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# Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

EVIDENCE

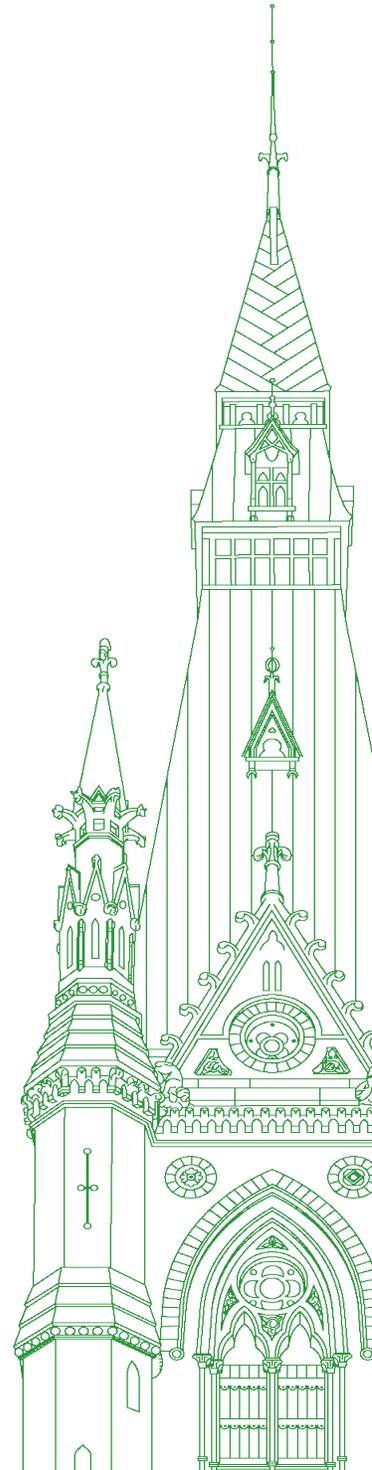
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Thursday, March 24, 2022

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Chair: The Honourable Jim Carr





# Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Thursday, March 24, 2022

• (1100)

[English]

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

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 14 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

We will start by acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021.

Colleagues, I don't have to read about all of the public orders and the way that we keep our distance. We wear masks when we are not speaking. Staff wear masks at all times, please.

We will run the meeting as efficiently as we can. Members will be participating virtually and they may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for the meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English, or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we will set it right.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 15, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of the occupation of Ottawa and the federal government's response to convoy blockades.

With us today by video conference, from the Ontario Provincial Police, are Commissioner Thomas Carrique, Deputy Commissioner Chris Harkins, and Chief Superintendent Carson Pardy. From the Ottawa Police Service we have Steve Bell, interim chief, and Trish Ferguson, acting deputy chief. Welcome to all of you.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Interim Chief Bell, I now invite you to make opening remarks of up to five minutes. I have a fancy-dancy sign that says 30 seconds, which will be your indication of how much time is left. People who know me know all too clearly that I'm a stickler for starting and ending on time.

Chief Bell, the floor is yours. Please proceed.

**Mr. Steve Bell (Interim Chief, Ottawa Police Service):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I share your passion for well-run meetings, so thank you for that.

Distinguished members of the committee, I'm pleased to be given this opportunity to meet with you today.

Joining me today is Deputy Chief Trish Ferguson, who was the operational lead for the successful resolution of the illegal protest. We're here today to answer questions about the illegal protest that occurred in Ottawa between January 28, 2022 and February 20, 2022.

As the police service of jurisdiction in the nation's capital, our members are well-practiced in keeping the peace during demonstrations.

Every year, hundreds of protests occur in our capital. Our officers are trained to maintain the safety of both the demonstrators and the public at large. The vast majority of these protests are peaceful and lawful, and protesters return home when their point has been made.

This unlawful protest was unprecedented. The protesters brought thousands of vehicles to our city with the full intention of disrupting our capital. After they arrived, many chose to stay and they were clear in their words and actions that they meant to do damage to our community.

Our police service received regular reports of intimidating and threatening behaviour towards residents on a daily basis. We had reports of hate crimes being committed and of wilful disregard of police and court orders. The protesters used their vehicles as tools to back up their behaviour, honking their horns and racing dangerously around the streets in the downtown core.

Despite our attempts to negotiate and despite threats of investigation and enforcement, the illegal and disruptive behaviours continued throughout the protest and became elevated on weekends when more protesters arrived.

Our response as a police service, along with our many partners, was to work to safely manage the disruptions, contain the behaviours and negotiate the protesters out. In the early days, we were able to ensure that no serious injuries, deaths or damage to infrastructure were committed, but that's not the standard of policing any resident of our city or any Canadian would expect.

As a police service, we understood quickly that we needed assistance from all levels of government in the form of legislative powers and policing resources if we were to safely remove this unlawful protest from our streets.

It's important that this committee understand and appreciate the negative impacts this behaviour had on our entire community and our businesses, and especially the impacts on our vulnerable, marginalized, indigenous, 2SLGBTQAA+ and racialized communities.

Our Centretown is a diverse, proud and vibrant place. During the protest, we saw clear signs of hate, such as swastikas, anti-government sentiment, leaders posting threatening language on social media and other various forms of social disorder. It shook the community's faith and confidence in the ability of police and government to keep them safe. We have seen the same effects in cities such as Calgary, Windsor and in Coutts, Alberta, where similar protests were held.

Our goal from the outset was always to remove this protest safely. Doing that required careful coordination between all of our policing partners to develop a strategy that would ensure a safe resolution. All three levels of government responded with legislative measures that aided our strategy. I want to thank the City of Ottawa and the Ontario government for the changes brought forward. I also want to thank the federal government for invoking the federal Emergencies Act.

From a policing perspective, the legislation provided the OPS with the ability to prevent people from participating in this unlawful protest; to restrict people from travelling to any area where the unlawful protest was taking place; to secure protected places and critical infrastructure; to create and maintain the secured area to prevent people from violating the act and safely remove people who were attempting to do so; to go after the money funding the protest; and to require third parties to assist us in removing the heavy vehicles that were clogging streets and creating a safety hazard. It was a critical piece of our efforts, but it was only one piece.

Another critical piece was the rallying of police resources from the RCMP, the OPP and police services from across Canada. I want to thank them all for their support.

As you saw, once we had all of those authorities and those resources in place, we were able to implement a methodical police operation between February 17 and February 20 with an integrated command led by the Ottawa Police Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Ontario Provincial Police to safely remove the protest.

In total, there were 230 arrests, and 118 people were criminally charged with more than 400 criminal counts. Hundreds of provincial offence notices were issued. Cases are still moving through the courts, and multiple investigations are ongoing.

In a democracy such as Canada, there is no doubt that a discussion and assessment on the appropriateness of the invocation of the Emergencies Act, which provided police broader powers, is important. I am pleased to be here to contribute to that discussion.

I can tell you that police chiefs across the country are watching this discussion because they know that similar situations could occur or are occurring in their jurisdictions. I have spoken to many of them who have sought out advice.

• (1105)

Finally, I want to reiterate my pride in all of the police members who worked on this operation, including the members who came from across Canada to assist us. This was truly a Canadian effort and it showed the vital role that police play in maintaining our democracy and keeping our residents safe.

Deputy Chief Ferguson and I look forward to answering your questions today.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Interim Chief.

Now I would like to call on Commissioner Thomas Carrique.

Sir, you have five minutes for an opening statement. The floor is yours.

**Commissioner Thomas Carrique (Ontario Provincial Police):** Thank you, Chair.

Good morning Chair, vice-chairs and committee members. I am joined here today by Ontario Provincial Police Deputy Commissioner Chris Harkins and Chief Superintendent Carson Pardy.

Under the Ontario Police Services Act, the OPP has a unique dual mandate to provide frontline policing services to 328 municipalities across the province, as well as to provide assistance and/or specialized support to municipal services upon request.

As it relates to the "freedom convoy" and the associated illegal blockades in the city of Ottawa, the OPP's intelligence bureau commenced reporting to our policing partners on January 13, 2022. As of January 22, daily intelligence reports focused on the convoy headed to Ottawa and the anticipated protest movements across the province. The intelligence reporting was shared with more than 35 Canadian police, law enforcement and security agencies.

As the convoy crossed over the Manitoba-Ontario border and travelled across the province and until it arrived in Ottawa on January 28, OPP officers professionally fulfilled their duties without incident.

In support of the Ottawa Police Service, throughout the occupation an increasing number of OPP officers and specialized resources from various services became engaged, ultimately contributing to an integrated plan and the establishment of a unified command.

Simultaneously, our members responded to many other convoys and demonstrations that consistently and repeatedly emerged in communities across Ontario. These included, but were not limited to, the critical blockage of the Ambassador Bridge, the blockade of Highway 402, multiple other attempts to block Canada-U.S. land border crossings, and demonstrations that posed a risk to the area of the Ontario legislature.

In addition, from day one when the convoy entered Ontario, we were responsive to requests for assistance from other municipal police services. This was a provincial and national emergency that garnered international attention.

In response, the OPP and more than 20 other police services from across the country worked collaboratively to address public order emergencies that were unmatched in recent history. Protests and demonstrations are often complex in nature. The role of the police remains that of protecting the public, upholding the law and keeping the peace.

The province's Critical Infrastructure and Highways regulation, under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, and the federal Emergencies Act were effective supplementary tools needed to help protect critical infrastructure and ensure the continuous and safe delivery of essential goods and services, while at the same time maintaining—or in the case of Ottawa, restoring—peace, order and public security.

As the committee is well aware, in addition to the critical events experienced in Ontario, the illegal Ottawa occupation was accompanied by numerous other high-risk “freedom convoy”-related protests and blockades across Canada. The OPP worked collaboratively with the Ottawa Police Service, the Royal Canada Mounted Police and other policing partners to develop a sustainable integrated operational plan that was informed by best practices from other high-risk critical events, available police resources, and other concurrent and emerging operational requirements in a number of police jurisdictions.

Sufficiently trained public order officers were amassed from throughout Canada and deployed in an integrated, strategic and measured manner, which resulted in the collapse of the occupation. The situation and the associated events simultaneously taking place across Canada required unprecedented national collaboration to prevent injury, preserve life and protect critical infrastructure.

As the commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police, I am extremely proud of the remarkable professionalism and dedication of the officers deployed to Ottawa and the other high-risk events simultaneously occurring across the province. Despite all the challenges, our officers and those from a multitude of other Canadian police services remained committed to their roles and responsibilities while the entire nation watched live. They represented the entire policing profession with the utmost professionalism, discipline and competence.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

I look forward to answering any questions you may have for the Ontario Provincial Police.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Commissioner. We appreciate your opening remarks.

Colleagues, I'll now open the floor to questioning.

Mr. Lloyd, you are first up for a six-minute round.

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

Interim Chief Bell, in Ottawa, during the protest-clearing operation, were any loaded shotguns found in the trucks of protesters?

• (1115)

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, what I can indicate is that throughout the protest we did receive information and intelligence around weapons and the possession of weapons by people who either had attended or intended on attending the occupation.

As a result of the clearing, at no point did we lay any firearms-related charges, yet there are investigations that continue in relation to weapons possession at the occupation.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Yes or no, Interim Chief, were loaded firearms found in the trucks during the protest-clearing operation?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** As I indicated, Mr. Chair, there have been no charges laid to date in relation to weapons at the occupation site.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** It's a clear question, Interim Chief. Were weapons found? Were loaded firearms found, yes or no?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** No, not relating to any charges to this point.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Thank you, Chief. That's very illuminating.

On March 19, this past Saturday, a reporter, Justin Ling, wrote in the Toronto Star that police sources indicated that loaded shotguns were found in trucks at the Ottawa protest.

Is this false information?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** I'm unfamiliar with the quote you're referring to, but as I indicated before, we received intelligence information, we continue criminal investigations, and no charges have been laid to date in relation to firearms.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** But the article claims that a police source told the journalist that loaded shotguns were found in trucks during the protest-clearing operation. You have said to this committee that is in fact not the case, that loaded shotguns were not found in trucks during the protest-clearing operation.

Is that the case, Interim Chief?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** As I indicated, we received intelligence information. I'm unclear around the source of information that was received through that article or the corroboration around it. We have not laid any charges—

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Interim Chief, can you clarify, speaking on the record, not off the record, that loaded shotguns were not found in the vehicles during the protest operation? Can you confirm that?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Consistent with my answer previously, yes. I can confirm that to date no charges have been laid.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** If there had been firearms found, would the government have been made aware of that, as far as you know? Would the cabinet have been made aware of that if there had been firearms found?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Our normal course of action would be that we would conduct an investigation and charges would be laid. As a result of those charges, there would be public notifications of those charges. We wouldn't specifically notify any level of government as to the course or the conclusion of any investigation.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** But they would have been immediately aware if you had found firearms. Correct?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** There would have been public notifications made.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** We had a cabinet minister, the Minister of Crown Indigenous Relations, Marc Miller, retweet that article from Justin Ling from the Toronto Star claiming that there were loaded shotguns found in trucks. This is misinformation, Chief.

I submit to the committee, this is misinformation being spread by a journalist and misinformation being spread by a member of this government. I'll close my remarks and give my time to Mr. Shipley.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Interim Chief.

**Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I'd like to thank all the witnesses who are here with us today. I witnessed first-hand what went on here in Ottawa. Both your services, in very trying times—I spoke to many of the officers out there—handled themselves in a very professional manner.

I'd first like to direct a couple of my questions to Commissioner Carrique.

Hello, Commissioner Carrique. I understand we have some mutual acquaintances.

I had the opportunity to speak to two previous commissioners of the OPP as this was going on, trying to get some information. One of them told me an interesting statement, which is that you will never find a police service that would turn down additional powers.

Would you agree with that statement, Commissioner?

**Commr Thomas Carrique:** Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I would like to know the context of the statement. I don't know that we are in a position to turn down additional powers. We utilize the laws that are provided to us. We do so in a judicious manner consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Thank you for that.

I'm not giving you all the details, so I know I kind of put you on the spot. It was obviously around the emergency measures act and how that could help some services.

Also, through discussions with those two past commissioners, they both felt that the emergency measures act was not required. Could you elaborate on that? Do you agree with your predecessors on this?

• (1120)

**Commr Thomas Carrique:** The Emergencies Act was an extremely valuable tool. This was identified as a threat to national security. We were able to utilize a number of the powers in the Emergencies Act: specifically, prohibiting people from attending designated areas; limiting the presence of children, which created a significant public safety risk; compelling service providers to assist with the removal of vehicles that required heavy tows and providing indemnification for those service providers; and the freezing of accounts.

These tools made our operation very effective, and in the absence of having those tools, we could have not have been as effective as we were.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I would know like to invite Mr. Noormohamed for six minutes of questioning.

Sir, we'll go over to you.

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

I'd like to thank both of you for being with us today.

I'd like to start with Interim Chief Bell.

Thank you so much for your opening comments. I think they were important for all of us to hear.

I just want to clarify something that was asked of you. I know my colleague Mr. Lloyd is not here, but I think it's important for the record.

To be clear, you said there have been no charges laid to date related to firearms. Is it possible that charges could still be laid related to firearms?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** We don't specifically comment on the progress of ongoing investigations. As I indicated in the answer, information and intelligence was received prior to the demobilization of the demonstration around the existence of firearms within the footprint. Investigations relating to weapons offences continue. Upon the completion of them, we'll be able to provide information if there are charges ultimately laid. To date, there have been no firearms-related charges laid in relation to our takedown.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you.

There has been, as you know, a lot of interest across Canada in what happened in Ottawa. Many of us receive emails from people with information about how they believe things went down in Ottawa.

If you'd indulge me, I have a few questions. I want to ask you just to clarify things you said in your opening statement for folks across the country, so there isn't misinformation about what happened in Ottawa.

Would you classify what happened in Ottawa as a peaceful unobstructive protest?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, as I indicated in my statement, no, I wouldn't. As the protest demonstration unfolded, we quickly identified it as an illegal occupation of our streets. Beyond our own observations of it, that was by far and large the sentiment we were receiving from our community: that the activities ongoing within the streets were extremely disruptive and made them fear for their own safety within their community.

So, no, I do not believe this was a lawful demonstration within our streets, and for those reasons we took the course of action we did to ultimately remove them.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you.

Interim Chief, just to clarify again for folks who may not have heard your statement, were there multiple reports of allegations of hate crimes?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** The existence of undesirable, intolerable criminal behaviour that the residents of our city were subjected to is well documented through the course of our investigations and through the course of the unfolding of our dismantling of the occupation.

What I can tell you is that all through the occupation, we had conversations with our community where they demonstrated and identified and reported incidents of hate-based crimes and incidents that they were experiencing within their streets. We continue to investigate those incidents. We continue to look at the community healing and reparation that we know needs to go on within our community based on the intolerable circumstances and behaviours they were subjected to.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you.

There were reports of visible minorities, of indigenous people, of women, of vulnerable communities being harassed, being made to feel unsafe, and they were told not to worry because this was a peaceful protest.

Do you believe they had reason to worry?

• (1125)

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, I think it's a very interesting question, and I don't think I'm the one properly situated to answer it.

What I can tell you is that the community members we spoke with experienced that. They felt unsafe in their communities. They were terrorized by activity that occurred in interactions with them relating to people who were present in and around the occupation. They experienced incidents of hate, biased crimes and biased incidents in their interactions. Their very real, very relevant experi-

ences were exactly that; they felt unsafe within their own communities.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Interim Chief, as you reflect on what was going on and having heard from your community, how did you feel when you saw political leaders encouraging or supporting the blockade and defending the actions of those who were occupying your city?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, my focus throughout this was to work with my policing partners.

I would like to publicly thank Commissioner Carrique and Commissioner Lucki for the amazing support they provided throughout this. When it came to our interactions with various levels of government, our sole focus was identifying how we could access the resources and supports we needed and how we could leverage adequate tools, including the legislative changes like those in the Emergencies Act, which we ultimately received. When it came to political and government operations, those were the only things we focused on.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** We have a very short amount of time left. I'm going to ask you two very quick questions and I'd really appreciate your answers. A lot of folks said that the protest became illegal only after the Emergencies Act was invoked. Could you share your perspective on that very quickly? Could you also share whether in fact laws and statutes were broken prior to the Emergencies Act being invoked?

Could you also confirm or deny that “a large number of—”

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but he's going to have only 10 seconds to answer both.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Okay.

Could you confirm your perspective on whether the Emergencies Act was needed or not?

**The Chair:** Time's up. Sorry.

I'll give you 10 seconds to answer, Interim Chief.

**Mr. Steve Bell:** That's a challenge.

The unlawful activity progressed throughout the course of the occupation; that is, from the time people did not leave what could have been a lawful demonstration to, ultimately, our takedown, unlawful activity was observed, documented and prosecuted.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I'll now call on Ms. Michaud to begin her six-minute question slot.

The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses for being here with us today. We appreciate it; we were looking forward to hearing their testimony.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ottawa Police Service for its excellent work. I also want to thank the officers, who managed to implement a large-scale operation to remove the protesters who had set up on Parliament Hill for several weeks.

That said, the first question that comes to my mind is this: why did this operation not take place earlier? Why did it take so much time to implement it?

I can't help but draw a parallel with what happened in Quebec City. As soon as they got the information that people were heading to the National Assembly in Quebec City, the mayor of the city and the premier of the province issued warnings. They said that they would not tolerate any excesses. Police blocked access to the Parliament. There were police officers from the Sûreté du Québec, or SQ, and from the city's police force just about everywhere near the National Assembly and in the surrounding streets. There were even tow trucks on site.

That said, I wonder about the Ottawa Police Service's preparation.

At what point, Mr. Bell, did you know that people were heading to Parliament Hill?

How did you prepare? How did you work with other police services, with levels of government and with the City of Ottawa?

How did you prepare for this convoy that was clearly headed for downtown Ottawa?

[English]

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One of the things that I think are really important to highlight is that as the police of jurisdiction in Ottawa, on a yearly basis we deal with hundreds of demonstrations. In the seat of the Parliament for the nation, as the police of jurisdiction in the nation's capital, we do that. That is what we do. On a daily basis, we manage, support, liaise and work with protesters and demonstrators in our jurisdiction so they can engage in their lawful right to have their voices heard.

This circumstance was unprecedented. We'd never seen it previously. On previous occasions within the six months prior to this, several demonstrations involved vehicles attending our jurisdiction to have their voices heard.

All of the past activity consisted of people attending, having their voices heard, as is their constitutional right, and then leaving. We prepare, support and work with protesters to look at how we can best manage their safety and the safety of the community.

What I can tell you is that as this built, as this moved across the country and as it ultimately settled down into our jurisdiction—ultimately occupying our streets—this grew to be a very different circumstance from any other protest or demonstration that we had managed in the past. The very outcome of it identifies how different it was.

Last year, during protests here, there were fewer than five arrests associated with demonstrations and demonstration activity. In this protest, we had 280 arrests that resulted in hundreds and hundreds of criminal charges. Those circumstances did not exist prior to this demonstration occupying our streets.

Since this has occurred—

• (1130)

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Bell. As I don't have much time, I'd like to go back to the main question.

You said in your opening remarks that the intent of the protesters was clearly to disrupt public order and to disrupt the downtown area. People were displaying symbols of hate. You're saying that this is something you'd never seen before.

Every week, people who want to be heard come and protest in front of Parliament. However, the ones we're talking about clearly intended to stay. They were telling the media that they would not leave until they got what they wanted. We could see that they had the intention of going a little further.

I have the impression that at some point, the scale of the situation became unprecedented. Around the 11th or 12th day, an Ottawa Police Service employee wrote a letter to Mr. Trudeau and to the mayor of the city, Mr. Watson, asking for 1,800 more officers. These additional resources could have allowed you to act more quickly.

How did you prepare yourselves?

When you asked for help, were you heard?

[English]

**Mr. Steve Bell:** I think you've identified scope and scale, which are very important factors that play in this. The original intelligence we had identified a much smaller footprint for the people who were what I would call motivated to stay for longer periods of time. What ultimately ended up on our streets in terms of scope and scale—geographical footprint—was not consistent with what we believe was intended to occur.

Beyond that, the activities engaged in by the protesters were not what we believed would occur and were not consistent with previous demonstrations that had occurred in our streets. The hate, the disruptive behaviour, the intimidating behaviour and the noise pollution that terrorized our communities—24 hours a day, seven days a week—were nothing like what had occurred before.

You mentioned the preparations by other jurisdictions. I can tell you that through conversations with many other chiefs of police, which are ongoing, much has been learned from what occurred in Ottawa.

Chief Ramer from Toronto clearly indicated—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I'm sorry, Interim Chief, but we're out of time on that block.

I'd like to turn now to Mr. MacGregor.

Sir, you have six minutes. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Thank you so much, Chair.

Chief Bell, I'm going to continue with you. Your opening remarks quite skilfully and completely deconstructed the narrative that this was a peaceful protest. I appreciate your providing Ottawa Police Service's perspective on what your officers were dealing with.

I want to go through this timeline. The convoy arrived in Ottawa on the weekend of January 28. On February 6, Ottawa declared a local state of emergency, and on February 11, the Province of Ontario followed suit. Then on February 14, a federal state of emergency was declared. With the declaration of a state of emergency by both Ottawa and the Province of Ontario, there were a lot of questions as to why existing laws were not sufficient to deal with this protest. Why did we get to the point, on February 14, where federal powers were necessary?

Can you please explain to the committee why a local state of emergency and then a provincial state of emergency were not enough to deal with the occupation of Ottawa?

• (1135)

**Mr. Steve Bell:** As I indicated in my statement, and as Commissioner Carrique reiterated in his opening statement, there were several factors and several pieces that needed to come into play for us to be able to successfully and safely end the occupation of our streets.

One of those pieces were the injunctions levelled within the city of Ottawa. Another piece was the provincial state of emergency and Emergencies Act that were implemented. The final piece was the Emergencies Act. They all provided different components, legislation and tools for us that were utilized to ultimately and successfully take down the demonstration that was occurring.

Beyond the tools we had, we needed to amass the resources. We did ultimately have just shy of 2,000 police members attend our city streets in order to be able to successfully dismantle this.

We needed not only tools but resources and the plan. That all culminated in the ultimate takedown that you were able to witness.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I think that residents of Ottawa still have a lot of questions about their police service and the actions that led up to the declaration of emergency.

We had media reports and we saw pictures of police officers standing by while people were carting jerry cans of diesel fuel. A lot of residents rightfully have questions as to why those officers were not enforcing the law at that time. Can you provide some illumination as to why that did not occur?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, I'll concur at the beginning that residents of our city did have questions about our activities as we led up to this. I have questions about our activities leading up to this. That's why discussions like these and the internal review that's going to be done by the City of Ottawa are so important. We need to

learn from these circumstances. We need to make sure that something like this never replicates itself again.

This was an unprecedented, unseen event for any jurisdiction across Canada. The members of our police service, our unified command team between the RCMP and the OPP, were dealing with a situation that had never been tackled and had never been approached before.

We went through a series of methodical planning, a series of resource gathering, and ultimately utilized the tools that were presented to us in order to safely take down this demonstration and the illegal occupation of our streets. There were as many questions—

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I need to interject. I'm sorry; I have limited time here.

Very quickly from you, on what date did you feel that the protest had moved into an illegal occupation?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** As I indicated, as the protest grew in scope and scale, and as we observed the activities of the members, it turned from what would have been a demonstration to an illegal occupation very early in the stage, and that's when we—

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** So it was very early....

There are reports that some members of the Ottawa Police Service donated funds through GiveSendGo to contribute to the illegal occupation. Police officers are necessarily held to a higher standard because of the role they play in our society. What does it say when we have police officers funding an occupation that is actively undermining the residents' right to peace and security and the ability to go about their daily business?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, that is an extremely important question and one that has been asked of me many times.

I've been very clear around that: People who support, members who support, this activity do not share the values of this organization. We have already commenced and initiated investigations that will look to fully discipline, within our authorities, any misconduct that's identified.

I also think it's really important to balance that. The vast majority of the members of this police service, the members of the OPP and the RCMP and every police member who attended our city, did it with the values that we hold and share to make sure that these illegal activities and occupation of our streets were removed so that the streets could be given back to our citizens.

I think that's the important thing to focus on.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Chief.

Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll now move into the second round of questions. That begins with Mr. Brock, who will have five minutes.

Sir, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for your presence today and your testimony.

Largely, my questions will be directed towards Interim Chief Bell.

Interim Chief Bell, as just a little bit of background, we know that there were a number of other similar protests around this country. We know that there was a border dispute in Alberta, a border dispute in Manitoba and a border dispute at the Windsor Ambassador Bridge.

You'll agree with me, Officer, that those disputes were all resolved and removed and charges laid without the invocation of the Emergencies Act. Yes or no?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, I would debate the definition of "similar". Border protests in non-residential areas are considerably different from an occupation of what amassed to approximately 20 square blocks in the centre of a major municipality within the country, in front of a Parliament that had to suspend sitting for a period of time so that the police operations could be undertaken. The characterization of the other three demonstrations and where they were situated, as well as scope and scale, I don't think is comparable to what happened within the streets of Ottawa.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** You'd also agree with me, Officer, that in fact part of the wording of the statute is that the invocation can only take place where there are no other existing laws in Canada to remove the nuisance or dispute.

You'd agree with me that in these circumstances there were a myriad of Criminal Code charges, Highway Traffic Act charges and City of Ottawa municipal bylaws, as well as several Superior Court orders, that could have been utilized by the rank and file of the Ottawa Police Service, but there were no charges laid before the invocation of the Emergencies Act.

Do you agree with that, Officer, or not?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** I do not, and I do not because there were several criminal charges laid in the course of our enforcement through the process of stabilizing, maintaining and ultimately removing the demonstrators from our streets. The Emergencies Act—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** I'm sorry to interrupt. Was that before or after the invocation of the act?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** There were criminal charges laid prior to the invocation of the Emergencies Act.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Okay. What charges were they?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** I would—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Were they Criminal Code charges?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Absolutely: There were Criminal Code charges related to activities surrounding the demonstration.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** You mentioned "racing dangerously" around the city core.

Those laws exist under the Highway Traffic Act, and presumably that wasn't simply a report that was generated to the Ottawa Police Service, but your rank and file—hundreds and hundreds of rank-and-file Ottawa Police Service members—were able to witness that

dangerous behaviour, and yet no charges were laid in relation to that conduct. You'd agree with me?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** As I indicated in my opening, the Emergencies Act was one of the tools that we utilized. What specifically it provided us was the ability to create an exclusionary zone. One of the major issues that we had in trying to manage and maintain was the free flow of people in and out of the demonstration footprint—the red zone, as we called it, and our ability to—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** I get that.

Chief Bell, thank you. I have a limited amount of time. That does not answer my question.

My question is, there were a number of Highway Traffic Act infractions and Criminal Code violations being conducted in the presence of police officers where no charges were laid: What direction did leadership give to the rank and file to turn a blind eye to this illegal behaviour that only became necessary in terms of exercising your duty as a police officer after the invocation of the act?

• (1145)

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds, Chief.

**Mr. Steve Bell:** There was no direction to disregard criminal activity or the Highway Traffic Act activity. In fact, what we have done is to gather information and intelligence, and we continue to do investigations around that very activity you're discussing.

What was paramount for us was the safety of the community, the safety of our officers and the safety of the demonstrators, and on several occasions that safety was—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. It's not the best part of my job but it's an important part.

Now we turn to Mr. Naqvi, who has five minutes.

Mr. Naqvi.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.):** Thank you to all the officers who are here today.

My questions will be for Interim Chief Bell.

Chief Bell, thank you for being here and for being so forthcoming in answering questions.

I'm going to be asking some really basic fact-based questions, questions that I'm hearing directly from the community I represent. As you know, I represent Ottawa Centre, which was ground zero for this illegal occupation, and I think you've also been asked these questions by the citizens of our community.

Let me start with this: Is it a general practice for Ottawa police to let vehicles park on Wellington Street?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, as I indicated in an earlier answer, at various times, related to different protests that have occurred in the past, including in the very near past, provisions have been made to allow vehicles into that area, to have protesters' voices heard, after which they have left.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** As you mentioned, we get protests often around the parliamentary precinct. Have we in the past for various protests allowed cranes to be mounted right in front of Parliament Hill?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but if you mean specifically whether we allow cranes and we manage the access to that, then, yes, absolutely, that is one of the functions of the Ottawa Police Service.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** But we don't allow those types of equipment, as part of a protest, to be stationed on Wellington Street?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, it depends on the context of the protest. We, as a police service, attempt to facilitate people's lawful right to have their voices heard. We have facilitated that ability for many different communities in different ways in the past.

Last summer, we had a farmers protest in which many dozens of tractors occupied the same area. In the past we have had trucking association demonstrations, during which vehicles have come and parked in that area, driven around different areas, gotten their message across and then ultimately left the jurisdiction, as is the course of a normal protest.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Chief Bell, I've seen a lot of those protests as well, and it was highly unusual to see a crane right in front of the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's office.

Did these protesters have a permit to hold a protest at Parliament Hill?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** As the police of jurisdiction for Ottawa, we do not provide permits for people to protest within the parliamentary precinct. That's not within our area of jurisdiction. We are able—not ourselves but through our city partners—to issue permits for demonstrations and protests that occur within our city. I can tell you that as a result of the ongoing pandemic, those permits have been suspended, so no permit has been issued for any protest within the time span of the pandemic because protests have not been sanctioned by the city.

• (1150)

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Thank you.

The protest started around January 28. After the first weekend, around February 1 or 2, the Tuesday or Wednesday, I recall seeing a news release from Ottawa police that clearly said there were about 200 to 250 protesters with a couple hundred vehicles.

As you stated, a few laws were being broken, so why didn't the Ottawa police at that time move in and enforce the existing laws at their disposal to remove the occupiers?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** As I indicated before, I think it's important to understand the scope, scale and magnitude of the operation we undertook.

I understand that people have witnessed and observed how many police officers it took to come here, the amendments of powers that we needed in order to be able to create a safe environment to begin that operation. That took time as it moved through...

The numbers of people involved in the protest site fluctuated, but the number of vehicles did not dramatically fluctuate. The vehicles were an impediment to us—

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds, Chief.

**Mr. Steve Bell:** —and a concern and something that was different for us in dealing with....

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** But, Chief, in the eventual operation, you removed vehicles and—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but we're out of time.

Mr. Naqvi, you're out of time, sir. We have to move on.

We will move to Ms. Michaud.

You have all of two and a half minutes. Make good use of it.

[*Translation*]

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

I will pick up the conversation where I left off earlier with Mr. Bell.

Mr. Bell, you said that the other police services, such as in Quebec City, were perhaps somewhat better prepared because they took note of what happened here in Ottawa. They were obviously better prepared, and events made that clear.

I'm a little more interested in the outcome of the crisis. In Ottawa, we apparently needed the Emergencies Act to bring the crisis to an end, but that is not what happened in Quebec City, because protesters were not given time to dig in.

In Windsor, at the Ambassador Bridge, protesters did have time to dig in, but it was possible to dislodge them and dismantle the blockade without applying the Emergencies Act.

I'll ask you again the question I asked earlier. Prior to the use of the Emergencies Act, you had asked for reinforcements, for additional officers to be sent to you. If you had received these reinforcements, do you think that would have tipped the scales?

[*English*]

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, as I indicated, the pieces that we needed to come together needed to come together. They ultimately came together, and that allowed for our dismantling of the operation. Those pieces included the amassing of the resources and the tools we needed to create the environment we could undertake to ultimately dismantle the operation.

Those are the timelines that we've identified, and those are the timelines that I've spoken about over the course of these questions.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** I have the impression that these tools and resources could have been available to you already, and that it was not the Emergencies Act that enabled their use.

When a car obstructs a public road, you can write a ticket, you can have it towed. You can set up physical barriers, you can block off streets to prevent cars from moving in. These are all powers you already had.

Why didn't you use them earlier?

I think there was a change in attitude once the Emergencies Act was invoked. Before that, officers were supervising protesters and monitoring the protest as if it were normal. Clearly, it was not; it was an occupation.

Before the Emergencies Act was applied, we didn't see officers trying to remove the protesters. Why was there no attempt to remove them before, even if there was a slight lack of resources? Clearly, the tools were already available to you.

[English]

**Mr. Steve Bell:** The emergency measures act—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but we're out of time.

However, I'm going to give you 10 seconds to answer that, please.

**Mr. Steve Bell:** The emergencies measures act specifically provided us with authorities to utilize those officers who attended. It specifically provided us with authorities to exclude vehicles and pedestrians from the area, authorities that we did not have prior to it being invoked.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, we'll go over to you for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you, Chair.

Chief Bell, the integrated terrorism assessment centre, in the week before the convoy arrived in Ottawa, provided intelligence assessments that concluded that violent extremist groups were deeply involved in the protest movement. Then we had a convoy—with that assessment—arriving in our nation's capital, setting up on Wellington Street right beside the Prime Minister's office, right beside the seat of our democracy.

How did those assessments inform police behaviour? That should have put you on high alert. Even if what turned out afterwards was far from the assessment, that assessment alone should have put your police officers on high alert that potentially something could happen in a very bad way.

• (1155)

**Mr. Steve Bell:** What I can say is that we were on high alert as an organization, and we thank our partners from the OPP and the RCMP who helped us to actively gather intelligence throughout the buildup to this and all the way throughout the occupation and ultimate takedown.

We are actively now engaged in the reviews that identify the information we had, the courses that were taken and how we can learn in order to be able to make sure something like this does not occur again.

What I can tell you is that the planning we did was exactly in line with protest planning that had been done in the past. What we saw in front of us was an extremely unprecedented occupation.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Chief Bell, at the time, though, did you feel that was a national security threat? When you received those assessments, did your police officers feel that was a viable national security threat?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** As the intelligence experts we have are with us, I am going to turn this question over to Commissioner Carrique. He and his organization were principal in gathering that intelligence.

Commissioner Carrique.

**Commr Thomas Carrique:** Thank you, Chief Bell.

Through you, Mr. Chair, we did identify it as a threat to national security, through the provincial operations intelligence bureau, on or about February 7.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we have two more questioners but not sufficient time to give them the full allotment.

I'm going to ask Mr. Shipley and Mr. McKinnon to confine their periods to three minutes each.

Mr. Shipley, the floor is yours for three minutes.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Thank you, Chair.

Very quickly, to both Commissioner Carrique and to Interim Chief Bell, were you at any time during this protest given any political direction from any level of government, be it your councillor, your mayor, your board of police or your provincial or federal jurisdictions?

**Commr Thomas Carrique:** I can answer first, Mr. Chair.

Absolutely not. At no point in time did I receive any direction. I am solely responsible for the operations of the Ontario Provincial Police.

**Mr. Steve Bell:** I can concur with Commissioner Carrique.

I must make the statement, though, that I did not become chief of this operation until February 15. From that time moving forward, I have received no political direction or intonation around what I should do. We operate as an independent policing service under the oversight of our police services board.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Thank you for that. That's reassuring to know.

Interim Chief Bell, it was a bad situation, quite frankly. When I am here, I live in downtown Ottawa. I walked through this protest when coming to work in the morning, and at night.

I was surprised, though.... There was one particular night when I walked home with a colleague. I'll admit that we took a bit of a longer route to see what was going on and to have a look at this, as I had to walk through it. That night—and it was probably about nine o'clock at night or so—I did not see one single Ottawa police officer anywhere in the protest keeping an eye on anything.

I heard that perhaps absences were up at the beginning of this protest. Could you maybe give me some information as to why there weren't any officers there and whether absences were up at the beginning of this protest?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Mr. Chair, I can't comment specifically on what was observed because I'm unsure of the exact date and time.

What I can tell you is that our members and members from across the country came together in force to help support the take-down of the occupation. It took a considerable amount of time to amass that number of resources.

In the early days of the illegal occupation, we indicated the re-sourcing pressures that we felt as an organization. We relied on the Ontario Provincial Police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to help support our operations.

Although I can't comment on whether you saw an Ottawa police member in the crowd or not, what I can tell you is that from the time this started to the time that it was ultimately taken down, police members monitored and actively worked to dismantle it.

• (1200)

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Thank you for that answer.

I should have clarified that I didn't see any uniform members. I'm sure there were other members in and about there.

My last question, then—

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds, sir.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Very quickly, I know that Chief Sloly kept requesting the number of 1,800 officers. Was there a plan to use those 1,800 officers?

**The Chair:** That will have to be a yes-or-no answer.

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Absolutely. The number of 1,800 was built around a plan that we needed to build to monitor, maintain, stabilize and ultimately dismantle. That's what we were ultimately able to amass, as the refined planning went into—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now, for our last three-minute slot, I understand that I go to Mr. Zuberi.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here and for doing their duty to protect and serve society.

I'd like to double back on some remarks that have been made thus far.

We heard from the OPP, Interim Chief Bell, that on February 7, you had intelligence saying there was a national security threat. Was this national security threat related to far-right extremism?

I'm not sure if he can hear me. I ask that my time be paused while we're waiting for the answer.

**The Chair:** Chief, did you hear the question? Are you there?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** I'm sorry. That's my mistake. I believed that question was for Commissioner Carrique around the intelligence.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** No, for the Ottawa Police.

**Mr. Steve Bell:** My apologies. Again, I will defer to Commissioner Carrique around the intelligence. It was the OPP that led the intelligence efforts around this.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** If you could reply quickly, was that related to far-right extremism?

**Commr Thomas Carrique:** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. This is not the appropriate venue to get into the specifics of intelligence.

What I can tell you is that in the collection of intelligence right across this country, with the simultaneous activities going on and the events in our nation's capital, we did identify, collectively, a risk to national security.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you for confirming that.

We've spent about a minute on lost time due to lack of answers, so I ask for that back.

Going back to the OPP, there was a real and live national security concern. You've said that Ottawa handles hundreds of protests every year. Were you in contact with the protest organizers in advance of the actual protest or convoy? If so, did you try to prevent them from entering Wellington Street and the environs of the parliamentary precinct?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** I believe that question is for me, as I'm the one who stated that we have managed hundreds of protests.

We regularly and in all occasions attempt to make contact and work—liaise—with the organizers. That's the important part of our police liaison team—

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** I'm sorry—

**Mr. Steve Bell:** [*Inaudible—Editor*] extremely successful—

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** —but I'm just trying to ask a question. Were you successful in making contact with the protest organizers?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** This was a difficult group to identify protest organizers within. It was a fractured, frayed group. We did make contact with several people—

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you. My time is very limited.

I found the Facebook page of the convoy that was developed as of January 14. The protests started on January 22. Were you in contact with the protest organizers through information they made available through their Facebook page and other methods?

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Again, the protest organizers were extremely difficult to identify because it was a very fractured, frayed group of people.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** So I—

**Mr. Steve Bell:** Our police liaison team members did an amazing job in contacting as many different people that had identified themselves as organizers to start discussions....

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much.

I added it to the time—

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I have a point of order, Chair.

Just quickly, I was wondering, through you, if you could invite our witnesses to provide written briefs. They may not have been able to fully develop some of their answers during testimony, and I think written briefs from both departments would aid our committee in getting a fulsome picture of this.

**The Chair:** Sure. I can make that request.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming to appear in front of this committee at a very difficult time. The request has been made that—

• (1205)

**Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry to interrupt.

During the course of this meeting, Mr. Lloyd has tweeted that “Ottawa interim chief Bell...confirms that no firearms were found during [a] clearing of the Convoy protests”. That's not the testimo-

ny I heard. I believe that mis-characterizes Chief Bell's testimony and I would urge people to look at the actual testimony.

**The Chair:** We're not going to be debating tweets in front of the committee.

However, I will ask the witnesses to feel free to give us more information if they had insufficient time to answer these questions fully. I would encourage them to do that.

On behalf of the committee, and in fact on behalf of the Parliament of Canada, I want to thank the witnesses. I know how intense a time this has been for all of you. We appreciate you sharing your views and your perspectives for us. Thank you very much.

Members of the committee, we will now suspend for five minutes and we will return in camera. Thank you.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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