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Chair

Mr. Tom Lukiwski

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)): Colleagues, since we have quorum, I'll call the meeting to order.

I want to thank our guests for being here. Colleagues, in the first panel we have before us representatives from the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman's office, and the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman. I thank you all for being here.

Mr. Lick, my understanding is that you will be first to speak and you have an opening statement of approximately 10 minutes. Is that correct?

Mr. Gregory Lick (Interim Ombudsman, National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman): Yes, sir.

The Chair: Following that, Mr. Dalton, we'll ask you for your opening statement. Following those two, we will go directly into questions.

Mr. Lick, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Mr. Gregory Lick: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the committee members for inviting me to speak to you today about hiring veterans for public service positions.

I'm very humbled to appear before you today as National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces ombudsman.

[English]

My name is Greg Lick. Prior to assuming my current role, I served as a director general of operations of the Canadian Coast Guard. I am also proud to have served in the naval reserves for 17 years.

Joining me today is retired major Carole Lajoie, who serves as our director of education and collaboration. Madame Lajoie has a great knowledge of, and experience in, the topic you are studying today. If there's a question I can't answer, I'm confident that she can.

I'm also pleased to appear with the veterans ombudsman, Craig Dalton. Craig and I have already established a strong working relationship. Our offices are already exploring areas of mutual collaboration and interest.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): I have no translation. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Are we good now?

Sorry for the interruption. Mr. Lick, please proceed.

Mr. Gregory Lick: We recently presented to two external stakeholder groups together, and we are working on more opportunities to take the Craig and Greg show on the road.

I was appointed as ombudsman on an interim basis in November 2018. For me, serving this important constituency for the past seven months has been some of the most rewarding service in my career.

[Translation]

Every morning, I wake up and read the news summaries to see the National Defence community's positive impact both on the global stage and in Canada.

We're witnessing it right now. Seeing Canadian Armed Forces members deployed in our own backyards in the National Capital Region to deal with the devastating floods reminds us of our military's vital role in protecting Canadians. To them, I say thank you.

[English]

The constituency that our office serves is extremely large. Not only do we serve members of the Canadian Armed Forces, both regular and reserve forces, but also National Defence civilians, Canadian Rangers, cadets, Junior Canadian Rangers, non-public funds employees, new recruits, as well as the families of all those I have just named and persons who are attached or seconded to the Canadian Armed Forces.

These responsibilities are not taken lightly by me or the team of over 65 passionate public servants who work in our office. In fact, the professionalism of these employees and the sense of duty they have to this constituency are, in my view, virtually unrivalled. Some of these employees have been with the office since they turned on the lights in 1998. As a result, we possess the institutional memory necessary to fulfill our mandate, assuring fairness and contributing to lasting change for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces community.

[Translation]

This institutional memory has helped me to understand the history of our engagement regarding the very important subject that your committee has been studying.

In addition, in my career at the Canadian Coast Guard, and especially as a senior executive within that organization, I've been both vocal in my support for and active in hiring retired members.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. There's a bit of a translation problem. We'll try to get it straightened out.

Colleagues, I would suggest that if we can't get the translation on one channel, just switch back and forth between channels so you're able to understand the French and English versions.

Once again, Mr. Lick, you have my apologies. Please proceed.

[Translation]

Mr. Gregory Lick: My support was based on what I saw as natural links between the Canadian Coast Guard and the Canadian Armed Forces.

I recognize that the links between the training elements of the Canadian Armed Forces and organizations such as the Canadian Coast Guard, Canada Border Services Agency, Parks Canada and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police may appear less clear for other departments as they look to retired members to fill public service positions. However, I believe that all public service hiring managers must meet retired members halfway. We're committed to giving retired members post-service employment opportunities. In my experience, the public service ultimately gains from their expertise.

• (1535)

[English]

However, for members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are medically releasing, we have an obligation to provide them priority access to public service positions. Those members who are medically releasing as a result of an illness or injury sustained as a direct result of their service are placed at the top of the statutory category for priority entitlement.

For those whose illness or injury is not as a result of their service, their priority entitlement is entrenched in the regulatory category. In either case, we have a duty that far outstrips a policy or initiative. It was within this context, as well as the context of the introduction and passage of the Veterans Hiring Act that my predecessor became publicly engaged on this issue. In 2015, he published a report in consultation with Mr. Dalton's predecessor that recommended "that the Canadian Armed Forces is best placed to make the determination of whether a medical release is attributable to service pursuant to Bill C-27."

More importantly, the ill or injured Canadian Armed Forces member stands to gain significant benefit from quicker access to enhanced hiring opportunities in the public service.

In the end, the Veterans Hiring Act vested Veterans Affairs with the responsibility for adjudicating applications of CAF members seeking access to this priority list held by the Public Service Commission. Since that time, Veterans Affairs has struggled to meet its service standards, an unfortunate consequence that has seen itself play out in numerous media stories and public debate.

My interest in appearing before you today is not to fuel any of that debate. Rather, I want to provide you, in plain speak, what our office believes to be the elements that need to be considered to make this overall initiative a success.

First, we must consider perhaps the most relevant statistic. The average Canadian Armed Forces member will release around their 40th birthday. This means that former members have quite a few employable years before they're fully retired. Experience in the Canadian Armed Forces is unique, and the federal public service has the potential to harness quite a lot of this energy as it looks to fill its ranks with qualified individuals.

Medically released members may face greater barriers to entry and challenges in obtaining and maintaining a second career. For this reason, logically we have the provisions of the Veterans Hiring Act, as well as priority entitlements, to ease entry into public service employment.

[Translation]

However, there are delays for Veterans Affairs Canada to adjudicate files that would allow individuals to gain priority access to those jobs. In addition, there's a lengthy process on the Public Service Commission side in terms of putting these individuals on the priority list.

The natural consequence of these two administrative factors is that fully deserving and qualified former members of the Canadian Armed Forces are missing out on opportunities as a result of the administrative delays. Veterans Affairs Canada's statistics are getting better but are far from perfect. This causes a great deal of anxiety among Canadian Armed Forces members who are transitioning from military to civilian life, or from my jurisdiction to Mr. Dalton's jurisdiction.

[English]

Administratively, VAC has eliminated some duplicated adjudications to improve their response times. This is promising. What is equally promising is that the armed forces and Veterans Affairs Canada have established a process by which Veterans Affairs can now almost instantly access relevant information contained within the Canadian Forces' health information system to speed up their adjudications. This initiative is expected not only to speed up priority entitlement decisions, but also adjudications as a whole.

Nevertheless, if that applicant still faces significant wait times, more creative solutions may need to come to the fore when it comes to getting these individuals on the priority list.

[Translation]

Some non-medically released military members may already have private sector jobs. Others may have jobs in the federal public service, given that serving members can already apply for internal competitions under mobility and preference provisions. However, for many of them, this may not be the case.

Many constituents and hiring managers have told us that, despite the government's efforts, there's still a lack of understanding of how the knowledge and skills acquired through military service translate into the civilian work environment. This is troubling, considering that this issue has been a key priority for retired members and the government since at least 2011.

• (1540)

[English]

For example, the Standing Committee on National Defence recommended in its 2014 report entitled “Caring for Canada’s Ill and Injured Military Personnel” that the government “develop a comprehensive, algorithmic, military skills translation software tool to facilitate CF members to obtain civilian employment upon release.”

Such sophisticated translators already exist in the United States. An American military member can simply enter their service units and the certifications they have received into a computer database. The computer then spits out those civilian job equivalencies as well as a civilian resumé template once the member has made some simple drop-down menu selections.

The CAF has developed a translator tool, but having a singular government-endorsed tool would be valuable for current and former CAF members and public service hiring managers. Whatever that tool looks like, it should take the next steps beyond simply transforming a military occupation code to a civilian occupation. It must incorporate and recognize the leadership and management experience that is gained over the course of one’s career here in Canada, as well as on international deployments.

It is also evident that there is a genuine lack of awareness of valuable programs, such as the vocational rehabilitation program for serving members. This program enables eligible CAF members who have been notified of an impending medical release, with the approval of their commanding officer, to begin vocational rehabilitation training for up to six months prior to either their start of retirement leave or their final CAF release date, whichever is the earlier date.

What does the program for serving members mean for hiring managers in the public service?

The armed forces will continue to pay a member’s salary while that member works within your organization. If that member performs well within your organization, you have a high likelihood of bringing that individual on full time if you have a vacancy to fill and the selection criteria are met. The program is incredible, but few people know about it, despite the fact that it is a perfect example of seamless transition. Our office and I have used this program in the past, and we have gained from it.

Ultimately, the public service, and particularly those veterans now working in the public service, must take responsibility and be supported in mentoring, coaching and training service members in their transition. We have to make it as easy as possible for public service managers to hire former CAF members.

As the former Coast Guard director general of operations, I was committed to the hiring of CAF members by my organization. I, and others, travelled to CAF bases and wings in order to make the sales pitch for, and mentor and coach, releasing members to sign up with us. I know there are many public service hiring managers who are just as enthusiastic, but we have to provide them the information and the tools to empower them. We all have a stake in this.

Members of the committee, Mr. Chair, I want to thank you once again for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I’m free to answer any questions you may have related to this important file.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

As I mentioned earlier, before we go to questions, we’ll have another statement, this time by Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Dalton, the floor is yours.

Mr. Craig L. Dalton (Veterans Ombudsman, Office of the Veterans Ombudsman): Mr. Chair, thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today and for giving me the opportunity to talk about priority hiring.

I’m joined by Sharon Squire, the deputy veterans ombudsman.

[English]

I would like to begin by explaining what we hope to do with our time today, and that’s to share with you our perspective based on what we’ve heard from veterans on priority hiring over the last number of years and to speak from the perspective of an organization that has hired veterans as recently as two weeks ago through priority hiring.

I should also declare a bit of a personal bias, too, that I try to remain conscious of. I think our veteran population represents a huge pool of talent that should be leveraged. It is not always understood across Canada in the public and private sectors. I’ve developed that bias as a result of serving for 25 years and transitioning to the public service but also by working as a deputy head in two provinces and now with the federal government and having hired veterans through normal and priority hiring processes.

I would like to commend you for undertaking this important study. The Veterans Hiring Act, and indeed all initiatives related to veteran priority hiring are important initiatives. They have the potential, when implemented effectively, to have a considerable impact both for government as a whole and for veterans and their families.

From the perspective of a veteran, priority hiring represents an opportunity for one at the end of a career of service to Canada and Canadians to continue that service in another form. That’s an incredibly powerful opportunity. I think we would all be aware of some of the challenges that occur with transitioning from uniform to civilian life. Priority hiring is one way, if implemented effectively, we could address and support these challenges.

They're not just opportunities for veterans, for those who are medically released, those who have suffered illness and injury as a result of their service to our country. It represents an obligation, an obligation on the part of government and an obligation on the part of Canadians to support those veterans who, through no choice of their own, are unable to continue their service in uniform. I think it's quite self-evident why it's important to get this right for those Canadians who have sacrificed for us and all Canadians.

From the perspective of the public service, veteran priority hiring initiatives represent a tremendous opportunity to tap into what is a large pool of highly trained, educated and experienced Canadians, roughly 10,000 servicemen and servicewomen, regular and reserve forces, released for a variety of reasons every year. Not all of those individuals would wish to pursue a career in the public service at the federal level. Some will enter the private sector. Some have the entrepreneurial bug. Some want to work in the not-for-profit sector, but a number are looking for public service employment. As a large employer across the land, it makes perfect sense, I think, for the federal government to want to engage these 10,000 or so highly capable and talented Canadians every year as the public service seeks to attract, recruit and retain the best and the brightest.

Lastly, from the perspective of government, I think veteran priority hiring represents an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in an important area. This leadership has already been demonstrated in instances like the introduction of the Veterans Hiring Act, but when it comes to implementation, I think much more could be done.

There are a number of private sector companies and corporations across Canada that have made it a mission to hire veterans and to advocate for the value of veterans to others in the private sector. There are also a number of organizations and groups that work hard to advocate and link veterans up to both private and public sector employers. These individuals demonstrate significant leadership. We think that the federal government could continue to play a leadership role and play an even greater leadership role as the largest employer in Canada and send a real message to the rest of the public and private sectors that there's tremendous value in hiring a veteran.

I was struck by one of the individuals who wrote to the committee to share his thoughts on his experience with veteran priority hiring. After a very articulate, compelling story of what he encountered, he wound up with a question. That question at the end of his submission, and this speaks to the role of leadership, was, "If the federal government won't hire veterans, why would the private or public sectors in other jurisdictions hire veterans?" I think that is certainly something worth considering.

How effective is the Veterans Hiring Act? How effective has implementation been? I understand that is really the task of your committee.

• (1545)

To be frank, I would suggest that at the strategic level that's a very hard question to answer. We have some statistics and those statistics are interesting and they tell a story, but when I look at them, I don't think they tell the full story.

One of the reasons I don't think we're in a position to really answer that question is that we've established an intent in the Veterans

Hiring Act to enhance veteran employment, but we have not established or articulated clear objectives. It's a case of knowing where we want to go but not necessarily describing in general and not necessarily describing specifically how we plan to get there and what success looks like. In addition, we haven't assigned clear accountabilities for delivering on whatever these objectives or outcomes might be. I think that's reflected in the testimony you've received from veterans in person and also in the submissions you've received.

On a more tactical level, there is clearly room for improving the delivery of priority hiring in the Veterans Hiring Act. I don't intend to repeat the testimony you have already received or indeed repeat some of the comments that Mr. Lick has made, but I would like to highlight a number of the observations that our office has made. They've been submitted to you in writing, so I won't go through each and every one but I would like to highlight just a couple.

The first is that the process is too complex and not veteran-centric. I would describe this as the burden resting on the shoulders of a veteran who is releasing and looking to be engaged with the public service, and not on the institution itself.

If you consider the context of a veteran releasing, particularly those who are releasing for medical reasons—again, many of whom are not releasing of their own volition—just try to imagine what it's like to be at a point in life where you've been told that you're no longer able to serve your country in the manner that you had and that you're going to release. Employment—finding a sense of purpose and finding meaning in your post-service life—is just one of the many questions you're trying to wrestle with.

You may be wondering about your personal medical care and continuing it post-release. You may be wondering where you're going to live, where your spouse is going to work and if this is going to affect your children's education. It would be an oversimplification to describe this as a stressful and challenging time in the life of a service member, but I think it's pretty clear that it is.

If anything, the opportunity to attach to the federal public service should be a bit of a lifeline. It should be a way to address one of those key questions, that of, "How am I going to find purpose in my post-uniform life?"

Unfortunately, today that's not necessarily the case. I could walk you through the process as shared with us by a recent hire on our part, but suffice it to say that it is anything but simple, and in my opinion it is not designed to help a veteran achieve success in the employment realm.

Decisions are not made in a timely manner. Mr. Lick has addressed the attribution of service question. That is one that continues to come up frequently. Not all CAF members are aware of the priority hiring process, nor are they necessarily aware, based on their employment experience, of what it takes to participate in the process of seeking employment in the federal public service.

I am going to skip a whole bunch of my notes and just speak about the federal public service side and some of the challenges we hear about and that we know exist.

One is on the part of HR managers and understanding the intricacies of priority hiring initiatives and being able to act on them. We've experienced that in our office recently. Equally, but more important, perhaps, there is a lack of understanding on the part of leaders and managers across the public service of the value that exists in service members who take off the uniform.

To share a short story, as the deputy head, I had an assistant deputy minister approach me about a competition he was running. They had narrowed it down to three individuals on the short list, one of whom was a veteran. This individual said, "My gut tells me to go with this individual." He said, "I'm concerned, though." One of the challenges he was trying to address was the leadership environment on his senior team, and he didn't know how this veteran would react in working in this new environment.

In the end, I told him to go with his gut. He ended up hiring this veteran, but for me it was another indication of this unconscious bias that exists, and if we don't do something about educating folks, it may continue to exist. This individual came to me some time later and said that in 26 years it was the best hire he'd made in the public service.

In conclusion, I'd like to offer three recommendations for consideration by the committee.

One, establish and assign clear outcomes to departments and organizations across government.

Two, establish clear accountabilities for delivering on these outcomes.

• (1550)

Three, ensure that all medically releasing veterans who wish to be considered for public sector employment opportunities are fully able, from both a personal and administrative standpoint, to actively participate in that process from the moment they receive notice that they're going to be released.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go directly into our questions.

We'll start with Mr. Peterson for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to everyone for being with us today and sharing your opening statements. Thank you for your service to our country and your continuing service. I very much appreciate it.

This is a lot to cover in the small period of time that I have.

Mr. Dalton, I'll start with you. Of the three recommendations that you listed, the first one is "establish and assign clear targets to departments and organizations". Are those targets along the line of quotas like we see in the U.S. and other jurisdictions? Is that what you had in mind when you made that recommendation?

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: Yes.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Have you given any thought to what those may be? Would they be driven by the departments, in your opinion?

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: No. I would say that it's clearly going to be a challenging exercise because of the nature of work that takes place in the diverse departments across governments, so those targets could vary. I would point to some of the testimony received from Veterans Affairs where they set a target and are working toward that target. I think that target probably reflects the reality of that work environment.

• (1555)

Mr. Kyle Peterson: You would consider that they would be driven by the department.

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: Yes, I would see the Public Service Commission and departments collaboratively identifying these targets.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Thank you.

This is a question for both of you, probably, and it's more of a general question.

There is a transition going on, obviously, from CAF over to VAC in general, not just for hiring but for everything when the release happens. Do you work together to try to make that more seamless? I guess the phrase everyone is using these days is "seamless". Above and beyond just hiring, how can we work together to make that transition period more service-friendly?

Mr. Gregory Lick: From the two ombudsman's offices, in terms of how we might deal with a particular complaint that comes to either of us, the typical jurisdictional line is, if it's caused by an issue to do with National Defence, our office would deal with it, and if it's caused by the Veterans Affairs process, they would deal with it. If there's a grey area in the middle, our teams work closely together to work out that complaint. We don't actually play in the game of throwing the ball back and forth.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: That's what I was getting to. That's good to hear. Thank you for that.

In your statement, Mr. Lick, among other things, you said that the natural consequence of these two administrative factors is that fully deserving and qualified former members of the Canadian Armed Forces are missing out on opportunities as a result of administrative delays.

How can we alleviate those administrative delays?

Mr. Gregory Lick: I'll touch a bit on what Mr. Dalton said as one of the recommendations, because I think that's very important. The delays are caused by the time it takes to adjudicate. If it's a medically releasing member, it's in the realm of Veterans Affairs. That takes time. One of the processes that I think has a huge amount of possibility of reducing that time for delays is in having almost real-time access to medical information on the member that can easily pass back and forth between CAF and Veterans Affairs to make that adjudication and make it easier to accomplish.

I think what Mr. Dalton had said in the third recommendation is actually very important. We just don't wait until the point of medically releasing before they get on the priority list. Let's think about it as soon as they get that notice that they may medically release or they will medically release. Why can't we then pass that information on to the Public Service Commission to get them on the priority list at that point?

If in the end result they don't medically release, they just come back off the list. That could shorten the time probably quite significantly.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: How does that medical release procedure work in the armed forces? What would the usual time frame be? How much of a runway would be given so you could actually start that list early, just from a practical standpoint?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Carole Lajoie (Director of Education and Collaboration, National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman): Good afternoon.

[*English*]

For the administrative review, it's once the permanent category has been established. If you've been ill or injured and now you're in high risk of breaching universality of service, there's a review to see what can be your future employment, either within the CAF or after.

That review can take, in general, about a year from the beginning to the end, but from the moment the decision is rendered as administrative release, saying you will be releasing, for the majority of CAF members it is six months ahead of their release date. This

means the member has six months to turn their life around and try to find employment for a seamless transition.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: During those six months, are they still fully entitled to all the benefits they had as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces?

Ms. Carole Lajoie: They are.

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: I would like to add that the third recommendation recommends that it's at that point—at the start of those six months or nine months, or however long that period is—that the veteran, in our eyes, should be fully informed and all of the authority should be in place. It shouldn't be the day after they're released that they're able to apply for a federal public service position.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: That's for obvious reasons and I appreciate that.

I have a couple of points. This is a question that applies to both of you, as you both raised it.

Mr. Lick, you indicated that not enough people are aware of the vocational rehabilitation program for serving members, even though it's a successful program.

Mr. Dalton, you mentioned that one of the obstacles is that a lot of CAF members aren't aware of this program, which is out there.

What can we do as a federal government to improve that awareness?

• (1600)

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: I'll make a quick response.

To me, it starts with targets. It involves three departments: the Public Service Commission, VAC and CAF-DND—and then all departments across government, ultimately. They are large bureaucratic organizations. Putting targets out there and helping people understand how to achieve those targets or why they're not achieving those targets will focus attention on the processes that are currently in place. I think focusing on the myriad processes that are there will have some marginal benefit, but it really starts with targets, making people accountable and then understanding why we are or aren't achieving those targets.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Welcome, everyone. I appreciate your comments so far. They've been very helpful.

A lot of what we're hearing is similar to what we've heard before, which is both good and also distressing.

Mr. Lick, you mentioned the U.S. program. What we've heard repeatedly from our veterans is that they have all these incredible skills, but as soon as you present them to the public service they're told they may have driven a tank or driven a multi-million dollar vehicle, but they're not qualified to drive a shuttle bus because it's not equivalent. How much have you looked into the U.S. system?

I understand that BCIT has a similar program that translates the skills over. Is it a matter of just buying the licence to the U.S. program or is it more complicated than that?

Mr. Gregory Lick: I haven't looked into it that deeply as to whether it's a contracting or procurement option. There certainly have been some initiatives within the federal government to try to create that system for us.

The one that's available now, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, simply translates the military code into a civilian code. In fact, I tried it this morning for myself. I was a marine engineer with the naval reserves beforehand, so I tried it. It simply gave me more marine engineering jobs and civilian jobs. It didn't accommodate the leadership skills and the other courses and the work in environmental response that I might have taken that could then translate into another type of job. That's the sophistication that I would suggest is needed.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is this issue of the skills translation an impediment?

Maybe I'm being blunt, but is it being used by the public service hiring managers as a tool not to choose veterans?

Mr. Gregory Lick: For last part of your question, I can't say. I don't believe it is.

Mr. Dalton and I have said in our remarks that, more than anything, it is a lack of awareness of what military members do in their day-to-day jobs and the types of skills that they obtain throughout their careers that are not simply in a code or in a job description. It's those types of skills that are available in the United States' example. You plug in not only your occupation but all the courses you take, all the experiences you had and all the deployments you've had. They then translate that into job opportunities.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Would something like that be a priority for any government wanting to fix this issue?

Mr. Gregory Lick: It would definitely be one of the tools that would help, not only to educate hiring managers about what's available in the military but also to help military members understand the huge amount of opportunity that their skills could translate into in the civilian world.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I want to read you an article. It was updated on May 16 from The Globe and Mail. It says, "Successive federal governments have said they would help disabled veterans get public-service jobs...a long-time advocate says the civil service is not co-operative and he questions whether anyone ensures that discharged military personnel are considered when openings arise." The gentleman says, "The public service is against this...they are not going to help the injured veteran get there. So who is getting him [or her] that job?"

This is what we're actually hearing from the witnesses and the veterans. It's similar along these lines, yet when we have Veterans Affairs or government officials sit in front of us, they seem to be patting themselves on the backs, saying everything is fine and there's nothing to worry about.

How do you view this? Why is there such a disconnect between what the veterans are saying and what the bureaucracy is saying? When we talk about comments about successive federal governments, I don't look across at my colleagues here or to the left. I don't look at it as a partisan MP thing. It seems to be in the bureaucracy.

Mr. Gregory Lick: I will comment on my experience. I can't comment on the whole public service and what every public service manager is doing.

In my—

• (1605)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Can I interrupt you there, though?

If you cannot comment on the others.... This is what's happening: "Well, I can't comment on the others. I can't talk about this." Bureaucrat after bureaucrat sit before us: "Well, I can't speak for anyone else."

If everyone just sits and says, "Well, it's some other department, not mine", who is speaking for the veterans, then, who are trying to get jobs in the public service? I'm sorry. I'm not trying to be critical of you. I'm trying to get an answer. How do we address this when everyone from the government side, the bureaucracy side, seems to say, "Well, it's someone else. We can't help them"?

Mr. Gregory Lick: I will answer your question.

In my experience, it is not about hiring managers' deciding that, because they are military members, they don't want to hire them. That is not my experience.

My experience is that there is truly a lack of awareness, particularly among those who have not had reserve time, regular force time or a large amount of exposure to military members. It is really a lack of awareness of those skills, competencies and leadership qualities that military members have. They simply don't understand. That is why I don't think it's in the realm of hiring managers' saying, "No, because they're military members, we don't want to hire them." I actually do not believe that.

I really believe that if we can provide people, through either mentoring or coaching, with information about what a military member can do for them, that would be the best thing we could do.

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: Could I possibly add to that?

I just wanted to add that I think—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Be brief because I have one last question for you.

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: Quickly, I'll go back again to targets. I think that we need to hear from veterans. Where are the measures today?

I agree with Mr. Lick. I don't think that there's a lot of untoward action being taken out there. I think that it's an unconscious bias in a lot of cases.

We have an intent in legislation. We don't have a program with clear targets that says, "Achieve this, and if you don't achieve it, understand why." A big part of that would be interviewing those veterans.

When we look at the stats today, for the 58% who were not selected, do we know why? Did they deselect? Were there issues with their applications? I think there's a lot of information that we don't have at hand because we're not managing this like a deliberate program. It's an option among many.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That was one of my other questions for later. Should we have a reverse onus, then, for the hiring of veterans, such that if they apply for the job and are genuinely qualified, we have to prove why someone else was chosen?

It goes back to your question. You mentioned that the manager had it down to the veteran and two others, and that he went with his gut check. With priority hiring, if all three are equal, why would a hiring manager even have to consult you or go for a gut check if he was qualified?

The Chair: I'm afraid that this will have to be a question left unanswered for now.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You have the bureaucracy going against what the law is.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Aubin, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for joining us.

I'm not a permanent member of this committee. I actually just came from the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Interestingly enough, one very good employer for veterans and reservists is VIA Rail. I know that VIA Rail isn't a department, but I still want to point this out.

Is there a way to promote the best practices of these employers, in order to create a ripple effect on other organizations? We're currently only discussing problems, but we must also talk about solutions. Could we create a ripple effect by promoting employers that have understood the expertise and experience of our former members?

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: Thank you for the question.

I think that we should establish accountability. The function that you suggested could be assigned to the organization responsible for managing the priority hiring program.

[*English*]

I'll add to that in English because I'm not sure if I got to your point.

I think that the more we approach this like an employment equity issue, with clear targets and outcomes that cause us to look at whether or not we're succeeding, at why we are or are not, at high performers.... If one department is doing exceptionally well and another isn't, sharing those best practices across government will aid everybody in moving toward those targets.

I read the testimony that VAC provided. It's doing some of that on its own initiative with other departments to help it get at some of the understanding that Mr. Lick mentioned is not always there. I think that formally having somebody clearly accountable for this, leading this effort and fulfilling the function that you've shared would be a good idea.

• (1610)

Mr. Robert Aubin: Do you want to add something?

Mr. Gregory Lick: Yes. In years past, groups like Canada Company had awards, annual awards to promote and market those companies that were doing superb jobs at hiring veterans, promoting the hiring of veterans, all of that. That is another tool in the tool box that can get at making not only the private sector but also the public sector more aware of the value of veterans. That is definitely one tool in the tool box that can help get the outcome we want.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

I'll turn to you, Mr. Dalton. When we've reached the point of meeting with the ombudsman, it usually means that things aren't going very well.

According to the document containing your opening remarks, only 42.8% of the applications submitted by veterans were accepted. That's not even half the applications.

Were applications rejected simply because the skills provided didn't match the desired skills? If so, how do we help our military members or veterans upgrade their skills?

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: We have access to this data, but not to the information needed to answer your question. I don't know why over half the applications were rejected.

[*English*]

However, that's the type of information we need to get at and feed back to veterans. I know you've heard from previous witnesses about the lack of transparency in the process. In a number of cases, individuals that applied and were not selected didn't get feedback that would have helped them then prepare for a future competition. It's a very good question, but again, we have access to the general data, but as an office, we have not looked into what is behind that data.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you. This seems to be a fairly major issue.

Mr. Lick, I'll turn to you, because something written in the document containing your opening remarks caught my attention: "However, applicants still face significant wait times. As a result, more creative solutions may need to come to the fore..."

I imagine that you already have a good idea of what these creative solutions should be. What do you have in mind?

[English]

Mr. Gregory Lick: I've already mentioned one of the creative solutions in terms of a skills translator that would provide information for both hiring managers, veterans or military members. The other one we talked about was the idea that, as soon as people are given the decision that they will be released, we should not wait the six months it takes for the final release. Get them on the priority list immediately. That is an easy solution, I believe.

The other one comes back to Mr. Dalton's recommendations with respect to making sure we know what outcomes we want to achieve and making sure we have targets. We should manage this like a program in government where you have a performance measurement framework and all the managerial tools you need to manage a program properly.

We should also make sure we know who is accountable for this, who is responsible. If you distribute responsibility across government or a large organization, then nobody has responsibility. We need to make sure we very clearly delineate who has responsibility. Making it accountable in one department could be one of those solutions.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I have one last question. I would like you to try to provide as brief an answer as possible, since I have only one minute left.

How do military members transition to civilian life and end up at Veterans Affairs Canada to benefit from the department's programs? Are they assisted throughout the process, or do they need to sit in front of their computer and browse different sites such as the Service Canada site?

[English]

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: Based on what we've heard from veterans, and what I see you've received in terms of witness testimony, it's more the case of the latter. But again, I know there are many initiatives under way to address and get at that. The Canadian Armed Forces transition group is one example of that, but your second option is the one that most people experience, I believe.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Ratansi, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you very much, and thank you for being here.

I'm trying to process the information we have received from the veterans themselves, from Veterans Affairs and what we're hearing from you. I think I'll catch up on what Mr. McCauley was asking you.

Who is accountable? There is the Canadian Armed Forces, there is the veterans, and then there is the public service. In your report it

says the Canadian Armed Forces is in the best position to determine whether a veteran is disabled—I'm going to park a question on that—but the Public Service Commission is the one that determines the eligibility for that veteran to work.

Now, if you pass the buck to the Public Service Commission and the Public Service Commission has no base for translating or harmonizing those skill sets.... We've heard from veterans many times over. You made a statement that you're easing the transition of the injured workers to the public service. How are you doing it? What are the concrete steps you are taking to do it?

•(1615)

Mr. Gregory Lick: In terms of service attribution, as I said, that has been given to Veterans Affairs to adjudicate, so that is the decision of the government. In fact, what I also referenced was how we are making that process easier. The armed forces and Veterans Affairs are working much more closely now on various issues to make that process easier. One concern is just to make sure that there is easy and almost real-time access to medical information so that the adjudicators can adjudicate properly. That makes it easier.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That was a concern raised by some of the veterans. When they are released from the army and they are released based on injuries, they go to Veterans Affairs and Veterans Affairs' doctors have a different assessment. They are down in the black hole. These are the people who have served, who have been injured during service, yet they cannot get the information or the respect that they deserve. They can't even transition into civilian life.

How have you reduced the problems between the assessments of the Canadian Armed Forces' doctors and the Veterans Affairs' doctors?

Mr. Gregory Lick: One part of the process where we hope to see improvement—and we both recommended this to the department—is that all the benefits, all the adjudication that's necessary, should be done before the veterans release so that ultimately those delays that we're seeing now should be reduced to almost zero.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: When was this implemented?

Mr. Gregory Lick: It has yet to be implemented.

That is one initiative that's within the transition group's program right now, but they have yet to implement that. We should see that later on in their plan.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Of the armed forces personnel who are released, 33% are injured. Do you have any statistics, does anybody have any statistics on how many are employed, how many are homeless, how many have issues? Does anybody keep track of that?

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: I'm not aware of anybody in government who has that sort of information.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Shouldn't it be one of your recommendations because these are the people who are falling through the cracks? They may have mental health issues. We talk about financial security for them and it appears that nobody wants to take charge of it. Once they leave the army, they feel they are on their own.

Who, in your opinion, should be accountable for that?

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: I'll take a stab at that.

When veterans release, they release for all sorts of different reasons and they're in a wide variety of situations. Many veterans don't require much assistance when they release. For example, I believe the veteran population has been pegged at around 600,000. VAC clients would total about 165,000. So for a large number of veterans who transition, the transition goes well.

I believe the number of individuals who have responded to "life after service" surveys expressing difficulty with transition would be about 17%. It would seem that for those individuals who are experiencing difficulty as they release and as they transition, ideally, we as a government would be aware of that. We'd be tracking those individuals up until the point that they're in a position where they may not have to avail themselves of government programs and services, or they're availing themselves of programs and services but don't require any detailed support. That's the place clearly we would all like to see government going.

• (1620)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That's the place where you do not want them falling through the cracks, because a lot of them have fallen through the cracks.

One of the suggestions they also made was that there are a lot of opportunities for injured veterans to work in the military area because there are a lot of civilian administrative responsibilities. Why aren't they being used? Why are they being sent out of the whole envelope of the Canadian Armed Forces? Does anybody know?

Mr. Gregory Lick: I don't have the numbers in front of me, in terms of how many of the ill and injured members are coming back into the department. That's something that we could likely follow up with you on. Certainly, just reviewing the statistics before this committee, back in 2017-18, which was the last time statistics were available, at least recently, the military members who were transitioning made up between 40% and 50% of the hiring that the Department of National Defence did. While I don't have the statistics right in front of me in terms of ill and injured members, that is something we could likely provide to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, we have another panel that will be joining us at 4:30, but we will have time, I believe, for two three-minute interventions.

We'll start with Monsieur Deltell and go, finally, to Monsieur Drouin.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome everyone to your parliamentary committee.

I have two specific questions, and I want you to answer them one after the other.

First, do you think that a pre-retirement program should start 6 months, 12 months or 18 months before the end of the military members' work?

[English]

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: This is more for Mr. Lick to speak to, but the approach that is being taken now in CAF and DND reflects a recognition that it needs to start as early as possible. The day they put a uniform on everybody knows that at some point they will be releasing. The sooner that preparation can begin, the better. Certainly, our interaction with the transition group is—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I need a number. Is it six, 12 or 18 months?

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: It should be as soon as individuals enrol. I think that preparation needs to be throughout an individual's career.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Okay.

Mr. Lick.

Mr. Gregory Lick: Right now, the objective of the transition group that they're trialing at this point in time is six months. Part of the purpose of the trial is to try to understand, on average, what would be a good time period for members to transition.

I do agree with Mr. Dalton, though, that it simply can't start at the end of your career, even if it's six months, a year or whatever. It needs to start almost in recruit school. As we've all done throughout our careers, we always tend to take our retirement courses at the end of the career. No, it should start when you're in secondary school, to understand how to manage your finances, how to manage your health. All of that should start very early on. In fact, there are some measures already available to military members to provide that information, that type of training, but probably, you could always do with a bit more.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, gentlemen.

I have another quick question. You talked earlier about the fact that this situation was identified as a priority issue in 2011. It has been eight years with two different governments and nothing has changed. What did we do wrong?

The Chair: That's a tough question and you only get 30 seconds to answer.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gregory Lick: I'm actually going to talk about what I believe has been done right, and that is to accept that we've worked a lot on recruitment into the forces. We work a lot, obviously, to get people ready and build their careers. We haven't been working as well on the transition part to becoming a veteran. That's what they're prioritizing now. I think we'll see, as the transition group gets its feet wet, how well it's going to do it. It has the right objectives in mind and I'm hoping to see that success over the next number of years.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Drouin, you have three minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I simply want to reiterate what Mr. Lick said. I fully agree with him. The Canadian Armed Forces provided very good service to our constituents who were affected by the floods. A number of residents of my constituency were affected, and the military members were there. I would also like to thank them.

• (1625)

[*English*]

I also want to talk about your experience. You said you made it your mission to hire veterans when you were director general at the Canadian Coast Guard. I'm assuming you hired veterans directly, but how did you empower your organization or the directors and managers that were working under you to let them know that this was a priority for you and to make sure that veterans had a fair chance at applying for these jobs?

Mr. Gregory Lick: There are a number of responses. A number of programs were available through Canada Company that helped, at the time, to get people like me, some of my directors, down onto the bases and wings, to mentor and to coach. That was a tremendous way of getting information out there, and getting people face time with the individuals who will be hiring.

The other element is a leadership element. I pushed my directors and my hiring managers to become aware of what the military can offer. I came from a reserve background. I knew what the military could offer. We also were an organization that worked very directly with the military on joint operations and so on.

As you grow that critical mass of people within your organization who have that knowledge, that's probably what the public service needs more than anything. Grow that critical mass to make people aware, and then it will grow on its own.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Dalton, I agree with your three recommendations. The second one, establishing clear accountabilities for achieving and reporting on outcomes, do you believe that deputy ministers should be held accountable? Should we perhaps tie performance bonuses, other than quotas, to the hiring of veterans?

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: Yes, and as a deputy head at the provincial level I was tasked to achieve certain employment equity targets. That certainly focused my attention. Nothing focuses the mind like a target.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes.

You've also mentioned that HR managers have limited knowledge of CF. How do we share that knowledge? Do we create working groups at the lower level?

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: Some are very good, by the way, and I should highlight that.

The Chair: Make a very brief answer, please.

Mr. Craig L. Dalton: Establishing targets and treating this as a program will start to get that message out, as Mr. Lick said, and individuals will take it as a core responsibility.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much for your appearance here today. Your testimony has been incredibly helpful. Should you have additional information, recommendations or suggestions that you wish to pass along to this committee as we continue our deliberations, I would advise and encourage you to please direct them to our clerk. We'll make sure they help form part of our final report.

Once again, thank you for your appearance here.

Colleagues, we will suspend for just a couple of moments while we get our next witnesses to the table.

• (1625)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1630)

The Chair: Colleagues, we will reconvene the meeting now. We have before us four individuals who will be making opening statements. Of course, we'll be following our normal question and answer period. Because of the shortness of time, colleagues, I would suggest that, following the opening statements, we go down to five-minute rounds for questions. That way we can try to get in as many questions as possible.

Monsieur Généreux, I understand you have an opening statement. You have five minutes or less, sir, and the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Généreux (As an Individual): That's fine. Thank you.

Mr. Chair and honourable members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee to talk about veterans' access to the Canadian public service.

My name is Luc Généreux. I retired from the Canadian Armed Forces following a medical release from the Canadian Forces in 2016 for non-service related reasons. This decision is currently under review and appeal. I served for 34 years in the Canadian Forces.

As noted on the sheet, I'm an engineer, urban planner and planner. I'm a member of several associations and orders that require national and provincial qualifications. I'm bilingual, and I had top secret security clearance. I'm fit to work in the public service.

[*English*]

In fall 2018 I initiated a process to join the federal public service. My journey was not easy. It was like crossing a minefield. Today I'm presenting 10 recommendations I wish to share to improve the process and help to reduce administrative obstacles to facilitate access to public service positions for Canadian Forces veterans. Veterans like me have lots to contribute to the Canadian public service. We hope to share our knowledge, experience and leadership, and hope to help mentor the next generation of federal public service employees.

I wish to thank PSPC, Public Services and Procurement Canada, for having believed in my file and for helping me to secure an excellent temporary position—I repeat, temporary position—while some of the administrative obstacles are removed to allow me to secure a permanent public service position.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for your economy of words. We'll have lots more time for questions.

Mr. Hicks, you're up for five minutes, please.

Mr. Robert Hicks (As an Individual): For the record my name is Robert Thomas Hicks. I have a degree, a diploma, a secret clearance.

[*Translation*]

I'm somewhat bilingual, but in any case, I can manage.

[*English*]

I am currently studying to obtain both my PMP and CMP.

I've served Canada twice. I hold the Queen's commission, and almost 20 years ago to this very day, I was serving overseas in Kosovo in the assault troop of Lord Strathcona's Horse, Royal Canadians. My father served in the seventies, and my grandfather, Thomas Hicks, was wounded in Ortona in 1943. Canadian military service runs in my family.

Please accept my sincerest appreciation for being allowed to speak.

By now, it should be apparent that the current mechanisms to bring veterans into the civil service could use new impetus. The majority of us are not injured or going into executive positions, and few of us have pensions.

Admittedly, I'm not a hiring expert, but I am an expert in not getting hired. I was removed from a competition because I used "emergency communications" as a skill instead of "crisis communications". HR never bothered to explain the difference. Other veterans have told me similar stories.

Right now, with this forum, I'll do what I've always done—speak, a shock to those who know me, I'm sure.

Currently, Canada's history, statues, culture and civil service are being disrespected and destroyed by intersectionality, virtue signalling and regionalism. Canada was built through hard work, pragmatism and flexibility of thought. We should return to those values.

I was taught to be proud of Canada, to respect our traditions and our history, and to make a positive contribution. To that end, all good communications, change initiatives and projects have at least two things in common: They are driven from the top down, and there is accountability. The only way this situation will be improved is by a push from the top down to find ways to make it easier and relatively risk free for civil service managers to get to know veterans and, ultimately, to hire them. Once we're in place, our value will become apparent.

Let's look at classifications. Currently, the classifications and the structures governing them are very rigid. If a sub-department requires a writer, they have to ask departmental comms, which usually leads to an underpaid contractor. I was that underpaid contractor. One solution is a new classification. Think "special projects officer", or in project management methodology, a "contingency reserve".

Create a new, flexible, agile classification for veterans that can't be backfilled by civilians. Create a veterans pool and make it mandatory to look there when hiring. Solicit feedback whenever someone from that pool wasn't chosen.

Make things even easier for managers. Create temporary categories or positions where they hire a vet for three years, minimum of one, and if after two years everybody's happy, the process to make that veteran permanent begins. Think "consultancy with a pathway to indeterminate".

The way forward is to loosen the hiring process for veterans. Give us a chance to win. Get to know us. Put the onus on veterans to make managers want to hire every last one of us. We're used to being thrown at problems to make them disappear.

Give us a chance to make managers brag about how many veterans they have on staff. My money is on our impressing the country with our flexibility, our integrity and our ingenuity, but it's still predicated on managers finding us, getting to know us and hiring us.

Remember, we're taxpayers, we're voters, we're citizens, and we deserve the same consideration for civil service jobs that everybody else enjoys.

Again, my sincerest thanks. Perseverance.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Northey.

Mr. Robert Northey (Audit Officer, Office of the Assistant Deputy Minister, Review Services, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me here today to be part of this committee.

My name is Rob Northey and I'm a veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces. I served just shy of 23 years—from May 1991 until March 2013. During this time frame, I was a vehicle technician, primarily with 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group. I deployed both domestically and abroad. Domestically, I was part of operations during the ice storm in 1998, and following that, I provided support to the 28th G8 Summit in 2002.

Abroad, I deployed to Bosnia in 1997 as part of NATO, and again in 2002. In 2005, I deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan, with the Canadian provincial reconstruction team as part of Operation Archer to support Operation Enduring Freedom, the war on terror. Unfortunately, due to a service-related injury, I was medically released in 2013.

I took advantage of the many programs that were available to me to support my transition to civilian life. I would have activated priority hiring at that time; however, I chose to wait until I upgraded my education. I went to college and acquired a diploma in business leadership. Following that, I was accepted into an executive MBA program focusing on innovation leadership. I graduated from the program in November 2016. I took a little time off to collect myself, and I activated priority hiring in, approximately, December 2017.

I chose to apply mostly within the AS, PM and ED-EDS streams, and I received approximately 600 invitations to apply for jobs across Canada. I actively pursued about 15 of these positions, and I was eventually hired with DND as an audit officer. I started in August of 2018 and relocated to the NCR. I work with outstanding people and exceptional leaders.

The priority hiring program is a great initiative, but it has many limitations that create barriers to entry for veterans.

The positives of the program include that veterans are supposed to get priority and need to meet only the essential qualifications. I was part of the veterans hiring pilot program with Veterans Affairs Canada, and the staff there was excellent in helping me with resumés, cover letters and providing other forms of support. Some hiring managers see the value of hiring a veteran.

There are some areas for improvement in the program. The process is slow, cumbersome and bureaucratic, and there is a negative stigma in the public service that priority hires are subpar performers who are unwanted and being passed around from department to department. Many hiring managers or their representatives were transparent in communicating to me that they already had someone internally whom they wished to bring on board and implied that they would appreciate it if I dropped out of the process. Hiring managers do not often find out that there is a priority hire until they have already invested substantial resources into a non-priority person. Many times I was screened out of a process with what I felt was improper justification.

As well, many of the testing standards for some jobs are unfair. An example is one job for which I was supposed to be able to look up research policy; however, during testing I was required to recall from memory policy specific to that department. Some HR reps are not familiar with the priority hiring process. Examples of that include denying me the five days to create a cover letter and resumé, and not communicating specific examples back to me in regard to why I wasn't chosen.

Although I could have rebutted in many of the jobs I was not chosen for, I chose not to. Why would I want to work with them if they didn't want me on board? In my opinion, it was very transparent that I was getting screened out for virtually no good reason. If it was not for the fact that I was in a good frame of mind and dedicated to

finding a job, I might have given up, and I feel that many veterans likely feel the same way I do.

• (1640)

However, I am very grateful because a great department did hire me, and this has allowed me to move forward with life after the service. As well, it is excellent to see that my employer sees the value in my military career and the advantages of hiring a veteran.

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

Finally, we have Mr. Fraser Zerebecki, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki (As an Individual): Thank you, Chair.

I served 10 years in the Canadian Armed Forces as a combat engineer and intelligence operator. I served in Afghanistan in Operation Athena in 2009, and I was medically released in 2017. I am fortunate to have maintained my faculties through ongoing rehab and therapy.

I thank the honoured members of this committee for their time this afternoon.

During my transition, I completed vocational rehabilitation and earned a postgraduate certificate in project management. I have successfully navigated the priority hire process and will be starting in a management position with ESDC in June.

Overall, my search for public service employment has been stressful, frustrating and unnecessarily complicated. The transition from the military is stressful, especially when managing a medical diagnosis. I felt pressure to use my VRPSM, but like most transitioning soldiers, I lacked direction.

It might help if there were a clear path to a public service job early in the process, with the support of a VPSU adviser. This vision of a job could help guide members in choosing the best routes to education and accreditation.

The SISIP vocational rehabilitation program should be sufficiently lengthened to capture educational requirements of civilian employment that correlate with the member's military trade. As an example, I was a combat engineer. The civilian equivalent would be a civil engineering technologist, which is a three-year program.

The SISIP program does not account for the time it takes members to secure public service employment after completing vocational rehabilitation. In receiving a job reference or analyzing a job poster, there is very little information that tells the applicant what the job actually does. This makes it very difficult to determine whether a job fits the applicant.

A priority hire candidate only needs to respond to essential qualifications within the statement of merit criteria, but this is the most difficult part of the screening process. To be successful, a candidate must write a clear response to the essential qualification, with no detail left out. This process requires support to examine, edit and proof these responses. Wordsmithing is a skill many people struggle with.

The feedback received when unsuccessful was often vague and unconstructive. It is highly demoralizing to be rejected without feedback.

There were issues meeting the educational requirement for positions I was otherwise qualified for. Specifically, I applied for intelligence analyst positions that I had experience for, yet failed due to a stringent educational requirement.

Overall, several organizations included requirements on understanding the organizational structure and mandate of that department, which puts veterans external to the public service at a disadvantage.

Lastly, priority hire benefits can be transferred to spouses upon death or severe disability. I feel that benefits for spouses should be more liberally applied or shared, to reduce the stresses on families in transition.

In summary, the key factors would be to connect transitioning members with potential public service jobs early, with support from VPSU; response to essential qualifications must be simplified; and SISIP benefits should be expanded.

As soldiers, we take our oath to serve the interests of Canada. There should be a simple process to continue that service as a public servant. As of today, the process is anything but simple.

Thank you.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you all very much.

Colleagues, we'll go to five-minute rounds to try to get as many questions in as possible.

We will start with Mr. Jowhari, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of you for your testimony and for the service you have provided for us and for this country.

I'm going to start with Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Généreux, you were very brief with your opening remarks, but I managed to pick up two things. You highlighted the fact that there are administrative obstacles, and you also talked about 10 recommendations.

We didn't get the chance to hear those 10 recommendations. However, can you explain what you meant by "administrative obstacles" and give us the top three recommendations that you have?

Mr. Luc Généreux: For the administrative obstacles, it's things like this: I served 34 years, I was considered bilingual for 33 years and I had a top secret qualification. One of the key issues right now blocking me from getting access is that I'm considered unilingual

because I haven't had the test yet—I've been waiting for six months now—a test to prove that I'm bilingual, although I was bilingual enough to serve in the Canadian Forces. It's the same thing for the secret classification. I'm just regarded as secret right now. It took six weeks to receive it. There are many obstacles that make the process very complicated.

Also, there is getting services for such things as we spoke about earlier, getting, let's say, the cover sheet right, which is almost like a secret art that nobody knows and few people are willing to help with. In fact, I had to seek the help from a retired deputy minister for my cover sheet because I was denied access from VAC, for the thing that they're supposed to help us with. Many obstacles are making the process to get into the public service complicated.

On the recommendations.... I thought you had been provided the translated sheet. I provided a sheet—

The Chair: Apologies, we do have the 10 recommendations Mr. Généreux has, and they will be distributed.

My apologies for the interruption, sir.

Mr. Luc Généreux: I would say there are many obstacles that need to be lifted, anything to do with having VAC or the Canadian Forces help us to accelerate our security classification renewal so we're ready to be hired. The bilingual status, too, helps. The priority management system is confusing. We're not getting feedback, as some of my colleagues have stated, so we need to have feedback. Within VAC there's total confusion about which program is offered. In fact, information should be shared....

● (1650)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you. I'm going to go to Mr. Hicks.

Mr. Hicks, you indicated that we need to take a top-down approach and make sure there's real accountability. Can you expand on a process that you want to be changed and expand on what you mean by top-down accountability vis-à-vis that specific process?

Mr. Robert Hicks: What we're looking at is that there is no benefit for hiring veterans. We're talking about getting veterans into the civil service, where our pensions can be topped up, for those of us who have them. For those of us who don't, we're a little closer. We're talking about getting us into the civil service. There are benefits for hitting quotas as far as being bilingual: What's the percentage of your staff that are bilingual? How many are visible minorities and how many are females, and all the rest? There is absolutely no incentive, and there's no accountability, for hiring managers in any job competition to bring any of us on board.

From a top-down perspective, there has to be a very clear delineation that says that they are supposed to grab these people and give them a shot, or if we have to go and implement a quota, it tells them they're not hitting 2% of staff for their recruiting requirement. Two per cent is probably a bit high considering how many veterans there are compared to the rest of the civilian population, but we have a right to see ourselves reflected in the civil service and we're not. Injured veterans have a slightly better chance and those who double-dip, go from being a colonel or a general into an executive, they do fantastically well. But most are like me. I don't have a pension. I have nothing.

When you ask for something specific, I say it has to be blanket. There has to be an accountability mechanism. If they're not hiring a veteran, if they're not hitting their targets, whoever that manager is, whatever department that is of the civil service, they have to be at least able to explain why.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. McCauley, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Great.

Thanks very much for all your information. It's very helpful.

Mr. Hicks, some of the things you brought up anger me greatly. Again, we have the veterans come before us with very clear issues, and then—I think you were sitting at the back—every time we get someone from the public service—

Mr. Robert Hicks: I'm their biggest cheerleader, sir.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: —they sit there and it's "look away, there are no issues here". I really appreciate your coming forward because there are obviously a lot of issues. We take it all very seriously, in a non-partisan way, so I appreciate that.

Mr. Northey, you brought up the point about hiring managers who have someone else in mind. This study came out of another study we're doing on general hiring into the public service and we heard repeatedly of nepotism. It wasn't hiring my brother type of thing, but my friend hiring this person, hiring someone I knew, instead of someone else qualified. How rampant is that, if I could ask the four of you? Is it an anecdotal feeling? Have you experienced that, where even though by law they are required to hire you, they're finding ways not to?

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: I can speak to that—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I get that strong sense when I talk to the vets back in Edmonton and here. It seems universal. This is the feeling they're all getting.

Mr. Robert Northey: As I was saying in my opening statement, I can count at least three times when I was told, "You shine on paper. Your cover letter is outstanding." Back to the cover letter, trying to decipher how to write one of those and get through that initial stage when you actually get a hiring manager to talk to you.... They tell you that you shine, only to then tell you, "We have somebody internal who we really want to place in that position, so if you don't want it, we'd appreciate it. Then we'll move on and you'll move on."

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: I could add some personal experience. I applied to over 26 positions, 12 of which were with the DFO and Coast Guard, both of which you would think would be a pretty good

transition. I was told in a phone conversation—not in writing—that I should not be applying for jobs above the PM-4 level, because those should be internal hires. That was directly from the director.

No one would put this in writing, but that's what's happening. If you want to transfer your skill set, they're going to be looking internally, 100%.

• (1655)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Again, that's confirmed some of my worst fears about the hiring process.

Mr. Généreux, what was your rank when you left the forces?

Mr. Luc Généreux: I was a Lieutenant Colonel. I was managing up to 600 people in my last position.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Maybe it was Mr. Zerebecki who commented that it's easier for officers to streamline into public service. I've read that repeatedly in reports from many organizations. Do you believe that's true? Is it just born of the fact they generally have different education or different skill sets, or do we have to look at why it's easier for officers than for non-commissioned or...?

Mr. Luc Généreux: Interestingly, four of the positions for which I was called for an interview.... In fact, I got called for interviews during the same week for the four positions. All four departments had received a copy of my CV via friends of mine. I applied formally, but I also had them circulate my CV. Some managers do not believe in the system, so if you know somebody inside who can circulate your CV and say, "Oh, by the way, there's a good candidate in the pool. Let's pick from the pool."

I was in the pool, and my CV was also circulated on an informal network. We have to use the system, but then bypass the system in order to be called for an interview.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Who else was in that pool?

Mr. Luc Généreux: There were pools that I had applied to—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Right, but as a medical discharge, you're not in some pool.

Mr. Luc Généreux: There are two, in fact. There are positions posted that people within the priority hires can apply for, but the public service also has a pool of names. If a manager knows you're a priority and also in the pool, you may have more of a chance to be called for an interview.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Aubin, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us.

First, on behalf of all Canadians, thank you for your years of service. You deserve better than the obstacle course that you've just described.

My first question will be very quick. I would like you all to answer it.

At the start of the process, how were you personally informed of your eligibility for priority hiring? Did you find out on your own or did someone show you the steps to take?

Mr. Luc Généreux: In my case, I was initially released in 2014, on a voluntary basis. After two years, in 2016, they told me that I was being released for medical reasons. At that time, I learned through newsletters, documents or newspapers that I was eligible to apply and that I had a set number of months to activate my priority status in the public service.

Mr. Robert Aubin: The reason is that you were looking for the documents yourself. No one assisted you.

Mr. Luc Généreux: Exactly.

Mr. Robert Aubin: What about you, Mr. Hicks?

Mr. Robert Hicks: I did the research. I was the one who told the public servants about the restrictions or requirements of the legislation at the start of the process, in 2012, 2013 or 2014. I was more of an expert than they were.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Wow!

What was your experience, Mr. Northey?

[English]

Mr. Robert Northey: Regarding my entitlement to priority hiring, I was told through SISIP, SCAN seminars and other peers who were getting out. For me, it was actually well known that I was entitled to priority hiring, especially as a medical release.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: What about you, Mr. Zerebecki?

[English]

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: Yes, I was also told through the SCAN seminars. There was quite a period of time between the SCAN seminar and when I actually activated my priority. I had to go back and find out where to get that activation. I didn't anticipate it taking so long to get through even that process.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

I'll turn to you, Mr. Hicks. In your opening remarks, you shocked me a little bit, and I would even say that you shocked me a lot, when you said that you never received a response regarding the difference between emergency communications and crisis communications.

In your opinion, how does the skills recognition process work? How do we distinguish between the skills that you acquired during your military career and the skills that are needed in civilian life?

I have the impression that the process is as complicated as recognizing the skills of a foreign doctor.

● (1700)

Mr. Robert Hicks: Based on my experience with the situation, the reason was that they didn't want to hire me. It was an excuse that they found for not hiring me. The reason wasn't that a crisis doesn't mean an emergency or an emergency doesn't mean a crisis. The words are synonyms.

It was just an excuse to tell me that I didn't have the skills to participate in the competition and that they were going to turn to someone else.

Mr. Robert Aubin: A number of you have spoken about the many barriers that must be overcome during the process. In your opinion, who should be held primarily responsible for the barriers that you need to overcome? Is there always a new person responsible for the barriers that emerge, or do we keep coming back to the same point?

Mr. Luc Généreux: I would say that there are barriers at several levels, in a number of departments. I've encountered barriers in the public service, at Veterans Affairs Canada and at the language centre.

To get back to your question, for example—

Mr. Robert Aubin: Let me interrupt you.

Do you face the same barriers in each department, or is the process different depending on the department that you're applying to work for?

Mr. Luc Généreux: Each department has different barriers.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Wow!

Mr. Robert Hicks: I'd say that the same barriers exist everywhere. It's the same mentality from department to department. Human resources are the issue in the various departments.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Where will we find the solution? Will we find the solution to the barriers in each department's human resources service, or should the solution come from higher up, through a message sent to all levels?

[English]

The Chair: I'm afraid we'll have to wait until the next round to get an answer to that.

Mr. Boissonnault, welcome to our committee. You have five minutes.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. It's a great pleasure to be here. I can't believe I'm saying that about the OGGO committee; however, some of the reports I've read from this committee are really good soporifics.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I want to start by saying thank you. Thank you to each and every one of you for your service, and for all that you are and have learned about navigating the federal public service system.

North of my riding and north of Mr. McCauley's riding is 3rd Canadian Division Support Base Edmonton. We're very proud of Edmonton garrison and the women and men who serve there.

I have five minutes, so I'm going to go with short, sharp questions.

[Translation]

I'll start with you, Mr. Généreux.

You were a lieutenant-colonel. You have a great deal of experience. In particular, you managed 600 people.

In the public service, is there a series of equivalencies for the various skills that determine whether a person has the necessary skills for a specific position?

Mr. Luc Généreux: I'd say no, and I'll tell you an anecdote.

When I applied to work in the public service, I submitted my file by completing the requested form. The file was submitted to a classification expert. According to the decision, I could apply for an engineering apprenticeship position, which is usually given to a graduate with two years of experience or to an intermediate engineer.

I didn't stop there.

Before I left the Canadian Forces, my position had been classified, for civilian employment purposes—I was entitled to take a vacation—at the senior engineering level. I asked the classification expert whether I could appeal the decision. I had documents proving that my position had been classified at the senior engineering level. I sent the documents, and in the end, they told me that I was eligible to apply for senior engineering positions.

If I hadn't had access to those documents, I would have been eligible to apply for only engineering apprenticeship positions. These positions are given to engineers with two years of experience, whereas I have almost 30 years of experience.

[English]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Maybe the committee could consider this idea of equivalencies, so that the public service doesn't have reasons to go internal-only.

Mr. Northey, you said that something clicked at the end, you persevered and you found a good position. What, other than your perseverance, changed? What tilted things in your favour, so that you could find the job that you have?

• (1705)

Mr. Robert Northey: I had a hiring manager and a department that had the values and the ethics to follow the priority hiring program, and to believe in me enough and in my service to see the true value of what I could provide. I would go one step further. I work for DND right now, but in my department, I'm the only representative with previous military service.

I have the value of being able to navigate the system, understanding the chain of command, the culture, the day-to-day life of living in uniform. My department sees value in my being able to communicate that to the other civilians within the department.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I may seem like a rogue element on our own committee here, but the partisan hats are off. There are 338 of us in Parliament and there are 300,000 federal public servants. Just do the math—that's a whole lot of hiring managers. It also takes a while to change the ship of state. What you just said sounds to me like running an ag department without anybody who understands farming. Your unit has one person who understands what it's like to be in the field. It doesn't matter whether you're in finance, ag or

somewhere. You'd have on-the-ground experience. That's the kind of thing we're setting this up for. It's to not have your field experience inside your own shop. I take that to heart.

Mr. Zerebecki, you mentioned you would hope that some of the spousal benefits and some of the other things could be loosened up or more liberalized. Can you give us some examples of what you'd like to see happen?

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: It's been a long understood issue with regard to moving your family around with the military. It's always hard to find employment for your spouses. When the member, who is the breadwinner in the family, is transitioning, it makes that even harder.

There was the METSpouse program. It's still active. My wife tried to use that program when we relocated, and the opportunities were marginal entry-level opportunities that would not help our situation. Most of them were nighttime, call centre-type jobs. If she had some priority entitlement or a regulatory entitlement to just see the rest of the federal jobs that were out there.... I'm not saying to get them to the front of the line by any means, but just a little more help during that transition period.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Thank you, Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome everyone to your House of Commons.

Thank you for doing such a wonderful job of serving our country. I would like to thank the 2,000 men and women who have been deployed in recent weeks, particularly in Quebec, to deal with the unprecedented floods that we've experienced and endured. I know that my colleagues have already offered their thanks. However, I thought that I should do the same, given that I'm from Quebec City, which is very close to the Valcartier military base.

I would like to congratulate you on this incredible collaboration between the provincial and federal governments. As a result of the collaboration, these men and women can take action, in the best sense of the word, and provide a service. This is also why you and these military members joined the Canadian army.

Mr. Généreux, I'll keep talking with you and I'll follow up on what Mr. Aubin and Mr. Boissonnault have said.

You caught our attention earlier when you said that you needed help from friends to submit your CV. Can you elaborate on that? Why doesn't the system work and why did you need help from friends to make it work?

Mr. Luc Généreux: As my colleagues here today have said, and as a number of people have told me, there's a perception that the candidates on the priority list aren't the right candidates. A number of managers have acknowledged this perception. There's a system whereby positions are posted, and we can be added to a pool of candidates in order to be considered for one of the positions. Managers can draw from this pool as needed.

In my case, I circulated my CV in some departments. Some departments are looking for qualified people, but they have difficulty finding them. When these people saw my CV, they said that they didn't know I was available. That's when I received calls for an interview.

The perception of the system is that it doesn't generate good candidates. In three cases, I was contacted because I had boosted my application by circulating my CV on my own. The system works to some extent.

• (1710)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: You've experienced this situation in four different departments?

Mr. Luc Généreux: I've experienced this situation at the Department of National Defence, in two cases, and at Public Services and Procurement Canada, in another case. This has happened in at least three departments.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I can understand that Agriculture Canada, for example, may not have the same open-mindedness because the expertise isn't the same. I'm not defending this department, far from it. However, I don't understand why National Defence wasn't able to assess you properly. The one place on the planet where you should be properly assessed is National Defence, since you've served in the Canadian Forces for years.

Mr. Luc Généreux: Yes.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: How do you explain this?

Mr. Luc Généreux: If a manager knows that a quality candidate is available, the manager may be more interested. On that note, one of my recommendations today would be to inform managers of the benefits that veterans can provide for their departments.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I understand, but why doesn't this work at the Department of National Defence?

Mr. Luc Généreux: I don't know.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: May I ask you a question? That's why we're here, anyway. Are the managers military members?

Mr. Luc Généreux: In a number of cases, no. The people who make the decisions are human resources analysts. The analysts are usually the ones who do the initial screening.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: If, by chance, the people responsible for the selection process also had real expertise in the military field, do you think that this could be useful?

Mr. Luc Généreux: That could make things easier, anyway.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: These people would have a somewhat better idea of what's going on.

Mr. Luc Généreux: Yes.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Okay.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Yip, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you for your service, and thank you for coming.

We've heard a lot of frustration in searching for a job. I was wondering if you ever approached the veterans ombudsman or someone else who would advocate for you or as a group.

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: Having recently gone through this process, I did get to an application. I did not understand why it was rejected. It turns out there were some wording issues in one part of the response. My first course of action in the rejection letter was to go to the Public Service Commission. They told the hiring manager to give me further feedback. I got further feedback. I went back to the Public Service Commission and they said I got further feedback and that's it.

From there I went back to the Department of National Defence. They put me through to VPSU. I was unaware that this unit even existed before then. I had conversations on how I had to wordsmith my submissions to a point that I didn't even understand what I was applying for. That was my process.

Ms. Jean Yip: Did you not think to go back to Veterans Affairs?

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: I was connected with Veterans Affairs through the veterans in the public service unit. They were the ones that eventually reviewed my submission and told me how I was going to improve it next time. It wasn't the Public Service Commission, it wasn't DND, and it wasn't the hiring managers. It was the VPSU.

Ms. Jean Yip: Anybody else...?

Mr. Robert Hicks: Do you mean the guy who left and didn't shake any of our hands or want to know who we were? I'm sorry, but that answers it right there.

We're thrown to the wolves. We have degrees, diplomas, professional accreditations. Quite frankly, trying to get us into the civil service, it seems that until there's some system of accountability and some—pardon my language, I'm trying to be respectful—hammer of the gods to say, "Look, you're not hitting any of your targets. You're not doing anything right. Start all over again"....

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: Right now, the onus is on the members to find the help they need and to get their applications through. If you can't advocate for yourself, you'll fail in this system. There is no way to do it. If I weren't adamant and kept turning over every rock, I would not succeed.

• (1715)

Mr. Robert Northey: On top of that too, if it's clear somebody doesn't want me as a member of their team and I rattle the ombudsman's cage to get that position, then right there my job is in jeopardy. I'm on a one-year probation. If I was two minutes late, see you later.

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: I got the same advice from the Public Service Commission. Why would you want a job where they don't want you?

Ms. Jean Yip: All right.

I will cede the rest of my time to Randy, who has a burning question.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I'm going to test an idea on you. I know this is about jobs, but there's something else we want to do. We want to open up federal procurement to diversity groups. The U.S. has done this for 12 years for persons of colour, women, indigenous, vets, LGBTQ2 and persons with disabilities. If we could certify that there were veteran-owned businesses, and they would automatically get a piece of all the federal public services and the construction and the services that went out, would you like that idea? If so, let me know, and when you're wrapping up, tell me where you think the bias is coming from against vets, because I don't stand for it.

Go ahead, Mr. Hicks. You didn't get air time last time.

Mr. Robert Hicks: All right. Fair enough.

I think one thing you did was to sort touch on the fact that almost all of those employment equity groups—

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Four are protected.

Mr. Robert Hicks: Four are protected right now. We're not. I'll go to the meat of it and say, yes, that would be a fantastic idea for veterans to have a cut. The problem is, take a look at the four of us here. We're almost the demographic of the Canadian Armed Forces. We're four white males and I imagine we're straight. We don't fit into an environment where the hiring practices are all based on where you fit according to intersectionality and those kinds of rules.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. McCauley, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Great.

Thanks again, gentlemen. I think we all share your frustration over this. To go back to someone's comment earlier, when I was coming back from my break in between witnesses, they would not talk to me either as they passed through, which says a lot. We seem to be tilting windmills against the various bureaucratic levels again and again.

Mr. Drouin, one of my colleagues, talked about a quota system. What would you think of that? How would you apply it? I think we need to do something, but I think it would be kind of difficult to do that. Do you have any thoughts?

Mr. Robert Hicks: If you guys don't mind, I'll jump on this because I prepared a little bit for it.

When the EEA was implemented, it was because they recognized that certain groups were being marginalized and excluded from public life, from commercial life. That was way back when. That was women and that was visible minorities, and it sort of grew.

The simple fact is that we're hurting. We're a talented pool of people and we're being excluded from jobs when, as citizens, as taxpayers and as voters, we should have every single right to that kind of privilege. If we have to go to a quota system, which is originally what the act did, and do that for a little while, I would be happy to say turn off the tap once we build up to a critical mass and we don't need it anymore. We started with that to make sure everybody had a shot at the civil service. Having been in the private

sector, it's feast or famine. There's a reason why people say that the civil service is like winning the lottery.

Perhaps we have to go to a quota system, at least until we can prove ourselves. As I said, you give us the chance—you bet on us—and we'll produce for you.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's what the law is supposed to be.

To Mr. Boissonnault's comment about procurement, we were studying it and we heard very clearly from the bureaucrats that, no, we're following the law. Then we'd have all these identified groups saying, no, you're not, so it's not just for hiring vets.

Our first set of witnesses talked about the U.S. system where they have the equivalency of skills. We've heard from previous vets about BCIT in Burnaby, which has a similar set-up. To me, just looking at it, the biggest first step we could take would be to have something like that, to have the skill equivalency, so that they cannot shoot you down for having crisis communications and not emergency communications. Is that a fair idea? Are we on the right track to maybe focus on that as a priority?

• (1720)

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: Yes. I ran into that with some of my applications as well. I know that in the Coast Guard there was a requirement for marine radio communications. I had advanced comms in the military but that didn't really apply.

For most of the credentials that I ran into, they were on technical jobs. What I raised with the hiring manager is that if these are simple courses, why can't I do the course once I'm in the job? How do the people in the public service get these credentials in the first place? There's no school out there that gives you a radio operator certificate or a rigid hull inflatable operations course, right? Just train me to do it and I'll do it.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: What do you think the best complaint mechanism would be when you're running into these guys? I don't want to use the word “discrimination”, but the law says you have priority and you should be hired and they're pulling stuff like they're doing to, say, Mr. Northey. What do you think would be the best complaint mechanism? Obviously, going to PSC doesn't work, and the veterans ombudsman doesn't seem to be the way. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: Honestly, I think the PSC needs to have more teeth to mandate the hiring managers to have flexibility when converting these skills. It should be up to the hiring manager's discretion to say, “Yes, you know what? We'll find a place. We'll find a system that works for this, because you're close enough. You're never going to be perfect on all these credentials, but we'll make it work. We'll be adaptable.” That's what's missing.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Our final five-minute intervention will come from Monsieur Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be sharing one minute with Mr. Peterson because I feel generous today.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Thank you.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Zerebecki, you've explained your *cheminement* through the hiring. Once you applied for your current job, how long did it take before you went through the interview process and whatnot? Did that take a year or...?

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: I'm still waiting on an offer letter. It's been four weeks, so I don't know exactly when I'll start. I got that application on January 7, so it's been six months. I've been in the priority system for a year. I've consistently applied to every opportunity that came by my desk, and yes, it took a year.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It's something that we've heard. Once Canadians apply, the average wait time is one year from when you submit your application. I think all of us were sitting here and saying that by that time you're gone and you've found employment somewhere else. Thanks for that.

We've talked about the quota system. Mr. Hicks, you've expressed your opinions on that: If we can't hire veterans, then let's implement a quota system until we change that culture. I think that's the issue. While we all sit here and say, yes, we want to hire veterans, once that is translated it doesn't translate to the people actually doing the hiring down in the weeds, I would say.

What would you recommend? I've heard you say that the higher ranks are fine. They get jobs easily and they're transferable. I know you were in the room when the previous witnesses came here. There's a system in place within DND that helps transfer or sort of transfer your skills from military codes to civilian codes. Have you tried that?

Mr. Robert Hicks: No. I have never even heard of it. I released, my second time, in 2012, so most of this is brand new.

The thing that I will say is, again, bet on us. Bet on every single one of us, because odds are you're going to come up as a winner. Whoever the hiring manager is or whoever the HR person is, they would need direction to look at us. Again, I've been washed out for the difference between crisis and emergency. There are other funnier stories out there. They're synonyms, but....

The other thing I said—and I think it would be an easy way to go for it—to make it easy for hiring managers is to bring us on as consultants. Say to us, “Look, we're going to hire you as a temporary, as a try-before-you-buy, so you get a year, and if after a year you're still producing, we're giving you a second year.” If after the second year they still want to keep you, they have that year to make you permanent. I think every single one of us is willing to say, “All right, we'll earn our keep.” We'll earn our daily salt if we know there's a pathway to actually getting in and making the most of it.

I don't know if that answers your question—

● (1725)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes.

Mr. Robert Hicks: —but I think that's the way to go.

The Chair: You can go for one minute.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, and all of you, for your service and for being here today.

I wanted to get everyone's opinion briefly, if I could. What do you think is the benefit or the value of having almost a concierge system through either CAF or through Veterans Affairs to help you with this process? There's no inherent knowledge that anyone would be born with to be able to navigate this process, so what services should we provide to help you get through it?

Mr. Fraser Zerebecki: I've given this some thought, and right now that won't work, just because the system is so convoluted that you can't have one person who knows how to navigate the whole system. It would help, but it's not enough right now.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Okay.

Is there anyone else?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Généreux: We currently have a system made up of systems. If we had the help of a consultant or an expert, we could better navigate through all this and it would be a major step forward in improving the system. It may not solve all the problems, but it would help us to better manage our frustrations. We would receive tips and advice on how to navigate this minefield.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Colleagues, that will end our direct interventions.

Let me say in closing that I want to thank each and every one of you for being here today. I'll choose my words carefully when I say that your testimony has been not only informative but also, in many cases, eye-opening, and to underscore what Mr. Boissonnault and Mr. McCauley said, at times, troubling.

If you have any other suggestions or recommendations that you feel our committee should consider as we continue our report, I would recommend strongly that you get those in to our clerk. Believe me, all of your testimony will help form part of our final report.

Once again, thank you for your service to your country. Thank you for your testimony here today.

Colleagues, we are adjourned.

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