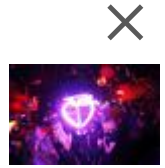




TOP STORIES

As meth rips across the Prairies, volunteer drug testers help ravers stay safe



Brad Blair's lawyer Julian Falconer says OPP hiring process was 'rigged'

COLIN FREEZE > AND LAURA STONE >

PUBLISHED 12 HOURS AGO

 [0 COMMENTS](#)



Julian Falconer said he would follow up for his client – Mr. Blair, who was passed over for the top OPP job – in the courts. He also said he hopes that eventually there will be a public inquiry into the Taverner affair.

KEVIN VAN PAASSEN

As Premier Doug Ford publicly held up a watchdog's report as a "complete vindication," the same document was being proclaimed as a victory by the fired OPP police commander who alleges he was a victim of Progressive Conservative "cronyism."

"A sham rigged for a certain result is nothing to be proud of," said Julian Falconer, acting for the ousted Ontario Provincial Police deputy commissioner Brad Blair.

On Wednesday, Ontario's Integrity Commissioner J. David Wake released his findings after spending three months probing potential wrongdoing in a process that led to Mr. Ford's friend – Toronto Police Superintendent Ron Taverner – being hired as the next OPP commissioner.

Mr. Wake ruled there is no evidence that the Premier broke any rules in terms of shaping last fall's hiring process, which involved a panel comprising career civil servants and an outside executive search firm.

"The most important part of the Integrity Commissioner's report was that he said there was no wrongdoing by the Premier," Community Safety Minister Sylvia Jones told reporters at Queen's Park. She would not commit to following up on a key recommendation that the government establish an independent, transparent process for appointing future OPP commissioners.

Supt. Taverner never took the OPP position. He chose to fully withdraw his candidacy this month in the face of a lingering public outcry over his relationship with the Premier.

After conducting 21 interviews and reviewing more than 35,000 records relating to the OPP hire, Mr. Wake in his report also detailed a series of communications between Dean French, the Premier's chief of staff, and Steve Orsini, the province's then-chief bureaucrat, who appeared to break ranks over the OPP hire of Supt. Taverner as he resigned last December.

Critics of the process are now highlighting these parts of the Integrity Commissioner's report. Some of the messages that Mr. Orsini sent in December are "all about 'we can't call this independent. We rigged it,'" Mr. Falconer said. He added that "I find it absolutely stunning that the highest-ranking bureaucrat in the province recognizes only very late in the game that he presided over a rigged process."

Mr. Falconer said he would follow up for his client – Mr. Blair, who was passed over for the top OPP job – in the courts. He also said he hopes that eventually there will be a public inquiry into the Taverner affair.

The Integrity Commissioner wrote that such an inquiry might be a worthwhile idea, given the limited scope of his office. "A public inquiry may be useful as a postmortem exercise where there are not the same live issues outstanding as there were here," Mr. Wake wrote.

The Opposition NDP, which continues its own calls for a public inquiry, says the Integrity Commissioner's report reveals a "very disturbing situation."

"The government took advantage of a weak process to have Mr. Ford's best friend become the OPP commissioner," NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said. "It was not an independent process."

Mr. Orsini did not respond to a request for comment. His lawyers declined to comment on a series of questions on Thursday, including about Mr. Orsini's communications with Mr. French and the circumstances of his retirement.

Revealed in the Integrity Commissioner's report is a series of electronic messages about Supt. Taverner that Mr. Orsini exchanged with Mr. French before, during and after the selection process for the OPP commissioner.

These messages are described by the Integrity Commissioner as giving rise to "serious doubts as to the fairness of the process" and indicate Mr. Orsini, who sat on the hiring panel, helped steer events toward the Taverner pick.

The hiring of Supt. Taverner was announced Nov. 29. In the days that followed, Mr. Orsini pushed back against messaging from Mr. Ford and his cabinet denying that politics played any role in the pick. "The messaging in today's legislature on the OPP Commissioner uses the term 'independent' selection panel. Independent of who? I'm the Deputy Minister to the Premier. ... I would drop the word 'independent,'" Mr. Orsini wrote to Mr. French on Dec. 3.

On Dec. 14, Mr. Orsini announced his resignation.

The Integrity Commissioner's report reveals that Mr. Orsini that same day gave an ultimatum to the Premier, writing to Mr. Ford to say that if the Premier did not endorse Supt. Taverner's decision to temporarily withdraw, then a replacement chief civil servant would have to be hired.

"If you feel that the installation must proceed, it is with a heavy heart that I recommend the appointment of a new Secretary of the Cabinet who will fully support your decisions as the Premier of Ontario," Mr. Orsini wrote.

The same week in which Supt. Taverner announced he was withdrawing his candidacy, the government hired a new OPP commissioner and also fired Mr. Blair from his deputy commissioner's role at the OPP, alleging that he had leaked sensitive police documents as part of his continuing legal battles.

More From The Globe and Mail

Ford did not break rules in hiring Taverner, integrity commissioner rules, but calls process 'flawed'



Globe editorial: The next time Ontario hires a top cop, the Premier has to stay out of it



Federal budget 2019: Ottawa increases funding for money-laundering watchdog



Evening Update: SNC-Lavalin CEO Neil Bruce speaks out; Doug Ford did not break rules in hiring Taverner, integrity commissioner rules



Toronto homicide case highlights realities of domestic violence among seniors



Morning Update: Canada's vaccination data gap; New Zealand banning semi-automatics; SNC-Lavalin CEO fights back



© Copyright 2019 The Globe and Mail Inc. All rights reserved.

351 King Street East, Suite 1600, Toronto, ON Canada, M5A 0N1

Phillip Crawley, Publisher