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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. This is meeting number 20 of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security on Tuesday, January 31, 2012.

Before we begin, I want to welcome all members of this committee back to work here in this new session. Happy new year. I know we are all looking forward to a very productive session.

In our second hour today we will take time to have committee business. It's been on the agenda, and we will have it.

In our first hour today, pursuant to a motion brought forward by Monsieur Chicoine, which we passed before the Christmas break, we're meeting with Canada's new Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Our committee wants to provide a warm welcome to Commissioner Robert Paulson.

Welcome here.

He has appeared before our committee in the past, and we are very pleased to have him appear again here today in his new role of commissioner.

Congratulations on that appointment, Mr. Commissioner. We certainly wish you all the best moving forward in this new role.

My understanding is that Mr. Paulson has no opening statement and that he wants to provide as much opportunity as possible for each one of us to ask questions. So we will proceed into the first round of questioning, starting with the parliamentary secretary, Ms. Hoepfner, for seven minutes.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I also want to extend a welcome to you, sir. Thank you so much for being here. Congratulations on your appointment. I know the government is very pleased that you accepted this position. We have tremendous confidence in your capability, and we know that you're going to bring a lot of experience and a lot of benefit to the position. Again, we congratulate you and we want you to know you have our full support.

Commr Robert Paulson (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: My very first question is about something that has been discussed very recently. It was brought up

during question period by opposition members, and it's been in the news and in the forefront over the last maybe three, four, or five days. It has to do with the communications protocol that is in place. Our government has been accused of muzzling you. You've been accused of really not having a mind of your own and not having independence.

Commr Robert Paulson: It's not the first time.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: At the very forefront, I want to give you the opportunity to respond to those questions. I'm wondering, for our benefit and for the benefit of Canadians, if you could also explain your experience in terms of past protocols—certainly protocols for government organizations that answer to a minister, but also the protocol of any organization you've been part of vis-à-vis its strategy for communicating with the people it serves.

So, sir, could you begin by addressing the communications issue?

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you for that.

Mr. Chair, I didn't see any of the news this afternoon or today, but the communications protocol that's been brought into effect for the RCMP is one that simply reflects the policies the RCMP has had for years and years and years. It essentially consolidates all of our policies into a helpful document that assists me and assists decision-makers in our organization. Our policies used to speak about the need to bring things forward when they might attract attention, for instance in the national media or as the subject of questions in the House of Commons.

This protocol tries to formalize a class of activity that already existed in our policy, and it makes it easier, frankly, for me to engage my deputy commissioners, my commanding officers in all of the regions, to make sure we are identifying key issues that are outside of operational matters. One of my challenges as Commissioner of the RCMP is having a bit of a dual role, both as the head of police operations and as the head of a significant department within the government. That's all the protocol is designed to do: to give some structure to those roles and to make sure they are separate.

I have certainly not been muzzled, but thank you for that question. I don't know how it came to be that I was thought to be muzzled, but I'm not. I think I have a duty to perform, which I try to do, and it's the same duty I expect all of my staff to perform.

The Chair: Ms. Hoepfner, you still have four minutes.

• (1535)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you very much.

I want to go to another topic at this point. In December and November we heard some pretty disturbing reports in regard to sexual harassment among the RCMP. As soon as you were appointed, you immediately took a pretty tough stance on that.

I can tell you that I just came back from a series of town hall meetings in my riding of Portage—Lisgar, and constituents brought that issue forward. There is so much respect for the RCMP, but when there's any kind of report of misconduct...any kind of misconduct, but it's especially disturbing to hear of that kind of harassment.

Can you please explain to us your stance, and why being tough on this issue is important and action needs to be taken?

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you for that.

Just as I was appointed, actually, so in and around November, pre-existing cases and complaints of harassment and sexual harassment really bubbled up and attracted a lot of attention. My response and my strategy has been to first of all centralize the oversight of all of our harassment complaints. When I talk about harassment, that includes sexual harassment, but we also have other cases of harassment. Right now I think we have about 87 or 90 cases under review. From year to year we'll have maybe 130 cases, up to 150 in some years, of complaints of harassment, which include all variations of gender. We'll have male complaining against male—every variation.

One of the things we needed to do to demonstrate to Canadians that we were committed to having a respectful workplace was to assemble all of the complaints into the centre here and make sure that timelines were respected. One thing we've heard from some complainants was that they've made complaints and haven't heard anything, that things have taken a long time to get resolved.

By centralizing the oversight of the process, we've been able to make sure that timelines are being respected, that the complainants are being advised appropriately, that the people who are the subject of the complaints are also brought along. That goes to the process issue, but there are also the core behaviours that give rise in the first place to any sort of complaints. I had all of the commanding officers come to Ottawa, where we had a very special and pointed conversation about expectations around oversight of behaviours and leadership and accountability in the divisions.

I met with my SEC colleagues, the senior executive of the force, which includes all the deputy commissioners, and had that same sort of frank discussion. We recognized that there were opportunities to improve upon how we manage discipline and conduct in the organization, so we've taken some steps toward moving to improve that process.

I also had a meeting with the lead of the agency from the Status of Women. We've undertaken to do a gender-based audit of our workforce, which will essentially look at current practices and examine how.... The day I had that meeting with the head of that agency, we were looking at some of the paraphernalia in my office, including Mounties on horses and hands holding swords. She was quick to point out that they were all male hands and male Mounties on horses. It illustrates some of the challenges we have in terms of advancing the organization.

There are a couple more things that need to be done with respect to the sexual component of the harassment complaint. We've had a hard look at the number of women we have in senior positions in the organization. We're under-represented significantly. I think it's rather intuitive to know that if more women were at the senior decision-making level of the organization, we would have a more balanced approach to workplace issues and respectful workplace matters. I've increased the number of women that we're recruiting into the organization at depot. We had been aiming for a 30% representation in our intake. We've upped it to 35%, which is well beyond the labour market availability.

So those are just some of the things we've had to do.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry to cut you off a little bit, but we're trying to keep to a timeline.

You have seven minutes, Mr. Sandhu, please.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you to the commissioner for being here today. On behalf of the official opposition, I also want to thank the commissioner for taking on this very, very difficult job.

We had hoped for two hours to be able to meet with you; however, there are so many important issues to discuss. They are not only important to this committee but important to Canadians, so I'll get on with the questions very shortly.

I think we can all agree that restoring the public's confidence in the force is critical at this point. I hope that under your leadership we will be able to restore that confidence in the RCMP.

I'll get right on to the questions. Following up on a similar line of questioning from my colleague, Mr. Paulson, I was hoping you could clarify—I want to get a very clear idea—whether you need approval from the minister's office in order to meet parliamentarians.

Commr Robert Paulson: No.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Certainly part of what we saw in an e-mail from the minister's office was that the other party members have to be there to meet you.

Commr Robert Paulson: I don't know what the minister's office or the department has said. The bottom line is that I don't think I need anybody's approval to meet anybody.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Okay. My second question is, do you need approval from the minister's office in order to issue a press release?

Commr Robert Paulson: No.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: So that's done directly under the RCMP. You do not go through any sort of communication with the minister's office.

Commr Robert Paulson: Well, on your first question, the simple answer is no. To elaborate a bit on the communications protocol, which I think we're heading towards, I think we recognize that there are instances when we would want to give people who are ultimately accountable to Parliament for our activities a heads-up or advisory of a particular issue. But we don't need approval to issue press releases.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: What if that issue involves investigating the government itself? Would that communication go—

Commr Robert Paulson: Well, then, absolutely no.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Okay.

You have worked with the RCMP for over 20 years. In previous positions, such as deputy commissioner, have you ever had to ask for approval from the minister's office to meet with other parliamentarians?

Commr Robert Paulson: No.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Okay. I'll move on to my next line of questioning.

I was very pleased when you took the position and you talked very strongly about tackling this harassment issue in the RCMP. What measures are being taken now to deal with outstanding harassment complaints?

Commr Robert Paulson: Well, the outstanding complaints need to be in our current process. That's going to change in a little while, but the current process requires that a harassment complaint be screened for validity. Once it's determined to be a valid harassment complaint, then it's analyzed for code of conduct or criminality.

That's a bit of a cumbersome process, but one of the things we've done immediately is to go directly to a code of conduct or criminal investigation, if it's warranted. The steps we're taking are to make sure that all of those complaints currently before us are screened and investigated and that determinations are made. Part of that process, though, includes in the very early instance to have opportunities for early resolution and so on.

That's what we're doing. We're making sure that the existing harassment complaints are thoroughly, fairly, and quickly investigated and acted upon.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: You mentioned the words “cumbersome process”. We've heard from a number of complainants that this process was way too long. Some of the complaints have been there for eight or nine years.

What steps are you taking to make sure these harassment complaints are resolved in a timely manner?

Commr Robert Paulson: I don't take issue with some of them being around for that long of a time, but let me distinguish between a disciplinary process on the back of a harassment complaint that's taking years to get resolved versus a harassment complaint that's unscreened for years and years.

I know that's a fairly delicate difference, but if you'll give me a second.... A harassment complaint is made and it gets screened as either a workplace conflict or harassment, which gives rise to a code of conduct that attracts the RCMP Act. Depending on what the behaviours are, that may attract a criminal investigation.

So if the code of conduct, say, is attracted by the conduct, then we have this very cumbersome disciplinary process, which seeks to provide all parties with a sense of the fundamental principles of justice, fairness, and so on. That has gotten away on us, I confess, and it is in dire need of an overhaul. It's something that we're doing actively.

● (1545)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Okay.

How do complaints break down between ranks and gender?

Commr Robert Paulson: I don't know if I have them between.... I have them per division, and somewhere in this pile here is a separation between gender. But I'll say this. There's a fair representation in each category of women complaining against women, women complaining against men, men complaining against women, and men complaining against men. Not all of them are sexual, though. I think we need to separate that class of harassment. If we have sexual harassment, we have a whole different class of conduct, which immediately attracts....

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Would you be able to forward those numbers to the committee at a later date?

Commr Robert Paulson: Yes.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sandhu, for those questions.

We'll now move back to Mr. Norlock, please.

Mr. Norlock, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, welcome to the committee. I know it's not new to you. Some people consider you to be in a hot seat; I consider it a warm seat. You should feel at home with this committee because we should be here to help you. And from time to time, of course, accountability comes through.

But I want to talk about pride. As you probably know, because you're a policeman and you've got to know who you're talking to, for 30 years I wore a uniform. It was a provincial police uniform. I know that we were always told that if you're going to have pride in what you do, you have to look good, and then portray that—from you comes the image.

Canadians do have pride. I heard “reinstitute pride, reinstitute confidence”. Quite frankly, Canadians do have pride and confidence in their national police force, as do we and as do I. But I'm just wondering if you have some new and innovative ideas to bring to the table to let the men and women know that Canadians support them, and what they can do to show appreciation of that support through how they work and what they look like.

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you for that question.

That's what I've been engaged in over the last several weeks, since my appointment, frankly, when I can find the time. For example, last week I was in eastern Canada and I had occasion to get out with some of our officers and do a quick traffic enforcement. In P.E.I. they're having a particular problem with impaired drivers.

I went for a media availability event afterwards and I took two members with me. There was one officer who had gotten about 23 impaired drivers by himself within a prescribed period of time and another officer who, with his team, had solved a burglary in progress. While the reporter was very interested in understanding what I'd said or done at the lunch with the provincial and territorial ministers, I kept wheeling these officers out to try to talk about them. That's what I want to do. I want to showcase the incredible work we do. I know we have some challenges and we have some issues, but I tell you solemnly that our men and women are doing remarkable work day in, day out, for Canadians. And to the extent that we can figure out new and innovative ways of showcasing that without appearing to be trying to pat ourselves on the back, I think Canadians would be interested in some of the work we do.

What I've asked our communications people and my colleagues to do is to look for opportunities, innovative ways, because I think just sending out a press release and saying how smart we were or how Johnny-on-the-spot we were isn't cutting it. We need to be a little bit more aggressive in doing that, because I tell you, there is some amazing work being done in the federal business line, in the contract business line, internationally, everywhere.

• (1550)

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you for that.

Have I got more time?

The Chair: Five more minutes.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Great.

I'm just out for a comment from you. I don't mean to be too preachy, but I'm going to be somewhat suggestive.

Late in my career, sometime in my career, we were always told that if you want to incite confidence from the people you serve, you need to look the part. I just wanted to reiterate the fact that any time I've seen the RCMP—and not just on the Hill here in official capacity, in the red serge, but whenever I've been in other parts of Canada. I know we are proud of them. They do look good, they wear their uniform properly, etc.

I'm just wondering about some of the programs you might have internally to heighten the men's and women's attention to those types of necessities, and furthermore, to get their message out to the people they serve in the cities, towns, and villages.

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you, again, for that question.

I can tell you that I recently brought along a corps sergeant major to be by my side, and that individual's responsibility is the deportment, in the broadest sense, of all our officers and NCOs. I've also reinvigorated our divisions, so that every commanding officer will have a sergeant major. We call it the warrant rank. In fact, I'm bringing the warrant rank in next week, I believe, to meet with all of our commanding officers and to reinvigorate the warrant rank.

I agree with you, I must say, that if you're paying attention to your uniform, you're paying attention to how you conduct yourself with Canadians and your engagement with Canadians. Deportment needs to be understood in the broadest of possible senses. I put it on our warrant ranks and my corps sergeant major to square that off. That's one aspect.

The other aspect that we're moving towards in a revamped conduct regime is to push down discipline. Discipline should be corrective and it should be developmental, ideally. Sometimes we get to what I described earlier in my new role as dark-hearted behaviour—those people have to be treated differently—but by and large discipline is intended to develop people and to fix mistakes. So we're going to be pushing down informal discipline, redefining our discipline scheme, and describing it as a conduct regime, so that NCOs, corporals, and sergeants have conduct of the lion's share of our day-to-day discipline.

One of the things the Brown task force talked about was the importance of the NCO ranks to the organization, and that is absolutely true. We need to have our NCOs empowered because they are, frankly, the backbone of the organization.

There are a number of other initiatives as well.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you, Commissioner.

One of the tools that I found was very effective in the interrelationship between management and the men and women who pound the beat was some form of participatory management, detachment planning, or that type of thing. Does the RCMP have any equivalent of that?

Commr Robert Paulson: Yes, we do. Many detachments and units have an advisory group of employees, who get together and inform the detachment commander or the officer in charge of that particular unit. In fact in the federal context, I know that here at headquarters in our national security area, Assistant Commissioner Gilles Michaud brought in a whole new approach to how he manages that program. He has the very thing of which you speak—the employee committee advising him on issues, which can be seen by our junior officers and our senior NCOs to be circumventing, but it engages. I think we all agree that to the extent that we can have an engaged workforce, we'll have a productive and happy workforce, so it's a very targeted strategy for engaging our employees.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Commissioner.

We'll now move to Mr. Scarpaleggia, please, for seven minutes.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Commissioner Paulson. We wholeheartedly support your appointment. We think it's an excellent appointment, and we wish you much success in discharging your duties.

I just want to follow up on a point that Mr. Sandhu raised, which is whether or not you need permission from the minister's office to meet different parliamentarians. I'm a little confused on that issue still. Do you need permission?

• (1555)

Commr Robert Paulson: No, but if I can elucidate—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Yes, please.

Commr Robert Paulson: I think I can meet whoever I want, whenever I want. I think the practice is one in respect of parliamentarians or senators. If they want to meet with me, I advise the department and the minister's office and give them an opportunity to engage with their fellow parliamentarians to have an examination of what the issue is.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: But why should they have to route their request through the minister's office? Why can't they just contact you and leave it up to you to decide whether you should be meeting them? Then you would inform the minister's office, because they should know, rightfully, who you're meeting. But why do they have to route their request through the minister's office and give the minister the opportunity to maybe discourage that meeting request?

Commr Robert Paulson: I think your emphasis on the word "route" is taken from an e-mail I wrote to the good senator. Just because I used the word "route" doesn't mean they have to route their request. I was trying to say, "Why don't you go and talk to your colleague, and then we'll reassess."

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Well, I think the word "route" means that you have to go through the minister. Anyway, I won't pursue that too much.

But do other parliamentarians from other parties need to be present?

Commr Robert Paulson: Well, you know, I don't know. I don't think so. I know the minister expressed some issue of fairness. I don't know what Senator Kenny—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: But are you waiting for the minister to tell you (a) whether you can meet this parliamentarian and (b) whether members of other parties need to be present?

Commr Robert Paulson: Am I waiting for him to tell me that?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Well, when someone makes a request, you say to them—you write back to Senator Kenny—"I'm sorry, I can't help you right now; you have to route your request through the minister." So you're waiting to hear from the minister's office (a) whether you can meet Senator Kenny and (b) whether you should be meeting him in the presence of maybe Ms. Hoepfner, or Mr. Aspin, or Mr. Sandhu. Is that the way it works?

Commr Robert Paulson: I'd just as soon not meet with Senator Kenny, to be honest with you.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: But he's an expert on security and his committee has produced I think 24 reports on security.

Commr Robert Paulson: No, I know that. I've met with Senator Kenny before.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I don't need to meet with you necessarily, but I think Senator Kenny should be meeting with you because he has something very specific to say on these issues because his committee has focused on the RCMP and on public security, and I think he's a very wise man when it comes to public security.

But I won't continue on that line, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask you about the gun registry and the firearms reports that come from the RCMP. You know, it is a little fishy that the recent firearms report came out on December 16, on the last day Parliament was sitting, after second reading debate on—

The Chair: On a point of order.

Just one moment, Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Actually, we all left on December 15. The House rose.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Well, that is actually even fishier because it's right after Parliament stopped sitting. It's right after second—

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia, the point is taken.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Don't misinform.

The Chair: I think Parliament had already recessed for the Christmas break, so I'll take that as a point of order, but I—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: It's not central to my point.

The Chair: Yes, okay, continue.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: It's just important to not misinform Canadians.

The Chair: Continue.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: It's not central to my point. I apologize.

But the issue here is that it was released after second reading debate on Bill C-19. It was released after this committee finished amending Bill C-19. The same thing happened when Parliament was debating Ms. Hoepfner's bill, Bill C-391. I just find it odd that the reports are coming out later and later and they seem to be timed in a political fashion.

I'd like you to give us a bit of background on why it was released so late when it obviously was prepared a long time before, because it had former Commissioner Elliott's signature appended to it.

Commr Robert Paulson: Okay. Well, here's what I can tell you. Of course, I was appointed in late November. The report showed up in my office on, I think, December 14. I think I signed a covering letter to it on December 15, and it was hand-carried to the Department of Public Safety on December 16.

So from my end—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Fair enough. Okay.

Commr Robert Paulson: I think I held up my end pretty well there.

• (1600)

The Chair: All right, Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Can I ask one more question?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I'd like to ask you a question, as a police officer, as a professional, and I'm going back to the gun registry, if you don't mind. Some of the witnesses who came before the committee told us that the registry, which the commissioner's report is very supportive of, actually, if you look at it.... I understand you didn't sign it, but the report signed by Mr. Elliott is quite supportive of the registry. Witnesses came and told us that the registry gets in the way of the relationship between police officers and law-abiding citizens. It creates distrust between law-abiding citizens, specifically law-abiding gun owners, and police officers.

In your professional opinion, is that the case?

Commr Robert Paulson: To be absolutely clear, I don't have a full understanding of what you just said, of how it gets—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Witnesses came to the committee, and they said that because police officers have the right to take away their weapon, this creates a distrust between them, as law-abiding gun owners, and police officers. This is what the government has been arguing for quite a while, actually.

I'm just wondering if you believe that's the case. Do you think that law-abiding gun owners, as citizens, have a distrust for police generally—not the RCMP—because of the existence of the gun registry and the powers the police have with respect to gun ownership?

Commr Robert Paulson: Well, I think.... Look, that's part of the fundamental challenge of running a police force the size of the RCMP.

To the public trust issue, we have a lot of powers, and we can impact the lives of Canadians in many, many different ways, so it doesn't surprise me. That's why I think we undergo the sort of level of scrutiny and demands for accountability and transparency that everybody makes of us. So—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: So it's not the registry. It's how police are trained to deal with citizens.

Commr Robert Paulson: I can't speak to what other witnesses have said about that, sir. I just know that we have to be mindful of people's rights.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner Paulson.

Thank you, Mr. Scarpaleggia.

[Translation]

Mr. Chicoine, you have five minutes.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Commissioner, for coming here today. We wish you all the best in performing your new functions. Since Canadians seem to have very high expectations of you, we would like you to make the best decisions possible in order to restore the confidence of Canadians in the RCMP.

Mr. Paulson, a task force on governance and cultural change in the RCMP informed the government in 2007 that the current oversight system of the RCMP lacked transparency. What is your evaluation of the current state of oversight of the RCMP by a civilian third party?

Commr Robert Paulson: First of all, thank you for your comments.

I am very much in favour of external monitoring of the RCMP. I will continue in English to make myself clear.

[English]

I think the external review of policing is absolutely vital to public confidence. When I was the assistant commissioner in contract and aboriginal policing, I held the pen, actually, on developing our external review and investigation policy.

I think it's.... Where jurisdictions have a means of providing that external review and investigation, our policies require that we subscribe and cooperate. I think it's absolutely vital to our core mission.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Do you think that a national civilian oversight body should have the power to make recommendations that are binding on the RCMP commissioner?

Commr Robert Paulson: In fact, that is the case now.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: In your opinion, what would be the best measures to take soon in order to improve civilian oversight so as to restore the public's full confidence in the RCMP?

Commr Robert Paulson: First of all, I think that the government has the responsibility to make decisions regarding external oversight of the RCMP. Our responsibility is to provide the information regarding the RCMP, and I make every effort to do so as commissioner. That is what we are doing in the case of the CPC harassment investigation. We are providing all our information to the CPC.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: You mentioned earlier that you intended to centralize the resources in Ottawa. However, some stakeholders see the RCMP as perhaps too large to be overseen properly.

How will you make sure that commanding officers inform you properly about the issues related to complaints and the corresponding disciplinary measures?

• (1605)

Commr Robert Paulson: We centralized oversight, but we have not centralized the investigations or decisions within the divisions.

I will continue in English.

[English]

to be precise on this.

I think that's a very good question.

What we've done.... So in centralizing the oversight, that gives me the opportunity to get the sort of big picture view, but what I've done with my commanding officers is I've written them directly on this issue to say, look, here are my expectations with regard to how you will manage some of these discipline matters. I've been quite particular in laying out my expectations.

I've also laid out a personal responsibility. I was just questioned this morning by our criminal operations officers, and in order for me to be persuasive with our front-line supervisors and leaders, if I'm not doing that at the top with my deputy commissioners and my senior executive, then I think all is lost. So first of all, I'm setting the example. Second of all, I'm making very, very clear our expectations and I'm requiring a certain accountability of leaders and supervisors.

The Chair: You have another 30 seconds if you choose.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Earlier, you mentioned the new protocol, which seems to be limiting you. Why was this new communication protocol necessary?

Commr Robert Paulson: A new protocol is necessary because our officers and people at the department change often. Our policy was very clear, but it could be found in many places within the RCMP. Therefore, it made sense to group everything together and sign an agreement with the department to clarify how non-operational communication should be managed.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Merci, Monsieur Chicoine.

Now we have Mr. Leef, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My comments will probably mirror Mr. Norlock's a little on the department front in the introduction. I must say that from my past I feel as though I should be standing to salute you before I address you. I certainly hoped when I introduced myself that you wouldn't be checking out the shine on my shoes to see if I was up to snuff any more, but I've been trying to retain my diligence at that.

I'm from the Yukon territory. I represent a northern riding. I just want to give you an opportunity to share your experiences with the committee from a rural and northern perspective, and maybe just touch on what you see as some of the challenges facing the three territories, and perhaps ones that overlay the rural part of our county as you take on this new role.

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you.

I don't want to sound like I am making a pitch here, but if you have not had the opportunity to tour the territories and see some of the remote deployments of our officers, it is really quite something to behold.

First of all, let me say how impressed and thankful I am for the work that the folks do in our territories day in and day out. They are the representatives of the Government of Canada in many respects, beyond what you would expect of policing. Therein lies the challenge, and most of our officers, God bless them, are absolutely community oriented. The people who go up north are a special breed of people. I'm not trying to shine your apple or anything, Mr. Reef, but they are remarkable people.

The challenge is keeping people engaged in the organization, cycling into the north, providing the support for them as they make the sacrifices for their families and other sort of amenities in the north. Personnel-wise it's a challenge. Community engagement is quite a success, frankly. We've had some challenges in some areas from time to time, but by and large our people are very well respected up there.

As the north begins to grow we're seeing what you would normally expect. I didn't come here to whine and snivel about resources, but we need to be mindful of how the north is growing and, as opportunities develop in the north, that I am able to deploy enough resources to satisfy the demand.

• (1610)

Mr. Ryan Leef: This touches a little on what Mr. Scarpaleggia was saying. I think you answered the question quite well, but I just want to tie it up a little bit.

Do you feel that your role as commissioner of the RCMP is to comment on legislation the government is dealing with and offer opinions on the creation of legislation, or is it more to engage in the business of enforcing the law and having your forces do that?

Commr Robert Paulson: That's right. To the extent that I can concentrate on my primary mission, which is to lead this tremendous

organization in the mission of keeping Canadians safe, then all the better.

I do have a role from time to time to provide advice to the minister and the department when I'm asked, but I agree with you that I don't think it's my role to comment publicly on legislation or matters of the government.

The Chair: You have a few more moments if you choose to use them, Mr. Leef.

Mr. Ryan Leef: On the territorial front, through the RCMP contracts the territorial government is working closely with the Northern Institute of Social Justice. I won't put you on the spot and expect you to know about that program, but they are engaging in strategies to recruit first nations into the RCMP. Maybe you can comment on some of the national strategies you are looking at to deal with the first nations recruiting issue in the country.

Commr Robert Paulson: Okay.

I ask for a lot of innovation from my people, and I want to get away from the idea that our policies in the past have prevented us from having people in a community come back to a community. The only way, frankly, we're going to get adequate representation from some of these distant communities and provide inroads into those communities, really, is to have local people brought into the organization and brought back to the communities. That's an initiative, a trial, a pilot, as we refer to it, we're engaged in right now. We're actively recruiting people from aboriginal communities and asking them to go back to those communities. There are some risks in that sort of strategy. There is some good thinking around being able to move people around. That's one of the things we're prepared to risk out.

The Chair: Thank you.

I know I'm cutting you off a little bit. I'm just trying to keep to the timelines here.

We'll go to Mr. Garrison, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for appearing, Mr. Paulson.

I want to go back to the question of the independence of the police force. Canada's a little bit unusual, I think, in that in our system, the independence of the courts and the prosecutors and the police is really key to the functioning of our justice system. But the courts and the prosecutors have a few more institutional protections of that independence. The reason we're concerned, on this side, is that independence in the policing forces really operates as a convention, and it depends on the integrity of both sides to protect that independence. I have no reason or wish to question your integrity. But I think no matter who is the government, any government will always be tempted to push across that line. That's my reason for going back to this question about your relationship with the minister.

In the case of meetings, if we're talking about prior notice of meetings, is that just for members of Parliament and senators, or are there other meetings you would include in that category, where the minister might receive prior notice?

Commr Robert Paulson: It is primarily for parliamentarians, but sometimes I'll alert.... I can't think of an instance when I've done that. I get requests for a lot of meetings from a lot of folks, and generally I meet with a lot of people and a lot of folks. Sometimes some of the folks are from other countries, or ambassadors want to meet with me, and so on.

I agree with you. The independence of this organization is absolutely vital, and I'm defending it like a terrier. But I also have a role to play in the broader community here. It's kind of a dual-hatted thing. I'm not a politician. I wasn't elected to anything, and I don't really think it's my area to be weighing in on that. My test would be that as the nature of the meeting begins to approach a political realm, I would perform a bit of an assessment as to the political nature of the meeting and would want to step away from it.

•(1615)

Mr. Randall Garrison: I guess I would say, with respect, that I trust your judgment on that more than I do the minister's judgment on that. I think any minister would have a tendency to push the boundaries to get more information about what others in the political system are doing.

Commr Robert Paulson: I'll say this, sir, if I can, because that's an important point. I've been in Ottawa for six years now, and my experience has been that people are very mindful of staying away from the operations of the RCMP. I don't have a lot of problems with that. I think people want to engage the RCMP for a number of different reasons, but operationally, that's a line we don't cross.

Mr. Randall Garrison: You mentioned the Brown task force. What's the current status of that? Is there any existing report on progress on the non-legislative recommendations, or is a report planned?

Commr Robert Paulson: There was quite a comprehensive report that Commissioner Elliott put out some time ago, and he tried to distribute it as widely as possible. We've achieved just about everything we agreed to achieve. I know there are some other legislative requirements. But short of the role and the mandate of headquarters, which has expanded, I've just reinitiated or relaunched a wide-ranging review of that. We didn't deliver on a document on the mandate of headquarters, which is a little contentious, but that's coming. With the exception of the university degrees for new admittance, everything else is pretty good.

Mr. Randall Garrison: One of the concerns raised by the task force was fair compensation for hours worked and the problem of understaffing and backfilling.

Can you tell us how much progress has been made on that?

Commr Robert Paulson: Our staffing levels are at our funding levels. With policing in particular you're always going to face.... And we have a number of sources of funds, too. With every division we have agreements of new contracts with the provinces and so on. To the extent that we have empty positions, we should staff those, but I'm fairly satisfied that they're staffed. The problem is our ability to prioritize our work and to say no to some things. I think you come into a police force wanting to solve everybody's problems, but if we're not properly led and supervised, we'll let these people run themselves into the ground. One of my strategies is to help people say no.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Frankly, that's a concern. As a former municipal police board member, we always had concerns that our members would work themselves into the ground because of their dedication and their commitment.

Commr Robert Paulson: That's a very real danger.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I'm very pleased to see that it's one of your priorities, because I know it's one of the most difficult things for those members.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Garrison.

I'm going to take the chair's prerogative. I did look to the government side to see if there was another question. I would like to ask you a couple of questions.

First of all, to assure Mr. Garrison, I think it was in the late nineties—and maybe there are some reporters here who would be able to tell the time better than I can—that the Hughes report came out. One of the very strong recommendations in the Hughes report was the depoliticization of police forces. I can assure you that our government very much pushed for that then, and we still very much believe in that now. I know that the current minister, who was the lead critic at the time, stood very strong on that point, during the Hughes report and shortly after that. The Hughes report was in the late nineties and I think he came into power in 2000.

My question to you, Mr. Commissioner, is about a couple of things we took as a committee before the appointment of a commissioner.... One was the development of leadership from within. How do we develop leadership from within the ranks of the RCMP, not just to some day reach the position that you have been appointed to, but to make certain that good governance and leadership from within the RCMP are enhanced by certain resources or by programs to enhance leadership? That would be my first question.

Secondly, we've seen very strong recruitment in our armed forces over the last little while. Are there any new plans for selling recruitment to the RCMP, so that the youngest and the brightest men and women who are coming out of our high schools, colleges, and universities would want a career in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police?

•(1620)

Commr Robert Paulson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that.

Let me talk about the leadership development programs. You may have heard about the force's efforts to revamp our whole approach to developing and training leaders and providing support for our leaders. We have three levels: the supervisory development program, the managerial development program, and the executive development program. Just this morning in fact I got the final briefing on the third leg of that, which is the officer development program. I'm very reassured by what I'm seeing there. I've received tremendous feedback from some of our corporals and front-line supervisors who have gone on the supervisory program. Our middle managers have similarly given me positive feedback. It's all real-life-based leadership examples. It's not theoretical. I think we've come a long way there. We'll not see the fruit of that for perhaps another year or two.

On the executive development plan, this morning I talked about a desire to professionalize the officer corps of the RCMP. Earlier I talked about the need to have NCOs step up and run the place effectively under the supervision of our warrant groups and so on. But we also need effective managers who are professional officers. That's why we have all the pips, crowns, and bling on the shoulders. But we need to preserve that in the traditions of this organization. We are taking steps to start to give officers...and to start to expect from officers that they understand the context in which they are being asked to lead. I'm very excited by that. I think it's in good stead.

On the recruitment issue, I take your point. We don't have any problem getting applicants. We have a lot of applicants. One of our challenges is to get to a steady state of recruiting so that we're not up and down in terms of intake of people at Regina. Of course, that turns a lot on how the provinces and territories and the economies of the various regions of our country develop. The point is to elevate our intake in terms of the class of people we're taking. We have a very rigorous screening process. Often, as I root through some of these more unattractive discipline situations, we always end up back at our recruiting opportunities. We're polygraphing our recruits. We're looking for life experiences. We're looking for education. I think there's an opportunity there to try to improve that as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go back to the New Democratic Party one more time.

We go to Madam Morin.

[Translation]

You still have five minutes.

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Thank you.

First of all, I would like to thank you for coming here to meet with our committee. It is helpful to speak with you.

Given the incredible state of harassment complaints, would it be pertinent to entrust oversight of the regulations regarding the harassment cases to a third party in order to show more transparency to the public?

Commr Robert Paulson: Yes. Our policies regarding harassment and our regulations are very clear. Managers and others have received training in these matters. This is well known. It may be a bit complicated, as was said earlier, but our policies and regulations comply with those of the government.

[English]

I think I'm open to any sorts of improvements in our policies, in our oversight of that. I'm very anxious to understand and take the advice of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP—which is doing a systemic review, as you know—so yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: In your opinion, what would be the best measures to adopt soon to improve civilian oversight in order to restore the trust of the public in the RCMP? This trust is not necessarily lost, but we know that it is weakened somewhat.

• (1625)

Commr Robert Paulson: Yes, well put.

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: I am not saying that it is gone, but—

Commr Robert Paulson: First of all, I think that this must be transparent. We must be clear that we are prepared to help our colleagues everywhere who are responsible for overseeing the RCMP. When we make mistakes and there are complaints against us, we must be willing to speak frankly and openly with the investigators. However, that will come at some point.

[English]

We get to a point where we can be as transparent and as open as possible. That's one of the challenges I have with my discipline process, that we have to preserve the principles of fundamental fairness. What I ask of my supervisors and my leaders is that we are open, that we are engaging, that we open the books to the extent that we can around some of these matters, and I think we will soon re-establish the confidence we need from Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Thank you.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair? Two minutes, you say? Great.

I have one last question. We often hear about the blue culture, or police culture. It is well known and documented. This culture makes some good police officers remain silent in the face of abusive behaviour or corruption. I do not want to generalize, but we know that it is a well-known situation, at least I think that is the case. Does the RCMP take any measures to prevent such behaviours, and if so, how?

Commr Robert Paulson: Yes.

[English]

I would say we're very fortunate right now to not be particularly challenged with those kinds of issues, but we do have very robust internal investigation services in all of our divisions. We do, in certain cases, proactive integrity testing of our officers. That is something that I monitor very carefully. I think you can tell, in some of the behaviours that are challenging...or rather, when you begin to see officers behave in certain ways, it often signals some other issues. We have a very robust program of overseeing that sort of misconduct.

The Chair: You still have 40 seconds, if you want a final comment.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: No, it's okay; I do not have any other questions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Paulson, for having answered our questions.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Garrison, very quickly, just to summarize.

Mr. Randall Garrison: What I was going to raise as a point of order, I'll just raise now.

Since we extended the invitation to Mr. Paulson, we had hoped we might have him for two hours. Can we, as well as ending with our thanks, end with the understanding that we might like him to come back in the future to talk to us at greater length?

In his comment on relations with the minister, he was saying he was trying to stay out of things political, but there may be things we wish to study in the future at the committee, like street gangs or service to victims, and we might like to draw on his expertise. So I just hope we could end with that understanding.

Commr Robert Paulson: If I could, Mr. Chair...?

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, Commissioner.

Commr Robert Paulson: Just to go back to the opening comments earlier, to what I think Mr. Norlock was saying, I think there's a great opportunity to be able to give.... I want to have the matters that our officers deal with day in and day out shared with folks such as yourself. I think that's the fundamental strategy: it's to open it up. But I'm happy to come back or have my staff come back.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That pretty well concludes our meeting. I do again want to congratulate you on the appointment as our commissioner. I have seen many different commissioners, many different individuals, appear here in the role you have. Certainly we wish you all the best and that you will, with honour, work through your role there as our commissioner. We just know you will.

Thank you for the experience that you've had in this position. Good luck in working with the rest of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in continuing to make it a strong police force that all Canadians are proud of. Thank you very much, sir, and thank you for being here before our committee.

We're going to recess momentarily. We'll suspend and then come back in five minutes.

That will give you a chance to shake the commissioner's hand if you so choose, and then we'll come back into committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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