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Chair

Mr. Royal Galipeau

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● (0845)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC)): Good morning. Welcome to the 40th meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[*English*]

Today we have a number of witnesses in the second hour, but right now, in the first hour, we're delighted to welcome Mr. Donald Leonardo, Mr. Tim Laidler, and Mr. Tim Armstrong.

I don't know if you know each other.

Tim, meet Tim.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We particularly appreciate the help that you're going to give us today. What concerns us particularly is the transition from being a serving member of the armed forces to becoming a veteran.

When a Canadian Forces member is being released, there is a transfer of responsibility for the member from the Department of National Defence to other actors, notably Veterans Affairs Canada and the service income security insurance plan. The number of programs that support the transition of military personnel is large. Military personnel, veterans, and the public can therefore find the process difficult to navigate, and this can cause misunderstandings.

By studying this continuum of services, this committee, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, wishes to clearly identify the main stages of the process, the programs available to military personnel, veterans, and their families at each stage, and the respective responsibilities of the actors involved. We hope this study will help with a greater understanding in the overall process of transitioning to civilian life for military personnel. I thank you very much for helping us to do that by telling us about your personal experience.

Each of you will have 10 minutes to make a presentation. We all hope to learn from it.

The first at bat is Mr. Leonardo, the founder and the national president of Veterans Canada.

Mr. Donald Leonardo (Founder and National President, Veterans Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the invitation to appear today.

I sincerely hope that I'm heard today, because over the past nine years the stakeholders have given about 486 solutions to problems

with the new Veterans Charter. I think three of them have been used, so it would be nice to humour me once in a while and use one of my suggestions.

Today, the purpose of this booklet is twofold. It is essential that those currently in the armed services shall be fully informed of the steps that have been taken as they look towards their rehabilitation in civil life. It is of equal importance that prospective employers of these people and the Canadian public as a whole know what has been done to fit them for return to dominions of normal peacetime operations.

Canada has been making plans for the civil reestablishment of its service personnel since a few months after the outbreak of the war. Many of the steps that have been taken are in full operation. Hundreds have received financial assistance. Others have been given training. Those discharged up until the present time have given us a testing basis, and results of this testing have been encouraging. Canada's rehabilitation belief is that the answer to civil reestablishment is a job, and the answer to a job is fitness and training for the job.

Our ambition is that these men and women who've taken up arms in defence of their country and the ideals of freedom shall not be penalized for the time they have spent in the services, and our desire is that they shall be fitted in every way possible to take part in Canada's civil and economic life. We believe this ambition and this desire can be achieved. Results up until the present indicate this belief is well founded.

This was written by the honourable Ian A. Mackenzie, who was Minister of Pensions and National Health in 1944. This was the rehabilitation program, the transitioning program after the war, for one million Canadian soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen returning from the war. Somehow we left this behind and never used it. I've left a copy of the original handbook with the clerk if you would like to take a look at it.

Why was this successful program not updated over the years as the U.S. GI Bill was? That program was for those who served in the U.S. armed forces.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to present two present-day scenarios.

A young man, after graduation from high school in 1991, joined the Canadian Armed Forces and enrolled at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario, under the regular officer training plan. During a four-year period, he received a free education, a salary for an officer cadet, and room and board. In return he would apply himself while attending the college and give five more years of service after completing his degree. He was then commissioned as an officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He was posted to 17 Wing Winnipeg, Manitoba, to complete his training as a navigator. He received his wings in 1997 and was posted to 12 Wing Shearwater. While serving at 12 Wing he was promoted to the rank of captain. In 2000 he transferred to the Canadian forces reserves and attended law school at Dalhousie University. He graduated from Dalhousie Law School in 2003, and returned to Ontario to practice law until his election as a member of Parliament in 2012. In 2015, he was appointed Minister of Veterans Affairs. By now you realize I'm talking about Minister Erin O'Toole.

My point to this little history lesson is to say that he was given every opportunity possible to become successful through transitioning within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Now, let's look at a different story.

A young man, after graduation from high school in 1991, joined the Canadian Forces and enrolled as a non-commissioned member. After recruit training he was sent to battle school, and after successful completion, he was posted to an infantry regiment. In 1992, while employed with an infantry section, he was deployed with the battalion to Cyprus. Upon his return from Cyprus the soldier was told that he would also go with the battalion to the former Yugoslavia UNPROFOR. It was the early part of 1994. Upon his return from Yugoslavia he was promoted to the rank of corporal. In December 1996 he again started training to return to Yugoslavia with the battalion as part of SFOR. He returned to Canada for a year or so in garrison. He began deploying, once again, this time to Kosovo. This was his fourth overseas deployment.

• (0850)

After his return to Canada he remained static with his unit until the significant and world-changing events of September 11, 2001. After 9/11 the world changed and once again he started predeployment training. He deployed to Afghanistan in February 2002. The soldier was present at the Tarnak Farms incident that occurred on April 18, 2002, when an American F-18 jet dropped a laser-guided bomb on a group of soldiers. Over the next nine years he would redeploy to Afghanistan two more times.

This soldier, after many deployments, was diagnosed with severe post-traumatic stress disorder. He was given a 3(b) medical release after 20 years of service.

Since his release he has continued to struggle with his illness from years of combat-related stress, and has been receiving treatment from a Veterans Affairs OSI clinic. After years of therapy he thought he would like to attend university and complete a goal he once had. The goal was to get a university education. Unfortunately, a fully paid four-year university education degree program for civilian rehabilitation for this veteran is not possible today through the programs offered by Veterans Affairs Canada.

Here is the moral of my story. The Canadian Armed Forces took a 17-year-old kid and provided him with a university education. They did this without reassurances of how this investment would turn out. A battle-hardened Canadian Armed Forces non-commissioned member, who has time after time given everything he has to serve his country, does not receive the same considerations or opportunities to become a success and achieve his goals after release.

I personally had the following conversation with my therapist: "If you were to become successful and financially independent, would you need Veterans Affairs Canada any more?" My answer was, "No." She said, "So then, go and become successful."

This question and answer is the reason why the federal government and Veterans Affairs need to create an atmosphere of positive opportunity. Every member of the Canadian Armed Forces who has or will have an honourable or medical release deserves an abundance of support and opportunity to become successful.

This is one of many times I've been to this committee. The last time I was here, I suggested that when a member is injured in the Canadian Forces and receives a medical release through MRV, the Medical Review Board, and CRB, the Career Review Board, they should not have to be readjudicated by Veterans Affairs when their medical release is imminent. That was my testimony the last time I was here. I hope it will be heard this time.

I also have some additional recommendations for transitioning for injured veterans.

Add to the rehabilitation program a complete paid university or college education, including tuition, books, and academic equipment. This would also include providing salary and benefits while earning a degree. If the member is totally incapacitated, this benefit can be transferred to a spouse. NCMs would then qualify for public service jobs. We all know that we've been trying to put through a bill for priority hiring. The only problem is that a non-commissioned member without a university education will never meet the prerequisites to make the same salary in the public service they're receiving right now.

• (0855)

I also recommend low-interest, zero-down-payment, guaranteed home loans for veterans, with more favourable terms for new construction compared to existing housing. The government loans money to banks at low interest rates—why not the veterans who have served our country?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Leonardo—

Mr. Donald Leonardo: May I just say the last point, sir?

The Chair: I just want to warn you that I had given you the sign that your time was getting short.

Mr. Donald Leonardo: Yes. I just have one point to say, sir.

The Chair: I'm sure the committee wants to hear it.

Mr. Donald Leonardo: I also recommend veterans mortgage life insurance, because mortgage protection insurance could help families of severely disabled veterans pay off their home mortgage in the event of a veteran's death. There are many veterans who have been medically released who do not qualify for mortgage life insurance due to their injuries. Therefore, Veterans Affairs Canada should provide for this.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I thank you very much, Mr. Leonardo.

You've noticed there's something wrong with my voice; there's nothing wrong with my hearing. I thank you very much for what you've done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chicoine, please go ahead.

•(0900)

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

But I think we have other presentations.

The Chair: Are we hearing from the other two witnesses first?

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Yes, there are other presentations.

[*English*]

The Chair: Before we get to questions, we will hear the two other witnesses.

First up is Tim number one: Tim Laidler.

Mr. Tim Laidler (Executive Director, Veterans Transition Network): I'd like to thank the chair and this committee for inviting me to present again.

I have been here in the past, and I'm happy to provide an update about the Veterans Transitions Network. This is a network that provides a 10-day program for veterans transitioning out of the military and into the civilian world. It was a program started at the University of British Columbia by Dr. Marv Westwood and Dr. David Kuhl in the Faculty of Education. The program brings veterans together in a group setting and helps them share their stories, ideally integrating some of their experiences, overcoming barriers to transition, and learning how to transition forward despite things like post-traumatic stress disorder.

I came across the program when I returned from Afghanistan myself. I served in a convoy escort platoon in 2008. Our primary job was to guard supply convoys from Kandahar airfield to the different forward operating bases in the Kandahar province. What I can say from my personal experience overseas and my tour is that we did our job, we were well trained for it, but what none of us really expected, including me for sure, was the toll that we would have to witness on the Afghan people from this conflict. In 2008, the biggest risks were the suicide bombings and the improvised explosive devices. Our vehicles were good at that time. We still sustained casualties, but for the most part, when the IEDs were going off, we were not being killed or injured at nearly the same rate as the Afghan army and

Afghan civilians were. Having to go through the city and see the devastation and the lack of regard for the women, children, and anyone who happened to be out shopping in the market on the day of an attack was something that stayed with me.

Although we all bunkered down, I was able to continue to do the job, but I did notice when I came back from overseas that I would start to think about those experiences and start to ruminate and wonder if there was anything I could have done differently. There are all sorts of labels out there with post-traumatic stress disorder, operational stress injury. When I was 23 years old, coming back, I didn't understand what any of that stuff was. All that I knew was that I was spending a lot of time and energy thinking about the tour. I remember at one point a girlfriend at the time asked me if there was ever going to be a day when I didn't talk about Afghanistan.

So I was still high functioning; I went back to school to finish my degree. I was transitioning successfully by a certain measure in that I was finishing the degree, moving on into the workforce, yet there was something slightly different. It wasn't until I found the Veterans Transition Network that I really started to realize that there had been an impact and that I could start to open up emotionally again and become more of my old civilian self.

I'll talk just a little bit about the history and the lessons learned from the Veterans Transition Network here in Canada, and hopefully talking about this can help set a model for other organizations that are trying to innovate in this space right now and other organizations that are trying to help out.

Our story really started back in 1997 when the professors came together to address a need of many of the veterans coming back from the former Yugoslavia at that time. They evolved the program at UBC, iterating through different versions, trying what was working, and always evaluating it with academic rigour. The evidence was presented yearly at the CIMVHR conference, the organization that Dr. Alice Aiken runs. The evidence was able to be put up on screens, presented, and challenged by other academic minds, and the program ended up coming to a place where the final product was rolled out in 2012.

I was able to come here to the committee to present the program, and I was extremely excited to see that almost nine months later, after the committee had come out to B.C. to see our program, the Minister of Veterans Affairs took leadership to fund the program nationally. They joined with other partners, primarily the Royal Canadian Legion, whose BC/Yukon Command stepped up with funding, as well as the True Patriot Love Foundation and Wounded Warriors.

To date we've put almost 500 veterans through this program right across the country, actually bringing our clinicians into their communities, running the group-based program, and leaving the veterans with an opportunity to continue supporting each other in a sort of organic way.

This brings me to some of my recommendations for today.

When we talk about transitioning out of the military, there are two very different experiences, from what I found with the graduates of our program. The experience transitioning from the regular force where you're paid full time versus transitioning from the reserve force where you're paid full time while you're overseas, and then back to being paid part time when you're in Canada, can be quite unique.

•(0905)

What I'd like to state is that transition for reservists can quite often start when they come back from their tour. They'll come back off a tour, they'll have a week's leave, then they'll be back into civilian life. If they are to go back on tour again and again, they'll continue training. They might try to work full time with the military, but some of them decide that's the point when they're ready to leave the military. The actual day they'll get the release, though, could be three, five years later. So if we think of the transition only starting when they're leaving the military, that will leave a reservist in a three to five-year limbo quite often. This is something that I think we can look at how to address and try to get more of these programs and services further upstream. The reservist can't apply for their Veterans Affairs benefits while they're still in the military, yet many of the programs like the retraining program that's there, the veterans rehabilitation program, often don't start until the reservist is actually released from the military.

The other key point I want to make today is about the outreach that's still needed. Our organization brings in 75% of our participants using our peer-to-peer network. When we advertise our program through Facebook, through social media, through sending out letters to Legion halls, we get very people calling us asking to take the program. The hyper-masculine culture that still exists within the military community and veteran community, I believe, is a major barrier to people accessing help. There have been so many stories of young soldiers whom we've met who have never been into a Veterans Affairs office, who have never thought about going to see a counsellor, and yet when we speak to them for just five or ten minutes, you can tell they've really struggled a lot. Reaching out to those people, I believe, is essential.

There's an organization that started up recently called Send up the Count, which was using the peer-to-peer buddy system to check in on their friends. We've found that the most successful sort of model. If you try to use a psychologist, somebody who is not necessarily familiar with the military to do the outreach, it's often not successful. Nothing is quite as successful as a buddy reaching out and saying there might be something wrong, come check these guys out, you can trust them.

The last point, and something that was helpful for me in my transition, was the education piece. When I got back from my tour, about three days later I was back to the University of British Columbia to finish my undergraduate degree. It was really difficult

to make that transition right away but I think it contributed to my success. It put my mind to work and at the end of that year, I had my degree. I went on to finish a master's in counselling psychology later on. Definitely my experience overseas impacted me. I definitely struggled when I came back, but I can stand here today and say I feel like I'm fully functioning. I'm very grateful for the support I got from Veterans Affairs. I know that's not always the case for veterans, but in my case, I was quite impressed by it.

I'll end up by saying thank you to this committee again for your advocacy on behalf of the Veterans Transition Network and for your recommendations. It's made a huge impact on my life and on many veterans here in Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Laidler.

Now, Tim number two.

Mr. Armstrong, I thank you for coming all the way from New Westminster. Please enlighten us.

Mr. Tim Armstrong (Director, Honour House Society): Thank you for the invite, Mr. Chairman, and committee members.

Yes, I'm from the city of New Westminster, B.C., the original capital of B.C. for a short period of time. There is a lot of history in New Westminster. I'm the fire chief there and on the board of directors for Honour House, the subject of the presentation I'm going to give you.

Honour House is a home away from home for first responders and military personnel seeking medical treatment in the Lower Mainland area of Vancouver. There is a vision behind Honour House.

Our president, Al De Genova, was watching a documentary on Trevor Greene. It's called *Peace Warrior*. Trevor Greene was serving on a peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan when he was attacked by a militant who hit him over the head with a fire axe. He was severely injured, was flown to Germany from Kandahar, went back to Alberta, where he sought treatment, and then went on to B.C. Al De Genova saw this, was touched by it, and said that something needed to be done for these veterans, that they needed a place to go to, hence Honour House was born.

The vision was there. We raised money to get the initial capital. The mayor in New Westminster approached me to get involved and to be on the committee. It wasn't a hard thing to get involved with.

The home is actually on the same site where the parliament was supposed to have been in New Westminster. We bought the property, but the house was slated for demolition. We took it right down to the studs, more or less, and renovated the home. The British Columbia Construction Association donated up to \$250 million of in-kind costs.

The total cost for the home was \$4.9 million. It has 10 rooms, all with their own handicapped-accessible washroom. There are common areas, meeting rooms, and a common kitchen to give families the ability to connect with other families who are staying at the home. The home is free of charge for any serving military person or veteran needing medical treatment or care in the Lower Mainland.

Some of the fundraising efforts we have done include galas and Helmets for Heroes, a campaign that we launched with first responders—firefighters, police, paramedics and military—going out to the community with their helmets out and reaching out to the public for help. This isn't something that's commonly done. Military personnel and first responders are usually proud. They're used to giving back to the community, not asking for help, so this is a way for the community to give back to our first responders.

You can see in this slide that the house is very calming. We had psychologists come in and pick the decor and the colours, especially for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress. I know that we talk about post-traumatic stress, but it is very real. In fact, when I get home, next week we'll be burying a firefighter who was being treated for post-traumatic stress and took his life last week.

Again, there is a need for this. Honour House is the only home in the country that's fully accessible to any military personnel, either serving personnel or veterans, as well as their families, and that's probably the key thing. It's not just for the veterans. It's for their families. We've had personnel stay there with spouses who were seeking cancer treatment. Most of the vets we've talked to say that it would financially cripple them if they had to come and stay in a hotel in the Vancouver area.

• (0910)

Again, we've had many success stories. Since opening the doors in 2011, we've had 2,000 night stays. Nonetheless, the house is very underutilized. We opened in 2011. About 10,000 night stays were available to veterans and their families, so we're really only at about 20% capacity. I know there's a great need out there for that. There's no charge. The problem is getting the message out. We're a small society made up of volunteers. We only have one full-time paid house manager. The grounds are maintained by volunteers. All the linen, the laundry service, the cooking is done by volunteers. Local grocery stores provide the food to the house for people staying there.

Again, we're underutilized only because we don't have the ability to get the message out. We've talked to different organizations. We go around the province. We haven't even been able to get outside the province. We've had some initial talks about creating another Honour House in Alberta.

We're seeing more and more cases of post-traumatic stress, operational stress injuries. We've been holding sessions in the house, where they actually come in and do sessions monthly in the house.

Master Warrant Officer Jim Sutton, who was kind enough to let us tell his story, stayed in the house free of charge. He stayed in the Lower Mainland. It would have cost him upwards of about \$12,000 just for the stay.

Our goal is to get an Honour House in every province across the country. Right now there's only one in the country, and that's in New Westminster, B.C. We've been in talks with other communities, and there seems to be some interest, but it's a big undertaking. Our operating costs for the home are approximately \$160,000 to \$200,000 a year. That's all covered by public funding, fundraising, donated support. We have no federal funding whatsoever. We were lucky enough to get a low-interest loan from BC Housing. It's becoming more and more challenging just to keep the doors open. There are so many different funding initiatives out there that it is becoming more and more challenging to make even the \$200,000 a year to keep the house operational, never mind trying to knock down the debt on the home.

For fundraising, we've had great support from different entertainers. Jim Cuddy and Sarah McLachlan have come out and done in-kind concerts. At our galas we do once a year, we raise between \$200,000 and \$300,000, which pretty much goes into the operating costs of the home.

The takeaway from this, really, is asking this committee to look at funding sources through the federal government that could help with operational or initial capital costs to develop these homes across the country. Veterans need them. The second ask, really, is to create a platform for communicating this resource to veterans and getting the message out in a clear way. Going around with a small group of volunteers is a hard way to get that message out. We've heard many stories where people have said after the fact that they didn't know this resource existed. They say they had to come down to the Lower Mainland for medical treatment and that it was a financial hardship for them. Other veterans who have stayed there have said that they would have been financially bankrupted if this resource had not been available to them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the committee. That's my presentation.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Armstrong. If you don't mind, I have a question before we start.

How much was the house?

Mr. Tim Armstrong: It was \$4.9 million.

The Chair: How much did the British Columbia Construction Association contribute?

Mr. Tim Armstrong: In materials and labour, we figure that it was about \$2.5 million in kind support.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I just wanted to clarify that number.

[*Translation*]

It is now over to Mr. Chicoine.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank our witnesses for being with us today and the work they do in their respective organizations. It's extremely important work that is no doubt appreciated by members and veterans.

Mr. Leonardo, at the end of your presentation, you recommended a rehabilitation program that provides for a university or college education. Last year, Minister Fantino announced that the budget included up to \$80,000 in additional assistance for every veteran. That appeared to be enough to cover the cost of a university education at the undergraduate level. What is your assessment in terms of that announcement?

In addition, I believe, if I'm not mistaken, a maximum amount of \$5 million was earmarked to help, according to our calculations, a few dozen veterans every year.

What is your take on that announcement? Do you think it addresses your recommendation, or would you say that more needs to be done? I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

•(0920)

[*English*]

Mr. Donald Leonardo: Thank you for your question.

The announced additional money—and member of Parliament Laurie Hawn mentioned a few times the amount of money available for rehabilitation—isn't for those non-commissioned members.

Tim mentioned he finished his university education, but he had already started it. For those who want to start a fresh degree program, it's not available for you if you are starting from scratch. If you've already started a degree program in the service, in the military, then yes, you can continue it, but not if you are starting from scratch. That's why I brought up the point. A 17-year-old joins the Canadian Forces under ROTP, and the government doesn't have any assurances that he is going to be successful. Yet a 20-year combat-hardened veteran doesn't have those same opportunities, and he certainly didn't have them during his career, if he has done seven or eight deployments.

That is why I bring this up. The opportunities were there, back in 1944, to do whatever you desired to become successful. Giving everybody these opportunities is going to benefit Canada and Canadians in the long run.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Thank you.

I gather that you're talking about individuals who are still serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces. There's a difference, I believe.

[*English*]

Mr. Donald Leonardo: Yes. Some people get the opportunity to take additional education while they are in the forces. If I am not mistaken, National Defence has cut back on those opportunities through its budget cuts. Those opportunities to continue education have been greatly reduced. The non-commissioned members have a difficult time to advance their education while they are serving.

We have the JPSU, where the injured veterans are going. If they could start their education while they're in there, as they transition from the JPSU to Veterans Affairs, that would be wonderful. Over the past 10 years, we have never seen Veterans Affairs and National Defence work together very well. They used to have the centre, which was a collaboration, though that program wasn't very successful in getting the two departments working together.

We could put on rose-coloured glasses and have the two departments work together in transitioning, so that our injured veterans and our soldiers, sailors, and airmen and airwomen would be able to have every opportunity in the world to become successful. That would be wonderful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Thank you for those observations.

At the end of your presentation, you also made two other recommendations and you didn't have much time to explain them. Would you like to take a moment to discuss them in a bit more detail?

[*English*]

Mr. Donald Leonardo: Yes, I very much would.

At present, injured veterans are already taking a 25% pay cut when they go on their earnings loss benefit. Had they not been injured, it's money that they would have put aside, put into savings, in the best part of their career, in the end years. In the U.S., ever since the GI Bill came out during the Second World War, there have always been low-interest home loans available for injured veterans get them on their feet, to make them stable in their home life, thereby taking stress off the family.

An injured veteran at this time cannot get home mortgage insurance. Because they're injured, they don't qualify. If they happen to pass away due to their injuries, then the wife is left with the burden.

These are some programs in the U.S. that aren't available in Canada. I think it's something this committee should recommend correcting.

•(0925)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Leonardo.

Mr. Hawn.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank you all for being here.

Chief Armstrong, are you familiar with—it doesn't sound like you are—a facility in Edmonton called Valour Place?

Mr. Tim Armstrong: No, I am not.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: We turned the sod on that in 2011. There are 12 units for families, all accessible. It's the same kind of program, same everything. It's been pretty full, maybe because Edmonton is a bigger centre and it's easier for the word to get out and so on.

I am going to give you a card with a guy's name on it, Honorary Colonel Dennis Erker. Just Google Valour Place; you'd be really advised to give Dennis a call. He's an absolutely fabulous person. He was the driver behind Valour Place. You could get a lot of information from him. I mean, it a huge initiative, a great initiative, and there are others. Honour House and Valour Place I think could certainly serve as models for the rest of the country.

So I'm going to give you his name, because you really need to talk to him.

Mr. Tim Armstrong: Great. Thank you, sir.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

I have a couple of points of clarification on what Mr. Chicoine said. The amount for an individual to take training is actually \$75,800. There is no limit or cap. The \$5 million set aside was just initially. If a hundred people apply, a hundred get served, and if a thousand people apply, a thousand get served. There is no cap on that. Veterans Affairs programs are demand-driven. If the demand is there, then they will get—

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): On a point of order, while I respect your experience, Laurie, and all of your contributions, I'm not sure you're an authority to give evidence before the committee that if a thousand apply, a thousand get served.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: No, no, I am clarifying, as a point of order, what was said.

The fact is that every Veterans Affairs program—this isn't my testifying, but just my correcting a misimpression—is demand-driven. Everybody will be served who meets the requirements of whatever the demand is.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: By "served" you mean they will be given the money if they apply for it?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes, if they qualify, there is no limit. Numbers are set aside as an initial budgetary guess, but as many step forward who qualify, they will get it. That's a fact.

I want to talk a little bit to you, Mr. Leonardo. Now, you say you haven't been heard. Actually, I think you were heard.

Are you familiar with the 14 recommendations of the House committee—

Mr. Donald Leonardo: I am very familiar with them, but they haven't been implemented.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Well, Mr. Leonardo, they actually have. The very first one goes to exactly what you and Mr. Laidler talked about, and that is transition. It was the most important recommendation by this whole committee, that nobody should leave the CF, should leave as a soldier, become a veteran with Veterans Affairs, until everything has been adjudicated—until they have been medically stabilized,

until their records are back, until the case manager of VAC is holding hands with the member while he is still a member of the Department of National Defence. If somebody is medically releasing, that can take three to five years.

Are you familiar with some of the progress that's been made on that?

Mr. Donald Leonardo: I'm very familiar with the progress, Mr. Hawn. The fact is that Veterans Affairs is still readjudicating a case that medical doctors have given a medical release for. Yes, there is a transition now from National Defence to Veterans Affairs, where your paperwork, your medical records, will be moved as you work towards it, but there's still the readjudication, where a team from Veterans Affairs, instead of just giving the doctor the benefit of the doubt that he's the expert on the injuries...

I think part of the problem might be the table of disabilities not matching up to the injuries.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Are you aware that Veterans Affairs and DND are going to be able to match those tables. Are you aware of the...?

You can always find one that is still caught up under the old system, but are you aware of the progress?

Mr. Donald Leonardo: But, again, the National Defence ombudsman even brought this point up recently.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Are you aware that the National Defence ombudsman and the veterans ombudsman are working together hand-in-hand and moving forward on all of these issues? Are you aware of that?

Mr. Donald Leonardo: Okay. That's why I brought it up. We brought this up last time and recently with the announcement of the priority hiring in the public service, his concern was the length of time it's going to take. Remember, this program is five years to get a public service job.

• (0930)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Are you aware of the fact that they are working hand-in-glove and making progress on that?

Mr. Donald Leonardo: I understand they are. I was just reiterating that it wasn't completed yet.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Well, I think everything is going to be a work-in-progress.

Mr. Laidler, kind of along the same lines, you've been an expert on the transition process, having been through it yourself and so on. I think you've probably paid some attention to some of the things that have gone on in that regard. Do you have a comment on the recommendations the committee made and what you're aware of that's been done on any of them, particularly the transition piece?

Mr. Tim Laidler: Yes, and it even perhaps goes to this education piece of \$75,000. I have a good friend who's just entered that program. His schooling is being paid for him to go back and get re-trained.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: It's available to all ranks, correct?

Mr. Tim Laidler: That's correct. He's a corporal and we served in the same platoon in Afghanistan. He was medically released for post-traumatic stress disorder and is in that program. The one piece I would like to bring up, and I actually agree with Mr. Leonardo on this, is that the sooner we can get that education started the better off veterans with be. He was one of those reservists who had to wait a few years to get started in the program. If he could have started with that education sooner, before his release, I think he would have been in a much better position. That's perhaps where we can make some more improvements.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Absolutely, and I think that's a good place where we can move forward.

You went to university. Now with all due respect to BScs and BAs out there, they don't often lead to really good jobs. You've gone beyond that. You're more specialized and that's good. What's your view of...?

I mean, \$75,800 is not just for university; it's for any training. Particularly in Alberta where I'm from, trades training is pretty important. Can you give your opinion on the ability of a soldier to use the \$75,800 for university or any other trades training and the value of that flexibility?

Mr. Tim Laidler: My colleague did trades training. It paid for more than just his schooling, but his expenses as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Valeriote.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Similarly, gentlemen, thank you for your service and for coming up here and speaking to us about this important matter.

Mr. Leonardo, I think the point you're trying to make is your perception that some people are gaining access to the education programs while others, who you feel ought to have had access, are denied access to that education program. It's not often that I would agree with Mr. Hawn, but he did use the words "qualify for the program". Even coming out of high school doesn't mean you automatically qualify to go to college or university. So, would you agree that that program should be available to those who qualify and would otherwise have been able to to university or college, rather than automatically enrolling in the education?

Mr. Donald Leonardo: We used to have a saying in the military, "Did it, done it, got the t-shirt". While the theory is nice, I qualified for university. In fact, in my testing through CanVet, the organization in Calgary that you go to for testing to see if you can go back to a rehabilitation program and education, I came in the top 2% of the testing in Canada. I went to Mount Royal University, but I couldn't do a degree program.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Why was that?

Mr. Donald Leonardo: Because they said I wasn't allowed to do one.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Who's "they"?

Mr. Donald Leonardo: Veterans Affairs Canada. So I was taking courses within Mount Royal until they kicked me out because of my PTSD. I was taking courses but they would not let me do a degree program.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Did they offer you any help?

Mr. Donald Leonardo: They told me that reason was that it's only a two-year program. A degree program isn't two years. Tim could finish it because he had already started it. I was starting fresh in university and I could not do a four-year program. So it's a thing called "Did it, done it, got the t-shirt".

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Okay. Are you telling me there are other people like you that qualify, but were not given the opportunity?

Mr. Donald Leonardo: If there's one, there are many.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Can you give us other names?

Mr. Donald Leonardo: I can't give you other names. I'll give you my name.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: All right, and if you find other names would you please bring them to the attention of the committee.

For the record I happen to agree with you on your third recommendation that veterans mortgage life insurance ought to be guaranteed, or made available, because it appears to me that in many cases veterans would have qualified for that life insurance, but for their service. I think we're not honouring our sacred covenant if we can't step up and make sure veterans would qualify for that life insurance.

Mr. Laidler, you had some success using the program, but you also said you know that's not always the case for other veterans.

Can you tell us about other veterans for whom that was not the case who you know of, specifically others that may have qualified but weren't given those benefits.

• (0935)

Mr. Tim Laidler: Sure. The one person I can think of, maintaining confidentiality, was a 21-year-old reservist from my regiment who went overseas to Afghanistan, was injured, came home, and had a knee injury I believe.

He was able to have his contract extended. He was going to be paid full time while he was undergoing treatment, but he was required to report to the unit to do paperwork and things like that throughout the week. It was quite a commute for him to get there.

Going through the process within DND he felt fed up and stressed out by the program. He said that he didn't want to deal with it, and left. That was the last time any of us saw him.

We hear reports that he's okay and everything, but he has just gone off on his own. He has not applied for Veterans Affairs benefits that we know of. He has not accessed any services. That's the sort of stoic military culture that exists.

That is the most common type of veteran out there right now: somebody who had just gone on and done it themselves. I would predict we would see those people coming back, down the road, if they are not getting support and not being successful.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: I would describe those people as the ones who are falling through the cracks. They're the ones to whom some assistance may have been offered, but not enough attention has been given to them. I think many of us around this table have pushed for programs that would try and to find those people, to reach out to them. I don't believe there are enough services available to help prevent them from falling through the cracks.

From 20,000 feet I came into this portfolio, and I see many civilian, not-for-profit groups like your own—Wounded Warrior, Canada Company, Veterans Transition Network—that are trying to fill gaps that ought not to exist, that government ought to be filling itself.

This is one of those gaps. Goodness, you guys provide great services, but we need a more robust program that would offer better transition services so that veterans do not have to rely on you, but would have those services available right from the government.

Tim, could you make recommendations to us right now on how some of those gaps could be filled, and identify where they are, and what needs to be done to fill them.

Mr. Tim Laidler: Absolutely. The Veterans Transition Network was filling a gap. The government now pays us \$15,000 per veteran. We created a solution. The government saw that as a success. This committee made the recommendations. Within nine months the minister made that announcement.

That's one case example. There's a Send Up The Count organization that's doing similar things. If there are ways the government can come in and help fund those solutions that already exist out there, and help support them, that's how I think we're going to get to a place we all want to be.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Laidler.

I'd like to ask members of the committee, as they feel they are getting closer to the end of their time, to look at the Chair and his signals and his anxieties, because you have good questions. Make the questions shorter so you can get more information in the answers.

Mr. Rafferty, we're waiting for you.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Are you going across the way first?

The Chair: Oh, yes. We want to hear from you, M Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today and participating in this study.

I have a slightly different model than I think Mr. Valeriote does. I feel the government has a primary and key role to play in the

provision of services to veterans, but I certainly think that other organizations bring their own strengths to serving veterans. I'd look at it more as a mosaic. I think there's great value in the work you're doing out there, and it has to be a teamwork approach.

What I hear is that communication with the veteran, and being able to make the veteran aware of the services available, is a challenge. It's a challenge that you face and it's a challenge that we face, which is why there is promotional types of literature and advertising out to veterans to let them know what is available to them so they can plug into Veterans Affairs.

Tim, you spoke about a veteran who has gone dark in a sense. He has unplugged and he's looking after himself. It's my hope that if he sees advertising from you or from Veterans Affairs, a light might go on, and that he would say to himself, "I didn't realize that", or "You know what, now that I see that, I'm going to plug in", and be helped by what the government does, and by what you do as well.

I'd to focus a bit more on the study. Tim, if you don't mind, perhaps I'll use you as an example.

Let me go back to the vocational training. Let me ask first, were you a reservist or a full-time soldier?

• (0940)

Mr. Tim Laidler: I was a reservist.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: When you came back, did you use the vocational program to help fund the university program that you wanted to pursue?

Mr. Tim Laidler: No, I did not.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Okay. Was that available to you?

Mr. Tim Laidler: It would have been if I had gone through the whole process.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: You weren't sure whether you would be accepted or not. You just decided to go on your own to return to university?

Mr. Tim Laidler: I didn't feel that I needed it.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: All right.

Let me ask about a few other programs. If you don't mind sharing your experience with the committee in terms of how you transitioned out of the military, were you a voluntary release? Were you a medical release? Did you find that the military was looking after your needs up to the point of release? Perhaps you could share some of that with us.

Mr. Tim Laidler: Sure. I'm still going through the process. I'm still in the military. I'm still in the reserves. On my transition out and what I found, I think the most useful thing to talk about is that there was not a moment when I realized that I had to leave the military. It was a longer process. It was quite a challenging process to get to that point and decide things, and ask, "Am I no longer going to be a soldier and not go overseas on tour again?" and "What am I going to remake myself to be in the civilian world?" It was something that I struggled with for a long time.

Sometimes it would change. I'd wake up and say that I wanted to go back overseas and do it again. Sometimes I'd say that maybe it was just not good for me, that I should really look at getting out. I think that process is still ongoing, to a certain extent. I think a lot of my colleagues are in a similar spot. It's not like one day they wake up and realize it's time to get out and start getting services. It's an ongoing conversation. I did find that the medical doctors were quite collaborative with me in making that decision.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Okay. Have you found within DND, then, that if.... For example, we had a presentation by the Department of National Defence at our last meeting. We were talking about categories, temporary medical categories and permanent medical categories, as well as the medical support and assessment that's provided throughout that stage or, actually, those multiple stages. The stages can last anywhere from two to five years from the time when either a serving member self-discloses and says they have an issue and they think they need medical help, or the service looks at them and says they think that member has an issue and needs medical help.

Are you able to perhaps shed some light from your experience on that process, if you don't mind? Were you part of that process of the temporary medical categories and the permanent medical categories, and did you find that the military was looking after your medical needs as you were going through that process?

Mr. Tim Laidler: The short answer is yes. Within the military, I felt very well taken care of.

Another program that's available and that we've had other veterans take advantage of is that when they're in that two- to five-year window, they can actually go and work for another organization. We've now had five military personnel paid for by DND come to work for our organization in different parts of Canada to get civilian credentials as part of their transition out.

Again, I just want to bring awareness of this. We speak about these programs and we really get into the nitty-gritty on them, which is good. We always want to evolve and improve them, but there are a lot of other veterans we've met who've felt something different, who are voluntarily released from the military and who now come back to us five years later without a 3(b) medical release, without having gone through anything. We find that they are the people who are really struggling and we need to really pay attention to them and try to get them into the retraining programs quickly.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I think that's a very valid point, because I think that in the military, as I say, once the system has been flagged, they do look after their soldiers, and I think that with all the supports it eases transition into Veterans Affairs and into civilian life. It doesn't guarantee it.

Mr. Tim Laidler: That's right.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: There are always improvements, as you say. I do agree that someone who does a voluntary release, for example, and then has to plug into Veterans Affairs, could feel that they're facing obstacles in doing so.

Mr. Tim Laidler: That's correct.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I'll end it there. Thank you, Chair.

• (0945)

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tim Laidler: I think you got the points made.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lemieux.

I want to thank all three witnesses for the enlightenment you provided the committee.

We'll now suspend for a few moments before we welcome our next witnesses.

• (0945)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (0945)

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting to order. Perhaps members could come back to their seats.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for being here today. We're in the second half of our 40th meeting and we have three witnesses. We have two organizations facing us. I don't know if it's an aptly named organization; they call themselves Monster Canada, but they don't look very scary. We have Scott Byrne and Greg Smith. From VeteranVoice.info we have Mr. Perry Gray, the editor-in-chief.

Mr. Gray, you'll be first at bat. You have the floor for 10 minutes and then we will hear from the other witnesses, after which members of the committee will try to elicit more information from you.

• (0950)

Captain(N) (Retired) Perry Gray (Editor in Chief, Veteran-Voice.info): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm speaking to you both as a client of VAC and a former secretary of the career medical review board for non-commissioned members. Serving on the board provided me with knowledge and experience of how the military determines the nature and extent of any medical condition and how it affects military careers. Ultimately, the board decides whether to retain or release military personnel and it was my job to inform those people affected by the board's decisions.

The board is composed of personnel, known as career managers, who were responsible for assigning personnel to jobs and ensuring that the Canadian Forces had enough people to do its work. The board was advised by a medical doctor who could translate medical information into layman's terms. If the board's recommendation is that the member is expected to be released from the forces, the board ceases consideration of the case and issues a notice of intent to the member via the chain of command. The member has 14 days to respond, and it is normal for a member to be granted more time to respond if needed. The member has three main inherent rights within the procedure: notification, the right to know what is happening; disclosure, the right to see all material that the board has; and representation, the right to respond to the board's decision.

It is important to understand how the board works because it significantly differs from the VAC process. When I was diagnosed with PTSD in 2000, I was subject to a review board for officers. The severity of my condition warranted a medical release because I was not in compliance with the universality of service requirement, being severely ill or injured. Members with permanent limitations who do not comply with the universality of service principles, and who are severely injured or ill and have complex career transition needs, may be retained in the CAF for a period of transition of up to three years. These members work one-on-one with the multi-disciplinary transition team to develop a tailored and flexible plan that features comprehensive health care and social and career transition support. In preparation for release, the member is entitled to a range of transition services and benefits available through various CF agencies.

This is what it is today. It wasn't true in 2000. In 2000, I worked with a transition team here in Ottawa to prepare for my retirement. This included applying for citizen benefits from both VAC and SISIP. It seemed that my transition would be relatively smooth at first. I was enrolled in a training program with SISIP and started to receive financial benefits to augment my military pension. My first indication that there was a problem was when I was informed of my level of disability by VAC. It was quite a shock to learn that my medical condition was said to be minor. Based on the VAC assessment, I could still work with some limitations. This was clearly at odds with the military assessment of severe disability. I checked with my good friend and former colleague, Sean Bruyea, who advised me that I was experiencing the common process practised by VAC, known as low-balling, in which clients are given a much lower disability level than they deserve.

For example, the usual threshold for operational stress injuries is 25% to 30% despite the fact that VAC recognizes that OSIs are difficult to assess and their severity may fluctuate drastically based on a wide variety of factors. A veteran may exhibit anything from rare signs of distress to over-evidence of the disease, chronic psychotic illness. One of the major problems in determining the severity of a condition is that there is too much subjective assessment and a lack of standardization in methodology. Professional therapists are aware of the challenges. The lack of appropriate services for people with serious mental illness is increasingly recognized as a systemic problem.

So began a very traumatic battle to change my disability assessment, which is still ongoing today after more than 15 years. In my opinion, the appeal process is horrific, and regardless of what medical conditions a client may have had, during the appeal process they can develop a traumatic condition. Why is it so traumatic?

•(0955)

Well, this is the perception of VAC:

What we found in the pension system was it was a kind of perverse system, in effect, because we had quite a large number.... We took a number of files between 1998 and 2002 and looked to see how many people were coming back to us for additional pensions. People were making this their life's work. We had people coming back anywhere from 9 to 17 or 18 times, looking to boost a pension.

That was testimony given by the former deputy minister Jack Stagg to this committee.

It has taken me years to change my disability level, during which I have been hospitalized three times, arrested several times under the Mental Health Act of Ontario, and have actually been ordered to leave the Ottawa VAC district office or be arrested. I have been denied the services of the VAC lawyers and exhausted the appeal process. I am left with one option, which is to challenge VAC in a federal court, which could cost \$25,000 or more. In addition, my client information has been shared by VAC employees, contrary to the Privacy Act. All of these experiences have contributed to the worsening of my condition.

Of note is that SISIP assessed me as permanently disabled, based on my military medical file, long before VAC grudgingly determined that I was totally and permanently impaired. There has to be a better method employed by VAC to ensure that there is continuity in the determination of the nature and severity of the medical conditions of every client before the end of the three-year transition period.

My recommendations are the following:

VAC and DND must collaborate to ensure that the medical assessments of both departments are similar and that the client is aware of the level of disability. The client must be satisfied that they have been properly and thoroughly assessed before the end of the three-year transition phase.

VAC should not be allowed to determine whether or not a medical condition is a result of military service; only DND should make such assessments.

It should never be necessary to confirm severe medical conditions like the loss of legs. Once a client is assessed as having a permanent condition, then it should only be necessary to record any worsening of the condition.

VAC must change its appeal process. Too often, clients are denied a departmental review and instead are referred directly to VRAB when the client submits their first appeal. The first level appeal should be handled by the district office and involve the VAC assessor, who should have to defend their assessment.

VAC should not be allowed to deny services and to intimidate clients, as I was. Benefit of the doubt, dignity, and respect should always be given to the client.

VAC should also provide the following: front-line approval authority in an experienced case manager's hands, not a bureaucratically labelled case manager; comprehensive, tailor-made programs developed before the last day of release and executed soonest after release; a civilian medical team, lined up and providing appointments before release; thorough education development provided by rehabilitation specialists and psychologists on what the member and the family can expect when dealing with transition, disability, and bureaucratic obstacles and requirements.

Moreover, opportunity with security should mean exactly that: no diminishment in salary for as long as the member pursues a successful vocational rehabilitation program, with plans for more than just trade courses or community college, but full university educations, with post-graduate follow-on if successful, as well as funding and thorough education for starting up businesses.

In summary, the transition should be seamless, allowing the client to concentrate on coping with the transition and adjusting either to a new career or retirement. There should never be a long-term battle to gain and then maintain support from any agency. For many clients, it's hard to concentrate on draining the swamp when you're up to your neck in alligators.

Thank you.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gray.

Go ahead, Mr. Byrne.

Mr. Scott Byrne (Manager, Strategy, Monster Government Solutions, Monster Canada): Thank you.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for inviting us here today to share our recommendations on enhancing transition services for our veterans.

My name is Scott Byrne, and I'm the director of Monster Government Solutions strategy and client management with Monster Canada. I'll be sharing my time here today with retired navy Admiral Greg Smith, president of Military.com and vice-president of Monster Worldwide.

He will provide the committee with an overview of how Monster's partnership with the U.S. Department of Defense, the private sector, and non-profit organizations has resulted in a highly valuable set of online resources, tools, and services for military service personnel transitioning back to civilian life, many after years of combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We know that Canada's military veterans face many of the same challenges, notably translating the skills they have developed and mastered while in service into the skills needed by employers here in Canada. We also know, sadly, that this lack of clear translation results in higher than normal unemployment and, equally frustrating or more frustrating, underemployment. We all accept that the more tangible skills of leadership, commitment, self-discipline, teamwork, adherence to standards, staying focused under pressure, and eagerness to take on new challenges are all attributes that every employer wants in an employee. But how does a 30-year-old service member demonstrate those valued attributes in an application process? Equally important, how does a recruiter or supervisor

who never served in the military see these intangible attributes in a veteran's application?

While service members recognize their leadership and management potential, recognition and understanding of these qualities within human resources departments is severely lacking. A recent Veterans Transition Advisory Council survey of 850 corporate human resources departments in Canada revealed that only 13% of the respondents said they knew how to read a resumé from a military veteran applicant.

The veteran pool of talent is unique and skilled and would certainly serve as a significant asset to Canadian employers if we could unlock the veteran's full civilian potential. The federal government has an opportunity to bridge this gap by investing in a tool that interprets an individual's military skills, experience, and training and matches them with prospective employers.

Monster has developed and deployed such a tool, the military skills translator. Admiral Smith will provide a few more details in just a moment. Some of your colleagues in other committees have referenced the importance of bringing such a tool to Canada.

Recommendation 32 of the June 2014 report of the Standing Committee on National Defence, "Caring for Canada's Ill and Injured Military Personnel", calls on the government to "develop a comprehensive, algorithmic, military skills translation software tool to facilitate CF members to obtain civilian employment upon release."

Further, recommendation 47 of the December 2014 Report on the Standing Committee on Finance, "Towards Prosperity: Federal Budgetary Priorities for People, Businesses and Communities" calls on the federal government to "maintain its strong support for veterans by providing key investments and services, and by exploring new ways to connect veterans with jobs after their service, such as a military skills translator."

I will now hand this over to Admiral Smith who will talk about the specifics of our skills translator.

Admiral (Retired) Greg Smith (Representative, President, Military.com and Vice-President, Monster Worldwide Inc., Monster Canada): Thanks, Scott.

Thanks to the committee for allowing me to speak on this important topic.

I served in the U.S. military for 30 years, the last four in combat both in Iraq and Afghanistan. I retired in October 2011 and began my own transition into civilian life. While my story is not unique, it highlights many of the same issues young men and women face when they take off the uniform. Notably, how do I tell my story of what I can bring to an employer? How can I translate these seemingly unique experiences into a language they will understand? Even I, the two-star admiral, face such questions. I have the greatest empathy for the young men and women who have the same challenge and hurdles when they re-enter the job market.

Monster understood the value I brought as a senior executive and today I represent Military.com as its president. We're the largest online community resource for military personnel, active and reserve, veterans, and their families. We boast over 10 million members, and while the vast majority are from the United States, thousands of Canadians visit our website each and every month.

At Monster, we realize the importance of the overall transition challenge to our service personnel as they prepare for civilian life. Military.com serves both as an online community and as an information portal to help them with the myriad of complex issues around pay, benefits, and for purposes of today's discussion, employment.

One of the features of our website is the transition centre. This section is dedicated to supporting the specific needs of service members as they transition out of uniform. The resources include guidance to transitioning health care for the ill and injured, relocation resources, benefit eligibility, and career mentoring, along with timely information, planning guides, and checklists for finding the right job. The key to all this is the military skills translator.

Our military skills translator uses world-leading algorithms that literally take every single documented skill set that a service member has achieved and been trained and certified in, and translates that into matching civilian skill sets used by human resources departments to code open jobs. The military skills translator also factors in years of service and rank, etc., to better match a service member to future employment. When this set of data is compared against open jobs, such as the hundreds of thousands we carry on Monster.com, a service member receives immediate feedback on potential opportunities.

We all recognize that there is still more to getting a job than just matching military skills to civilian skills, but the success of this translator is undeniable. There were 2.5 million unique views of the military skills translator in 2014, and over 800,000 U.S. veterans have used the tool to date to support their transition. In December 2014, the military skills translator was awarded the most innovative use of technology by the Northern Virginia Technology Council for its contributions to furthering veterans' employment.

Equally exciting and powerful, there are customized versions of this tool now with more than 50 private companies in the United States, along with a number of veteran support organizations and trade associations. For example, The Home Depot has integrated a customized version of the MST, the military skills translator, into its own employment website, helping to hire veterans to meet its internal hiring goals.

Let me close by thanking the committee for taking on this critical issue. You should be proud of the highly skilled and professional military personnel that represent and protect Canada. They have a great contribution to make to the civilian world. Investing in a military skills translator is a tangible way for the Canadian government to ensure that it retains the investments made in its military long after they step down from uniform. Canada deserves the very best and its veterans will continue to serve in equally meaningful ways in the civilian job market. All they ask is a little help making that transition a reality.

Thank you very much.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Admiral.

Mr. Rafferty.

Mr. John Rafferty: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today.

Let me begin with Mr. Gray and a question about military personnel when they are getting ready to transition out of service. We've heard witnesses in our last session and for the last year talk about all the services that are available in the military before people leave. The thing that strikes me, and that struck me earlier, is that they always talk about these services being optional, or that members are being encouraged to seek the services of a psychologist, for example, or whatever the case may be.

It strikes me, as I listen to your presentation, that I wonder if some of these services that DND says are offered to help with the transition should be compulsory. Almost all them quite frankly seem to be optional, where the members are encouraged to be part of them. I wonder if they were compulsory and members had to make sure that they spent a certain amount of time with a psychologist, or if members had to make sure that they attended the group sessions for transitioning out, and the various things that are available.... Would you agree with me that perhaps they shouldn't be optional or encouraged, and that the members should have to be part of this to help their transition?

Capt(N) Perry Gray: One problem is that you have to understand the pre-release procedures. In some cases, unlike mine, the person is just getting out on a voluntary basis, so doesn't take advantage of all these optional services. My release was a medical release. Therefore my transition team worked through the former National Defence medical centre here in Ottawa. So, yes, I was screened by a psychiatrist.

• (1010)

Mr. John Rafferty: Let me just ask you, Mr. Gray, about people who release on their own and don't take advantage of these services. I would suggest there are some who later need the services of Veterans Affairs, who perhaps have transitioned out on their own, but really, they should not have transitioned on their own. In fact, they should not just have been encouraged to be part of these transition programs, but actually should have been part of them.

Capt(N) Perry Gray: As I said, that's part of the problem. DND doesn't have the resources to screen everybody, as you suggest, simply because you're talking of tens of thousands of people who would have to be screened medically. It's hard enough to get screened if you are a medical case. There would have to be a significant increase in resources, and that would mean taking resources from other sections within National Defence.

Mr. John Rafferty: Resources aside, do you think there would be value in that, and making sure the resources are there?

Capt(N) Perry Gray: Given my experience with OSI, yes, because in many cases people don't start to exhibit an OSI until much later, and it could be triggered by any number of things. Based on medical professionals' experience, up to 25% of the serving military, both regular and reserve, could experience an OSI anywhere from minor to very severe conditions.

Again, that has to be done in pre-deployment and post-deployment screening, as well as pre-release screening. That's a pretty comprehensive program you're talking about.

Mr. John Rafferty: I guess my question was triggered by your implying that it's pretty clear that not everyone who is leaving has an opportunity to even talk to anyone before they leave.

Capt(N) Perry Gray: As Mr. Laidler mentioned in the first session, there's still that machoism: "I don't need help because I'm okay." How do you break that syndrome?

Mr. John Rafferty: Hence, my suggestion of making it compulsory and to make sure they speak to the right people before they go....

Did you want to say one last thing before I go to Mr. Smith?

Capt(N) Perry Gray: No. I'm finished.

Mr. John Rafferty: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Gray.

Mr. Byrne or Mr. Smith, you see and probably talk to lots of people who are just leaving the service and are interested in using Monster. Because you see lots of them, in what ways do you think the preparation of members to leave the military before they use your services could be improved so that there's a seamless move to post-secondary education or whatever the case may be, but also a seamless move to use your services and use them well? Are there any suggestions you might have on how the preparation of members could be improved?

The Chair: One moment, please. Mr. Rafferty stretched out that question so much, you have 10 seconds, but I'll give you 30 seconds.

Mr. Scott Byrne: There are a number of organizations, like True Patriot Love and Canada Company, that do provide the basis for getting people ready for transition, but unfortunately, it's after they leave.

The skills translator is one of those tools that we can use to help augment the services that are already out there. The prior transition is something we've taken a look at. However, fiscally right now it's not something that I believe we could handle economically for the government, so we have basically wanted to augment by using the skills translator.

The Chair: Mr. Opitz.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To our witnesses, thank you all for being here today.

Thank you, Admiral. I think many of us have served with outstanding individuals in the United States armed forces of all elements. I certainly have.

I'm just looking at your Military.com site. It's a very good portal, I see, and I'm looking at the military translator right there. It seems to be a very useful device.

On Monster Canada and the way you work together, Admiral, let me start with you. There are a lot of different groups in the States, and of course, having just recently got out in 2011, you have seen first-hand some of the issues with veterans in the United States. I think they are having a very difficult time, given the number of veterans. Obviously, there's a lot larger volume of them than in Canada, in many respects.

Can you talk briefly about some of the issues that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is having with veterans right now?

• (1015)

Adm Greg Smith: Much of the same discussion I heard this morning.

The issue of individuals who need real services, medical services, is being addressed in a more holistic way today than it has been at any time in our past. There is no question about it. What we still have a difficult time doing is taking care of all the elementary needs to support their becoming just another citizen in this country, where they can extend the value they have earned and the skill they have developed in the military, and translate that into something that matters in civilian society. People want to succeed; they want to succeed while they are in uniform, and they want to succeed while they are in civilian life. What we lack is that ability to really help them get over that hurdle, taking, say, five or six years of military experience and helping them find how they can best fit into civilian life, helping them translate those skills and skill sets. That's one area where, again, we thought there was a great need and we filled that void with the military translator.

Mr. Ted Opitz: There are a lot of common challenges.

In the U.S., in terms of Monster and other things, are you familiar with The Flag and General Officers' Network?

Adm Greg Smith: This assignment that I have today was because of that.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Admiral Carey and.... He's a good friend of mine, by the way.

Adm Greg Smith: That's right.

Mr. Ted Opitz: That's good to hear. You have that at The Flag and General Officers' Network level, but do you have things that you push down to junior officer troop level?

Adm Greg Smith: Again, that's the problem.

In society today, obviously from a business point of view, people use all kinds of networks to find good-quality employees. A lot of our folks are in those networks. Again, they're there and they're struggling trying to figure out how to explain who they really are and what they did. If they use the translator, it gives them a stepping-off point to be able to really begin to have that conversation.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Something like the concept of leadership is translated into the concept of management.

Adm Greg Smith: That's correct.

Mr. Ted Opitz: This is something that you're having some—

Adm Greg Smith: That's right. It's about using the right terms, because we use terms in the military that just do not speak the same language in the civilian sector.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Okay.

In the States, do you have similar groups to Canada Company, True Patriot Love, and others?

Canada Company is an organization that Admiral Carey is very familiar with, by the way. It's Canada's leading captains of industries who help out and try to provide jobs and opportunities. There are many other groups, like True Patriot Love and others, that are performing absolutely tremendous service.

Adm Greg Smith: We found that companies recognized that they had a need to hire veterans but had no real tool inside their company to make that translation work. That's why they placed the MST on their websites to integrate in their hiring process.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Were you working on Military.com? This acts as a portal that basically encompasses veterans affairs. Military.com reaches out to civilian industries looking to hire people. I see a tremendous number of things across the top: veteran employers, transition centres, job fairs, skills translator, and that sort of thing.

How many members do you find using this portal?

Adm Greg Smith: Again, we have over 10 million members in our overall website. Over 800,000 used the military skills translator in 2014.

Mr. Ted Opitz: That's people going flow-through, but what is the success rate?

Adm Greg Smith: The success I think is the fact that the tool is there. We get a tremendous amount of feedback from companies that say this is a highly valuable resource for them.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Okay. That's great.

What types of jobs are you placing people in? Is it a wide variety? Is it based on—

Adm Greg Smith: That's the best thing about the military skills translator. If you are a truck driver and that's what you've done, and you have skills and logistics, those kinds of skills can be put into civilian speak, and all those jobs then pop up into your profile.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Opitz. You have one minute on the table.

Next we have Mr. Valeriote.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Thank you, gentlemen, for coming before us today.

I'm going to start with Scott and Greg.

Could you create an algorithm to be applicable in the Canadian context if you were given the opportunity?

Adm Greg Smith: Absolutely. Our current team of engineers has advised me that all we really need is a relationship with the government to make certain we have all the various skill sets identified that are currently being used inside the Canadian Forces, and from there we can plug that into our current algorithm and working with your HR and the way HR in Canada looks at its civilian sector, we can make all those matches work.

•(1020)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: I had the opportunity to be out at Wainwright and on the HMCS *St. John's* for five or so days, and I was frankly amazed at the professionalism of the active members of our forces. I was thinking then of what they could be doing after their time in service.

I think we severely underestimate the skills they learn. Many people assume that they're just going to go into policing or something like that, which is so archaic.

If I understand—and I have seen your system—you have computers that are put in front of someone and you put in the person's position he or she served in and it translates all of the potential skills they've learned in that position, and there are prospective employers out there who are linked to the system and looking for people with these skills. Is that the case?

Adm Greg Smith: Exactly....

Mr. Frank Valeriote: How many prospective employers are linked into the system? Did you tell us that?

Adm Greg Smith: Technically it's endless if you have an aggregate data base like Monster, where we look at all the job boards across the country. In Canada there is a similar system where all government and civilian jobs—if there were a way in which those could be aggregated together, the system could screen against all those jobs. There is no limit.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: One of the benefits that is currently available through VAC is \$1,000, which helps someone create a robust resumé to send out. This would be far beyond just creating a resumé for somebody, because somebody creating a resumé doesn't know how to translate their own skills.

Adm Greg Smith: A lot of companies don't use resumés. For a lot of jobs out there, they are looking at skill sets. They want to know what skills you have, what certifications you have, what training you've had, how many years you've worked in a particular area. That's what they want to know.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Could you tell us how much it would possibly cost for you to introduce that in the Canadian setting?

Mr. Scott Byrne: The number that we have socialized takes an initial \$1.7 million to set it up and then \$400,000 a year to maintain the system.

Maintenance of the system is required to make sure that we keep the skills, ranks, and duties up to date. For instance, 10 years ago there was no such thing as a social media coordinator job out there, and today, obviously, there is, so that's part of what we'd have to do. As skills change, it would get changed with it.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Boy, when I compare \$1.7 million to other expenditures that VAC has made, it seems like an insignificant amount to give our veterans an opportunity to transfer successfully from military life to civilian life.

Do I have a bit more time?

The Chair: Yes, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Great.

Mr. Gray, you brought home for me something I have been feeling and observing for some time, and that is this threshold you spoke of at VAC to qualify for certain benefits. For instance, someone leaves active service after being considered severely disabled—in other words, the person doesn't meet the universality of service test—in other words is highly graded there. Then at VAC they are almost dropped to the bottom of the list. The veterans ombudsman talked about the accessibility of these benefits being a real issue, let alone

the issue of the money being given, but just being able to qualify. You brought that home.

Would you provide a written copy of your submission to the committee, please? Could you do that?

Capt(N) Perry Gray: Yes, I can.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: All right, could you talk to us more about the experience you had being put in the bottom category when you knew intuitively you should have been in a higher category?

Capt(N) Perry Gray: One of the basic problems that everyone faces when they're assessed by VAC is that the person doing the assessment has no medical training and is relying strictly on the Merck Manual, which defines exactly what the doctors and nurses understand as your condition or illness. They basically are trying to translate it into terms that they understand.

That assessor has no contact with the client. At no time can I go to Charlottetown and ask, "How did you make that decision? Please explain it to me." Instead, other people are left to interpret what that person has done, and that is the biggest problem that we face.

Now, I explained how the career review board works in the Canadian Forces, and there, that kind of interaction exists: the person who is being reviewed has recourse to the board. All I'm asking is that VAC create a similar parallel.

• (1025)

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Gray.

Mr. Lizon.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, all of you, for coming here this morning.

Before I ask the question, I have two comments or pieces of information.

Concerning the Honour House he mentioned, in the last travel this committee undertook, almost two years ago, to Washington, D.C..... There are 64 or 66 of what are called Fisher Houses in the U.S., which are built next to military hospitals across the country and serve the same role. We visited one in Washington, D.C. It's a beautiful place. The way they are financed is that Fisher House became Fisher House Foundation, and that's how they finance this network of houses.

To speak to Mr. Valeriote's comment about why these organizations have to fill the gaps and the idea that everything should be done by government, we also travelled to operational stress injury clinics, places that house homeless veterans. They have a very important and valuable role to play. Some of their veterans don't feel comfortable speaking to bureaucrats, speaking to people in Veterans Affairs; they would rather speak to their peers. That's why it's so valuable and important that we support those groups, which do such wonderful work for our veterans.

But going back to our topic, just for clarification, you are with Monster.ca; is that correct?

Mr. Scott Byrne: That's correct.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: That is part of Monster Worldwide, is it, of Monster.com?

Adm Greg Smith: That is correct.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Do you somehow focus on the group of veterans or are you just part of the Monster employment portal?

Adm Greg Smith: I'm the president of Military.com. We are owned by Monster Worldwide. We were founded in the late nineties in the San Francisco area and were bought 15 years ago by Monster. So Monster has invested in the veteran space, and because of the employment connection, we grew out that space. That part of our portal dedicated to employment was enhanced because we're part of the Monster family.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: In other words, then, if someone logs on to Monster.ca, that portal would bring them to the military section of the portal, would it, or how does that work?

Adm Greg Smith: No, today there is no portal that is dedicated to Canadian Forces, so there is not a Canadian-like Military.com out there. This is a U.S. Military.com. We have created the translator, which we think the Canadian government can invest in and make its own by having that tool on some other portal within the Canadian government, whether it's Veterans Affairs or the forces.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Then, that would cost \$1.7 million. Is that what you refer to—building that part of the portal?

Adm Greg Smith: That's right.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Now, it's very important that these skills be translated to the ones that employers are looking for. But in the whole process, what is missing is that there are some valuable things that former military members can bring to the employer, and I don't think you can put them in and translate them in the translator, such as discipline, loyalty, punctuality. These are sometimes more important than hard skills.

How do you propose to translate those so that an employer looking for someone to employ would say "I have to spend some money on training those people, but I want those people because I would be able to depend on them"? Is there something you are working on or collaborating with someone on? That is a very important part of the whole process.

• (1030)

Adm Greg Smith: I completely agree.

This tool will allow you to get some of the answer. Part of the real solution is working on the other side, with the employer. The

employer has to be educated, and there are groups out there that are spending their resources to help human resource departments be trained to understand those inherent skills that a military person brings and also to understand what their needs are, so that when they bring them into the company they can assimilate them in a way that fits the way a military person thinks about organizational dynamics and can retain that military person.

We've found that when companies do that, they actually have higher retention rates than the rest of the population, by focusing on how to make that connection work for the military. It's very powerful, but it does require a training for the human resources departments as well.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Do you have a pool of employers across the country whom you're working with, or is this something that is left on its own while you rely on the people who log on and look for someone to—?

Adm Greg Smith: No, we're fortunate that we have a number of employers who have specifically said they want to hire veterans and need our help to hire them, who like our tool and will use our tool on their own site and will train their people to be sensitive to this transition. It has become much more of a role played by industry to self-educate, and we have given them the resources and the tools to make those linkages with the military skills translator.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next questioners are going to have five minutes.

[Translation]

First, it is over to Mr. Chicoine.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a few questions, and if I have any time left afterwards, I would like to share it with Mr. Rafferty.

Mr. Gray, I have a few questions about your presentation. You told us a bit about your situation, saying that Veterans Affairs Canada didn't recognize your injuries. The department challenged the medical decisions made by Department of National Defence, or DND, doctors.

Could you explain to us how the process works in a case like that? I've heard about too many cases like yours, where Veterans Affairs Canada had challenged the medical decisions of DND doctors.

In your case, did Veterans Affairs Canada have access to your medical records? Did you request to have the information transferred to Veterans Affairs Canada?

[English]

Capt(N) Perry Gray: Yes, medical information was made available to Veterans Affairs from DND, but as the gentlemen from Monster have explained, there is difficulty translating military information into the equivalent civilian terminology, and the problem is that Veterans Affairs, with so few former military people on staff, doesn't always appreciate the extent of these things.

As I said, there's a difference between this subjective assessment and the objective assessment. More has to be done to determine exactly the extent and nature of each condition.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Thank you.

You also mentioned that your medical records were shared with other people, in breach of confidentiality rules.

I missed the part of your presentation when you were talking about that. Would you mind explaining it to me?

[English]

Capt(N) Perry Gray: Yes. You're probably familiar with the case of Sean Bruyea, who sued the department and members of it. There have been a number of people—I don't know exactly how many, because most of the information is confidential—who have had their information shared. My own personal file was shared by more than 700 different employees.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: That's quite disturbing.

Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to give the rest of my time to Mr. Rafferty.

[English]

Mr. John Rafferty: Thank you, Mr. Chicoine.

This is for Mr. Smith and Mr. Byrne. I guess perhaps I don't understand the technology you're talking about and would just be comparing it on the basis of cost. It seemed like an awful lot of money—not necessarily the startup to get everything in place, but your \$400,000 number annually to run and update the program and so on. Is that figure based on the anticipated volume of use, or is it just a simple sort of flat fee that you're suggesting?

•(1035)

Adm Greg Smith: There were a couple of issues.

One, you have to maintain an engineering staff to constantly update and make certain that when working with industry.... In particular here, if the design is such that it's going to be employed across government and the private sector, the unique nature of all of those relationships has to be worked on a customer basis, so there's quite a bit of back and forth on that.

We've had this tool for more than a decade, and I can tell you that the cost of running the program I run is much, much higher than that. I think the number that's represented here is a reasonable number to put into play to ensure that the program remains viable over the life of the program. Contractually this is intended to be a three-year to five-year program, so you want to make certain that there are the

tools available to make those updates as quickly as possible to reflect the reality of the marketplace.

Mr. John Rafferty: When you're coming up with that figure—the United States armed forces, of course, is much, much larger than Canada—I suppose it was done on a proportional basis, the anticipated use, or is it—

Adm Greg Smith: Again, it wouldn't be on a cost per use.

In other words, the individual using it doesn't cost money. It's really about the size of the scale here in terms of jobs in the marketplace. They all have to be coded against the scale, and all of the jobs inside the military have to be coded, to make sure those linkages remain fresh and valuable throughout the life of the program.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Admiral.

Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will share my time with Mr. Hawn.

I only have a couple of questions.

The Chair: You have five minutes.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Thank you very much.

Mr. Gray, thank you for bringing forward recommendations in your opening comments because we, as a committee, in fact look for recommendations. I believe some of your recommendations have already been implemented.

That being said, what I do want to know from you is whether you have seen the "Mental Health Services for Veterans Action Plan" that was released by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Capt(N) Perry Gray: Yes, I have.

I haven't commented on it yet because I'm waiting until next month when there's a summit with the minister.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Okay. I will be looking forward to your comments at that time.

Thank you.

Mr. Smith and Mr. Byrne, this military skills translator is fascinating. Does it ever determine that additional skills are required, or additional education is required?

Adm Greg Smith: One thing we've done with our system is that we get to the middle ground, so education, training, whether it's a skills training area like certification to be a welder, all the way to a university setting, or the linkages to what jobs you might want to take. For instance, if your goal is to be X and to bridge that gap requires perhaps a couple of years of working in a certain area, that helps to identify that as well.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: That's interesting.

One comment that was made by an earlier witness was that when we invest in education, which we do—there's \$75,800 available for education—there was a concern of how we can be assured that the investment is going to pay off in the long run.

It would seem that you've answered that. This identifies the appropriate skills set and the appropriate gaps, in terms of where this individual should go for education.

Adm Greg Smith: That's correct.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Very good. Thank you.

I'm going to turn my time over to Mr. Hawn.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you very much.

Thank you, gentlemen, all for being here.

Admiral Smith, over my years I have had many fond memories of service with the United States Navy, and some service in the back part of Miramar that wouldn't be—

Adm Greg Smith: No, no, that's alright. Another day.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: In relation to some of the comments about the cost, I think it's pretty cheap, frankly.

You talked about some of the big employers being on board.

Do you have some of the big ones that are the size of GM, Ford, GE, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, those sorts of folks?

Adm Greg Smith: Those are the major employers that have set national goals of hiring, say, 100, or 200, or 1,000 veterans.

They needed this tool, so they made that investment in their own company's website.

•(1040)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: So those kinds of companies are posted on the job boards.

Adm Greg Smith: That's right.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Okay, cool.

What kind of support or association do you have with DOD?

Adm Greg Smith: We have full access to all of the data that we need to be able to do all the assessments, everything from what we call MOSs, military occupational specialties, down to specific training and what training is involved, what the curricula are.

We had to build all that in to build the competency to ensure that when we said you had the skill, you in fact did.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Maybe I'm missing something, but are you funded by DOD?

Adm Greg Smith: No, sir. This is a private company.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: It's totally private.

How much contact, if any, other than individual committee members, have you had...? Have you had any contact with DND or Veterans Affairs Canada?

Mr. Scott Byrne: Yes.

We've been knocking on doors for about two and a half to three years for this. We have met with Veterans Affairs a number of times. We have met with members of DND. We've gone from members of the committee to talking to former CMPs.

We've been around the horn.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Generally speaking, what has the reception been from DND and VAC?

Mr. Scott Byrne: The reception is equivalent to something a friend of mine used to say, "Everybody believes in global warming, but not one of them wants to buy a Prius"—

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I wouldn't buy a Prius.

Mr. Scott Byrne: This is basically it. Everybody thinks it's a great idea and then they turn around and look at the next person to see who's going to open up the wallet.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I don't think that's a very deep wallet that has to be opened up, frankly, in my personal opinion.

An hon. member: Frank's offered to write a cheque.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Has there been any interest at a higher level, a broader level, in the United States? I'm thinking in Canada this might be of interest to the Minister of Employment and Social Development on a much broader basis than simply military veterans.

Adm Greg Smith: We've actually had this tool employed across the entire veterans administration at one point, so there are major organizations that have taken this on as well as something they thought was really viable.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Are there government organizations beyond the veteran and military side that have looked at this?

Adm Greg Smith: No.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Have you pitched it to anybody?

Adm Greg Smith: The hiring of veterans inside that space is a little different model, so it didn't quite work as well.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes, okay.

The Chair: We're about to be summoned to the House for a vote, so I want to thank our witnesses, Mr. Gray, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Byrne.

I just had one clarification that I require. When our last witnesses were here I asked a dollar question, and I have a dollar question for you now. When we were talking dollars a minute ago, I assume we are talking Canadian dollars.

Adm Greg Smith: It's Canadian dollars, yes, sir.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The committee's 41st meeting will take place here, on Tuesday, March 24, 2015, and the committee will continue to hear from witnesses as part of its study on the continuum of transition services.

[English]

We're going to have three witnesses that I know of, Brad White, the dominion secretary at the Royal Canadian Legion; Dr. Alice Aiken, the director of the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research; and Kim Davis, director of administration with The Caregivers' Brigade.

Thank you very much.

The committee is adjourned.

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