

Thunder Bay

Police officer under investigation over Facebook comments back at work in Thunder Bay, Ont.

Police chief responsible for decision about officer's return to work, Ontario's police watchdog says

By Jody Porter, [CBC News](#) Posted: Dec 16, 2016 6:30 AM ET Last Updated: Dec 16, 2016 6:30 AM ET



Thunder Bay Police Chief J.P. Levesque is responsible for the decision about whether an officer under investigation by Ontario's police watchdog can return to work, according to the Office of the Independent Review Director. (CBC)

The suspension is over, but the investigation continues into the conduct of a Thunder Bay police officer who posted offensive comments on Facebook in September.

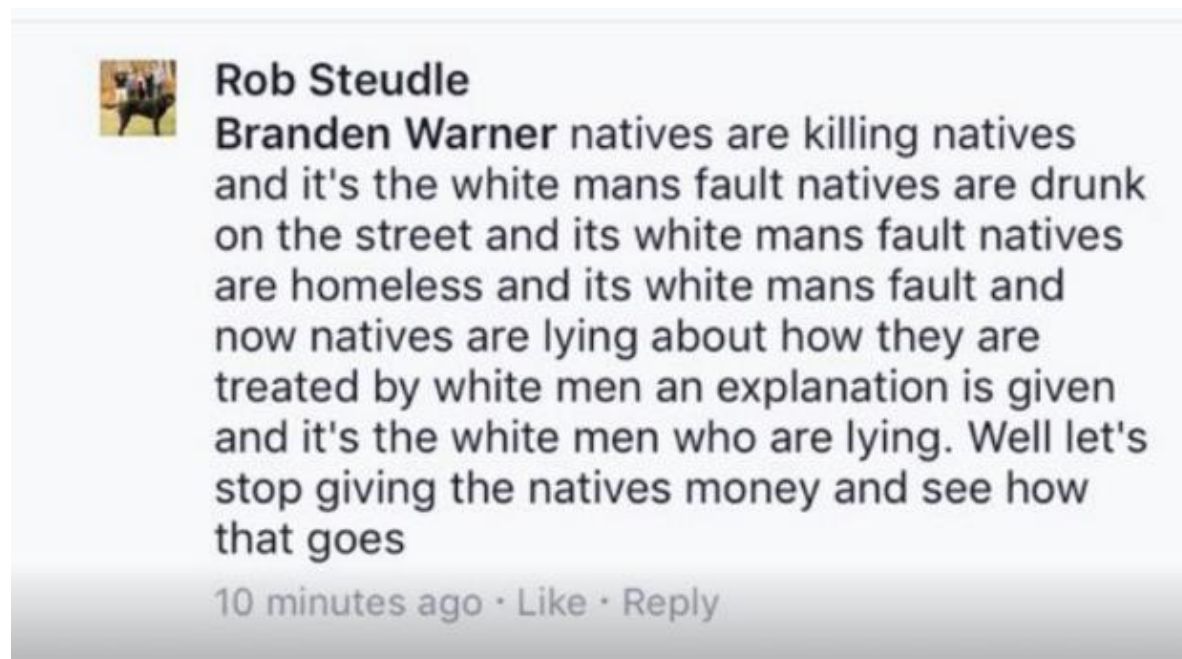
Thunder Bay police confirmed on Thursday that Const. Rob Steudle returned to work this week, on administrative duties.

Steudle's comments that "Natives are killing Natives" were posted in response to a letter to the editor of the local paper from Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler.

- **Thunder Bay police officer's Facebook post prompts professional standards investigation**
- **Thunder Bay police suspend officer who is subject of professional standards investigation**

The comments prompted Thunder Bay police to launch a professional standards investigation, which was handed over to the Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD) in October.

The request to the OIPRD was made to ensure public confidence and transparency in this process, and to recognize the compelling public interest in this matter, Thunder Bay police said in a statement at the time.



Thunder Bay police say this is the Facebook post that prompted their internal investigation. (Facebook)

The OIPRD investigation is expected to be wrapped up in January. It is a separate investigation from the systemic review the watchdog is undertaking to examine allegations of racism within the police service.

- **Thunder Bay, Ont., police face 'systemic review' of Indigenous death investigations**
- **'Alarming questions' raised about police treatment of Indigenous people in Thunder Bay, Ont., watchdog says**

The decision to allow an officer who is under investigation by the OIPRD to return to work lays with the chief of police, said OIPRD spokesperson Rosemary Parker.

The investigation into Steudle's conduct could result in an informal resolution or, if it is deemed more serious, discipline could be pursued under the Police Services Act, according to the OIPRD.

Four other police officers were assigned to administrative duties in connection with the investigation into the Facebook comments.

Those officers have returned to regular duties.

"Their matters have been dealt with internally," said Thunder Bay police executive officer, Chris Adams. "We cannot discuss that process due to issues of privacy."

Ottawa officer demoted

Police in Ottawa took a different approach to dealing with comments by one of its officers in the comment section of the Ottawa Citizen in September.

Sgt. Chris Hrnchiar was demoted to constable for three months and ordered to undergo sensitivity training for making racist online comments about the death of Inuk artist Annie Pootoogook.

Hrnchiar pleaded guilty in November to two counts of discreditable conduct under the Police Services Act. One charge relates to knowingly using racist comments and the other centres on commenting about an open investigation.

After Hrnchiar's hearing, Ottawa Police Association head Matt Skof spoke about the goal for police members to hold a bias-neutral mentality.