

Thunder Bay police officer suspended over allegedly making racist comments on Indigenous people

National News | October 5, 2016 by APTN National News |



APTN National News

Thunder Bay police have suspended an officer and put four more on administrative duties over allegations of recent inappropriate Facebook posts on Indigenous people.

Police said the comments are alleged to have been made by Const. Robert Steudle's personal Facebook account.

Steudle is suspended with pay, as per the Police Services Act.

Thunder Bay police initially launched their own investigation into the comments written Sept. 17 and Sept. 18 but have since asked the Office of the Independent Police Review Director to take over the probe.

APTN National News reporter Willow Fiddler first alerted Thunder Bay police to the comments.

The comments were posted on a newspaper's page regarding a letter to the editor by Nishnawbi Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler.

The Facebook account used by Rob Steudle stated on Sept. 17: "Give your head a shake Alvin Fiddler. I think it's too foggy to see the truth."

The Facebook posting then followed up with: "Natives are killing natives and it's the white mans fault natives are drunk on the street and its white mans fault natives are homeless and its white mans fault and now natives are lying about how they are treated by white men an explanation is given and it's the white men who are lying. Well let's stop giving the natives money and see how that goes."



Thunder Bay police officer Rob Steudle.

Police said they'll cooperate with the OIPRD's investigation.

"We recognize the issues of trust and respect that this matter raises in regard to our relationship with Indigenous people," said Thunder Bay police Chief J.P. Levesque in a statement.

This follows a similar case in Ottawa, but the comments were made around the same time involving a different matter.

Ottawa police said one of their members was under an investigation stemming from a complaint from the chief of police over “racist” online comments posted in response to a story about the death of Inuit artist Annie Pootoogook.

The comments were posted Saturday by Sgt. Chris Hrnchiar who used his personal Facebook to log into the Ottawa Citizen’s comment section. Hrnchiar was responding to a story about the death of Pootoogook who was found submerged in the Rideau River on Sept. 19.

Pootoogook’s death is being treated as suspicious by Ottawa police investigators.

The OIPRD is also conducting a review of Thunder Bay police and how the force handles investigations into deaths of Indigenous people.

The city was the site of an inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations students.

Five of the seven dead students were pulled from the city’s rivers drowned.

Jethro Anderson and Jordan Wabasse, both 15, were found in the Kaministiquia river while Curran Strang, 18, Reggie Bushie, 15 and Kyle Morriveau, 17 were discovered in the McIntyre river.

Julian Falconer, the lawyer representing the Nishnawbe Aski Nation at the inquest told APTN in October 2015 that investigators, pathologists and toxicologists who worked on the cases between 2000 and 2011 focused on the “drunken Indian” scenario where alcohol was the root cause.

news@aptn.ca