

As Elliott departs, search begins for new RCMP commissioner

DANIEL LEBLANC AND COLIN FREEZE

Ottawa and Toronto— From Saturday's Globe and Mail

Published Friday, Feb. 04, 2011 2:20PM EST

Last updated Saturday, Feb. 05, 2011 10:42AM EST

William Elliott is quitting as the commissioner of the RCMP a few days before some of his fiercest critics appear in front of a parliamentary committee, which will now shift its focus to whether a police officer or a civilian should take over as leader of Canada's national police force.

Mr. Elliott, a long-time bureaucrat who became the first civilian RCMP leader in 2007, is leaving behind a police force still in need of reform, including a new oversight system and more independence from the government in the form of a board of management.

[I look at myself in the mirror every day, and certainly the criticism caused me to look more closely](#)

—RCMP Commissioner William Elliott, in "RCMP boss hurt G20 security efforts, senior Mountie says"

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While the RCMP has lately avoided the type of national police scandals that plagued it during the past decade, it remains in transition. Almost all of the senior brass are new to their positions, after a number of retirements and a large-scale shuffle that followed last summer's failed mutiny against Mr. Elliott by some of his most senior deputies.

The Harper government refused to be coerced into replacing the head of the RCMP. But Ottawa insiders said Mr. Elliott did not earn an open-ended mandate to serve as long as he wished, especially as the pace of reform slowed down.

In a statement on Friday, Mr. Elliott told RCMP officers that he will leave the force in their capable hands.

"I am confident that the new [management] team is very strong and well positioned to lead the Force in continuing to provide high-quality services to Canadians and advancing our ongoing efforts to bring about positive change in the RCMP," he said.

The federal government is taking the unusual step of consulting the House of Commons committee on public safety to come up with the selection criteria for the next commissioner, launching in effect a public debate on the ideal face of the future in the RCMP.

The resignation will allow the committee to focus on Mr. Elliott's replacement when it convenes on Tuesday. The scheduled witnesses are former RCMP assistant commissioner Mike McDonnell and Deputy Commissioner Raf Souccar, who has been sidelined by Mr. Elliott.

The two were some of the top members of the force when they complained to their bureaucratic bosses last summer about Mr. Elliott's erratic management style, including frequent outbursts and a perceived lack of action on the reform agenda.

Liberal MP Mark Holland, who is a member of the committee, said the next commissioner needs to show more distance from the government, characterizing Mr. Elliott as a "lap dog" who acted as "an apologist for the Conservative government's inaction."

"First and foremost, we need someone who is independent," Mr. Holland said, adding the winning candidate should have policing experience.

An expert on RCMP issues, Liberal senator Colin Kenny, agreed the next commissioner should be a current or a former RCMP member, and not a civilian. Frequently named candidates for the position include RCMP Senior Deputy Commissioner Rod Knecht, as well as former Mountie and current Ottawa Police chief Vern White.

NDP MP Don Davies and security expert Wesley Wark said the RCMP could benefit from another civilian commissioner to finalize the reforms initiated during Mr. Elliott's tenure, including oversight and improving internal morale.

"The concept of another civilian head holds some promise," the New Democratic MP said.

Paul Kennedy, the former RCMP complaints commissioner, said the force has seen an exodus of many senior managers during Mr. Elliott's tenure, leaving no obvious internal candidates for succession.

"The very people who were considered worthy enough for that job are no longer there," he said. "You've got a new group in, but they got to accumulate four or five years under their belt."

Whether civilian or cop, the next leader ought to be someone with a very strong background in the criminal justice system and the culture of the Mounties, Mr. Kennedy said.

"The ideal candidate would know the force," he said, adding that the candidates could include senior ex-Mounties who have joined other forces.

"We have to look and see who has been tested by fires and who has a breadth of knowledge and experience," Mr. Kennedy said, adding that the rank-and-file Mounties also need someone to rally behind. "They will have to look and say, 'Yes, that is my leader.' "

Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced the departure in a statement, thanking Mr. Elliott for "his dedication and service to the RCMP."

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