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TORSTAR INVESTIGATION

# Ontario police officers are named in leaked list of donors to the ‘Freedom Convoy’

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In early February, while police were unable to bring an end to the illegal occupation of Canada's capital city, some officers were financially contributing to the protest.

A Torstar investigation has found at least a dozen Ontario police officers are named on a leaked list of donations to the "Freedom Convoy" that shut down downtown Ottawa for more than three weeks.

By combing through the nearly 100,000 people who donated to the protest via the crowdfunding website GiveSendGo, Torstar reporters identified 15 police officers who as of 2020 were on the payroll of the province's three largest police forces: Ontario Provincial Police, Toronto Police Service and Ottawa Police Service.

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All three services had officers on the ground in Ottawa to police the "Freedom Convoy."

The police donations were small, ranging from \$20 to \$200, and all were made on or after Feb. 5 — by which time the prime minister and Ottawa's police chief had declared the protests "illegal" or "unlawful."

The OPP has launched an internal investigation into the officers named on the leaked donor list.

"The OPP holds its members accountable for their actions while on duty and off. They have a responsibility to demonstrate neutrality and remain non-partisan. Any demonstration or expression of views and opinions that may be interpreted as condoning illegal activity is in direct opposition to the OPP's values and mandate," said spokesperson Bill Dickson.

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Toronto police said the force is not relying on the donor list, but confirmed it is looking into the activities of two officers Torstar found on the list.

“As this was illegally obtained data, we would not speculate on its validity as we are aware of multiple lists in circulation which could be altered or manipulated,” spokesperson Connie Osborne wrote in a statement. “However, we have made our Professional Standards Unit aware of two of the three names and it is being reviewed.”

A spokesperson for the Ottawa Police Service said in an email that the service was “exploring” the issue.

Torstar reached out to every officer on the list through their police emails and their personal emails included in the leak. Most did not respond. Of those who did, all declined to comment. The Star has decided not to name the officers because we could not ensure each one had seen our request for comment.

The RCMP said Monday the donor list was not being used to freeze the bank accounts of individuals who had given money to the protest. It is not illegal for police officers to donate to political causes.

The “Freedom Convoy” protest has polarized the country, drawing high-profile endorsements from politicians and celebrities, while also being denounced as a lightning rod for racists and extremists.

The unprecedented occupation of the nation’s capital prompted Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to invoke the Emergencies Act, a successor to the War Measures Act last used by his father during the October Crisis of 1970, when separatist terrorists kidnapped and executed a public official.

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While police were finally able to clear the streets of Ottawa over the weekend, evidence of support for the protesters among their ranks continues to emerge.



The “Freedom Convoy” 2022 crowdfunding campaign on the Christian website GiveSendGo raised more than \$10 million in a matter of days after the protesters’ first online donation drive was shut down due to police reports of unlawful activity.

The site was hacked and a list of donors was posted online. The Star previously published the protest’s top five Canadian donors.

The leaked GiveSendGo donors list included the names and postal codes of donors (postal codes had to be accurate for credit card payments to go through). Torstar reporters cross-referenced the list with publicly available records, including property records and Ontario’s most recent public salary disclosure, the 2020 Sunshine List.

The review identified two recently retired Ottawa officers, three officers from Toronto and 10 OPP officers, whose identities were corroborated with middle names, birth dates, and photos from social media. After this article was published

online, Toronto police said one of those names “was not a service member” but would not provide further information.

Another 23 donors shared names and geographic locations with Ontario police officers from the three services, but reporters were unable to find any other data to either include them among the identified officers or cross them off the list.

Rick Parent, a professor emeritus of criminology at Simon Fraser University, says policing is a unique profession because officers are responsible for their off-duty conduct.

“When you contribute to these things, at best you’re contributing to something that may undermine government, that may undermine public health orders. That’s at best. At worst, you could be helping people commit crimes,” said Parent, co-author of the book “Ethics in Law Enforcement.”

“The times we live in are precarious. Everything happens so fast. You could be contributing to a cause and all of a sudden it goes from being a righteous, legal cause to an illegal act, which undermines your credibility as an officer of the law.”

Kash Heed, the former police chief of West Vancouver, said it’s important to establish if the officers made their donations after the protest was declared illegal.

“That distinction is very important. If you knowingly donate to a cause that’s illegal in Canada, you’re actually breaching your oath as a law enforcement officer,” said Heed, who was also solicitor general of British Columbia.

“There should be — and I’m sure there will be — consequences if those officers donated to an illegal cause,” he said. “Each one of these officers has sworn an oath to serve and protect. They cannot go out and appear to break the law and maintain the trust of the community.”

Jeffrey Monaghan, an associate professor of criminology at the Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Carleton University in Ottawa, said officers



who donated to the occupation are a “particular class of bad apples.” But he isn’t surprised by the donations.

“We know that police culture shares elements of the same kind of politics that are kind of represented in this convoy movement,” he said.

The convoy of protesters started out saying they were opposed to a vaccination mandate for cross-border truckers. They quickly dug in and the occupation took on more insurrectionist overtones as hundreds of semi trucks parked end-to-end, paralyzing Parliament Hill. Organizers issued demands, including one that the federal government be dissolved.

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Police fell under heavy criticism for standing by and not intervening as protesters lit open fires on the streets, harassed passersby and openly defied a prohibition on bringing jerrycans to refuel the hundreds of trucks that had been parked to obstruct the streets of the capital.



Former Ottawa police Chief Peter Sloly, who resigned amid accusations that the police were not doing their job, said his officers were not entering the areas occupied by protesters out of fear for their safety.

Exasperated Ottawa residents posted videos of police fraternizing with the protesters, expressing their support for the cause, and posing for selfies.

In a video posted on Twitter, one unidentified OPP officer was recorded encouraging the protesters headed to Ottawa during a traffic stop.

“I get what you guys are doing,” he was filmed saying. “I support you guys 100 per cent.”

Another video shows a different OPP officer jovially allowing protesters to sit in the back of his cruiser and pose for pictures while pretending to be detained.

Police began to clear vehicles and demonstrators from downtown streets on Feb. 18, arresting 196 protesters, laying almost 400 charges and towing 115 vehicles. For the first time in 24 days, downtown Ottawa was clear of protesters Sunday.

Monaghan said donations are not the only way some police officers supported the protests. Law enforcement specific anti-vaccine and anti-mandate groups such as Police on Guard for Thee and Mounties For Freedom — which includes former RCMP and occupation leader Danny Bulford, who was arrested in Ottawa on Friday — openly backed the convoy.

*Editor's note: This story has been updated to include a comment from Toronto police received after the article was first published.*

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