossed?

Commr Brenda Lucki: It's about the principle of police independence, and it's about exercising police powers and making decisions in the operational realm. But, providing it's appropriate, I feel, for government and police to exchange information to provide situational awareness on events.... But if any of the political officials were to ask me to do something in an investigation specifically or

provide specific direction in an operational realm or in an investigation, that would be crossing the line. Asking me to arrest somebody, asking me to investigate somebody or asking me to turn a blind eye and not to investigate somebody would be some examples.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Did the Minister of Public Safety ask you to do any of those things, anything that would be considered inappropriate or cross that line?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Absolutely not. If anybody is more conscious of that, it's Minister Blair, especially as a former police officer.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: What would you say to those who say that the government wanted to leverage this into a gun ban? What would you say to those people, and what can you say to us about the work that was done previously in respect of banning weapons such as the one that was used in this awful tragedy?

● (1250)

Commr Brenda Lucki: As per the conversation with Ms. Damoff, it was absolutely something that's been on the radar for several years. It followed from Mr. Goodale into Minister Blair's portfolio in the mandate, and it continued with Minister Mendicino. We had been helping them with policy and legislation for several years, well before I became the commissioner.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Is that something that happens regularly between the Commissioner of the RCMP and the Department of Public Safety, regardless of who is in power?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Absolutely, if it involves the police. I gave the example of the cannabis legislation. We provided a ton of advice on that as well.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Let's switch a little bit to the conversation around pressure. I can only imagine the pressure that you and your team were under in trying to make this happen, pressure from the government, from opposition, from the media, everywhere, and you provided good context in your comments earlier about this.

Can you share with us whether or not you felt the pressure that you were under was inappropriate in any way, shape or form from the minister or from the government?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Absolutely not. The only inappropriate pressure was the media.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: If you were to look back, were you asked to do anything out of the ordinary that a government should not be asking you to do in such a situation?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Absolutely not.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Did the minister ask you to do anything inappropriate or questionable as time evolved, not just the beginning but throughout, that would then change the way in which you might answer a question or you might speak to the media?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Absolutely not.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: When answering my colleague Mr. Lloyd, you spoke about how facts on the ground change and how your ability to answer questions based on information that you can provide changes. Can you explain to all of us and to Canadians the context you were under on day one, day three or day five, and how decisions are made that allow you to provide different types of information at different points in time?

Commr Brenda Lucki: It's a communication reel, and any time, from the very first press release that I did or press interview to the very last, I don't have the information in front of me. I go to my comms people, and they go to the people on the ground. The comms person on the ground is part of the command triangle in an investigation, and they're privy to everything. They, with the people who are investigating, decide what can and can't be released and when it can be released. When I'm doing media, that's how I get the information.

But, I'll tell you, I was by myself in the office, unusually, because I usually have a whole team around me who tell me where I need to be, what time I need to be there, and they put the meetings in my calendar. Like I said, it was so unusual in that context because of COVID.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: But, despite that unusual nature of COVID and everything that was happening, you were absolutely crystal clear on the lines that could not be crossed, and you can stand here hand to heart and say that not a single line was crossed, either by you or by the minister, in the type of questions that you were asked, the work that you were asked to do and in the information that you were asked to provide.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I can clearly say that I was not interfered with, I was not directed, and I did not cross any line.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Commissioner.

The Chair: You have eight seconds left, Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm good, Mr. Chair. I'll hand it back to you. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll take that time and move immediately to Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Michaud, you have two and a half minutes in this round. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll pick up where I left off earlier and come back to Mr. Campbell's notes. I'll quote him again.

[*English*]

The Commissioner then said that we didn't understand, that this was tied to pending gun control legislation that would make officers and the public safer. She was very upset and at one point Deputy Commissioner (Brian) Brennan tried to get things calmed down but that had little effect.

[*Translation*]

Commissioner, you said you weren't angry and that you are a relatively calm person. I don't want to contradict you, since I was not at that meeting. However, Mr. Campbell was there and, in light of

his notes, he contradicts you. So I'll direct my question to Mr. Brennan.

Mr. Brennan, is it correct that you had to try to lower the tension? It is true that sometimes tempers flare during meetings.

As Mr. Campbell recalls it, you tried to calm things down a bit.

Correct?

[*English*]

D/Commr Brian Brennan: Yes, that would be accurate. At that point in the meeting, I felt that we were revisiting the same thing over and over again and we needed to start focusing on how to move forward. My focus was on, "Let's learn from these mistakes or these issues. How are we going to do better in communicating in the future?"

That's what I was trying to steer the conversation toward.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: You are also of the opinion that there were many communication problems in this whole situation.

Isn't that so?

[*English*]

D/Commr Brian Brennan: Yes, there were communication issues because of the volume of information, the size of the investigation, the timeliness of information coming into national headquarters and what was being reported on social media versus what was being reported officially. The complexity of the whole situation was adding to it.

It was something that we really needed to work on to make things clarified for governments, for our employees and for the general public.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

Commissioner, you said that you had discussions with the government regarding the regulations long before they were enacted on May 1, 2020. You say that when the government asks you questions, it is not political interference because they are entitled to ask them.

However, did you feel that the government could take advantage of a situation to advance...

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Michaud, you're out of time. You'll have to pose your question very quickly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: It would take too long.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

We are done with that round and we will now move to Mr. MacGregor.

Sir, you too have two and a half minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

Commissioner Lucki, I'm wondering if you can just confirm this for me. When the government asked if the information about the firearms would be released, that question in fact did come from the minister's chief of staff.

Commr Brenda Lucki: That is my recollection. I know it didn't come specifically from the minister; it came from his office.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay. That was the question.

We know that in the course of a police investigation, the make and model of a firearm used in the commission of a crime is a very significant piece of information. What operational information did you have as commissioner that allowed you at that time to make the confirmation that the information would in fact be released?

Commr Brenda Lucki: It wasn't about the actual firearms that were being used, because that still needed to be determined and attached to the forensics. It was about the information about the firearms that were seized in the vehicle of the perpetrator.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay. That's an important clarification there.

I think that's probably the limit of my questions. Thank you for appearing before us, Commissioner.

I'll cede the rest of my time to you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Perkins.

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Perkins. You have five minutes in this slot. Take it away.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you. Maybe I can just follow up on that last question.

Commissioner, in your email of April 23 to the chief of staff, you said, "Here is the information about the firearms we know to date". It doesn't say those were the ones found in the vehicle or not. It wasn't clear. That was at four o'clock. Then you included a list of the details.

Earlier we heard the minister testify that there was a cabinet meeting that day, or a briefing or cabinet meeting somehow with the Prime Minister that day. Between that meeting and this email, where did the request for this information specifically come from? Was it a call from the chief of staff after that cabinet meeting?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I was getting general requests from both the.... Normally when major events happen, I brief the deputy minister of public safety, the national security advisor to the Prime Minister and I often include the chief of staff, so the minister will be briefed up. Sometimes I directly brief the minister and others.

People in any of those groups were asking, so I went back to the Nova Scotia people and asked if there was anything we could give about the guns. I was actually told that we couldn't talk about the guns used. We could talk about the guns seized. That's where that information came from.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

In your call or whatever remote system you were using on April 28—a conference call facility of some sort—who from RCMP headquarters was also on that call?

Commr Brenda Lucki: It was Deputy Commissioner Brian Brennan; our director of communications, Sharon Tessier; and another person from communications, Dan Brien.

Mr. Rick Perkins: He's the media relations head.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes.

• (1300)

Mr. Rick Perkins: In that call that was referenced earlier, you said that the team in Nova Scotia didn't understand that this was tied to pending gun control legislation. Did you say that in that meeting?

Commr Brenda Lucki: What I recall is that.... Somebody might have mentioned why the weapons were important, and I said that it's not a surprise because part of the minister's mandate letter is, in fact, gun legislation.

That's how I was tying it in. That's why I inferred the question was being asked about whether those weapons are going to be included, along with numerous other times I was asked when information was going to be released.

Often in a press conference, the Prime Minister was asked something and he didn't have the information. They would come back and say, "Do we have that information?" We were not ready to release that yet. They'd ask, "Do you have this...?"

Because they were asked these questions, we were just trying to get them the information that they could release.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It was part of an active police investigation and at the time, I believe, the team was trying to figure out the actual origin of the firearms and were dealing with the United States agencies.

Was there any reason that anyone outside that police investigation actually required the details of those firearms for any reason whatsoever in an active police investigation?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No.

It's funny because when I think of all of this investigation, I honestly was thinking about the connection of the guns used and tying them to the forensics. When I asked if any of the information on the guns could.... I had no idea what was going on with the investigation, so I asked the question of whether any of the information on the guns could be released. I got an email that you saw on the 23rd with the caveat. I said, "Okay. Great."

I literally forwarded the email—or cut and pasted—and put it towards the people who were asking.

Mr. Rick Perkins: In that email you said to please not give it beyond the Prime Minister and the minister, but—

Commr Brenda Lucki: That was the instruction I was given.

Mr. Rick Perkins: At 10 at night, six hours later, in that email chain you actually copied five other government officials and an RCMP person. You actually started to disseminate it beyond the two you had said.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I'd have to see that.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's in the email that was provided to the Mass Casualty Commission. Mr. O'Reilly, Mr. Moreau, Mr. Barrick Stewart and Vincent Rigby were all copied on that same chain. In essence you had released the information about the firearms to a large number of people beyond the Prime Minister.

Commr Brenda Lucki: My chief of staff has all the information that I had. The three primary people and their chiefs of staff usually are included. They are the national security adviser to the Prime Minister, the deputy minister of public safety, and the minister via the chief of staff.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Superintendent—

The Chair: Thank you. We're out of time in that round of questioning.

I now move to Mr. Hardie, who will have the last slot in this round.

You have five minutes, sir, whenever you're ready.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, thank you for being here.

From the letter to you from Lia Scanlan, I wanted to read one section here.

It says, "It stood out to me that once you were informed there was a miscommunication, and Sharon advised that she briefed incorrectly...".

Who is Sharon?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Sharon is the director of communications at national headquarters.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Was it Sharon who told you that the information on the firearms would be disclosed?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I see.

Who did Sharon ask about that? Do you know?

Commr Brenda Lucki: You'll have to ask her. She's in the next panel.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay, very good.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I'm going to assume it's communications on the ground.

Mr. Ken Hardie: A critical piece here is, when the question was asked, was the question asked "if" it would be disclosed, or did they ask "for" it to be disclosed?

Commr Brenda Lucki: To my recollection, like I said at the very beginning, it's "if" the weapons information would be included.

Mr. Ken Hardie: All right.

Now there were two briefings, one on April 24 and one on the 28th. Did Superintendent Campbell conduct the briefing using prepared notes?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Which briefing are you referring to?

Mr. Ken Hardie: The ones on the 24th and/or the 28th.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Are you talking about the media briefings?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes, correct.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I'm not sure about the 24th, because I'm not involved at that level. You'd have to probably talk to the comms people. I know the one for the 28th, because it was so extensive and they were covering so many parts of that. They were actually going through a chronology with maps and locations. They were working with our comms people and their own comms people in reference to his notes...to go through all of that.

• (1305)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Were you privy to the notes that were...?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No. I don't get involved at that level.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Given that you were led to expect that the firearms information would be included in the briefing to the media on April 28, did you subsequently ask to see the notes that Superintendent Campbell was using during that period?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I definitely saw the speaking notes, but I saw them early on in the day. Like I said, there were many versions that came after, and I didn't follow it. I just had too many other things to do. I left that for my comms people. There were lots of things that were changing, so I wasn't privy to the final version.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay, but in the version that you did see, was there a reference to the firearms in that?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I don't believe so, no.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay. That wasn't a flag for you at that time?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No.

Mr. Ken Hardie: If it wasn't a flag to you, how important was it, to your mind, that this information be released in those briefings, and why was it important to you?

Commr Brenda Lucki: It wasn't important whether or not it was released. Where I was concerned is that I asked the question, I was told that it would be released, and I transmitted that information to the minister's staff. Again, it was an example of inaccurate information, and there were a lot of issues we were having with the flow of communications.

Whether or not it was released was not a concern. Somebody asked me if it was going to be part of it. I asked them, they said yes, and it wasn't.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I see. So it was really more the general scenario of misinformation and miscommunication which was the concern or the focus of at least part of your conversations with the team on April 28.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Absolutely. We were getting criticized by the media at every angle for the lack of timely information. There's nothing worse than watching your team get.... They're out there trying to do the best they can and getting hammered by the media for not providing the information.

We wanted to get ahead. We wanted to be more proactive than reactive. It was hurtful and it was hard to hear, and the narrative was becoming very negative. We were trying to do everything we could to help them.

Mr. Ken Hardie: In your judgment, did the details of the weapons, provided by Superintendent Campbell on April 24 during that briefing, balance the interest of the public and the media for transparency without compromising the investigation?

Commr Brenda Lucki: If he released them, then yes, because that was his call to make. That's part of his job is to make sure he balances.... If it was him who released it in a media release, then he wouldn't have been compromising the investigation.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Was there not a provision—?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Hardie. We're out of time.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

The Chair: We're out of time for this session.

I would like to thank the witnesses very much for the generosity of their time. This takes us to the end of this panel.

Colleagues, we're more than two hours through a four-hour meeting. I think that probably means that one or more of you may want to make a trip somewhere, even if it's to get a sandwich.

I'm going to suggest that we take a 15-minute break now to give members a chance to do whatever it is they feel obliged or required to do, or want to do. The clerk will give us the go-ahead sign in about 15 minutes when we will proceed with the next panel.

Thank you very much. We're suspended for 15 minutes.

• (1310) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1325)

The Chair: I would like to call this meeting back to order, everybody.

Our third panel of witnesses are, as individuals, Lee Bergerman, former assistant commissioner and commanding officer of the

RCMP in Nova Scotia, and Sharon Tessier, former director general, national communication services, RCMP. From the RCMP, we have Chris Leather, chief superintendent, criminal operations officer, Nova Scotia.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks after which we will proceed with rounds of questions. Each witness in this panel has their own opening remarks to deliver, so that will be three times five minutes each.

Welcome to all.

I now invite each witness to make their opening statement. We will proceed in the order listed on the notice, beginning with Ms. Bergerman.

You have the floor for five minutes. Please go ahead.

Assistant Commissioner Lee Bergerman (Former Assistant Commissioner and Commanding Officer, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Nova Scotia, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Lee Bergerman, and I retired at the rank of assistant commissioner earlier this year, having served 36 years in the RCMP.

On April 28, I was a serving member and was the commanding officer of H Division.

On April 18 and April 19, 2020, a gunman murdered 22 innocent people in Nova Scotia during a 13-hour rampage until he was shot and killed by RCMP members. This mass casualty shooting was the worst in Canadian history and has forever impacted many lives in a negative way.

On April 28, 2020, in my role as the CO of H Division, I was doing detachment visits to those most impacted by the casualty event. Those detachments are in the northeast part of Nova Scotia, where most of the murders occurred.

Many of our first responders were heavily impacted by this event, as you can well imagine. They were hurting for the loss of their fellow citizens who lived in the communities they policed. We were also mourning the loss of our own Heidi Stevenson, who was murdered by the gunman during the rampage. We also were very much concerned about Constable Chad Morrison, who was shot and wounded during the gunman's rampage. To say that many of our police officers and community members were traumatized would be an understatement.

It was my responsibility as the CO to do personal visits to support our members, assess the needs of the communities in the aftermath and develop action plans for the support of those affected. I was also pursuing the development of strategies for future resource needs.

On April 28, after finishing my detachment visits, I returned to H Division headquarters in Dartmouth. Soon after I got back to the office, I watched Chief Superintendent Campbell's press conference that he and our communications team had been working on for days. At that time, H Division was being heavily criticized for lack of information being shared about the mass casualty shooting.

This press conference was extremely important, not only for the RCMP but also for the public, to have a preliminary understanding of what occurred during the 13-hour rampage. Chief Superintendent Campbell did an excellent job presenting the facts and answering questions for the many press members who were there.

After the press conference, I spoke with Lia Scanlan, director of communications for H Division, and Chief Superintendent Campbell, and I congratulated them for the excellent job they had done presenting the facts. There were many details that could not be shared publicly due to the ongoing investigation.

Shortly thereafter, Ms. Scanlan came back to my office to advise me that Deputy Commissioner Brennan had called her and said that we were required to be on a conference call in five minutes with the commissioner. Ms. Scanlan was visibly upset and advised me that Deputy Commissioner Brennan was very mad and demanded that I, Chief Superintendent Leather and Chief Superintendent Campbell be on the call. We all assembled in my boardroom and were joined by the commissioner, Deputy Commissioner Brennan, Sharon Tessier from national headquarters and Dan Brien.

The commissioner started the conversation, and it was evident she was very angry at my team. The tone of her voice and what she said to all of us made it apparent that she was not happy and felt disrespected and disobeyed. It should be noted that I was confused from the start of the conversation, as I had not been privy to any conversations that I now know occurred the night before and during the day of April 28, 2020. During the conference call, at one point I asked Chief Superintendent Leather what this conversation was about. It was apparent Chief Superintendent Leather was as blindsided as I was at the tone and content of the conversation.

Near the end of the call, Chief Superintendent Campbell left the room obviously upset, and Ms. Scanlan was emotionally very upset. After the call, both chief superintendent and I had a brief conversation about what occurred, the negative impact on our employees and the inappropriateness of the content.

When I left the office shortly after this conversation, I called Deputy Commissioner Brennan and expressed my disappointment at how my team had been treated, the inappropriateness of the tone and the things that were said on the call. Knowing the impact this conference call had on my staff, I advised Deputy Commissioner Brennan that the conference call and the content were very big missteps by the commissioner and that I didn't think the commissioner realized the impact her words had on our staff.

I say all of this without any personal agenda or with any previous issues with Commissioner Lucki. I consider her a friend, and I can honestly say that this meeting was not at all reflective of her leadership style.

It is with regret that it has come to this, but as the commanding officer of H Division at the time, it is my duty and responsibility to speak up for our members based on the truth and my perspective of the situation. I wish to affirm that I am testifying to the best of my personal recollection and doing so in the interest of fairness and living up to the vision and values of the RCMP, which I hold dear.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now ask for Ms. Tessier to take the floor for up to five minutes for an opening comment.

Go ahead.

Ms. Sharon Tessier (Former Director General, National Communication Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, As an Individual): Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to participate on this panel.

Over two years ago, family members, friends, communities, first responders and members of the RCMP endured a massive and devastating attack on their loved ones that deeply shook the people of Nova Scotia and Canadians across the country. Two years later, the gravity of the unprecedented tragedy still has a strong hold on me and my RCMP colleagues, and to this day, I hold the victims, their families and those who faced the danger in my heart.

My husband is from Cape Breton, where we spend several months a year. My children are all students or graduates from St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. I have seen in my family and friends the grief, devastation and bewilderment caused by the rampage in this province. The sense of loss is profound.

I've been invited here today to discuss allegations of political interference in the 2020 Nova Scotia mass murder investigation. On April 18 and 19, I was more than 1,000 kilometres away and had the benefit of not being in the eye of the storm. I was the director general of the RCMP's national communication services in Ottawa. While I worked very closely with the communication teams across the country, they ultimately reported to their commanding officers and worked in partnership with their colleagues on the front line, who briefed them on operational issues.

We provided advice and guidance. Communications, generally, does not have the authority to direct or dictate what our subject matter experts share. We were non-partisan and protected our operational independence while respecting the communications protocol of keeping our partners in Public Safety and the Privy Council Office updated. I also regularly briefed our senior leaders, including the commissioner.

While I have a profound respect for the work of the RCMP—my father was a regular member, as is my son—I know enough about the complexities of policing to know that I am by no means an expert. However, what I do know, after more than three decades working for several different departments, is how to communicate and how to manage a crisis.

As such, in the aftermath of the April 2020 massacre, my positioning was clear. I was strongly advocating for the timely release of information, knowing some would need to be withheld to preserve operational integrity. My goal was to uphold public confidence and trust in our organization and more specifically the Nova Scotia RCMP. The backbone of this was to be open and transparent, sharing what we could and explaining why some details could not be discussed at that time. My goal was to give clarity to the public without divulging any information that could impede an ongoing investigation. It was, to say the least, a delicate balance indeed.

This is why I was pushing to share more information and information constantly, quickly and openly to the media and the public. One such item was the weapons used. The public knew about the presence of guns and I advised that we provide as much detail as possible. In crisis communications, silence is not golden and can bring doubt, rumours and speculation. You cannot build trust in a vacuum.

I was present at the meeting convened on April 28, at the request of the commissioner, to discuss the ongoing communications. Now, two years later and having retired in November, I'm at a disadvantage, as I do not have access to all of the information from that time, such as emails or communications material, but I will share my recollection.

I remember it was an unpleasant meeting. Commissioner Lucki was controlled but clearly frustrated and dissatisfied with our overall communication efforts. I cannot speak to how others felt, but it was emotional for me. I don't know anyone who likes to hear that their boss is unhappy with their work, particularly after so much effort.

At the meeting, I shared that I had informed the commissioner that there would be more clarity on the weapons, albeit at a high level, during the news conference held earlier that morning. I briefed her that it would go one way; then it went another. To my recollection, this was the impetus for the conference call shortly after. With regard to political pressure, I cannot recall the commissioner's exact comments, but I do remember she was irritated that she had briefed the minister that we would be proactively discussing the weapons, based on my earlier update.

I'm not here to second-guess my actions or those of my colleagues. Our experiences, perspectives and views were different. They were under immense pressure in Nova Scotia. There had clearly been some miscommunication between us, as can happen when moving at an unrelenting pace, adjusting to remote work and having numerous versions and discussions circulating at once. I offer this for context, not as an excuse.

These are the perspectives from which I will be speaking today, and I look forward to answering your questions to the best of my knowledge.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

• (1330)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now like to invite Chief Superintendent Leather.

You have the floor for up to five minutes, whenever you're ready.

Chief Superintendent Chris Leather (Criminal Operations Officer, Nova Scotia, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and select members of Parliament on the SECU committee.

My name is Chief Superintendent Chris Leather. I am the criminal operations officer for the RCMP's H Division, Nova Scotia, as I was so assigned in April 2020. I've been a police officer for over 32 years and a commissioned officer since 2014. I'm honoured to be here in person today, along with my colleagues Ms. Bergerman and Ms. Tessier.

Before I offer my introductory remarks, I would like to take a minute to recognize the Portapique tragedy of April 18 and 19, 2020, one that so horrendously impacted the country, the province, its communities and of course the victims and their families in Nova Scotia. The impacts have been and continue to be felt by the public and our membership. The pain will be felt by all for many years to come. As Canada's worst ever mass murder, we are forever scarred by this senseless act of violence perpetrated by the lone gunman. In all of this, I am proud of our members' dedication, commitment and resilience then and now in the face of such horrendous events and criticism.

I'm returning to Nova Scotia tomorrow. I'm scheduled to testify for two days at the Mass Casualty Commission. Also, I recently provided a 10-hour recorded audio statement to MCC counsel pertaining to my roles and responsibilities during and after the Portapique tragedy. I will remain engaged to assist with policy change, law amendments, cultural change and whatever else is asked of me.

We look forward to receiving the final report from the Mass Casualty Commission in November this year and acting on the report's recommendations. We know that there are many areas we can improve on and gaps that we will address. I know that the "after action report" work will be crucial to bolstering public safety and confidence in the RCMP.

I want the committee to know that we recognized issues early on. Where we could, we already began addressing the gaps identified, working shoulder to shoulder with our provincial government counterparts, Nova Scotia municipal police chiefs, fellow criminal operations officers and commanding officers across Canada, and of course the communities we serve to improve and evolve as an organization.

The RCMP is the provincial police service in Nova Scotia. We serve at the behest of the Province of Nova Scotia, the public, and Public Safety Canada. We take this responsibility seriously. We look forward to serving Nova Scotians in this capacity for years to come.

My role as the criminal operations officer is as the de facto 2IC of the RCMP in Nova Scotia. All operational units and programs, except federal policing, roll up under me. This includes all general duty policing and specialized policing services for the RCMP, including but not limited to uniformed policing, specialized policing services, including our emergency response team and critical incident commanders, and operational communications managers and call-takers, all of whom played critical roles in our Portapique response.

I understand that the focus of this committee's work is to determine whether there was political interference with the RCMP as it related to the gun legislation passed by the federal government in May 2020. I was a participant in the April 28 teleconference hosted by Commissioner Lucki, which included Deputy Commissioner Brennan, Ms. Tessier, Mr. Dan Brien, Assistant Commissioner Bergerman, Chief Superintendent Campbell, Ms. Lia Scanlan and me. As I said in my MCC statement, I am available to answer questions concerning what I heard on the call and my related roles and responsibilities leading up to the call of April 28 and key after-discussions with my colleagues—namely, CO Lee Bergerman, Chief Superintendent Campbell, and the director of corporate communications, Lia Scanlan.

What I will say at this point is that the meeting was remarkable in its timing, only 10 days after the tragedy; the call contents, infused with emotion; and a reference to pending gun control legislation by the commissioner, just a few minutes after a key press conference given by Chief Superintendent Campbell, during which he effectively provided a comprehensive update on the criminal investigation known as H-Strong, including associated timelines.

What I will also say is that I was unaware of the key lead-up conversations that had occurred between Chief Superintendent Campbell, Ms. Scanlan, Ms. Tessier and Dan Brien of national corporate communications on the evening of April 27 and into the morning of April 28 surrounding the firearms used by the gunman specific to the talking points that were prepared for Chief Superintendent Campbell's April 28 televised news conference. I was truly taken aback by the discussion at the teleconference, and it would take several post-fact discussions for me to piece together and to better understand the context of the comments.

• (1335)

The Chair: Your time is up, sir. You have just 10 seconds, please.

C/Supt Chris Leather: I've completed this post-fact review and have a much clearer sense now of what occurred. I look forward to sharing with you what I heard and have learned since.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you for the opening remarks from all of our witnesses.

We now move into the first round of questioning.

To open, it will be Ms. Dancho.

You have six minutes, whenever you're ready.

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

Ms. Tessier, you were the former director general of the national communications service for the RCMP, correct?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Yes, I was.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Following the Nova Scotia attacks, you would have been in direct communication with Minister Blair's office, notably his staff, and the Prime Minister's Office, notably the Prime Minister's staff, correct?

• (1340)

Ms. Sharon Tessier: No, I was not.

I have a director of operational communications, and she was the one who was briefing, we call it "downtown", which was Public Safety and the Privy Council Office. We have a protocol that the minister's office reaches out through Public Safety Canada, not directly to us.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: What was her name?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Jolene Bradley.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Who was her contact in the Prime Minister's Office?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: She would not have been dealing with the Prime Minister's Office. It would have been Privy Council Office. It would probably have been Ken MacKillop, the head of the communications at PCO.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Was there anybody in Minister Blair's office that she was dealing with?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Not that I'm aware of. She would have been dealing with our colleagues in communications at Public Safety.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Sharon Tessier: You're welcome.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Ms. Bergerman and Mr. Leather, thank you for being here. Thank you, Ms. Tessier, for being here.

Ms. Bergerman, you mentioned a meeting that happened the evening before the April 28 press conference and a subsequent meeting with Commissioner Lucki. Did I hear correctly that there was a meeting the night before?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: I'm not aware of a meeting.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I must have misheard you.

I'm going to ask you a few question in response to Lia Scanlan and Darren Campbell's notes and letter.

Lia Scanlan also mentioned to the MCC in interview that the Prime Minister and Minister Blair were "weighing in on what we could and couldn't say".

Was that your experience?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Only on this particular phone call that we had on the 28th, where there was a reference to the minister putting pressure on the commissioner.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I think you're referencing what Lia Scanlan had also referenced, that the commissioner indicated that Minister Blair pressured her to release this information.

Was that what you heard from Commissioner Lucki as well?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: I heard “minister”. I don't recall hearing “Minister Blair”.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: What did Commissioner Lucki say about the minister: that some minister had pressured her to release the information about the weapons used in the attack?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Part of the conversation was more that we didn't understand the big picture and that there was pressure from the minister to release the calibre, make and models of the weapons used in the mass casualty shooting.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So you would agree with Darren Campbell's notes that Commissioner Lucki...the words he used were “promised” Minister Blair and the Prime Minister's Office that that information would be released.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So you heard the commissioner say she “promised” the minister and the Prime Minister's Office?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Yes.

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Did Commissioner Lucki directly tie that to the forthcoming firearm policy from the Liberal government?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: She did.

She said the pressure was from the minister and the Prime Minister's Office, that she had promised them that information would be released, and the pressure was a result of its being tied to the forthcoming gun policy from the Liberal government.

Is that correct?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: That's correct.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Leather, can you answer the same questions as well?

C/Supt Chris Leather: Yes.

I've had an opportunity to review the notes that Superintendent Campbell also prepared. I have to say, with great detail, he provided a comprehensive and detailed overview, which essentially, to the letter, I would support. Certainly on the points that Ms. Bergerman spoke about, I would agree with the statements made concerning the minister, the Prime Minister's Office and the impending gun legislation.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: With regard to the statement in particular that we just went over—but just to confirm—Darren Campbell said that Commissioner Lucki said to you in the group that she promised Minister Blair and the Prime Minister's Office that the information about the weapons used in the attack would be released. That's what you're referring to.

C/Supt Chris Leather: That's what I recall hearing.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: And that that pressure...which was also said, correct?

C/Supt Chris Leather: There was pressure. She was under pressure.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: And that was related to the upcoming firearm policy from the Liberal government.

C/Supt Chris Leather: Yes, it is.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Were either of you aware that the announcement for that upcoming firearm policy would be May 1?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: I wasn't.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Was this the first time that you were hearing of this forthcoming firearm policy?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: From the commissioner, yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'll go back to Ms. Scanlan. She had said that Minister Blair and the Prime Minister were weighing in on what could and couldn't be said.

Based on what you heard from Commissioner Lucki, does it seem to be accurate that the Prime Minister's Office and Bill Blair were, in essence, trying to pressure Commissioner Lucki on what would be released?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Based on what I heard on this particular teleconference.

• (1345)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

Ms. Tessier, you were in the room as well. Is that correct?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Yes, I was.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Do you have the same recollection as Ms. Bergerman, Mr. Leather, Mr. Campbell and Ms. Scanlan?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: I do not. I remember her being irritated that she had told the minister that we would be releasing guns, but I do not remember talk of pressure or any of the like.

I didn't take notes, which is not helpful.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Ms. Tessier, you work with the national headquarters of RCMP and not the Nova Scotia RCMP. Is that correct?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Leather, you work with the RCMP in Nova Scotia. Is that correct?

C/Supt Chris Leather: Yes, I do.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Ms. Bergerman does as well, as did Darren Campbell and Lia Scanlan at the time.

The four individuals from the RCMP in Nova Scotia have a different recollection from Ms. Tessier and Commissioner Lucki. I find that very interesting.

With my remaining seconds, did you have anything to add?

The Chair: We're out of time, Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we'll move to Mr. Noormohamed.

Sir, you have six minutes in this round. Whenever you are ready, the floor is yours.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for making the time to be with us.

Assistant Commissioner Bergerman, in your dealings through this matter, did you ever hear directly from the minister or the minister's office in respect of what they were asking the RCMP to do or not do?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: No, I was not.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You were not aware of any instance, which you directly heard yourself, where the minister or the minister's staff were instructing anyone to do anything. Is that correct?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: I never heard anything directly.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You never heard the minister in any way, shape or form try to pressure anyone.

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: No.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You were hearing second-hand information, which you are now conveying. Is that correct?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: From the commissioner, yes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: We can all disagree with people's management styles. We can disagree with how people come across in meetings. Is it possible or probable that the commissioner was expressing frustration as a result of the commitment or confirmation she might have given versus what was asked of her?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: I'm unaware of that because I didn't know of any conversation prior to this teleconference that had gone on between, I'm guessing, Ms. Tessier, Ms. Scanlan and probably Dan Brien.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You would not be able to say this with any certainty. Is that correct?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Not be able to say what?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That what you're saying, that this possibly happened or this possibly happened [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: I don't have any direct knowledge of conversations that were had prior to this teleconference.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

Ms. Tessier, you have been in the business of communications for a very long time and you have seen a lot in your career. Can you talk to us about how facts on the ground change the RCMP's or any national security agency's ability to communicate and what they can and cannot share?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: We always try to keep our credibility and the confidence and trust of our communities by sharing as much information as quickly as possible. As you've heard, information changes over time. What may have been something that we needed to withhold until it is clarified and confirmed, we can eventually share.

As time went by, they were able to share more information on the gunman. The information on the number of victims and the victims' names, the use of the replica police car, the uniforms.... As time passes, it's possible to release more information.

I am not a police officer. I always asked that they release as much as they could. I respected that some stuff would have to be withheld, but it never stopped me from asking them to release stuff

so that they could take a look at it and decide if it would actually impede an operation or result in decreased operational integrity.

I understood my role and my lane and they understood their role. My goal at the end of the day was.... Confidence and trust in a policing organization is essential, so I was trying to keep our credibility as high as possible.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Is it safe to say that everyone involved here was aware of the lines and doing their best not to cross any lines?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: I think absolutely. That's common. Our members know that they need to provide us with the information. We can only share what we know, but they also know to keep a box around the stuff that has to be withheld. That's how we operate. We always have and it works well.

• (1350)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Would you say that was the case in this situation, notwithstanding the frustration people may have felt or what may have been perceived as anger or disappointment, as Commissioner Lucki characterized her own views as? Is it fair to say that everybody across the way acted with integrity and within their own lanes?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Absolutely. They were working night.... We were all working night and day, but they were in Nova Scotia, right there, and there was so much extra pressure.

As I look back on this, there were clearly miscommunications between my group and the group in Nova Scotia, and it's very unfortunate that I ended up briefing the commissioner one thing and it went another way. I think that's what caused this whole dissatisfaction with our communications.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: If you were to reflect on this now.... There's a lot of political hay being made that the minister perhaps meant this, did that or said this to the commissioner and the commissioner said this or did that.

Can you go back to this point about miscommunication? With your own experience—however many significant decades of experience you have—can you speak to how miscommunication may have played a role or could have played a role here versus malice or bad intention?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Just looking at the number of versions of speaking notes we had going back and forth, the discussions that were going on between Lia and me and the different discussion going on between Mr. Brien and Mr. Leather or Mr. Campbell, there were so many people trying to do their level best. Everyone had the same goal in mind.

We were working as well as we could together remotely for the first time. With COVID, it was terrible. We couldn't even see each other while we were working. It was very difficult, and I know that everyone working on this file was doing their level best and beyond that. People were making Herculean efforts, working night and day—and I mean night and day. People would shut off their computers at two in the morning and fire them back up at five.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Sharon Tessier: You're welcome.

The Chair: I now turn the floor over to Ms. Michaud.

You have a six-minute slot. The floor is yours, Madame Michaud.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the three witnesses for being with us today. We very much appreciate it.

I'd like to come back to some answers they gave to my colleague earlier.

I agree with my colleague that it is somewhat curious for the Nova Scotia RCMP to remember the meeting on April 28 differently from the national RCMP. I just want to come back to that.

I will address Ms. Bergerman first.

Ms. Bergerman, could you elaborate on how this meeting went? Earlier, you stated that the RCMP commissioner appeared to be under pressure from the government, the Minister of Public Safety, the Prime Minister or their respective offices to publicly disclose certain information about the weapons used. You specifically mentioned the calibre and model of these weapons.

What made you believe or think that the commissioner was under pressure from the government? Could you go into more detail about your thinking or your reaction at that point? Does it reflect anything in Mr. Campbell's notes?

[*English*]

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Thank you for the question.

I think it's important to remember that going into this conference call, I was taken aback by the tone and content of it because I wasn't aware of any of these conversations going on about what was required or what was wanted in the press conference. I was confused, and when it started off, it was evident that the commissioner was angry. There was no yelling, but you could tell. I know her well enough to know when she's angry. She used phrases like "I promised the minister". She didn't say what minister. I understood a minister and that the calibre and types of weapons that were used in the mass casualty shooting would be disclosed in the press conference. That was her expectation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Based on what we understand from Mr. Campbell's notes, his response was that he could not release the information at that time because it could compromise the investigation.

Do you also agree with that?

• (1355)

[*English*]

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Not the inquiry, the investigation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Very well.

Earlier, while listening to the interpretation, Commissioner Brenda Lucki thought I was talking about the commission, but I was also talking about the investigation.

Mr. Leather, can I ask you essentially the same questions on what you remember about the way that meeting went and your impression of the commissioner? Did it seem to you that she was under some political pressure?

Getting information and asking for information are not normally interference, unless it seems that there may be some pressure to get it faster. That may, indeed, be what happened.

Do you get that impression as well?

[*English*]

C/Supt Chris Leather: To the member, through the chair, I think it's important to provide some context in the lead up to the call of the 28th.

It was around April 22 that I got a phone call from the commissioner directly requesting the gun "inventory", for lack of a better term—the list of guns, makes, models and serial numbers. Really, that's when it began for me in terms of this issue, and it was a request that, obviously, I took seriously, coming directly from the commissioner.

That would be out of the norm of communication to a criminal operations officer, but again, under the circumstances, and given the gravity of the situation, it didn't seem completely odd to me because that would be something that would make sense for the commissioner to share within her senior executive committee in Ottawa, the deputy commissioners and equivalents.

It was on April 23 that CO Bergerman and I actually had a conversation with SiRT. SiRT is the serious investigative team that oversees police activity, akin to the SIU here in Ontario for matters where there is a death in police custody or at the hands of police. It was quite clear from our conversation with the SiRT director that we would be allowed to provide a gun inventory to the commissioner so long as it was used within the RCMP—and that was it. That was the agreement and the commitment that we made to the director of SiRT, which I passed along to Ms. Bergerman, which presumably went up to Ottawa.

That's the background on the lead up, and then really for several days, until the 28th, and akin to what Ms. Bergerman said, there was no further discussion on the gun inventory or the speaking notes, or any sense of interest, from my perspective, in the inventory of guns being released publicly, internal to government or otherwise.

I would echo Ms. Bergerman's comments about the surprise that it came up the way it did on the 28th for an issue that I thought had essentially been resolved through obtaining this inventory and passing it along to be used for internal discussion and understanding.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now invite Mr. MacGregor to begin his six-minute slot of questions. The floor is yours, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Tessier, if I can, maybe I'll start with you.

We now have a fairly well-established timeline of what happened between the commissioner and the minister. She has confirmed, in fact, that it was the minister's chief of staff who asked her if the makes and models of the firearms, the detailed information about the firearms, could be released, and she made the confirmation/promise that yes, it could.

Just to confirm, when she did confirm that with the minister's chief of staff, was she basing that on the information that you had provided her? Can you just confirm the process that lead her to be able to make that confirmation to the chief of staff?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: I'm not aware of when she briefed the chief of staff. I just know that I brief her, and I had briefed her—I believe it was the evening of the 27th or the first thing on the 28th—that we would be releasing more information on the guns.

I did send a revised set of speaking notes to the commissioner, and the version I sent—well, one of the versions I sent—did include information on the firearms to the best of my recollection.

I cannot remember how much detail was in there, but there was reference to the firearms. I have never been in a briefing between the commissioner and the minister or the minister's office, so I can't speak to that.

• (1400)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: We can assume, based on that information you just confirmed that you gave her, that she was able to make a confirmation on that.

Now, maybe I'll turn to Ms. Bergerman.

In ongoing police investigations, when it comes to the make and model of the firearm that's used in any kind of crime, and given the state of the Nova Scotia investigation at that particular moment, Superintendent Campbell made reference to the fact that, during the teleconference, he said "I tried to explain there was no intent to disrespect anyone, however we could not release this information at this time."

Can you educate the committee, the public and the media here as to why he would tell the commissioner that? Why at that time was that information so sensitive that it could not yet be released?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: At that time, there was an ongoing investigation as it related to the weapons, because we were working with the FBI and with our counterparts in the U.S., the U.S. border patrol and CBSA, so there was kind of an investigation still going on between those three or four different agencies. There were some determinations of how the gunman got the guns, got the weapons, that had not been fleshed out completely, and there were still many witnesses who had to be interviewed. It would have been detrimental to that investigation to have that out in the public for potential witnesses to hear all this information without first getting the information from those witnesses.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: As Superintendent Campbell's notes indicate—which you have confirmed are quite accurate in retelling how that conference went—the commissioner came on to the teleconference call after she had made a confirmation/promise.... There's some ambiguity over which particular word it is, but in any case, as she tells it, she made a confirmation to the minister's office that this information would be released.

It was patiently explained to her by Superintendent Campbell that this could not be released at this time because of the investigation, but then she came back after that information was relayed to her and said that you, the group, didn't understand that this was tied to pending gun control legislation. The notes are not very clear after that.

Can you, by recollection, tell us what the reaction in the room was when she stated that, even after Superintendent Campbell told her, "Sorry, we can't at this time because of the ongoing investigation"?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: The reaction was, I would say, confused and a bit stunned, because any police officer knows that if you're in the middle of an investigation, certain information cannot be released. In this case, Superintendent Campbell, who is in charge of support services, or was at the time, and the major crime team working on this investigation working under him are the ones who ultimately make the decision, because they have the intimate details of the investigation. They said that at this time, the weapons and calibre and all of those details could not be released to the public.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Chief Superintendent Leather, do you have anything else to add to that? Ms. Bergerman said there was a sense of confusion in the room. Do you have anything to add to that in the final 30 seconds?

C/Supt Chris Leather: I'd just reiterate the importance of the sanctity of that information 10 days after the tragedy. Darren Campbell was well positioned to make that statement to the commissioner and to provide that rebuff to her, given his knowledge of the file and his courage of convictions around that. There was an exchange, if you will, between them about the importance of that. I don't believe the commissioner was overly compelled or convinced by his response, saying that we didn't fully understand the implications of not releasing—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now move to the next round of questions.

This is a five-minute round for you, Mr. Perkins. The floor is yours whenever you're ready.

• (1405)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for appearing.

You are both very seasoned police officers and investigators. Did either of you take notes of the conversation?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Yes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Could you table those with the committee?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Not here I can't. I would have to get them out of Nova Scotia to be able to table them.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Superintendent, could you do that as well?

C/Supt Chris Leather: Yes, I have them here.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That would be great. Thank you very much.

I know at RCMP HQ they have the ability to tape every phone conversation. Did your office conference room have the ability to tape this conversation, or did you?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: We did not tape the conversation.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

Chief Superintendent Leather, you said that SiRT said that the information on the firearms could not be released to anyone outside the RCMP, and that was on April 23. Is that correct?

C/Supt Chris Leather: Yes, sir.

Mr. Rick Perkins: So at four o'clock on April 23, when the commissioner emailed the details of the firearms to people outside of the RCMP, was she breaking the rules with SiRT?

C/Supt Chris Leather: I'm not sure that the commissioner was aware of that caveat that was put on the notes. My communication with the gun inventory went to Ms. Bergerman. Where it got communicated beyond that and what was contained in the caveat or not, I'm not sure. It was clear from our conversation with Mr. Curran, the director, that it was the expectation of the RCMP that we keep it in house, and I certainly passed that along.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That would not be an unusual request in the circumstances.

C/Supt Chris Leather: Under the circumstances, because they pertained to the gun inventory of the weapons seized from the gunman's car at the now infamous Big Stop, where he was dispatched, SiRT in fact had primacy on that investigation because there was an investigation into the shooting of the gunman by our members.

H-Strong was an ongoing criminal investigation that we were running parallel, and therefore it's only appropriate that we would consult with the SiRT director to make sure he was comfortable with this release.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The commissioner would know that in the incident where RCMP have been involved in a shooting, generally SiRT would insert itself into those situations and would restrict the information flow.

C/Supt Chris Leather: The commissioner would be well aware of the SiRT investigation, yes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay.

Ms. Tessier, were you involved in the drafting of the commissioner's public statement for June 21 that was released this year?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: June 21 of this year? No. I've been retired since November.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay.

Were you informed that evening, in the 40 minutes when the shooting started, that this had happened?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: No.

Mr. Rick Perkins: When were you informed?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: It is terrible to say it is a blur, but I believe it was the following morning.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay, thank you.

I have more questions, but I'd like to turn the rest of my time over to my colleague Raquel Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, I'm going to move a motion, which procedure-wise we know we would need to discuss now, or at your discretion, Mr. Chair. Of course, at the will of the committee, we could discuss it after we finish this round of questions from all parties.

My staff has hard copies in both languages and is emailing an electronic copy to the clerk now.

Mr. Chair, I move the following motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee hold a meeting on the Allegations of Political Interference in the 2020 Nova Scotia Mass Murder Investigation study no later than Wednesday, August 31, 2022, to hear from the following witnesses: Superintendent Darren Campbell, Nova Scotia RCMP; Lia Scanlan, former RCMP Communications Director; Alison Whelan, RCMP Chief Strategic Policy and External Relations Officer; Dan Brien, Director of Media Relations, RCMP; Jolene Bradley, Director, Strategic Communications (Operations), RCMP; Ken MacKillop, Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet (Communications and Consultations), Privy Council Office; Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and his officials.

The Chair: Has this motion been translated and circulated to all members of the committee?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: We are passing it out now, Mr. Chair.

The clerk is in the process of doing that.

The Chair: Okay. I think we should deal with the motion now.

Clerk, once the motion has been circulated, give me the high sign and then I will open up the floor to comments on the motion.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair—

Ms. Pam Damoff: Chair, could we finish the round of questions and then come to the motion?

The Chair: Yes, if that's—

● (1410)

Ms. Pam Damoff: We could even defer it to later in the meeting, actually.

The Chair: I'm subject to the will of the committee.

Does the committee want to finish this round of questions and then deal with the motion? Can I have a show of hands?

Clerk, I see thumbs-up, so let's proceed in that fashion.

The time has run out in this current slot, so I would move to Ms. Damoff.

You have five minutes in this round. Go ahead, the floor is yours.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Ms. Tessier, can you just confirm what was transpiring in terms of communication between Nova Scotia and the commissioner around the dates of April 27 and 28? My understanding from the testimony we've heard is that drafts of press releases or drafts of speaking notes were shared between Nova Scotia and you and the commissioner. She had an understanding, which she shared with the government, about what was going to be said at the press conference. Is that correct?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Yes. As notes were finalized, I would share them with her chief of staff. Obviously, we ended up finalizing some and then revising them, but yes, I would share copies with the commissioner's office.

Ms. Pam Damoff: So when we talk about her being upset, she was being given information from Nova Scotia. She was then, in turn, sharing what she believed was going to transpire at a press conference on April 28, and the information that she was given was incorrect—or the information that she was given that she shared with the minister or the minister's staff was incorrect. Is that transpired?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: More or less; I can't speak to whether or not Nova Scotia was sharing information with her. I was not aware of that. As far as I know—

Ms. Pam Damoff: Sorry. Just to clarify, it was being shared with you, who in turn was sharing it with her.

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Yes. We were working very closely with our colleagues in Nova Scotia. Then I would share it.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. So her expectation, and what she said in terms of what she had shared with Minister Blair—

Mr. Stephen Ellis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you, sir.

I'm very confused. I've got a lot of “he's and she's” in here, and I wonder if the member opposite might use their appropriate titles and keep things a bit more clear. I think we're losing the train.

Thank you.

Ms. Pam Damoff: For clarity, Ms. Tessier, the Nova Scotia RCMP—I don't know who it was—was sharing drafts with you. Is that correct?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Yes. We were working on them together. Yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. And then you were sharing information with Commissioner Lucki.

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Yes, with her office—with Rob O'Reilly.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. And then the information that was shared by you with Commissioner Lucki was in turn shared with Minister Blair or his staff.

Ms. Sharon Tessier: I assume so.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's what she told us.

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Yes. Okay.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's what the commissioner told us.

Ms. Sharon Tessier: And that's what she told us.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I guess what I'm trying to clarify is that the commissioner had shared information that she thought was going to be shared publicly. As I remember it at the time, there was a lot of frustration by all parties, by the public and by people in Nova Scotia, about what information was coming out. There were challenges with communications between the people on the ground in Nova Scotia and with the commissioner in terms of what was going to be said at that press conference. Correct?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Ms. Bergerman, would it not make sense that the commissioner was then upset when she spoke to you about the fact she'd been given...? I'm not trying to lay blame with anyone, because I think it was a really important point that the commissioner brought up, that at the time this happened, we were a month into COVID. There was a challenge with people having been sent home. The normal working conditions were not in place.

I mean, I would think that the commissioner would have been upset about her not being in the loop about what was being shared at the press conference.

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Yes. Well, that makes sense now, why she was upset, but it should have never been shared with her that we were going to release details of weapons and calibres or whatever the ask was. She should never have been told that.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I don't disagree with you on that, but that's what happened. I think it's important to point out that the information was never shared publicly by anyone from the government or anyone else. In fact, the only way that information did become public, if I remember correctly, was through an ATIP request from the media. It's not like this information was leaked in any way. It did remain confidential.

I have only 15 seconds left here. I just think it's important to remember the challenges that COVID presented. I would suspect that had Nova Scotia's borders not been shut down, there would have been resources provided to you in Nova Scotia that were not available to you. Is that a fair assessment?

• (1415)

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Well, actually, no, because if you were coming into Nova Scotia, even though we had the bubble, and you were coming there to work—it was essential service, basically—then you didn't have to do any of the quarantining.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now move to Ms. Michaud.

You have two and a half minutes in this round. Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In one of the emails that came to light recently, we saw that the RCMP commissioner told the chief of staff or the office of the Minister of Public Safety that information on the pistols and rifles used by the killer should go no further than the minister's office and the office of the Prime Minister.

However, what we understand from the meeting on April 28, a few days later, is that this position had completely changed. The commissioner seemed to be angry or upset that this information was not going to be made public.

I will address Ms. Bergerman first.

In your opinion, Ms. Bergerman, what caused the commissioner to change her mind in this way? Were there any conversations with you, perhaps, or with ministers' offices, that caused her to radically change her position?

[*English*]

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: I'm unaware of why her position changed. I certainly didn't have any conversations with her about it. I would always rely first on the wishes of SiRT and the wishes of the investigative team at that time because they have the intimate knowledge of what they can and cannot release.

I don't know what changed her position.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Leather, do you have any idea what might have happened to cause this position to change so dramatically in a matter of days?

I understand that in an investigation like this, some information cannot be revealed in the first few days, but it can be revealed later. I understand that everything can change very quickly. And yet, this still seems like a rather significant shift in position.

What do you think was behind it?

[*English*]

C/Supt Chris Leather: Like Ms. Bergerman, I'm not aware of any conversations. I certainly didn't have any with the commissioner, deputy commissioner or Public Safety Canada. I was not aware of any significant change from the 23rd to the 28th, in terms of the investigation, which would have a shift like that in terms of openness and an ability or a desire to want to share that information with the public. We're talking about the press conference and it going out in the speaking points.

It remains a mystery to me as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now turn the questions over to Mr. MacGregor.

Sir, you have two and a half minutes whenever you are ready.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thanks, Chair.

I have no further questions.

The Chair: That's refreshing.

Mr. Ellis, I'm sure you do. You have five minutes to ask them. The floor is yours.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you, sir. I was hoping you'd give me the other two and a half minutes, but I'll take what I get, I guess.

It's interesting information that we've learned here.

I'll start with you, Chief Superintendent Leather.

You are the “criminal investigation head”—for lack of a better description—for us civilians in Nova Scotia. Would you have released this information on the 28th, with respect to the guns and the calibers, etc.?

C/Supt Chris Leather: No, sir. We weren't ready to make that release given the ongoing investigations—particularly stateside—which were in their infancy.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Ms. Bergerman, you were actually the head of the RCMP for us civilians in Nova Scotia at that time. Would you have released that information?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: No, I would not have.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: We've heard from testimony—at least written hearsay—that Darren Campbell would not have released that. We know that the SiRT would not have released it.

The question is, how did that information get to people who shouldn't have had it? How did it get to politicians? How did it get in their hands? Do either of you have any idea how it got there?

• (1420)

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: I can only make assumptions, sir. That would be that we shared the information and the inventory list that Chief Superintendent Leather was talking about with the commissioner and that information was passed on to Public Safety.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Chief Superintendent Leather, would that be your assumption as well, sir?

C/Supt Chris Leather: Yes. I'm aware of the emails that went from the commissioner over to the chief of staff for public safety and the deputy minister. That's the extent of my knowledge with the gun inventory.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Is it fair to say then that you actively would have said, “Please do not release this information to the politicians” and they got it anyway?

Is that fair, Ms. Bergerman?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Chief Superintendent Leather, is that your recollection as well?

C/Supt Chris Leather: My recollection was sharing the caveat that it was to remain within the RCMP and not go any further.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Got it.

Ms. Tessier, you were communicating with the commissioner of the RCMP. I guess the question is this: Was it you, then, who released this information? Did you have a conversation with the commissioner and say do with it what you will?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: I didn't have the information.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: So you, who were the communications director... Now, you said—correct me if I'm wrong—that you would communicate directly with the commissioner around this style of information. Is that correct?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: I would communicate with the commissioner on what was going to be released publicly. I did not have access to any operational.... I don't have operational information. We discuss what we can discuss publicly. I am not briefed, generally speaking, on makes, models and that type of thing.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: So then we have, on one side, the operations people, the criminal investigators, who are saying do not release this information, and then we have a commissioner who took the information and did with it what she wanted. That's what it seems to me.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Under pressure.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Under pressure—of course, yes, under pressure from the politicians; Minister Blair, perhaps.

That being said, Chief Superintendent Leather, I think you talked about a meeting on April 27, perhaps going into April 28. You mentioned Dan Brien, who is another communications person. Was it you, sir, who mentioned that meeting?

C/Supt Chris Leather: I mentioned in my opening remarks that there was communication between Dan Brien and Lia Scanlan and Darren Campbell in the division. However, I did not participate in those meetings. I just became aware that they were occurring in the lead-up to the press conference in terms of the preparation of the speaking points, Dan Brien having been a member of Sharon's staff at the time.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Right. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to cede the rest of my time to Mr. Perkins, please.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Perkins. You have another minute.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Bergerman, with regard to the SiRT demand that it stay within the RCMP, did you inform the commissioner or her office that it was not to go out beyond the RCMP?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Deputy Commissioner Brennan—and it was discussed as well between Chief Superintendent Leather and me.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Tessier, did you at any time communicate the details to Lia Scanlan of what was being asked before that press conference?

The Chair: I'm sorry. Your time is up.

I'll give the witness 10 seconds to answer.

Ms. Sharon Tessier: I was never asked to do anything in the conference. I was asking that we release as much information as possible. It wasn't coming from outside.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now call on Mr. Hardie for the last chunk in this round.

Given the time and that we have a hard stop at three o'clock eastern time, I'm going to cut the questions and let the witnesses go after this. Then we will go back to the motion.

Mr. Hardie, you have five minutes.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I may cede some of my time to Ms. Damoff if there is a question I haven't quite gotten answered.

We're dealing with the fog of war here. Things are dynamic. Information is coming in in dribs and drabs, some of it unconfirmed.

Chief Superintendent Leather, at one point you were asked if the alleged gunman was known to the police, and you said no. Okay. That stuff happens, and it happens rather continuously.

I submit to you, Ms. Bergerman, that if the commissioner was not happy in that April 28 conference call that she had with you, it may not have been because the information on the firearms wasn't released but that what happened was yet another failure in the communication process, one of many, that of course was putting your department under a lot of stress and pressure and putting the commissioner under a lot of stress and pressure.

Is that not feasible here?

• (1425)

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: Well, that's not what was communicated from her during the phone call. It was directly related to pressure about the calibre of weapons and that we didn't understand the big picture of the dynamic here with downtown. Certainly she didn't say on the call that she was displeased about our overall communication.

I would submit that the press conference that Chief Superintendent Campbell had just done was one of the best ones I'd seen, and—

Mr. Ken Hardie: But there was an expectation. With all of the various speaking notes going back and forth—and Ms. Tessier, I want you to chime in on this—at one point there was a reasonable expectation on the part of the commissioner that the information on the firearms would be disclosed. Now, how that changed and morphed with the various versions of the speaking notes going back and forth is perhaps a discussion that deserves longer time than we have, but tell us what was going on on the ground. Again, in the fog of war, or in this case this investigation, you had media after you continuously and you were under a lot of pressure. Indeed, there was a lot of criticism of the nature, scope or accuracy of the information that the RCMP was providing to the public during the episode and after the episode.

What was the common knowledge? What kind of information, particularly about the firearms, was being talked about at the street level, on the open-line shows or in the opinion pieces and news reports? Do you have any information on that?

A/Commr Lee Bergerman: No, I don't. I can't speak specifically to what was being talked about publicly because there were a lot of things being talked about publicly. However, I do know, based on Darren Campbell's and the investigative team's advice, that it would have been detrimental to the investigation to release the makes, models and calibres of the weapons publicly.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I understand.

Ms. Damoff, did you want to take my remaining time?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Sure.

Ms. Tessier, the witnesses we have here have said they would not release the types of weapons that were used to elected officials. However, this was given to them because it was in the speaking notes. Is that not correct?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: No, that's not correct.

Ms. Pam Damoff: So where did the commissioner...? The commissioner understood that the information on the weapons would be released. Why was that?

Ms. Sharon Tessier: Well, she understood that we would discuss the weapons. As for the calibres, models and all that, I cannot recollect if that was in one of the versions. I remember it was quite high level, but I assume the decision was made not to discuss them at all because it would just lead to further questions that we couldn't answer at that time. From what I understand, the information that was released was released after a direct request by the commissioner to Nova Scotia.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Ms. Sharon Tessier: You're welcome.

The Chair: Are you done, Ms. Damoff? You have 35 seconds if you want them.

Ms. Pam Damoff: No, that's fine, Chair. I would ask, if we could, to suspend for five minutes, though, after the witnesses are released.

The Chair: Okay. I will release the witnesses with a thank you for the generosity of your time and your expertise.

Colleagues, let's take a five-minute suspension. Then we will come back to deal with the motion.

• (1430) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1430)

The Chair: I now call the resumption of this meeting.

We will now discuss and debate the motion on the floor.

I understand that it's been circulated to all members and translated. Is that correct?

• (1435)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Josée Harrison): Yes.

The Chair: I open the floor to discussion on the motion.

Clerk, you're going to have to help me with the hands that are up because I cannot see them electronically.

The Clerk: We have Mr. Anandasangaree in the room.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Anandasangaree. The floor is yours.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will let others speak on the overall motion, but I do want to propose that we remove “Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and his officials”. We don't believe that it is relevant to what's being discussed today and the original motion that led to the meeting today.

The issue with respect to Justice is about documents. There were over 75,000 documents that have been disclosed to date through the process. The ministry has done that already. The review and disclo-

sure of documents is a work undertaken by officials at the Department of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and does not involve the minister or his office in any way. In fact, any manner in which the minister directs these would be inappropriate, as you are aware, Mr. Chair. Reviewing documents for privilege, which includes cabinet confidences, solicitor-client privileges, other privileges and personal information is the usual process done in all litigation inquiry work by the department—not by the minister or his office.

In addition, document production that follows review is a labour-intensive technical process that happens on a rolling basis and needs to be triaged based on production deadlines and the immediate needs of the inquiry for upcoming hearings.

I can assure the members that all documents related to the April 28, 2020 meeting have been disclosed to the commission. The Department of Justice and government are working co-operatively with the MCC to ensure that all relevant documents are received by the commission in a timely manner.

The Chair: Is this in the form of an amendment to the motion?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Yes, Mr. Chair.

We're essentially just asking that the “Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and his officials” be deleted from the motion.

The Chair: This is an amendment to the original motion. Is that correct?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: That's correct.

The Chair: Okay, now we open a discussion on the amendment.

I have two hands up.

Mr. Noormohamed, I think you were first.

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

I would agree with Mr. Anandasangaree. For all the reasons that have been articulated and outlined, I think it's very important for us to remember the role of the Attorney General of Canada in these deliberations and discussions and what his role is or is not. I think adding him to this conversation is just a bit of a red herring. It not only does not add value; I think it detracts from the important work this committee is trying to do.

I would certainly be in favour of removing his name from this list of witnesses.

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

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

I'm okay with keeping the minister's name in there. It does make reference to his officials, who would probably be in a better place to respond to specific questions.

It's been well documented in the media that the most valuable four pages of Superintendent Campbell's notes, which of course have led to this committee meeting being held, were somehow delayed in getting out into the public, so I do think there is value in hearing from the Department of Justice.

My only other quibble with the motion—and it's a minor one—is just the wording “no later than Wednesday, August 31” of this year. We're all pretty busy in our constituencies these days, so I would just ask if maybe we, as a committee, could come down to some kind of specificity, so we can plan our weeks in August accordingly and not just leave it wide open up until the 31st.

That's my only point there, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do we have—

• (1440)

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, if I can just interject here, that would be a second amendment to the motion, so perhaps we should deal with the first amendment. Then we can deal later on with the August 31 deadline, just to keep everything in order.

The Chair: Okay, so we're dealing with the proposed amendment that would remove the Department of Justice. We've heard several opinions. Do we have any other hands up?

The Clerk: Yes. In the room we have Mr. Fergus and Ms. Dancho.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The reason I think it is important to remove the name of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and the reference to officials from the motion is because our time is limited. Today, in fact, I would have preferred to continue to ask questions of the witnesses, because I know this committee will be sitting again.

The minister is just going to say what Mr. Anandasangaree already outlined: the decision was not his, but that of his officials. So we will waste five or seven minutes if we insist on asking him questions, because he will repeat the same thing.

As for the officials, considering the explanations they gave after Nova Scotia RCMP Superintendent Campbell's notes were released, I can think a number of other people who could give more interesting and enlightening explanations for Canadians and certainly for parliamentarians.

It is simply for the sake of efficiency that I propose to question only the witnesses on the rest of the list. That way we will get a lot of clarification about what happened between the two RCMP offices.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, but we're debating an amendment to the motion on the floor.

Ms. Dancho, you're next on the list.

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

I wanted to mention to Mr. MacGregor regarding his concern timewise that I agree. That's why I put something that gives us over a month. I thought the leads on each party could always discuss this with the knowledge of their colleagues' calendars and we can settle on a date. I just think we should be meeting before Parliament resumes. Again, we're looking to make this so that all parties can agree on it.

I'm wondering if the Liberals have any other objections aside from the Minister of Justice and his officials attending.

The Chair: Let's deal with the amendment on the floor right now.

Clerk, go ahead.

The Clerk: We have Ms. Damoff here, who would like to speak.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Chair, I was going to say exactly what you said. Let's deal with the amendment on the floor, which is whether the Minister of Justice and Attorney General comes, and then we can deal with other issues that we may or may not have.

The Chair: Yes, we're going to have to deal with them one at a time.

Clerk, are there any other hands up to deal with the amendment?

The Clerk: There's Ms. Michaud.

The Chair: Ms. Michaud, take the floor.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask my colleague, Mr. Perkins, for some clarification.

Mr. Perkins, I'm sorry to put you on the spot. But when the mics were off, you told me that it may have been the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada who decided that these documents needed to be released. I don't know if you can answer my open mic question.

To your knowledge, could this have been his decision, not that of his officials?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, do you want the floor?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I can answer. I was a ministerial assistant for almost eight years, so I know that the release of documents to a public inquiry and commission would not be made solely at the official level. It would go into the minister's office for final approval, without question.

• (1445)

The Chair: Do we have other commentary or observations?

Are there other hands up, Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes, Mr. Anandasangaree would like to speak.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

With the greatest respect to Mr. Perkins, I would disagree. Disclosure of this nature is undertaken strictly at the level of the departmental officials and not at the minister's office or the minister's discretion in any circumstances.

The Chair: Do we have other hands up?

The Chair: Ms. Michaud.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Maybe we could compromise and not have the minister, just his officials.

I don't know if that would please everyone.

[*English*]

The Chair: That would be in the form of a subamendment, I would gather. We have to deal with the amendment that's on the floor now.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Very well.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are there any comments about the amendment?

If there aren't, we'll go to a vote. If there are, I'd like to know whose hands are up.

The Clerk: Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, with respect to Ms. Michaud's amendment, we would be in agreement with that, if that is the will of the committee.

The Chair: Clerk, do we then proceed to a vote on the amendment or do we introduce a subamendment as Ms. Michaud has suggested?

The Clerk: You can vote on the subamendment by Ms. Michaud and then go from there.

The Chair: Remind us what the substance of that subamendment is, Clerk.

The Clerk: The subamendment, I believe, was to simply remove the minister and to keep the officials in the motion.

The Chair: Okay. Do we have comment on the subamendment before we go to a vote?

The Clerk: There are no comments in the room.

The Chair: Let's take the subamendment to a vote.

Clerk, remind us about what the vote constitutes and then call the roll, please.

The Clerk: Mr. Lloyd would like to speak first.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Can I just move that we have unanimous consent on the subamendment?

The Chair: That's music to my ears. We have agreement and unanimity that the subamendment, as articulated by the clerk a moment ago, shall pass.

(Subamendment agreed to)

We move back to the amendment.

Can you remind us, Clerk, of the amendment we're debating?

The Clerk: Yes. The amendment was to remove both the minister and the officials from the motion. Now the officials remain in the motion per the subamendment, so it gets a little bit tricky here. You're now just removing the minister from the motion.

The Chair: Yes, there's agreement to remove the minister. There's no agreement that I've heard to remove the officials; the officials should stay as part of the amended motion.

The Clerk: That's correct.

The Chair: Everybody who wants to speak to it has already spoken to it, so we should be in pretty good shape. I like it when we're in good shape.

We would go back to the main motion. Is that correct?

The Clerk: We're already in agreement with the subamendment that the minister is to be removed and the officials remain, so there doesn't need to be a vote on this.

The Chair: There's nothing left.

The Clerk: Ms. Damoff would like to speak, and Mr. Lloyd after that.

The Chair: Ms. Damoff, the floor is yours.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Chair, I just want to speak to Mr. MacGregor's concerns about broad timing by the end of August.

I appreciate Ms. Dancho's giving the chair flexibility here to get witnesses. We also know there's a time in August, particularly the first week of August and also towards the end of the month, when the House is doing its system maintenance, so we're trying to be respectful of that. Again, I commend Ms. Dancho for recognizing that.

I am a little hesitant to put in a specific date, just because we already know that two witnesses were unable to appear today, but I'll give you, Chair, the flexibility to work with the clerk to try to find a date that would work for these witnesses. This is with the caveat, though, that all of us are trying to make plans in our constituencies. Many of us have already made plans in our constituencies, and if we can get more than a couple of days' notice from the clerk as to when the date might be, it would make it a lot easier for us, rather than just leaving the rest of the summer open.

I'd like to hear from Mr. MacGregor on that, but I think we should leave it with the chair to find a date and notify us with good timing so that we can make plans accordingly.

• (1450)

The Chair: I have Mr. Lloyd. He had his hand up.

Mr. Lloyd, go ahead.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Substantively, I agree with Ms. Damoff. As long as it's within the timeline that we passed in the motion, I'm fine with it. I totally agree that we need some advance direction from the clerk so that we can all make plans around it. I agree with that.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Given that the critical system maintenance starts on Monday, August 22, perhaps the specificity we're looking for that would also give us a little bit of leeway is possibly during the week of Monday, August 15. Again, some of us are going to have events set up then.

The Chair: I don't know if that's going to work for everybody or not, so I think we need a bit of discretion here. I'm very happy, on your behalf, to provide that discretion. I can hear clearly the willingness of the committee and that this must happen before the resumption of Parliament. Given the holiday schedules, the House of Commons' capacity and the infrastructure available, there are a lot of moving parts here. If the committee is okay with it, you can leave it up to the clerk and the chair to come up with the most convenient time given all those exigencies. I'd be glad to take on that responsibility.

Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I think we've covered this. I agree with using the chair's discretion, and unless anyone's against that, I move to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Don't we have to pass the motion first?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: We've already been told the motion has been passed.

Mr. Ken Hardie: No. That was the amendment.

The Chair: We have to do a formal vote.

Ms. Pam Damoff: If you want to adjourn, Dane, that's fine.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: No, no.

The Chair: I wish they were all this easy, but I'm sure the clerk would be very happy if we had some formal roll call on the main motion. Wouldn't you, Clerk?

The Clerk: You can choose to have a roll call or you can unanimously agree that it's at the chair's discretion.

The Chair: Can we unanimously agree that it's at the chair's discretion, given what we have heard, and that the motion carry? I see thumbs-up. Is everybody okay with that?

The Clerk: I believe Mr. Fergus would like interject.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I fully agree with your having full discretion in finding a date that would be convenient.

[*Translation*]

I would like to know one thing, though, and this is for all members of the committee. If the date falls on September 1 or 2 instead of August 31, would it respect the spirit of the motion?

I see people nodding their heads on the other side of the room.

I just want to give you as much flexibility as possible to find a date that works for everyone.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, I would interpret "the discretion of the chair" to include any minor modification that would be within the motion itself.

We have agreement, then, on the main motion.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: With that agreement in place, I think that our work is done for the day. It was a long day with very efficient use of our time.

I would like to thank all of our members. We will get back to you as soon as we've come up with the best date, given all of the contingencies. I thank you all for a very productive meeting. We'll see you the next time.

This meeting is now adjourned.

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