



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Winnipeg, MB

Day 3

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EVIDENCE

Witness 7: Richard Abbott

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[00:00:00]

Shawn Buckley

So our next witness today is Mr. Rick Abbott. Mr. Abbott, can you state your full name for the record, spelling your first and last name, please.

Richard Abbott

You bet. It's Richard Abbott, A-B-B-O-T-T.

Shawn Buckley,

And, Mr. Abbott, do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Richard Abbott

I do.

Shawn Buckley

Now, I just I want to introduce some of your police service to the commissioners. My understanding is that you were a police officer for a full 25 years [Exhibit WI-3e]?

Richard Abbott

That's correct.

Shawn Buckley,

And you had quite an accelerated career path. So in your first year, you were the class president; you were the valedictorian; and you were the winner of the Officer Safety Award?

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

You started in patrol services, which is the normal route. But very quickly you were moved on to a beat team.

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

And because of that, you got to know the drug world very, very well.

Richard Abbott

Very well.

Shawn Buckley

And then in year six of your career, you joined the tactical team.

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

And my understanding is that's very early in a career for a police officer to be joining the tactical team.

Richard Abbott

At that time, especially, in that era, yes, it was.

Shawn Buckley

Right. Okay, and then you were for eight years, a police sniper. Following that, you taught gunfighting.

Richard Abbott

That's right. When I left tactical section after just about eight years, I moved to our Officer Safety Unit, teaching the patrol carbine program.

Shawn Buckley

Right, and then you were promoted to sergeant. And so, you were sent back to the street to manage a beat team and a patrol team?

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

And then they took you back to the SWAT team, basically, in charge of the Sniper Unit.

Richard Abbott

Yeah, I was their training sergeant. That's right.

Shawn Buckley

And then, while you were still in tactical, acting as a staff sergeant, you were promoted to commander for the West Edmonton Division.

Richard Abbott

That's correct: promoted out of Tactical Section, as their acting staff sergeant, back into Patrol Services.

Shawn Buckley

Right, but as a commander.

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

So is it fair to say that in your 25 years as a police officer that you were trained quite extensively how to make very rational decisions with an aim to making volatile and violent situations safe?

Richard Abbott

Most of my career revolved around either responding to or commanding, using what we call risk-effective decision-making.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, now you're here to first of all, talk to us about the culture in the Edmonton Police Department when COVID arrived. And so, can you start sharing with us some of the things that occurred in the Edmonton Police Office concerning COVID and the approach taken?

Richard Abbott

I'll talk specifically today about two policies of the Edmonton Police Service that I think will show that, objectively, it crossed from worried about the membership's health and directly into coercing, bullying, and demeaning the membership who had decided not to take the COVID drugs.

The first one occurred in the fall of 2020. It was a disclosure that was forced upon the membership. So the service had said—and I'm paraphrasing—that they needed to know the vaccination status of the membership so that they can make good health decisions for both the police service and the community at hand.

This quickly became clear to me to be a lie. Let's say there's 2,500 combined membership of sworn and non-sworn members of the Edmonton Police Service: there was a handful of the membership who had held off on disclosing their vaccination status. I was one of them.

And to be clear, I was vaccinated and my chain of command knew that I was vaccinated. I'm not here to talk about the reasons why I was coerced into taking the drugs. I'm here to talk about objective reasons of how the policies were not about health.

Shawn Buckley

Right. Just so that I understand. So literally, there's roughly 2,500 people that we're talking about, and only a handful would not have filled in this questionnaire. So I mean, you're like 99.9 per cent plus, and they're saying, well, they need that last handful to fill them in so they can make proper health decisions.

Richard Abbott

Yes, and it gets worse. I had been respectfully speaking through my chain of command.

[00:05:00]

That means up through and including one of the deputy chiefs. I wanted to keep lines of communication open with them, saying, I think if they're not making a legal mistake here, I knew they were making an ethical or a moral mistake.

And I had openly told my deputy chief, "I'm going to fill out your form, but I'm purposely dragging my feet here to keep lines of communication open." And we spoke just like this. I said, "Don't fire me!" I was joking with them. "I'm going to fill out your paper." But when push came to shove, I got a phone call from the President of the Edmonton Police Association.

This might be a good time for me to fill in some three-lettered acronyms that police use. It can be painful.

So there's the Edmonton Police Service, which is the organization itself. There's the Edmonton Police Association, which acts as a union. So although police can't legally unionize, it does act as a union—also called the EPA. And then there's the Edmonton Police Commission. So the Commission is considered the buffer between the politicians of City Council and the police service itself. Across the nation, sometimes they're called the Police Services Board. In Alberta, it's called the Police Commission.

So I got a phone call from the union president telling me, "Rick, they're going to fire you if you don't fill out this form." And I told him, "I told you I'm going fill it out. I'll go fill it out now." So after I filled it out, it came down to one last member of the Edmonton Police Service.

So of those approximately 2,500 people, one patrol constable, who I've gained permission to use his name today: he was a 25-year-combined member of both the Police Service and

of the Canadian Armed Forces, named Constable Rob Kitchen. He was on a *Mental Health Complaint Act* [sic]—on duty as a patrol constable—when he was called in and told that if he didn't fill out the form, there'd be ramifications. He said, "I told you, I'm not telling you my status," and he was suspended without pay at that moment. I use the term tongue-in-cheek, but it's not funny: he was fired on the spot for not filling out a form.

So this is my first example where I think it clearly crosses from, this is not about health, this was about coercion. And they were firing Constable Kitchen to show the rest of the membership that if you defy any of these mandates, there will be serious loss for you and your family.

Shawn Buckley

And I just want to make sure that everyone hearing your testimony understands that when you have 2,500 members and only a couple have not filled in a health questionnaire, that statistically speaking, I mean, you've got the information you need to make any health decisions. That basically what you're saying is there was really no need for them to have 100 per cent compliance.

Richard Abbott

And objectively, since I had shown my hand culturally, saying, "I'm vaccinated." If there was one person left who hadn't filled out that form, you could take a scientific, wild guess as to whether or not that person was vaccinated. You could, basically, still make your decisions on how to make your health choices, as they said this was done for. They were lying. This was about coercion.

Shawn Buckley

Right, okay. Now, there was another incident you wanted to tell us about.

Richard Abbott

The second policy issue I can talk to you about is what I defined as the segregation incident.

So as a commander of a shift, essentially, in one of the divisions in Edmonton, I'd be responsible for a chain of command of, at any one time, four sergeants and their patrol squads, plus some detectives that would be in the area. At any one shift, I'd be working for between 50 and 60 people. This was in the fall, again, of 2020 [sic], where the policies of the police service said that if you chose not to take the COVID drugs, you could go every three-ish days, on your own dime and on your own time, to go get a rapid test to show whether or not you were sick with COVID.

So under my command—because nobody could truly disclose who is who; there was supposed to be privacy around that—there was at least, say, on a shift, three or four people who I knew hadn't taken the drugs.

[00:10:00]

Either a) because they confided in me because they trusted me. Or it came later to my knowledge because those who chose not to take the drugs were not allowed to use the lunchroom in the division. They weren't allowed to use the gym and they weren't allowed to work overtime, at that point.

So the issue over not using the lunchroom, really, was even unknown to me until one of my constables came to me and said, “Listen, you know that they’re calling the superintendent’s boardroom upstairs, now, the ‘shame room.’” And I hadn’t heard this: the shame room. “No, what’s the ‘shame room?’” “Well, the unvaccinated aren’t allowed to eat with the rest of their squads.”

Now, you have to remember what’s going on during the shift. We could have a vaccinated and an unvaccinated police member sharing a squad car, responding to the stabbings, to the family fights, to everything you can imagine a patrol service member goes through on a daily basis: sharing the steering wheel; sharing the tight space; I say, kickin’ and a’gougin’ in the mud and the blood and the beer, arresting people. Policing can be a messy job. Nobody wants to see it. They were allowed to do that messy job with their squad mate in the car.

Shawn Buckley

Right. So they’d be using the same computer keyboard; they could be using the same microphone. One would be driving at one time, one would be driving— Basically, they’re touching all the same surfaces.

Richard Abbott

And responding to these crowds of people, all day long, together. But when they came back to the division, they weren’t allowed to break bread together. So the boardroom became known as the “shame room” because there were some—a few—members of the service that were sympathetic to their squad mates who decided not to take the COVID drugs and they’d go eat with them in the “shame room.”

So okay, I had had enough—that was one of the straws that broke this camel’s back—and I wasn’t going to allow that under my command. I wasn’t going to push that policy. And I knew, based on my experience already with the vaccine disclosure forms, that the police service wasn’t listening to me anymore. They were going down this road irrationally.

And I went out of the chain of command, which is not my normal course of duties, and I wrote a letter to the then-Minister of Justice in Alberta, Kaycee Madu. I wrote him a letter directly, telling the story of segregation inside the police service buildings and outlined, as I just said to you, how irrational it was and clearly, this is not about health. This is about bullying; this is about coercion. The Honourable Madu sent that directly to the Director of Law Enforcement, where that complaint should have been directed, and had it investigated by the Edmonton Police Commission.

Shawn Buckley

So can I just stop you there. So this is an October 26th, 2021, letter.

David, can you pull up the computer screen I have for exhibits?

And I’ll just tell you, Mr. Abbott, that we’ve entered this is an Exhibit WI-3b. But I just wanted to read and have you comment. Basically, I’m going to start at the paragraph near the top of the page, “The unvaccinated.” And so, this is your letter. But I just want to read you a couple of paragraphs and have you comment on it.

So you write:

The unvaccinated are expected to respond to calls for service, sharing the same police car, hold the same radio mic, use the same mobile workstation, share the same washrooms, showers, locker rooms, parade room, computers, and even use Category I and II uses of force alongside their brothers and sisters in patrol. But the unvaccinated who submit to rapid testing are not allowed to use the lunchroom or the gymnasium.

Tonight, I witnessed unvaccinated members segregated from their work mates to eat and it was disgusting. Not just disgusting because I'm ashamed of the poison work environment our EOT has created, but equally disgusting because the segregation plans are working on our people. The members of the squads that exclude their friends are doing so mostly out of fear of the tyranny from our EOT and chief.

[00:15:00]

My subjective analysis is that most of our patrol members are pro-choice. They admit to me that they're afraid of becoming the next Constable Robert Kitchen.

And I'm just going to skip down and read another paragraph, but I'll just scroll down so it's up on the screen. It's the one that begins with, "We are told."

So you write:

We are told the reasons for segregating the unvaccinated from the lunchrooms and gyms, because this is where 'science' reports that COVID is spread, yet no one can cite any studies. This argument falls flat on its face with even the slightest amount of reason and common sense applied. Those who are taking rapid tests are the only persons in the building known to be COVID-free.

And I'm just wondering if you can comment for us on those paragraphs.

Richard Abbott

I'll give you some more insight into risk-effective decision-making. And I wish that the Edmonton Police Service could have taught this to the nation, although commanders across the nation use this same matrix that I'm going to quickly teach you right now.

It's an acronym: NRA. It does not refer to the Second Amendment Rights group in the United States. It stands for whether or not the decisions we make are necessary, risk-effective, and acceptable. So we do this every day. And I tried to get my command structure to use that NRA risk-effective decision-making matrix against this very decision of not allowing our people to eat in the lunchrooms.

Is it necessary to do this to our membership? There is no data to prove that, so it would stop at the N. We wouldn't go on to the R, in this. Is it risk-effective? Well, it doesn't pass the R test, either, of whether this is risk-effective or not because those who are testing are the only ones that we could say are safe from COVID. The others are not. So there's no risk-effective decision to be made there. But more important to this Tribunal—and I think the

legally-trained will understand this very well—is the A stands for acceptable. Is what we’re doing to the people I worked for that night going to be acceptable to the courts tomorrow? Is it going to be acceptable to the courts in 10 years? What about in 30 years?

So to quote another Edmonton Police Service member here, that I want to give credit to— Just recently in Edmonton, we made apologies for raids that were made in gay bathhouses in the 1980s. It was wrong. And we’re apologizing for that, today. Had we used the NRA matrix in those situations, we would have avoided the embarrassment and the wrongdoings that were done 30 years ago. If we were to apply that acronym here today, we all know that this is not going to bode well for our institutions: tomorrow, 10 years, or in 30 years. It was wrong yesterday. It’s going to be wrong in 30 years.

Shawn Buckley

Now, my understanding is that not only were unvaccinated officers prevented from going to the gym and the lunchroom, but they were also prevented from overtime shifts.

Richard Abbott

Yeah, for a short time. Yes, they were. I can’t speak to the timelines.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. Now, there was something else that happened with you concerning the— I’ll call them blockades or the Trucker Movement. I’m just wondering if you can share with us what your experience was and how you came to do your kind of own investigation there.

Richard Abbott

Yeah, you bet. I had been questioning what was going on in both Ottawa and in Coutts and Milk River in Alberta. Normally from media, we could get different perspectives and interpret from that what was going on. But from what I was watching in the mainstream media versus in any of the independent media sources I was watching, they were so diabolically opposed that I had decided that someone’s not telling the truth. The mainstream media was going off on racists, misogynistic, terrorist-types blockading the border in Coutts and protesting in Ottawa.

[00:20:00]

It’s a small community, this policing service, and I wanted to speak to someone in Ottawa who was witnessing it. And so, my number somehow found its way to a Canadian hero named Constable Danny Bulford. He shared a similar career path as I did, as a sniper with the RCMP’s Emergency Response Teams, and then became involved in assisting with the protests in Ottawa.

Mr. Bulford phoned me. And I’d never met him before, but I’d seen enough of him on TV and we spoke the same languages that I wanted to ask him what’s going on. And he told me not to believe him. He said, “Go see for yourself.” He said, “Either come to Ottawa or go—” And he hadn’t been to Milk River. He said, “It’ll be the same crowd. Go see for yourself who’s telling the truth.” So I decided to travel to Milk River.

And within a day, I did just that. And when I landed in Milk River, it didn’t take me long—

Shawn Buckley

And I'll just stop you. Did you travel with anyone else?

Richard Abbott

I have to be careful with

Shawn Buckley

You don't need to name names.

Richard Abbott

names, but I had travelled with another police officer who had been vocally critical of the mandates across the nation, as well. And this is a good point to make: I'm not alone in this. There's cops like me across the nation who've spoken out, but we'll quickly learn here why they're keeping their heads down.

Shawn Buckley

Now, were you on duty that day that you went to Milk River?

Richard Abbott

No, I was on a day off.

Shawn Buckley

And were you in uniform?

Richard Abbott

No, sir. I was in civilian attire.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, so you're just taking your own time to find out for yourself. Not as a representative of the Edmonton police force. But you just want to see for yourself what types of people are participating because the media is telling you one thing—basically, that they're dangerous. What do you recall the media saying?

Richard Abbott

I took it that it was, essentially, a terroristic activity that had taken over our border.

Shawn Buckley

Okay.

Richard Abbott

So prior to going, I did study Edmonton Police Service policy to ensure that I wouldn't break any policy. And at the time, I thought I had maintained, still, the civil right to travel

within my province and I thought I still had freedom of association. And I wasn't going to violate any of our social media policies. I just wanted to go see for myself who is telling the truth. And if I had a chance, my second goal was to encourage attendees and police, both to be peaceful.

So when I got down to Milk River, it didn't take me long to determine who was lying. And excuse me for using such extremist language, but there was no happy medium between whether or not we had terrorists at the border or whether it was the equivalent of a Canada Day celebration. But what I saw in Milk River was one of the funnest Canada Day parties I've been to. It was, truly, horsey rides, jumpy castles, barbecues, and teeth. When I say teeth, it's because people were smiling. It was teeth everywhere. It's remarkable to me to this day.

Shawn Buckley

Now, can I stop you because you've kind of described, you know, the media was referring to these people as terrorists. Do you recall also, perhaps, our Prime Minister calling them things like racists and misogynists?

Richard Abbott

I do.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. So you're going down to see these racists and misogynists and terrorists and what you see is, basically, the best Canada Day celebration you had ever seen?

Richard Abbott

I saw Canadians there. And if I can brag, I think I'm a good read of people. I've spent my career reading people and I believe I'm good at it: this was Canada there. It wasn't the latte/lunch crowd, necessarily. It wasn't just one demographic. It was every Canadian from every walk of life, and if I had to generalize and use a biased opinion of who was there based on my experiences, I would have actually called these farmers.

I come from a rural upbringing in Saskatchewan and I know a farmer when I see him. And although there was nurses, there was doctors there, there were plumbers, there were electricians, it was farmers and farm families that were generally protesting in Milk River.

[00:25:00]

Which I had now analyzed enough to see as a lawful protest.

Shawn Buckley

And I'll just stop you there. So it was a lawful protest because, actually, it was the RCMP that was blockading the road, just to prevent these people from going to Coutts.

Richard Abbott

That's correct.

Shawn Buckley

So they weren't responsible for actually breaking any law. So what they were doing there was a 100 per cent legal, as was your understanding.

Richard Abbott

Other than parking in ditches, which would violate the *Traffic Safety Act*.

Shawn Buckley

Oh, okay.

Richard Abbott

There was no criminality there. This is important for me to paint a picture of the type of people who were protesting in Milk River, too, because I respect them so much for it. Where I'm from, when we go to a Canada Day celebration, we'll imbibe and we'll do it respectfully. We'll put a drink in a coffee cup. I know that there was alcohol in Milk River, but I never saw one open drink and I watch for these things.

Shawn Buckley

Can I just give the people listening to you a little more perspective when you say you're analyzing things. You were a police officer, at that point, for 25 years, and over half of that time in a tactical unit. That's correct?

Richard Abbott

That's correct.

Shawn Buckley

And even a regular police officer, it's life and death being able to evaluate people, to determine whether or not they are a threat, either to the officer or to other people.

Richard Abbott

I'm always looking for bad guys. I cleared this room before I came into it.

Shawn Buckley

But the point I'm trying to make is that you are trained, specifically, to identify threats and evaluate people because the members of you and your team and innocent bystanders, and even the bad guys, depend on you being able to make accurate assessments.

Richard Abbott

That's correct.

Shawn Buckley

So you're not just somebody who, you know, works selling shoes, who have gone down to evaluate these people. You are trained in making this evaluation. And did you see any dangerous people?

Richard Abbott

None.

Shawn Buckley

So and I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I just thought it was important for people to understand: you're a professional at making a threat assessment.

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. So I'll let you carry on, to see what you saw. And I also want you to share with us how the police that were at Milk River would have been experiencing what was happening.

Richard Abbott

Sure, and it is important to understand that I saw this as a lawful protest because the RCMP were blocking the highway at Milk River, which is maybe 30 kilometers north of the border at Coutts. And my take is nuanced. I understand why the RCMP had done that. This was to minimize the number of people that could get to that unlawful protest down at Coutts.

The police members who were in Milk River I met with— I say this tongue-in-cheek, but it's true: this is the easiest overtime police can make. This is the easiest money police make is when they get paid overtime to go watch over you, and you, and you on the Commission. There's no police work to be done. It's minimal, other than dealing with what we'd expect good people to do, like parking in ditches and make noise. It was easy work for the RCMP, and they admitted to me as much.

Shawn Buckley

How were the people who were at Milk River, at this lawful protest, how were they treating the police that were there?

Richard Abbott

As good Canadians treat the police. I've always had good experiences as a police officer. Even though the news, as we've heard today, dwells on the negative, that has never been my experience with Canadians. Canadians are very respectful of our police agencies and are very supportive. They were exactly the same in Milk River and in Coutts, which we'll get to shortly.

Shawn Buckley

Do you mind— David, can you pull up the computer?

You provided me some photos that were taken at Milk River, and so I just want people seeing your testimony to understand what you're watching. So these are the types of people that our Prime Minister would describe as terrorists and misogynists.

So this is one such person at Milk River [Exhibit WI-3d]?

Richard Abbott

One of a thousand I met that day.

Shawn Buckley

And this is what you mean when, basically, you say smiling, lots of teeth.

Richard Abbott

Teeth everywhere.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, so this is representative of the type of interaction you were having?

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

And I'm just going to go to another photograph. This is also representative of the type of interaction you were having [Exhibit WI-3c]?

Richard Abbott

I believe he's a vet, if I remember correctly.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, so a war vet, and then I just need to move to another program. Sorry.

[00:30:00]

I just want to show four photographs from Milk River. So this is another one [Exhibit WI-3h].

Richard Abbott

Yep, another one of a thousand.

Shawn Buckley

And then, finally, another one [Exhibit WI-3i]. So these are photos you sent me and these are just the typical kind of farmer Canadians, as you described them, that you encountered

at Milk River. So what was then your impression of the media reporting, now that you'd taken Danny Bulford's advice and you'd gone to see for yourself?

Richard Abbott

Yeah, it didn't take me long to see who was not telling the truth. Independent media were recognizing the horse rides, the bouncy castles, and the barbecues. I decided, with what I'd seen in Milk River, that the media was lying.

Shawn Buckley

Okay. Now, something else happened at Milk River. Can you tell us about that? You were approached by a Calgary police officer.

Richard Abbott

Another brave Canadian police officer, Brian Denison, and he had left the Calgary Police Service because of the mandates. He asked me if I'd speak to the crowd. He said the crowd was itching to hear from a current police officer as to what we were thinking. There was, at least, 100 people gathered near an impromptu stage they had erected—maybe 200 people—and he asked if I'd give words to the crowd.

And since I had already determined that those folks were lawfully placed, legally there protesting, I wanted to encourage them to be peaceful because I also understand that things can go wrong quickly in crowds like this. With the lies that the mainstream media was producing over this time period, I also saw it as a powder keg and saw that they were being divisive. And so, I wanted to encourage this crowd to be peaceful.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, and what happened?

Richard Abbott

I told them that. I essentially told the crowd that as long as they're peaceful, they're lawfully placed. My understanding is that the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, at this time, still stood. I'm not a constitutional lawyer, but I knew at the time that none of the courts across Canada had gone through what's called an Oakes Test— And sir, you'll be able to explain this better than a cop. But essentially, because no courts had said that Canadians' *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* should be suspended, that these folks' Charter rights stood and that means that they could lawfully protest. And I encouraged them to do just that, but peacefully.

Shawn Buckley

And then did anything happen with your talk?

Richard Abbott

Well, within the next days, someone had obviously videotaped me giving this speech and they posted it on, I think, their Facebook page [Exhibit WI-3j]. This went back to my executive officer team in Edmonton who, within 10 days, suspended me without pay for violating Edmonton Police Service social media policy. And you need to know that I've

never had a Facebook page, even under a pseudonym. I've never been involved in social media and that I've been accused of discreditable conduct for what I did in Milk River.

Shawn Buckley

And if I understand the policy, basically, it was alleged you violated their policy because it was said you posted it online and yet, you did not post it online.

Richard Abbott

I had not.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, but you are suspended without pay. Now, you weren't finished there. You're at Milk River and you travel somewhere else. Can you tell us about that?

Richard Abbott

I did continue to the border at Coutts. I'd seen enough in Milk River; now I'm really interested as to what's going on at the border. So I did, and when I got there, I was met by RCMP on the perimeter who guided me into where the blockades had happened.

And this was a different crowd. There was very few people there—maybe 50 people—and again, the RCMP freely were letting people come and go from where the protesters had set up a blockade. And I found out that, only in the respectful, peaceful, Canadian way, they had effectively blocked the border at Coutts, but they did, of course, leave a safety lane open for ambulances to come and go through the border.

[00:35:00]

Shawn Buckley

Okay. So unlike Milk River, this isn't a legal blockade. So they are protesting, but by blockading. They're leaving an emergency lane so that, you know, if there's an emergency, the emergency vehicles can get through.

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, and how would you describe this group? This is a smaller group. How would you describe them? What do you think their backgrounds were and who are these people?

Richard Abbott

I would generalize, again, as calling them Christian farmers. I felt most of the folks were God-fearing, rural farmer-types. Of course, there was trucks there that they'd used to blockade, but I had also noticed that at least one of them was a cattle truck. So I would describe them as the same group that was up in Milk River, but it wasn't a party. This was serious. And they knew that they'd unlawfully blockaded a Canadian border.

Shawn Buckley

Right. So you met with the leaders while you were there.

Richard Abbott

I did, and their counsel.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, so can you tell us about that experience?

Richard Abbott

You bet. So I was asked, again, in Coutts to speak publicly to the crowd of folks that were there: to encourage them to be peaceful. And I said, "I can't speak to a public group here because you're blocking your border." And I said though that I would speak to the de facto leaders who were there with their counsel present. Their lawyer was there. And I told them that this was illegal. I told them that they were going to get arrested and this is how they do it safely and peacefully.

I encouraged them. I said, "if this doesn't go peacefully, you will have lost your message to Canadians." And they completely understood that. So I went through the actual arrest process with them on how to make it easy for the police to make the arrests. And these leaders understood exactly what I was saying. They thanked me for it and their lawyer thanked me for putting it into common language, from a police officer's perspective, on how to make this safe.

Shawn Buckley

So I just want to understand. What's happening is they understand they're going to be arrested.

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

So what was your understanding, in speaking with them, as to why they were choosing to be there, knowing they were going to be arrested?

Richard Abbott

They were bringing to light what Canadians hadn't heard until the protests in Ottawa and the blockades in Coutts. They wanted to have their Charter freedoms lifted. They wanted to be able to travel, was the biggest version here. They told me that they wanted choice. They didn't want to be coerced into taking any experimental drug for any reason.

So they were bringing to light the Charter violations being acted upon them. They knew it was a heavy-handed way of doing it, but nobody was listening to them prior to this. I believe our democracy is based on that. Someone said that you and I have a moral responsibility to protest against immoral laws and that's exactly what these folks were

doing. They saw a moral necessity for them to speak out against immoral laws by a tyrannical leadership.

Shawn Buckley

And would you describe the people that you saw there and interacted with as peaceful?

Richard Abbott

Horribly so. These were my relatives. They were our aunt and uncle. It's your cousins. It was us. I saw zero bad guys in this small group of people that were blocking the border. I feel like they were forced into this protest.

Shawn Buckley

So you basically saw a group of Christian farmers who felt forced to take a stand, to have a voice, who understood that they were going to be arrested for just trying to have their voice heard.

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

And you were doing the service of explaining to them how to be arrested peacefully.

Richard Abbott

That's correct.

Shawn Buckley

And they actually thanked you for that advice.

Richard Abbott

As did their counsel.

I should get this in now. I know it's impossible to measure,

[00:40:00]

but after the time that I spent down there, and any Canadians who took the time to watch how the surrender went down at Coutts— I'm not taking credit, but I know I had a small piece. But those small pieces add up. I had a small effect on what a wonderful ending it was to that blockade there: a completely peaceful surrender where we saw the protesters hugging the RCMP who had been set up on the border during their blockade.

Shawn Buckley

Can you describe that more for us, just so that the people watching your testimony understand exactly what you're talking about?

Richard Abbott

And I can't speak to what initially led up to it, but it was within two days after my visit to Milk River and Coutts—I think it was after the *War Measures Act* was called by the federal government—that the surrender happened. And the protesters in Coutts, there's a video of them lining up with another line of RCMP, like you'd see at your kid's sports event where the hockey teams would shake hands after. They'd all queued up to hug each other, to thank each other for ending the blockade.

Shawn Buckley

Right, and then they were all peacefully arrested.

Richard Abbott

I can't speak to the arrests that day. I don't know that part of the story, who was charged.

Shawn Buckley

Now, you attending at the Coutts rally, later created some difficulties for your employment.

Richard Abbott

Yes, like I said, I went back that very same day. I went home and went back to work. And within my first few days of returning to work, I was put on what's called administrative leave, which is, in English, suspended with pay.

And then, within a few days of that, there was an article on a mainstream media source that showed me down in Milk River speaking. Again, the service insinuated that I did that public announcement or speech in Coutts. I did not. And when that mainstream media article hit, I was suspended without pay. And the reason given by the police service was that my conduct was discreditable and I had violated our social media policy.

Shawn Buckley

Now, I just wanted to contrast this because you would agree that both at Milk River and Coutts, I mean, this is a protest that's taking place.

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

And you know, not far distant in time from that, there was a Black Lives Matter riot in Edmonton.

Richard Abbott

Within the same year. That's right.

Shawn Buckley

Right. And are you aware of any arrests from that riot?

Richard Abbott

I was not directly involved in any of the arrests from any criminal activity, but there was, yes, charges laid.

Shawn Buckley

I'm sorry. Okay.

Richard Abbott

There were charges laid.

Shawn Buckley

And there was property damage in that protest, am I correct?

Richard Abbott

I believe so, yes.

Shawn Buckley

You were given some other photographs and I just want to pull that up. So can you describe for the audience what this is a photo of?

Richard Abbott

This is a still pulled from Global News in Edmonton showing protesters of the Black Lives Matter [Exhibit WI-3]. This is a Marxist group, for the record. This is, politically, an open Marxist organization, protesting against police and recommending the defunding of police. And those are Edmonton police officers taking a knee, ostensibly, agreeing with the Marxists chanting in front of them.

Shawn Buckley

Okay and I'm just going to show another photograph [Exhibit WI-3a]. Can you describe what this photograph is?

Richard Abbott

Again, those are Edmonton Police Service officers taking a knee to,

[00:45:00]

ostensibly, in support of the Marxist Black Lives Matter protesters.

Shawn Buckley

Okay and I'm going to show you one last photograph [Exhibit WI-3f]. And you have deliberately hidden the identities of these officers, but can you tell us what this is a photograph of?

Richard Abbott

Those are Edmonton police officers posing with, apparently in support of, an Antifa member. So these folks call themselves anti-fascists. I don't think the irony of that name is lost on anybody on this Commission, but apparently, standing in support with an Antifa member.

Shawn Buckley

Now, with regards to the police officers that knelt to Black Lives Matter and with regards to these officers posing with an Antifa member, are you aware of whether there was an investigation into those officers as to whether or not they compromised the Edmonton Police Service?

Richard Abbott

I can't speak to whether or not an investigation was done, but I can say that there were no *Police Act* charges against any members of the Edmonton Police Service in support of the Marxist group or the terrorist group, Antifa.

Shawn Buckley

Okay, so you lost your job for what you just described occurred in Milk River and Coutts. That's correct?

Richard Abbott

That's right.

Shawn Buckley

But the officers that, you know, bent their knee in front of the media, in front of Black Lives Matter protests and the officers that deliberately took a photo-op with Antifa— There was no disciplinary action against them.

Richard Abbott

None to my knowledge.

Shawn Buckley

Do you have an explanation for that?

Richard Abbott

This is about policy and politics. Of course, they rhyme for a reason. I'm speaking to this panel today because I can objectively speak to the policies of the Edmonton Police Service: They were not about health. They were about politics. And it hurt our membership and it has hurt Canadians.

It's hurt me and my family, personally, obviously; I had to take an early retirement. So my travel to Milk River and Coutts on a day off, to encourage peace, well, after pension adjustments and loss of wages over the next 10 years—I tried to stay in shape; I think I had another 10 years left in me—will cost my family millions. But I'm not the only one.

We're losing police officers at a rate that nobody wants to talk about. Constable Robert Kitchen being fired for holding his ground on who he thought he should disclose his personal health choices to, will have a far-ranging effect on our communities and our nation, if we can't expect our police officers to speak up. So it's not just the individual. It will affect our communities and it is going to affect the nation, in terms of this piece.

Just this week in Alberta, our premier has promised 50 new policing positions to each Calgary and to Edmonton. I've been speaking with my old co-workers at the Edmonton Police Service, and they're the first to say, "That's nice. Where are we going to get people who want to fill those positions?" With what I've been going through— And I'm not alone on this: we have officers like me across the nation, maybe, with not as big a mouth as me because they know, now, that you will be fired if you speak out politically against the orthodoxy of the day. So the question is, where are we going to find those 50 people to fill those positions?

I can speak to where there's three of them who've spent a career at perfecting our craft. It takes a lifetime to get good at these jobs. And they're pushing us out of those positions because we don't take a knee to the orthodoxy of the day.

Shawn Buckley

Mr. Abbott, I think our bigger danger is the type of person that will fill police positions, understanding that they're guided by politics and they find that acceptable.

[00:50:00]

I think that that's a much larger danger to Canada than those spots being vacant.

Richard Abbott

I use the word "cull." They're culling us from the police agencies across the nation. I can't speak for all of them, but we know each other. We speak from coast to coast, and they're in each one of your communities, but they're being pushed out of your police agencies.

Shawn Buckley

Can you elaborate a little more? Because it sounds like what you're saying is that the officers that do not want policing to be politicized, and want to honour our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and want even to be able to exercise their own rights and freedoms are being pushed from the police service in favour of a different personality type.

Richard Abbott

This is how dangerous it gets. So I'm the prime example. I made a six-figure-a-year job and there's police officers in each one of your cities across the nation who are up against *Police Services Act* charges just like me. I can't mention their names because they're trying to keep their heads down, and I don't blame them for that. But they were there trying to fight. So I can't go into details with those people because it endangers them and their families so much to speak out.

A lot of them are just trying to put their head down, so they don't lose their livings over having had a political opinion. Mine is egregious: I was on a day off, in civilian clothes. I never mentioned my company when I was a police officer; I purposely kept the agents that

I worked for, to indemnify them. But now this is public information. I'm one of a few Canadian police officers across the nation who've paid the ultimate price for this and now the rest are, rightfully, running scared.

Shawn Buckley

Right. Mr. Abbott, I don't have any further questions for you, but I expect the commissioners will.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Thank you for your testimony.

You said when it comes to immoral laws, we all have a responsibility and a necessity to speak out against tyrannical laws. So taking that thought just a little further, the underlying premise of our institutions in Canada is to protect against any law that degrades humans and to recognize that any law that degrades humans is, essentially, an unjust law. I recognize that these were policies within the institution, not necessarily laws, but they still dictated a policy advocating, in your words, segregation.

So my question is, how do we reconcile this with other laws in the broader Canadian community? And I know you've alluded to the Charter, which actually demands accommodation and inclusivity of both citizens and minority voices. And the second part of that is: In your opinion, is there a way to change the institutional mindset within policing, and other authorities like policing, so our country doesn't break down into lawlessness, even when we are witnessing the infiltration of politics within these institutions?

Richard Abbott

Yeah, I can answer both of those. This is officially into opinion evidence now, which I think is allowed here.

The first one is— And I'll have to, partly, respectfully disagree with one of your earlier guests who said that in looking at how Jesus would respond to this— Although, for our brothers and our sisters who are going to come to us now, it's hard for people to say they were wrong over these policies. We need to be there with open arms for those people when they figure it out because they are figuring it out now quickly.

Where I disagree with your earlier guest is we need some of these leaders who, to this day continue to push these policies, to be held to account. The door is quickly closing, if I can paint a picture. We're here to still speak to you, but the door is closing. And if we don't hold those men who held high places—to put some more Canadiana into this, from the Rush song *Closer to the Heart*—

[00:55:00]

they need to act like they're in high places. And if they don't, we need to hold them to account. So that means litigation.

The second part of your question— The first part was about how do we get through it and the second half, excuse me, again, was?

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Just the institutional mindset: how do we prevent lawlessness from becoming the norm?

Richard Abbott

Bold leadership. Leadership matters. We need bold leadership in these institutions. So not just leadership: We need bold leadership. Leadership matters. It's a trickle-down effect. I saw some horrible behaviours come out of some of the people that I worked for in the police service. When we have weak leadership espousing violating human rights by segregating them in lunchrooms, it justifies poor behaviour amongst the employees.

I had one of the sergeants that I worked for say out loud that they didn't think any of the Edmonton Police Service members who refused to take the drugs, [they] should not be given access to health care. So these are police officers that are going to overdoses every day— they're truly heroes on the streets.

So the squads that I worked for, I could easily say they'd save one fentanyl death per shift. They'd save that person, and they would rush them to the hospital to get care that they dearly needed, and we dearly believe they need. And then, out of the other side of their mouth, say an employee who doesn't take the COVID drugs, we shouldn't let them get access to health care. That's from weak leadership.

We need bold leadership in all of our institutions and that starts with the truth. Just tell the truth. And I can speak specifically to police agencies: use what you've been trained to use in risk-effective decision-making and decide whether or not what we do in the future is necessary, risk-effective, and acceptable. Will it be acceptable to the courts in 30 years? I think you'll see changes in how we respond to these.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Thank you very much.

Shawn Buckley

And there's more questions.

Commissioner Massie

Well, thank you very much for your testimony. I have a question, which is about when police officers are called to intervene in any situation, I guess that there is a risk there that people they will interact with are not vaccinated and they don't know, right?

Richard Abbott

That's right—every day, all day.

Commissioner Massie

So was there something put in place by the police department, in order to protect policemen from these dangerous, unvaxxed people?

Richard Abbott

I laugh because it's laughable today. We'd cry, if we couldn't laugh. No. The masking mandates were the same across the nation, which we all know, when we were doing it, was not true. And most people complied with what we knew to be not true.

There's a certain segment of the people that I work for, though, the frontline officers in the police service—and I can't get anybody in trouble with this today—they knew it was a lie. But they'd still go to your family fights; they'd still go to the robberies; they'd still go to the stabbings. And the smart ones never wore a mask because they knew it was a lie. They were no different than the politicians who put on a mask every time a camera came around. "Oh, we better put on our mask. Here comes the superintendent." And then they go to your stabbing without it.

I don't know if that answers your question. There was nothing— You know the same stories as I do. These people were brave. They were going, even at the beginning when we thought that there could be an actual illness. Of course, we quickly learned, within months, that nobody was dying from COVID and then it became easier. But there were no measures to stop that. The essential workers went to work every day.

Commissioner Massie

So I hear you talking about bold leadership in order to get out of this difficult situation we're in. It seems to me that what bold leadership does well is establish trust:

[01:00:00]

between people, with one another, and with the institution. How can we build trust in a culture of lies? What you described, it seems to me, that police officers have licence to lie.

Richard Abbott

Thank you for the nice segue into what the bold leadership can do. So I was a middle manager. I understand that you can do nothing right. People are going to disagree with you whether it was the right decision or not. So when I say bold leadership, I mean what we need is for our leaders, at every level, to just simply abide by codified Canadian values.

So when we're responding to these high-risk incidents in policing— I spoke about our decision-making processes. When I'm scared, when people are going to get hurt, and when we're under time constraints, we abide by what we called standard operating procedures. So I don't know what to do during a car chase, where it's horribly dangerous, I'm under serious time constraints, and I'm scared. All I do is abide by my standard operating procedures, my SOPs.

We have the SOPs written for Canadian politicians. We have Canadian codified SOPs written for the leaders of our institution. It's called the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. So when you're scared, when you think people are going to hurt, and when you're under time constraints, just point at the Charter and say, here are codified Canadian values that are my standard operating procedures. Until those are lifted, our bold leadership just has to point at those and say, this is what Canadians are going to do next time.

Commissioner Massie

Thank you.

Commissioner Drysdale

Just so that we both know that you are going into the opinion area of this testimony, which is acceptable. I've got a question and I'm going to refer to a couple of witnesses that we've had prior to you on here.

A day ago, I think it was a day ago, we had a retired judge on the stand, and he talked about— I don't want to put words in his mouth, but as I heard his words, he was talking about a failure of the judicial system, in his opinion. Or at least, he was disappointed with the way the judicial system has acted. And I asked him a question about why that would be and he said to me that the judges felt they were under pressure. And one of the things I asked him was describe that to me: What does that mean? Does that mean, if they rule a different way, they're going to get fired, or so on and so forth. And my understanding of his answer was, no, they wouldn't get fired, it was more of a peer pressure, if I understood that correctly. And I'm prepared to be corrected on that.

We talked to doctors previously and they've sworn an oath, like a judge does and like a police officer does. And the doctors were afraid: they were afraid of losing their licence, but they weren't afraid of proceeding with a procedure or administering a drug they knew nothing about, or they knew that it hadn't been tested.

And I can go through the list of all of those people—teachers, doctors, ministers. We've had ministers on here saying the same things, police officers.

Police officers— Sorry, but they require special attention. Police officers are probably some of the bravest, gutsiest people I've met in my life, you know. Somebody's in terrible distress, someone's in a terrible accident, someone's gone crazy, and you have to walk in there. You're just an ordinary person. Courage is what defines the police, or what has defined the police, in Canada.

And yet, listening to all of these people—the doctors, the lawyers, the judges, the police and people carry guns—the most compelling testimony that I heard here today was a truck driver who said he had 40 employees, and he and his wife sat down one night and decided they have to speak up, even though they might lose everything, and they went into it knowing that.

And so, my question after all of that preamble: my question to you is, we talk about trust in our institutions, we talk about leadership in our institutions.

[01:05:00]

How can we ever ask Canadians to trust all of those people when it went so wrong? How is it the police took orders that they knew or ought to have known were illegal? How did they beat people in Ottawa? How did they kick veterans? How did they trample them with horses?

I'm sorry, that's a heck of a lot to ask you to comment on. But when I see what were heroes—and are heroes, in this instance, but they're not over here, they're hiding—and I see a truck driver risking his family, his business, and one person said 40 other people and his employees. So probably 100 people he put on the line. Can you help me out with understanding that?

Richard Abbott

In a word, no. I debate the same things as you and I get asked this all the time. And I try to juxtapose the police officers who run towards the gunfire with the political courageousness.

And I've used this example before: Mr. Dennis Prager, an American conservative Jewish radio host, he speaks about how things go wrong in a society and he, specifically, was speaking about the Holocaust. And he said that you get three things added together will end in bad things happening.

Propaganda. So my answer, first, to you is that police officers are no different than the truck driver. They are propagandized exactly the same way, and we heard this morning that we've had a war of propaganda on us. And they put their pants on one leg at a time just like you.

The second part of when things go wrong is when there's something to gain. And in these cases, I think it's not so much gain to the population, but it's keeping your job is something to gain by not saying anything.

And then, Mr. Prager says the third thing that happens is a paucity of people courageous enough to speak out—and I didn't know what paucity meant. Paucity means hardly anybody will speak out about this. But what I have seen is that sprinkling of courageousness goes across every vocation. It actually isn't concentrated anywhere.

So if I can leave you with any good news, is I think that paucity of courage is sprinkled throughout Canada and it's contagious. So we have a few rare doctors, we have a few rare cops, we have a few rare nurses. We have a few in every vocation who's spoken out against this.

The other truth is—I'm going to agree with you—is that the blue-collar folks, the folks that work with their hands who are the backbone of this nation, I would say that we've seen more of them, maybe.

But anyway, there is courageousness sprinkled out through society. The good news is maybe there's a concentration of courageousness amongst the working class, amongst the trades, who are the backbone of this society, and I think that's what gives us hope. Don't go looking for the police to do it. Don't go looking for the doctors to do it. It falls on every one of us, is my answer.

Commissioner Drysdale

And I understand and I agree with your statements. One of my other questions to you is—and I think you've, perhaps, answered it—about propaganda, you know. And the question is, do we have a free-market media or news group in this country anymore? And what did they contribute to the damage that's been done to our society?

Richard Abbott

I won't mince words here, again. The mainstream media is lying to you about what's going on in our nation. And I know it sounds extreme to put it in those terms. That's my personality. There is no halfway with this. They are lying to you about what's going on, on a myriad of topics, not just COVID.

Commissioner Drysdale

Thank you very much. And thank you for your service.

Richard Abbott

Thank you.

Shawn Buckley

There being no further questions, Mr. Abbott, I sincerely thank you for your testimony, on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry.

Richard Abbott

Thank you, folks.

[01:10:07]

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The evidence offered in this transcript is a true and faithful record of witness testimony given during the National Citizens Inquiry (NCI) hearings. The transcript was prepared by members of a team of volunteers using an “intelligent verbatim” transcription method.

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