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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. This is meeting number 80 of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. It is Thursday, April 18, 2013. We're continuing our study on the economics of policing.

As our witness today we have Ontario Provincial Police Commissioner Chris Lewis. Our committee wants to thank you, Mr. Commissioner, for making the time to appear before us to help in our study with the costs of policing in Canada. Certainly, our committee recognizes the good work of the commissioner and his staff all across Ontario. Also, I know the economics of policing is a very important issue that you deal with and that you probably hear about constantly, so we look forward to your comments today.

The commissioner is having a busy day today. He's appearing here this morning, then he's moving to another committee, as well.

We look forward to your comments. Perhaps you will have time, as well, for a round or two of questions from members of the committee.

The floor is yours, sir. Welcome, and thank you for coming.

Commr Chris D. Lewis (Commissioner, Ontario Provincial Police): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure to be here today and to appear before you. Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about the Ontario Provincial Police, as well as my perspective on the subject of the economics of policing.

Policing in Ontario and elsewhere in Canada is a fundamental service that is at the very basis of community safety and wellness, contributing to provincial security and resulting in savings in other areas of public expenditure. Policing, well-educated and efficiently delivered, has a significant and positive impact on the social, cultural, and economic development of Ontario's communities. It is also an investment in community. People do not want to live in dangerous and crime-ridden communities, and businesses do not seek to invest in them.

Our model of policing in Ontario is founded upon legislation, the Police Services Act. Based on this, the OPP has a special mandate to provide both municipal and provincial policing services. We are the police service of jurisdiction in 323 of Ontario's 444 municipalities, and we provide services to a number of rural and isolated parts of Ontario, including highways, waterways, and trails. Our operating costs are high. Meeting this mandate requires a high level of operational readiness and significant resources.

The current fiscal reality is that some municipalities are struggling to balance their books. The Province of Ontario is carrying a significant deficit. Global uncertainty is part of the economic picture. Meanwhile, police salaries and operating costs, particularly technology costs, are rising. This is not an issue exclusive to the Ontario Provincial Police. Concern about those costs is common throughout Canada, North America, and beyond. Additionally, evolving challenges relating to organized crime, terrorism, public protests, the Internet, and emerging cyberthreats over the past 25 years have made for increasing demands relating to staffing, training, equipment, and infrastructure on all police services. Policing is an expensive business.

Taxpayer concern about costs and expenditures is not new. There exists a constant struggle at all levels of government, as well as institutions such as the police, to adapt and change to meet new needs within a financially sustainable framework. In my opinion, our model of policing in Ontario is not sustainable in the long term.

Why do I hold this opinion? Right now Ontario's smaller police services have separate command and support structures, limited economies of scale for the purchasing of supplies and equipment, and a costly and independent infrastructure. Because resources are tight and in most cases getting tighter, the fear of a corporate takeover by larger provincial and/or federal police services is very real. The fear is that this may result in a reluctance to ask for assistance from provincial police during emergency response situations or in major case investigations.

In recent years, many small police services have turned to larger municipal police services for help at a time when those larger police services are dealing with their own fiscal realities. In my view, it makes little sense for the taxpayers of the larger cities to provide ongoing assistance to smaller police services except in short-term and emergency situations.

In addition, the demand on most police services has increased as various social service and government agencies have had their budgets cut, thereby bringing police into situations to provide a response with new or expanded capacities. Examples of this elevated response include situations with individuals experiencing mental health challenges or in the natural deaths of elderly and terminally ill patients who, more often, now go home to die.

Concurrently, sustainability is not only an issue at the local level with a number of Ontario's municipalities sounding the alarm. Sustainability is also my issue as the commissioner of the provincial police in Ontario. Although we are partially funded to assist all police services, the current funding and staffing models have diminished the ability of the OPP to be all things to all people.

Major police services can assist the OPP in large protests and other operations in return for occasional OPP support in a quid pro quo relationship, and they routinely work collaboratively with the OPP on major cases. But the smaller police services have few resources to share and little to give back, other than in short-term, infrequent, and intermittent situations. This is not a criticism. It's just a reality.

● (0850)

What will help us move through these challenges to better ensure improvement in public safety?

We all need to discuss and better define what the core responsibilities of police agencies should be to meet the modern-day needs and expectations of communities in 2013. We must continue to explore how we might deliver adequate and effective services in different ways, ensuring that police services have the right people at the right places and times to meet those needs.

At the local service delivery level, having some services performed by civilian staff or private security organizations instead of fully trained and equipped police officers has become a realistic approach. But as we consider the implications of these options, we must keep in mind the need to maintain a critical mass of police personnel for emergency response and major investigations.

Other delivery options include citizens' self-reporting of minor crimes, not responding to some calls for service that we historically have attended, and better use of analysis and technological solutions —although this too can be costly. A number of police services are currently using or exploring all of these options.

As well, an increase in a renewed focus on crime prevention, including private sector and government partnerships, will reduce response and investigative costs, and even more importantly, reduce victimization. These are all valid options and they've been on the agenda of the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Service's future of policing advisory committee in Ontario. This committee's four working groups are discussing these very issues and are focusing on four main topics: law enforcement and victims' assistance, crime prevention, emergency response and public order, and administration and infrastructure.

From my vantage point as commissioner of one of the largest deployed police services in North America, I see a need for legislative change, not merely fine-tuning and adapting but rather significant change.

Our model of policing must create up-to-date definitions of core duties and expectations, establishing firm adequacy standards regarding staffing levels, training requirements, emergency response expectations, crime prevention and investigative standards, all combined with strong governance and auditing regimes. This will require many small and some mid-sized services to form larger regional police services, amalgamations with neighbouring police services in the larger municipal police services, or they may choose to amalgamate with the Ontario Provincial Police. Although such transformation will be fraught with many political challenges, and even the bruising of some egos, the reality of these economic times isn't likely to improve soon, and frankly, it's what is right for the taxpayer. Policing community leaders will have to help lead their police services and communities through the inevitable change as opposed to fighting against what is a sad reality.

Policing responsibilities in Ontario are shared by the Ontario Provincial Police, 53 municipal police services, and 9 self-directed first nation police services. The OPP also administers policing for 20 first nation communities, under the Ontario First Nations Policing Agreement, and provides direct policing to 19 other first nation communities.

Together, we provide comprehensive policing coverage across the province. However, we have a very concerning situation in Ontario. Compared to the vast majority of provincial and municipal police services in Ontario, most first nation communities are woefully under-resourced, and as a result, have inadequately trained and equipped officers. There aren't enough officers or support staff, and the infrastructure is often poor or non-existent. Given these circumstances, it is tough to recruit and retain personnel. If you add into the mix the expansion of mining for precious resources in remote first nation territories, the resulting population growth with new camps and new communities, and the potential for organized crime activity, we could be in real trouble. In my view, this is a crisis situation.

The current funding model for first nations' policing in Canada is not resulting in the same level of policing in many first nation communities that is enjoyed in non-first nation communities. There's no doubt that some level of accountability and ownership of public safety needs to rest with the first nation communities, but we need a better strategy to ensure the current inadequate situation regarding policing in Ontario's first nation communities is quickly and appropriately addressed.

My presentation today to the committee reflects a strong belief in the need to examine the current model of policing in support of effective, efficient, and sustainable police service delivery in Ontario. The citizens of Ontario deserve no less.

I'll be pleased to offer more thoughts and opinions in response to your questions. Once again, thank you very much.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

We're going to move to Mr. Payne for the first round. Go ahead, LaVar.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Commissioner, for coming. My questions will go through the chair to you, Commissioner.

We did hear earlier this week from your colleague Chief Superintendent Couture who talked about special constables and some of the roles that they play, and particularly bailiffs. I'm wondering if you could tell us how, in fact, those special constables are relieving your officers. Is there anything else potentially that they can do to help relieve some of that cost-effectiveness in terms of the economies of policing?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Thank you very much. I'll answer your last question first. There is more they can do. This is an issue we need to deal with. The bargaining group was, in our case, the Ontario Provincial Police Association. There are some things that we do not need fully trained and equipped police officers to do. Once again, we have to keep the balance and make sure we have critical mass to respond with police officers to big events, and of course, to protest situations. We do get a lot bigger events than we used to.

But there are things, and prisoner escorts are one of those things. Ontario gave us some money some years ago when certain jails were closed in Ontario to do the escorting of prisoners by large vehicles—vans and trucks. Those are special constables. They receive some training and limited equipment. They're not armed and they don't have powers of arrest like normal police officers, and training and investigating crime and all of that. But they perform a very valuable function because otherwise you would have police officers tied up all day moving prisoners from community to community, sitting with them in court, and doing all that sort of thing that we have the special constables doing.

We're going through a process as we speak. Every job that we look at, we need to look at whether a civilian can do it. We used to train just police officers to do everything because only police officers could ever understand IT, or telecommunications or science. We realize that's not right. So we're hiring kids virtually out of university who are experts in this stuff and want a career in that. They don't have to carry guns and do police work. That applies to the special constable area as well.

We need to look at every job. Should it be civilianized? Do they need some powers like a special constable has? Or does it need to be a fully armed and trained police officer? We have to think that way. We traditionally did not.

Mr. LaVar Payne: That's probably part of your core responsibilities that you talked about in your opening statement in terms of reviewing that whole process.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Exactly, and it's not without some pain because we're dealing with a bargaining group, the Ontario Provincial Police Association, that doesn't necessarily agree on some of these things, and we have a good working relationship. There is a little tension in the system when we get talking about that sort of thing. We owe that to the taxpayer. Why pay someone $85,000 a year, a fully trained and equipped police officer, to do something a civilian out of college and university can do very well, and the special constable piece is a big part of that. So we have to look at that in every position we have.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Is that process ongoing right now in terms of reviewing your core responsibilities?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It is. We don't have a specific group doing that non-stop in that study, but it's one of several pieces of several projects that we have on the go right now, looking at finding more efficiencies in the organization. That's a real mindset shift for police officers.

Just for example, sir, at one point years ago, we have had 5,500 employees in the OPP. Five thousand of them were sworn police officers, and 500 of them were civilians, special constables, that other category. Now we have over 6,000 police officers in the OPP and 3,000 civilian members, so we really have made a shift. As we've grown, we've recognized the need to hire people who want to do a specific task for their career and they don't need to be armed to do it.

● (0900)

Mr. LaVar Payne: You also talked a little bit about the aboriginal communities. You talked a bit about some of the efficiencies there. What are some of the unique needs of those communities, and what is the OPP doing to help or assist those? Do you have any details you can provide us on that?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Yes, I certainly do.

We police some of the first nation communities in Ontario alone; we just are the police. Others have their own police, which are funded through the joint federal-Ontario 52%-48% partnership. Others have stand-alone police departments. They are funded the same way, but we really don't have as much to do with them unless they have some big event. I believe there are nine of those.

The vast majority don't have enough people or resources. One community in northern Ontario, Pikangikum, is a very remote community. One of the unique issues around a lot of first nation communities is that you can only get to them by ice roads in the winter, or aircraft year-round. There's nowhere to live. If you wanted to buy a house, you couldn't, so it's really tough to attract people. When they are fully staffed, and they seldom are, they have eight constables in that first nation community.

We did our workload analysis model, and if it were an OPP detachment, we'd have 30. At any given time they only have eight. We have people there rotating in and out—week in, week out—and living in a building to help those eight officers. We're doing that in various communities all across northwestern and northeastern Ontario.

Most of the first nation communities in southern Ontario are larger and have more of a self-sustained police service. But they don't have the same training equipment, resources, and infrastructure that other police departments do. In my view, for those communities—and I know they have to take some ownership as communities for public safety—that model is broken. It's not suiting the needs of those communities. There are some very violent crimes, abuse issues, and problems in there, and we can only help so much. We don't want them to fail. We try our best to help them, but something is going to give.

Mr. LaVar Payne: You talked about eight officers in that particular community. What size of community is that?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It's a community of only about 2,000 people, and I think last year they had almost 4,000 lock-ups in the cells. It's a community that has all sorts of social issues on top of policing. There are no social service agencies there, so the police become all things to all people. It's a very difficult community to police.

You don't get the calls there for a minor theft or shoplifting. Nobody calls the police for that. There are serious assaults. There are suicides. There are 10-year-old and 11-year-old kids who are virtually hanging from trees because there's no hope in that community, and the little eight-person police department has to try to deal with that.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

Thank you, Mr. Payne.

We'll now move to the opposition.

Mr. Rafferty, please, for seven minutes.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Commissioner, for being here.

I want to ask you about first nations' policing and the OPP and that relationship. I certainly appreciate the comments you've made on that.

But first I'd like to make a comment about special constables. I should first of all commend the OPP. In my experience, in our neck of the woods in northwestern Ontario, they really do a fabulous job. We also have some officers. I don't know what they're called... community relations officers? I'm not sure what their titles are.

In Fort Frances, there's a constable, Anne McCoy, who—

Commr Chris D. Lewis: I know Anne very well. She's a community services officer.

Mr. John Rafferty: Community services, okay. She does a terrific job.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: She does. Yes.

Mr. John Rafferty: As you were talking about special constables, you would immediately think that maybe that's the kind of job you might not have a police officer in, that it might be something.... I just want to say that I think it's important that a job like that be a police officer.

As you look for efficiencies that you might be able to find in those areas, I know you will be very careful about that. Those kinds of officers are a natural fit. To no longer have an officer there, a constable like Anne McCoy, who does such a terrific job.... I wouldn't put a special constable in that position.

● (0905)

Commr Chris D. Lewis: I have no intention of it, in those positions.

Mr. John Rafferty: Okay.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Those community services positions are really the gateway and the voice of the police in communities. Through their prevention efforts and what they do, they ultimately save us work. If they can teach a kid what to do when they get lost in the bush and we find that child quickly, it not only saves a life but the collateral benefit to us is that it saves millions of dollars.

People like Anne—and I didn't get this 35 years ago when I started this job—are really the face of us in those communities. That's an officer who needs to have a gun. She is out in the community in uniform every day.

Mr. John Rafferty: I'm sure you're aware of that, but you have to be cautious when you start thinking that someone else can take a police officer's job.

I wanted to make that comment.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: I couldn't agree more.

Mr. John Rafferty: I do want to talk about first nations' policing, which you have talked about, and the problems they have, and in particular, my experience in northwestern Ontario, in the Nishnawbe-Aski Police Service, or NAPS. Your comments about the struggles that first nation police services are having are absolutely right on. They're very accurate, and thank you for saying that.

You did talk about a new model. What would your new model look like? You must have given this a little bit of thought. What can be done?

I heard from a retired police officer that when the OPP handed over that whole area to NAPS, everything was fine, everything was in good shape. Then something happened in the intervening years. As you know, in first nation communities—and you outlined Pikangikum in particular—there are some estimates from NAPS that we have communities in northwestern Ontario with an 80% addiction rate.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Right.

Mr. John Rafferty: That's astounding, and so policing has to change. Do you have any ideas? Do you want to expand on that new model a little bit?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Yes. It comes down to funding. In the current funding model—and this isn't a criticism of either the federal or the provincial government—there's the 52% that the feds give, the 48% that the province gives, and when you add those together it cannot sustain adequate policing in those communities. A 52:48 ratio is fine, but the monetary values have to increase to create infrastructure and keep people in communities who don't want to stay there. They'll quit and join some other police department just to get out of that community because the conditions are unbearable in some places.

Mr. John Rafferty: Yes, the police services really are facing a huge uphill struggle.

We talk about the economics of policing. I think the general feeling around the table here is that when we talk about the economics of policing, we're talking about how we can save money and do things differently. But there are cases, with first nations' policing, for example, where money is going to be helpful—more money.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It is, but it's bigger than that. There are other social service agencies that are absent from some of those communities, for obvious reasons—there's nowhere to work or live. If we put more officers in communities and they stayed there because there is a place to live and they are properly resourced, they'd get more involved. They'd be coaching kids. They'd get more involved in the community and do a lot of things that may prevent kids from going the addiction route or getting involved in crime.

What are the overall savings to society there? There may be an investment to be made that will result in overall savings.

Mr. John Rafferty: The OPP has been very good over the years in terms of providing additional support for first nation police services when there are real problems that need to be dealt with. Understandably, with the economics and with the OPP getting squeezed that support has started to diminish, at least according to NAPS. I wonder if you'd like to make a comment on that.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: I don't say it's diminished. Certainly, I think our pressures are such that at times it's difficult for us to routinely assist NAPS, but we do. We put officers in communities to assist them all the time. We take calls for them all the time. We support them in major investigations. Would they like that to be more? For sure. If they had enough staff who were properly trained and equipped themselves, then they wouldn't have to rely on us as much. Once again, we can't be all things to all people. I wish we could, but we can't. That's just a reality of life.

Mr. John Rafferty: One way for the OPP to become more economical is to provide more resources for first nation police services to do the job they would like to be doing.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: For sure, and once again that saves in society in many different ways, whether in a reduction in suicides, addiction, or people getting involved in criminal activity.

● (0910)

Mr. John Rafferty: Let me go back to the comment you made in your opening remarks about different ways. You talked about how policing generally is not sustainable and there is a different way. It's not necessary, but if you could, include first nations in your answer. In general, what are those different ways? Would you want to expand on that a little bit?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: We in the OPP have traditionally responded to every call for service in policing. We're proud of that. We'll send an officer 75 miles down a gravel road just to verify that a chainsaw's missing out of a truck. There's no reason that we should. We're proud to do it and it's a contact with the community, but we just can't do that anymore.

There are technological solutions. There's the diversion of calls to officers who maybe are physically being accommodated because they can't go out on the road anymore due to a physical issue, temporary or permanent. There's more analysis and technology we can use, but they have a cost to them too. You just can't snap your fingers and have a bunch of analysts who are civilians, maybe, who are looking at where the best place is to send officers and direct patrols. But if you find efficiencies elsewhere, you can convert positions to analytical positions, and maybe make better use of those positions and the salary dollars.

Mr. John Rafferty: You know that costs are going to continue to rise because most of the work you do is rural.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: In the OPP, yes. We police a lot of communities and some 30,000 or 40,000 people, as well as a lot of undeveloped and rural land.

Mr. John Rafferty: You need cars and you need the kind of equipment that is going to continue to increase over the years.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It is.

Mr. John Rafferty: I'm thinking of northwestern Ontario and the work that the Atikokan detachment, the Emo, and the Fort Frances detachments do.

Am I done?

The Chair: Yes, you're done. It was a great speech.

Mr. John Rafferty: I wanted to throw in some more compliments to the OPP and the work that they do in northwestern Ontario.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Thank you. I'm proud of our people.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. John Rafferty: Why are there so many on the highway? Because—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Commr Chris D. Lewis: There are either too many or not enough.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Gill.

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are on the use of special constables, auxiliary officers, and volunteers, and how they come into play.

Would you be able to tell us what, if any, expenses are related to special constables, auxiliary officers, other court officers—to police services basically? What costs are related to a fully trained police constable versus an auxiliary officer? Would you explain what savings you see?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: There are a number of savings. Auxiliary officers, just to clarify, are volunteers. They are paid nothing. We pay for their lunch, and we do train them and equip them to a certain degree so there are costs associated with that, but no salary dollars. They certainly get worker's compensation if they are hurt, but traditionally we do not pay them a salary dollar.

Special constables do get paid a salary dollar, less training, less equipment, so there is a saving there and the salary is much less. It may be $50,000, for example, versus $85,000 for a fully trained and equipped constable, so there is a saving there. We have to be able to use them at the right place and the right time—where you don't need a fully armed officer. That's an ongoing issue. We've done a lot of great things and we have more to do.

Once again, though, in the case of a Caledonia dispute—and we had every officer in the OPP there at one point—ice storms, tornadoes, large protests, we need a certain number of officers to respond. So we can't tip the scales too far and have two-thirds special constables and one-third uniformed officers. It would just never work.

We have 850 auxiliary members. They are totally volunteers. They do great things, but they are limited to what they can do because they aren't armed. They can direct traffic at parades. They can attend events in schools and help out and do different things, but if there are arrests to be made, any threat of violence, we can't use an auxiliary officer. We have to have regular officers there either as well as or instead of auxiliary members. There's a balancing act there.

We had to negotiate with the police association to use auxiliary officers. They have a say in when we can use auxiliary officers and when we can't, because they don't want to see volunteers take the place of the salaried officers and don't want them put in dangerous situations where a police officer should be used.

It's an ongoing kind of balancing act for us. It works very well with 850 auxiliary officers. That's bigger than most police departments in Canada. We have that many auxiliaries alone who help us greatly and who save us time and money through their volunteerism, for a minimal investment on our part.

● (0915)

Mr. Parm Gill: What are the criteria for somebody who wants to become an auxiliary officer? I'm sure there are background checks.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Yes.

Mr. Parm Gill: Is there any sort of physical requirement testing done, anything of that nature?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Yes. They are not tested and don't have to maintain the fitness level of the full-time officers, but there are extensive background investigations, really as significant as they are for police officers, in terms of a criminal record. We don't want to hire auxiliary members who aren't going to represent us well.

On the fitness level, they only get one full week of training then another day or so a year, depending. The fitness level is much less, but we want them to look good in uniform and be physically able because some of them find themselves in dangerous situations, just by chance. We've had auxiliary officers in cars with uniformed officers involved in shootouts. You never know what they might get into while they're riding around with the uniformed officer. We demand some level of fitness, so they are tested. We don't demand that they do 40 push-ups and be able to run a mile and a half in a certain time period, but they certainly have to have a minimal fitness level. I'm just not sure exactly what that is.

Mr. Parm Gill: To your knowledge, do most of the police forces have their own auxiliary division?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Most do, to a much smaller level of course. Even the auxiliary for the Toronto police, which is almost as big as we are but not quite, is nowhere near the numbers of ours. We're spread out, too, so we have auxiliary officers in most communities that we police. The Toronto police has a core auxiliary force within the city of Toronto that can go pretty well anywhere, whereas our numbers are much higher.

Mr. Parm Gill: I'm going to give you an example back from when I was just finishing high school. I grew up in Toronto, basically. I was very interested in volunteering for the police. I went out to Toronto police at the time. I said I was interested in volunteering. I had some time on the weekends and so on. I was told at the time that they did not accept any volunteers. Therefore, I then went to Peel Regional Police, which was about 60 kilometres away from where I lived. They did take in volunteers. I was happy to volunteer for them mostly on weekends and so on, just at community stations doing simple stuff—smaller tasks, and so on.

I'm really trying to understand the reasoning behind one police force accepting it and the other refusing to accept it.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: I have no idea.

Mr. Parm Gill: This is basically a free service that one is getting. It's kind of beyond my understanding.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: In addition to our 850-person auxiliary, we have volunteers all over Ontario who help us and our detachments. They help us with various committees in the community around crime prevention, and so on. They help with seniors or children. In the eastern region alone, which is the area we're in right now for Ontario, from Belleville to Quebec, at one point we had 600 volunteers who worked with the OPP in a region of 1,200 personnel. So on top of that, we had 600 volunteers. That included the auxiliary and people who helped in detachments and did different things.

Mr. Parm Gill: When you say volunteers, are they above and beyond your auxiliary?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Yes. Well, the auxiliary was included in that 600. I just remember that number from when I was stationed down here. In the eastern region alone there are at least 200 auxiliaries. Another 400 or so civilian volunteers help in our detachments, with different community groups and committees.

Mr. Parm Gill: In your opinion, should we increase or decrease the use of special constables or auxiliary officers or even court officers?

The Chair: Could we have a very quick answer?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: We can't take any more auxiliary officers than we have. We have a certain number and that's the number we have to live with. We should always be looking at the use of volunteers, but they can't replace police officers. They can help, and there may be some things they can do to free up police officers to go out on the road. It's the same with special constables. We always have to look at that and find the right balance.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

Thank you, Mr. Gill.

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

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

Just to continue along that line, Mr. Gill was saying that some police forces may not be accepting volunteers. I would surmise that it's not because they have anything against volunteers, but maybe they're not organized to receive and manage volunteers. We as MPs all know—we have volunteers in our offices—that it's not just a question of opening the door and letting them in. You have to put them to work and organize them to work as part of the group or organization.

● (0920)

Commr Chris D. Lewis: That's correct.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: As I understand it, when it comes to the OPP, there wouldn't be areas where part of the force might say that they're not accepting volunteers for that reason. There's probably a requirement that all detachments organize themselves in such a way as to be able to accept volunteers, I would think. As I understand it, the problem is in municipal police forces. One might be organized and structured to accept volunteers and one might not be.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: That's possible, depending on their size. I don't know that there are any right now in Ontario that wouldn't have volunteers in some capacity.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Then Mr. Gill's account is somewhat dated in that respect.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It could well be. He may be right on the money still. I don't know, but I think the Toronto police has a significant number of volunteers now.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: In terms of civilianization, we understand how this change towards greater civilianization—using civilians for certain roles—would save money and so on, but at what level would the federal government have any role to play in encouraging that civilianization? This is a study on the cost of policing from a federal perspective. What can the federal government really do to encourage civilianization beyond doing so in the RCMP? Even there, I'm wondering if the RCMP is so arm's length that the federal government really wouldn't have much influence over that process anyway.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Obviously, if the federal government is going to influence any police department that way, it would be through the RCMP. Increased funding—for example, the federal government has funded the police officers recruitment fund for five years. That just ended but that was a great program. Funding like that, to increase civilianization, is always a possibility.

As I said, you just can't snap your fingers and always convert police to civilians. Sometimes you need to come up with the salary dollars somehow or other, and free them so you can create civilian positions. Sometimes it can be a swap out.

I can't see how the federal government could influence the OPP, for example, or municipal police departments in Ontario in a big way unless they were providing something to encourage that. Then hopefully that creates savings that go back to municipalities down the road.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Right. You said something in your remarks that I didn't quite catch. The way I understood it, it had to do with smaller police forces turning more and more to larger police forces. Then somehow, this leads to a gobbling up of the smaller forces by the larger forces down the line.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: There are two things there, sir. One is that smaller police departments don't have the resources or the internal expertise to do some things. We still have police departments with 10 to 12 officers so they don't have a tactical team or homicide investigators and some of those things. They traditionally turn to the OPP because we are funded, in part, to help them. We would do that at no cost.

But because they're afraid for their future and because some of them are afraid that if they call the OPP it's an admission that they can't do it themselves, they don't call us. They either go without that help or in some cases they've turned to a large department such as Toronto or Peel and asked for their help. Toronto or Peel would never let anyone down. I'm just picking them out of a hat. It could be Ottawa Police or whoever. But they have their own internal financial problems now, so they just can't send people to small communities to help with a homicide investigation.

It's created a fear of big brother, that being the OPP, and they're not going to get the help from their municipal colleagues in other departments, except in an emergency situation. So sometimes they're going without and that's not necessarily fair to the taxpayer nor the right thing to do in terms of officer and public safety.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: That's interesting.

In terms of first nations, you suggested there's not enough money for first nations' policing. Then you also said it's really a local infrastructure problem. As you say, it's hard to retain officers in an area that has very little in the way of community infrastructure.

I remember many years ago I visited a community in northern Quebec on James Bay, called Chisasibi. Yes, it was far from the big southern cities and so on, but they had an arena. They played broomball with the local Cree and so on. I guess that's what you're getting at. If you can build a little community, it will be easier to retain the officers, and that would probably lead to savings.

Is it a question of building community infrastructure in first nations or is it a question of more money for police operations, or a little of both?

● (0925)

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It's both. Other issues in first nation communities impact on the police, such as a total lack of social service agencies, so the police end up having to do everything. They're really the only social service agency in Pikangikum for the most part.

Because of budget cuts some of those social service agencies are non-existent or diminished so the police end up picking up the slack in dealing with things they normally wouldn't have to deal with. So do you invest in more $50,000 to $60,000-a-year social service people in different programs or do you invest in police who respond, lock people up, prosecute them, and incarcerate them? The expense on that end is bigger. If you can do things that prevent, that saves victimization and it saves—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: You're saying it has to be a coordinated response.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It does. All these agencies work together in most communities, but in first nation communities most are non-existent.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: How much more time?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I have 30 seconds. I'm so used to your shutting me down. No, you're very fair. I do mean that.

In terms of privatizing certain services, would that include IT services and so on? Would you be in favour of privatizing the firearms registry, because there's a motion on the floor of the House calling on the government, I believe, to privatize the registry of restricted firearms. Would that save the OPP money? Would that be useful?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It may. We have a lot of civilian personnel who work in that area for us. There are not all that many uniformed people. I don't know if there really would be a savings there or not. I've never done the analysis of that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to the second round of questioning. These are five-minute rounds.

Mr. Garrison.

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

Thank you, Commissioner, for being here. I know you have a large police force to run.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It's my pleasure.

Mr. Randall Garrison: It's a constant that we're hearing now from witnesses in policing that the current model is not sustainable. I'm interested in your committee on the future of policing, and the focus of that committee. From the titles you've given me of the subcommittees, it seems largely focused on cost reduction.

Can you say a bit more about the focus of the work of that committee?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: The committee has police associations and police leaders on it. The OPP are involved in all the subcommittees, as well as ministry employees, managers, and a number of other advisors who are really looking at four different areas, which are law enforcement and victims' assistance, crime prevention, emergency response and public order, and administration and infrastructure. They're looking at ways that business could be delivered potentially as efficiently or more efficiently, and financially, looking at a model that will ultimately save dollars. That's what it's all about.

But at the same time, it's not just about saving money. It's about delivering the services that the taxpayers need and deserve, and whether the model by which that is done is proper. There's a lot of discussion in Ontario about the Quebec model, because Quebec has a policing model that is unique in Canada. They have virtually legislated small police departments away. It's tough to say goodbye to a small police department in a municipality that has been there forever. The officers still have employment; they just wear a different uniform.

That's one of the things that this future of policing committee has been discussing to some degree, whether there is legislative change needed in Ontario. I think there is. Unfortunately, the 10-officer departments cannot keep up, cannot afford to have a chief, their own radio room, their own dispatchers, their own building. A larger police department could absorb them and deliver the services more effectively, using the great officers who are there. It's not a slam to them. It's just an inefficient model.

It's all about effective, efficient, sustainable police service delivery. That's the mandate of that committee.

Mr. Randall Garrison: You talked about the changing ratio of sworn officers to civilians, and you gave as an example the OPP ratio of something like 10:1, and now it's about 2:1—sworn officers to civilians.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Exactly.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Can you give us a similar picture of the use of special constables? I don't think we've heard any numbers. You talked about auxiliaries, but special constables....

Commr Chris D. Lewis: I'm not sure what our exact number of special constables is. I know there are at least a couple of hundred special constables. There was a time years ago when there was a handful. That number has increased exponentially as well.

● (0930)

Mr. Randall Garrison: When you talk about trying to find savings by civilianization, I would say if you look at that ratio it would look as if there's not much room left, when you've already gone from a ratio of 10:1 to 2:1. Maybe you've found all your savings in civilianization that you might be able to find.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Yes, I think that happened not so much because we were really looking specifically to do it. It morphed into that in a natural way. What we have to do now is to look at whether we can do more expansion of that, and we are. We're even looking at manager positions. Does this person in human resources need to wear a uniform and carry a gun, or is this a human resources expert who we can hire right out of university or from some government agency?

There is more to come. I don't think it will be significant. We're not going to go, for example, to half and half, but we can increase the numbers and potentially save money—and be as efficient or more efficient by having the right people doing the work.

Mr. Randall Garrison: We heard some very interesting testimony coming out of Prince Albert about a model they call HUB and COR. Of course, the police chief there is now the deputy minister of policing in Saskatchewan. Their focus has been on reducing demand. I just wonder whether your future of policing committee is looking at those issues of reducing demand for police services.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: For sure, and that's really around the prevention piece. Every domestic assault that can be prevented saves some woman from being victimized. Every crime that can be prevented prevents some elderly person from losing their life savings or someone from being victimized or brutalized in some way. That's the main goal. It saves money because prevention is cheaper than investigation, response, and putting people through the courts and incarcerating them. So let's try to prevent the crime so you're not responding hither and yon.

Crime has dropped in Canada, but it's because of the prevention efforts. Some communities say that because crime has dropped, you don't need as many police officers. But it has dropped for a reason. It's because they've put efforts into prevention. They can't stop doing that or crime will increase again.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Commissioner.

We'll move to Mr. Hawn, please, for five minutes.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Commissioner, for being here.

Through the chair to you, I want to pick up on a couple of things that you talked about, and they were starting to be alluded to here as well. You mentioned the need for legislative change, and you mentioned a little bit about provincial. Can you expand on that a little bit and be a little more specific? Are there federal legislative changes that you think are necessary?

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Provincially, it's all around the policing model and structure and service delivery model. In Ontario, there are 53 police services, plus the OPP. I think at some point that will be down to maybe 20, and the OPP. It's larger departments with more economies of scale.

On the federal level, I'm not going to speak on behalf of the Commissioner of the RCMP, but I think federally there have been a lot of good things coming out of the federal government in terms of legislative change and things that help us do our jobs better, which potentially saves money. There are things like the police officer recruitment fund that puts a lot of police into communities. There may be better ways for the federal government, if it wants to make investments to fight crime, terrorism, organized crime, and those things, to give police services across Canada money to help fight that, so they can keep their officers on the road doing the prevention and response activities they do now, but potentially get help with cybercrime and some of those things.

It may be a case of some legislation around who does what. Maybe the RCMP should be the lead on all cybercrime in Canada. I just picked that out of a hat. They're very involved with organized crime, as we all are. We work very cooperatively together. But sometimes for something that's federal in nature, the RCMP may not necessarily have the resources to take that on, so it ends up being done piecemeal from province to province. There may be some things that way, but I really haven't thought about the whole federal picture a whole lot, to be honest.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That leads into my next question. You talked about the need to do some amalgamation, and there are going to be some tough decisions that will have to be made. There may be some bruised egos, and so on. On a practical side of this question, and a philosophical side, Dale McFee, whom Mr. Garrison referred to as the assistant deputy minister in Saskatchewan now—

Commr Chris D. Lewis: I know Dale.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: —coined a phrase that I hadn't heard before, that this is about leadership, not ownership.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: That's right.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: You have to break down some of that ownership that people naturally have. How tough is that going to be?

On the practical side, would that allow an overall reduction in the numbers of people due to the amalgamation of back ends, and so on?

● (0935)

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Yes, that would result in an overall reduction in numbers. For example, we just took over the Perth Police Service two weekends ago. Thirteen officers and one civilian came over. The chief chose to retire and move on. We didn't need the chief. As far as the radio room that they had was concerned, unfortunately, those civilians lost their jobs because we have a radio room here and we can handle the calls that they would normally have with that one part-time person. That is not a slam at a police department or the personnel at all, but we offer economies of scale. We have a training officer, so we didn't need one. We have it internally—whatever—so we can absorb and absorb. Sometimes we have to add extra people, but we get that money back from the municipalities through contract policing agreements. There's way more efficiency there.

In Ontario, we once had 170 or 180 police departments, years ago, so over time that has happened, but it's been painful. I understand the dilemma the police leaders, who have the potential of losing their departments, have, as well as the elected officials. But Dale McFee's point is that we have to lead these communities through this change. It's inevitable. So to keep fighting it and fighting it and fighting it—and I can sympathize with their positions—isn't necessarily leadership. Leadership should be doing the best for the community we serve. And what is that?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: For those of us who are old enough to remember, the days of Mayberry and Andy Griffith are gone.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Pretty well. We give more than one bullet to our deputies now, yes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I'm glad to hear that.

I have a specific question that's in the area of data input, and I think the OPP does something in this area that might be a model for other forces. You have a system now of not having the police officer sit there and punch it in.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: We have a mixed system. We still have detachments where officers are doing it. We have another 100 civilian personnel who are being hired, as we speak, to do more of that. It's in dribs and drabs, depending on the contract with the municipality. If they want to pay to have civilians do it, which we welcome with open arms, that's what happens. But years ago, organizationally, long before I had any decision-making ability, we decided to go with officer-entry, not civilian. In hindsight, that wasn't a good decision. We should have gone with civilian data entry at the time. Now we're paying officers, and maybe inefficiently depending on their skills, to enter data and enter reports. It doesn't make sense.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

Thank you, Mr. Hawn.

We'll move back to Madame Michaud.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Lewis. Thank you for your presentation.

I am just finding out about your special constables program. I understand the reasoning behind the use of this type of constable. However, I have a few questions about the initial training they are provided on hiring, and about the ongoing training these constables may get in the course of their duties.

Their work can be dangerous work. You never know what might happen, even when they are put in situations that do not appear dangerous at first. I would like to have a bit more information on that.

[*English*]

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Yes, and that's a very good question. They receive a week's training at the front end of their employment in some aspects of the use of force and some kind of personal safety protection. They receive training on how to safely handle prisoners, how to frisk them, how to secure them, how to put them in vehicles in a safe way, and how to use the equipment that they use to do that. They receive training in first aid.

They receive some training in telecommunications, so that they know how to use the radios that they have and some stuff about policy and their authorities, and what they can and cannot do. Then they receive regular training.

As time goes on, things change. We identify weaknesses in training or policy changes we have to make. They have to be trained up to speed on that, so there's annual training for them.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Is that annual training mandatory or just on an as-needed basis?

[*English*]

Commr Chris D. Lewis: No, it's mandatory. We have to train regularly, so it becomes very instinctive how we do things. There's a full week of mandatory training for police officers every year—40 hours in the legislation—and reminders, requalification of firearms, and what not. That's to a much lesser degree for the special constables because their scope is much different in terms of what they do, but they do receive annual training.

Then there are other things that might come up that are communicated to them, such as changes and procedural policy, and they'll just get communications on that through emails or briefings.

● (0940)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: If a special constable is unfortunately injured on duty, what type of assistance can be expected from your organization? What type of support is provided when a special constable gets injured?

[*English*]

Commr Chris D. Lewis: They receive the same support that our uniformed officers would receive. They're covered by WSIB in Ontario. It's the former workers' compensation, for lack of a better term. They receive any counselling they may need from a psychological perspective. If someone goes through something significantly traumatic, they receive all the same supports that our normal uniformed officers would receive.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Thank you very much.

A bit earlier, when another topic was under discussion, you mentioned that the Police Officer Recruitment Fund had been very useful to you in your operations over the past five years. That fund was unfortunately discontinued, which undermines the effectiveness and the work of some police forces. Among others, in Montreal and elsewhere in Quebec, this fund was used to set up joint squads to fight street gangs.

In Ontario, do you use the fund in the same way?

[*English*]

Commr Chris D. Lewis: In Ontario, it was left to a committee of the chiefs of police to work with government to sort out who would get how many positions. Ontario got so many positions from what we call PORF. The OPP ended up with 125 of them due to some shortfalls that we already had. They were all put into front-line policing positions. The Ontario government has funded the specialty gang positions and organized crime positions for a number of years for us. It was at the front line in communities that we needed the bodies.

Toronto police got a certain number. Other departments got a reduced number depending on their size. Forty of the positions in Ontario went to first nations' policing. That was significant for them because they had such a need. Of course, they've lost those 40 positions now, so that puts more pressure on us to help them.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: That's right.

You referred to new ways of helping your organization, and that type of fund is very important, because it enables you to get the human resources you need in the places you really need them. That is my understanding.

[*English*]

Commr Chris D. Lewis: That's correct, yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

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

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

We've talked a fair bit about the first nation policing, and of course we've renewed that federal funding for the next five years, which certainly will provide some certainty for the first nation communities across Canada.

Having policed in northern Canada up in the Yukon Territory, I know there are some similarities, obviously, in what we'd be facing in the Yukon and in native northern policing and rural and remote Ontario. You touched on the things that we hear other witnesses say and that I have experienced—and that you would have experienced—as a police officer, which is that we can't be all things to all people. Yet we can't help ourselves in still trying to be that.

The real question is, how do we bring.... I mean, costs going up will only do so much, because that will also then drive the demand. As police officers, our human nature as police officers will be to take those resources and just do more and more with them, which will keep that demand going up and up. With the increased funding, we will be responding to calls that we never responded to before. I think the real trick is driving down that demand of the public's expectations.

I know that's a challenging question, but how do we go from that community policing model that we've driven, that I think is very important.... I mean, you play football with the kids at school and integrate into the community, which is a critical role of policing. We've set the bar so high. How do we bring that bar back down to a reasonable level now for Canadians, so that we aren't going to the cat-in-the-tree kind of scenario, or where our emergency response people aren't answering the phone to tell people how to spell the word “subpoena”? That sounds ridiculous, but I know that our telecom operators have done that for people.

How do we do that now that we've set the bar so high? Do you see that as a really important point, versus just pushing that financial envelope up more and more, which in my opinion will only increase our demand and our response to it?

● (0945)

Commr Chris D. Lewis: Pushing the financial bucket higher isn't the answer. It is a big piece of the issue in the first nation communities, because in many of them now they just don't have anything.

In the case of the OPP, for example, we're not going to get more money, so we have to change how we do business, and we are. We're not going to go to the cat in the tree anymore, and that's a sad commentary because we were proud to go to the cat in the tree for many years, but we have to focus more on prevention.

There has to be a more cooperative relationship between police and the private sector. There are a lot of companies out there that we should probably work more closely with than we do now, because they're losing money through frauds in banks, and telecommunication companies are losing cellphones, etc.

Also, with all social service agencies.... That's happening very effectively in some communities, but not so much in others. That's a big part of it. It's the prevention piece, I think, that is the most important part of all this. I wouldn't have said that 35 years ago. I would've said, “what the heck do they do?”, but....

Mr. Ryan Leef: Yes, and you raise an interesting point with that integration part. I think it's valuable. I know that in the Yukon it's going on very well right now. The one thing that I experienced in policing, certainly, and heard in my years of law enforcement after I left the RCMP in the Yukon, was that people really wanted to integrate and work together. For the peripheral agencies, I think their general feedback was that information goes into the policing world, but rarely comes back out. That wanting to share is a one-way street a lot of times.

I can only characterize that as an experience with the RCMP, but how would you characterize the OPP's relationship with that information sharing? I do know that services have said that they'd love to cooperate and collaborate with police, but that the police want the information in and they're not always willing to share, either it's privacy concerns or it's just simply “we're the end of the road for information and we don't give information back”.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It's a challenge, without a doubt. It ends up in the hands of lawyers at times, and information privacy people —you hit the nail right on the head—and there are times when we're prohibited from giving as much as we would like to give, whether it be to victims, organizations, or whatever. To say to someone, “You've been a victim, sir”, and then have them give you a call and reach out to you creates problems. There are all kinds of issues. We're trying to work through those to the benefit of “what's the best thing for the victims” and to try to get at some of that, but it is a huge job for us, without a doubt.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Commissioner, thank you for coming. We appreciate it. As was mentioned, we did have someone from the OPP here on Tuesday. He referenced you coming and being able to answer some of the questions that he wasn't able to. We thank you for doing that today.

Commr Chris D. Lewis: It's my pleasure.

The Chair: We are going to adjourn.

To those who are going to serve on the subcommittee, we'll reconvene here in about five minutes.

To the committee, the next meeting will be in camera.

This meeting is adjourned.