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# **Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Monday, May 13, 2019**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski**



## Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Monday, May 13, 2019

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)):** I will call the meeting to order. We are continuing with our study of hiring veterans for public service positions.

Colleagues, before we get into the meeting itself, there is a housekeeping note. For our second panel, which will start appearing at 4:30 p.m., we have three individuals by video conference, but that will be a 45-minute session. I would like to reserve the last 15 minutes of this meeting for some committee business.

With that brief introduction, I'd like to welcome all of our guests who are here in person.

We also have, via video conference from Windsor, Ontario, Florin Corcoz. Thank you for being here as well.

We'll start with Mr. Corcoz by video conference. All of our panellists have brief opening statements. I don't think any one of them exceeds five minutes in duration. That should leave us plenty of time for questions.

Without any further ado, Mr. Corcoz, the floor is yours.

We don't seem to have audio on our end. Just give us a moment and we'll try to rectify that situation. While we're working on the technical difficulties from this end, we will start with Mr. Ticknor.

Mr. Ticknor, thank you for being here. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Donald Ticknor (Sergeant-at-Arms, Chairman of Voluntary Resources and Executive Committee Member, Branch 350, Royal Canadian Legion):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you ladies and gentlemen for having me. I appreciate it. Hopefully, I can represent our veterans as best as possible and with integrity.

I have two briefs. I will try to be quick to get through them.

As a priority hire status and a veteran, and the sergeant-at-arms, chairman of voluntary resources and executive committee member of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 350, I find it is necessary to address some major problems with the hiring process of CX-01 correctional officer positions in relation to veterans and other candidates.

I propose that a veteran who has already been successful at the Canadian Armed Forces Military Police Assessment Centre, the acronym for which is MPAC; who holds a police foundations diploma with a high GPA; and who is a priority hire status should

not, without reasonable excuse, be denied an immediate offer of employment as a CX-01 correctional officer and be sent to Kingston, Ontario, for a correctional officer course. The candidate should also bypass some of the training in Kingston in relation to the already gained skill sets the candidate earned while being in the Canadian Armed Forces.

The reasoning is that the candidate has already, at this point, gone through an aptitude test at the local military recruiting centre, which is valid for life, and earned a high aptitude score to be considered as a military police candidate. The candidate has also undergone a full background check, medical and physical fitness tests, and has completed the requirements for priority hire status.

The candidate has completed MPAC, a three-day testing period for MP candidates where judgment, memory, integrity and other factors are assessed by the selection officers present. Keep in mind, I am not allowed to reveal the types of testing for confidentiality reasons, as I am not legally permitted.

These tests are credible and state of the art, more so than the 90-minute, 100-question multiple choice of either one of five options: ineffective, somewhat ineffective, not effective or not ineffective, somewhat effective, or effective, for the CX-01 correctional officer SJT, situational judgment test, which is ineffective at properly measuring SJT. The test is so subjective and vague at determining a proper SJT and is inappropriate compared with the far more credible and significantly more thorough three-day MPAC.

I recommend true or false questions, with less grey areas of subjectivity, coupled with scenarios to actually see how a candidate may or may not act in a certain situation for the SJT, situational judgment test. Those who have passed the MPAC should obviously bypass the correctional officer SJT and be sent immediately to the correctional officer course in Kingston, Ontario, and bypass some of the courses for already gained skill sets that the candidate earned while being in the Canadian Armed Forces.

It would be highly inappropriate to not make the needed changes on the SJT in the CX-01 correctional officer test, and highly discriminatory for those veterans who qualify, as listed above, for the policy to go unamended.

Mr. Chair, may I present the second brief?

**The Chair:** Certainly.

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** Veterans in supervisory and managerial roles create a positive synergy. The proposal is that veterans be considered priority hire based on an honourable release and that consideration be made for the public service to allocate a significantly greater percentage of veterans into the public service as priority hire and for supervisory and managerial roles.

The reasoning is that veterans have great practical experience when it comes to various avenues of life. These skills and attributes of veterans make many veterans suited for managerial and supervisory role positions based on a lot of the leadership qualities veterans possess, such as having the practice and utilization of teamwork experience in motivating others to complete goals and tasks. It would benefit almost any organization to utilize veterans for their skills and practical experience to further our public service and our country.

This is signed, sincerely, by Donald Ticknor—me—Royal Canadian Legion Branch 350, sergeant-at-arms, chairman of voluntary resources and executive committee member.

• (1535)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your testimony.

We'll now continue with our in-person witnesses. Mr. John Hewitt is next up.

Mr. Hewitt, you have five minutes or less.

**Mr. John Hewitt (As an Individual):** Thank you so much.

My name is John Colin Hewitt. I was named after my grandfather, Colin Bruce, a World War II pilot, and his father, a Boer War veteran. I grew up seeing my mother look at my father wearing his uniform in that indescribable way a woman's eyes convey the look that a man will live and die for.

Thank you for hearing me speak today. Let me begin by commending all the past and present casualties of war and the suicides. Your valour is not lost on us. We understand why you have done this.

To begin, I am not a war veteran. Let me tell you a bit of my story that led me into the priority process. I will skip right to my injury. I was injured in para school in Trenton, Ontario, during crash week. I landed badly, felt a sharp pain in my back, and at lunch I was locked up and sent to the hospital, carried away on a stretcher. I was given some muscle relaxants and I ran immediately back to school to complete my para course. I did not know then but I had herniated a disk in my back that hit my sciatic nerve. I jumped nine more times with pain increasing. Finally, on a rucksack march, my legs went numb and I dropped. An MRI showed the injury and I was put in JPSU.

At that time I only had a grade six education and learning disabilities to boot. I hired a specialist for a month to reteach me grade one. By the end of the month, I was up to a college reading level. From there, I completed high school and all the prerequisites for college. While awaiting release, I did two years at Lethbridge College. I had to drop two courses because of the workload, which was so intense due to my lack of education.

I entered into the priority system only to find that my school was only transferable to Parks Canada, which was exempt from the priority system. I was able to land a seasonal job as a park ranger. When the job ended, I was desperate for work, so I went back on the tugboat. I had severe pain. I found out about the VAC rehab system. I did not want to be provided for but I had a new baby at this time so my wife was off work. Out of desperation, I took a job with the Coast Guard as a labourer. I ended up in the hospital on the Alaska border and was flown home. My wife went back to work early while I looked after our baby so I could recover and get some money to live.

Veterans vocational rehab was approved by this time, and there was an assessment done. Once again, I went back to work as a labourer at DFO. Once again, the pain was overwhelming, even with cortisone shots. I saw a doctor and he said to me, "No more labour jobs." My back was screwed. I needed back and knee surgery.

At this point, after reading an investigative report into veterans committing suicide after war due to systemic problems, I decided to get a psychology degree. It took me three or four tries to upgrade my English for the psychology program, while going through back and knee surgery, a divorce and a constant fight against the Veterans Affairs system that said I was too young for this injury. Their doctor said my back was getting better—the opposite of what my doctor said.

Then it struck me. I knew why veterans were committing suicide. I was outraged. Why would VAC say these things? I went to an officer at the Legion who had experience dealing with Veterans Affairs. He said, "You know this is an insurance company, don't you?" Now it all made sense to me. I decided to fight back, get a lawyer and gather evidence but the doctors would not write me letters confirming the degeneration of my injuries, stating, "I do not deal with insurance agencies."

VAC finally left me alone when I was scheduled for surgery. After surgery, I finished upgrading. My prerequisites were entered into the psychology program, and once again, I was attacked for my learning disabilities. I was told a degree would take me too long. The final blow was an intelligence test the day before my psychology finals. All along I knew their intentions. They found my verbal abilities were well above average, but my math and spelling were well below average, disqualifying me from funding and pushing me back into labour.

I was done fighting. Without going into detail, I woke up in an ambulance, having been brought back to life. My dreams were crushed, my faith in Canada, myself and humanity were gone. Desperate, I started volunteering at a disability centre to gain some entrance-level administration experience, knowing I needed to preserve my back so I could play with my son in the future. I took a typing course, again began to apply for positions in the priority system and was denied, denied and denied.

I fought back, phoning everyone I could and demanding answers. I had no choice but to fight until I broke through.

• (1540)

I'm now at Service Canada. Here, I found what I can only explain as people accepting me for the way I am and empathizing with and understanding my past troubles. The manager quite frankly was too good to be true in terms of my diminished trust. He placed me beside a fellow PPCLI veteran who took me under his wing. The team leader was an ex-DND employee who spearheaded a mental health community and set up a decompression room. I had miraculously landed in a dysfunctional veteran's paradise.

I'm well behind my colleagues, and I have a feeling of constant guilt and pain that is always present, but they tell me every day that I'm worth it and to take a walk when I need to. They say, "When you get sore, we're behind you, no matter what." What they have done for me brings tears to my eyes. It will take me a long time to get my well-being back, but I have time.

I told them that I was excited to share this news, and they told me that I was lucky to be at this office. Quite frankly, other veterans would not get this support in some of the other places, but with this, I digress.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Hewitt.

We'll now go on to Mr. Grant. Hopefully, we'll have audio. The video conference seems to be down, but hopefully we'll have Mr. Corcoz by teleconference.

Mr. Grant, you're up first.

**Mr. Alex Grant (As an Individual):** Honourable chairman and committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

I am a retired naval officer. I work for DND, but I worked for VAC for three years. My evidence is as an individual from the perspective of a middle manager who was tasked to operationalize the Veterans Hiring Act, or VHA.

Back in July 2015, the VHA amended the Public Service Employment Act. Medically released personnel are now eligible for either statutory or regulatory entitlement, dependent on whether their release was or was not attributable to service. They have five years to activate their entitlement, and when it's activated, they have priority for five years or until they accept indeterminate employment with the public service. Serving members and all veterans have preference for external processes for five years from date of release. They also have mobility, which means they are eligible to participate in internally advertised appointment processes for up to five years after date of release.

I am very pro-VHA, but clearly to the layman it is complex. With the VHA, many armed forces members and veterans believed that upon retirement, they were automatically entitled to a public service job. This is not the case. When hit with the reality of public service hiring, some became bitter and felt betrayed.

As well, the VHA creates a complex space between the Public Service Commission, Veterans Affairs Canada and Canadian Armed Forces mandates. The Public Service Commission's mandate is to promote and safeguard merit-based appointments to protect the non-partisan nature of the public service. They are all about fairness and transparency. VAC's core mandate extends to the care, treatment or re-establishment in civilian life of any person who served in the Canadian Forces. Finally, one of the seven basic armed forces professional development objectives is to prepare retiring CAF members for the transition to civilian life. You have three departments whose mandates touch in this complex space, with no clear lead department, no MOU and confused clients. This is probably why this committee has been assembled.

Veterans Affairs Deputy Minister Walter Natynczyk talks to a lot of veterans and service members. He understands their concerns, and in an effort to close the seam between the departments, he took the initiative to create the veterans in the public service unit, or VPSU. You've heard about the VPSU's award-winning accomplishments from the Veterans Affairs director general of HR and other veterans. Its lines of effort are to influence two audiences—one, the veterans of today and tomorrow, and two, the public service hiring managers. There is a service delivery arm made up of veterans who understand the Veterans Hiring Act, have experienced the public service hiring process, and connect and relate with their clients as brothers in arms. To influence hiring managers, a strategic initiatives arm has, one, created an interdepartmental working group; two, leveraged GCconnex to share best practices; and three, completed outreach and connection pilot projects.

As the VPSU concept matured, I did internal stakeholder engagement at Veterans Affairs Canada. This is where I started to get a sense that operationalizing the VHA was going to be a difficult journey. I was challenged by HR professionals and hiring managers alike to justify the expense and resource drain of the VPSU when veterans are not an employment equity group. The answer, obviously, is that most veterans are not an employment equity group but the Government of Canada and Canadian people think they deserve enhanced public service hiring consideration—thus the VHA.

To improve, this will require continued education and accountability of our HR professionals and hiring managers. I have worked collaboratively with the Public Service Commission. I am confident they have the expertise required to address this issue. However, holding hiring managers accountable is an individual department's responsibility. I suggest that the way to do this and maintain transparency and fairness is for deputy ministers to, one, follow Veterans Affairs' lead and consider their department's mandate; two, consider the value that veterans represent; and three, establish reasonable aspirational hiring goals.

Then hold the hiring managers accountable for their actions. How can this be done? Well, I heard VIA Rail's president speak at a career fair. He said he has every director who screens out a veteran report to him and explain why and how that veteran could not be accommodated. When it comes to veteran hiring, I think public service directors and DGs can learn from his style of leadership and accountability.

When I left VAC, the requisite memos to cabinet and Treasury Board submissions were being considered to fund the VPSU. Up to that time, the VPSU had been funded through the DG of HR's funding envelope, and she was creative and innovative in making it work. I hope this can-do attitude continues, but I am concerned.

One of my last meetings while at VAC was to listen to legal counsel explain how they were having trouble aligning what the VPSU was doing with Veterans Affairs' mandate. To me, it's an obvious match. I hope they've figured it out, especially since a significant portion of VAC's evidence to this committee related to VPSU accomplishments.

• (1545)

In sum, there are two primary audiences: veterans who need to be mentored through the process, from skills translation to application, interview and immersion into a brand new culture; and appropriately monitored public service hiring managers who need to be educated about the veteran labour pool.

Sir, thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Finally, colleagues, we will have, by teleconference from Windsor, Mr. Florin Corcoz.

Mr. Corcoz, can you hear us? Are you receiving any audio? It looks like we're trying to get a connection here, colleagues.

Failing that, we will continue to try to reach him by teleconference, but I don't want to delay the proceedings any more than we have to, so we'll go immediately into questions.

Colleagues, we won't be able to get two full rounds in, but I think we'll still go with the seven-minute rounds. That will allow three questions from the government, two from the official opposition and one from the NDP.

For the first seven-minute intervention, we have Mr. Peterson.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, gentlemen, for being with us today. Your testimony was very enlightening for our study here.

Mr. Hewitt, I want to start with you. You're currently with Service Canada. Is that what you said?

**Mr. John Hewitt:** Yes.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Where are you located?

**Mr. John Hewitt:** I'm in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** How did you come about getting that job?

**Mr. John Hewitt:** I applied to, probably, five jobs. I applied to that job through the priority hire. I believe I got sent a priority message. I replied to it and then I did a follow-up email to ensure continuity to the manager. I'm pretty sure they didn't send it to the manager, but tenacity is really the only word that's going to get you anywhere.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Let me just say that I think what you've accomplished is remarkable considering the challenges you've faced and the obstacles you've had to overcome. Personally, I want to congratulate you for that tenacity. I think it's great to see the accomplishments that you've achieved based on your commitment to getting it done.

**Mr. John Hewitt:** Thank you.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Maybe I'll ask Mr. Grant, because it seems to segue into this a bit. You say you have two audiences here: the veterans whom you want to make sure have the proper expectations going into the process, which is a good way of looking at it; and on the other side, the managers and the people hiring. Mr. Hewitt seems to have found a good match in Service Canada. The manager in charge seems to appreciate that there needs to be some accommodation, values the contribution that Mr. Hewitt makes and obviously knows that any accommodation is well worth the return he's going to get.

Is that the perspective we need every manager to have?

• (1550)

**Mr. Alex Grant:** I think that would be great. I think there's probably an education piece there. I'm not sure where the research came from, but I have, from when I was working at VAC, close relations with the research group there. There's a best practice called "individual placement and support" which asks what is required for people who are coming back into the workplace. It requires a lot of engagement from not only the new employee but also from the manager. So, yes, I do agree.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** That's good—so do I. It seems to me that if we can operationalize this legislation to make that one of the metrics, it could go a long way towards getting us where we need to be. I think you'll agree with that.

Mr. Ticknor, thanks for your testimony, too. That was very enlightening. You were speaking about the specific example of the military police being able to become correctional service officers. Generally, that sheds some light on a problem that we're hearing about a lot: The specific skills learned in the military don't easily translate into layperson skills, so to speak. I think part of the shortcoming of making this work is that we as a government, depending on whatever department you want to look at, Veterans Affairs or DND, haven't taken the necessary steps to make that more seamless.

Would you agree with that?

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** I actually fully endorse your statement, most definitely.

That being said, my expertise on the subject has added light to the code talk of how these transferable skills align with CX-01, correctional officer, in relation to those who have completed the military police assessment centre, most definitely.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Did you want to add something?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** I heard a lot in the previous evidence that skills translation figured prominently. I'm not sure if the committee knows that ESDC granted the Canada Company in excess of \$1 million to develop a skills translator. It's called MNET. It stands for MOC, which is the military occupation code, and NOC—national occupation code—equivalency tool.

The beta version came up online. Then when Canada Company closed its military employment transition program, access to MNET went away. I've used MNET. I thought it was a great first start. It should come back.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Do we know the status?

Is it mothballed somewhere or is it gone for good?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** I don't know the status.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Okay. We'll have to maybe figure that out ourselves if we can. It seems to me that's exactly the kind of tool we might need. It's a shame we're not using it, for whatever reason. There might be a good explanation.

Mr. Grant, you mentioned the term "entitled" to a public service job. Is that a communications failing by VAC or by DND? Is there way to rationalize expectations when someone is leaving the service?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** I think that's what it was like back in 2015. We were talking about it in the ship and I'm sure they were talking about it at the water coolers in the armoury. It is complex, so there were misunderstandings. Some people thought they were going to get a public service job just handed to them, but no, they have to meet the essential qualifications of the job.

We want to make it easy for.... I'll stop there.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Go ahead if you want to.

**Mr. Alex Grant:** I just think that this veteran audience needs help. It's a totally different culture. They don't understand the paradigm of how the public service hiring system works. You've heard some horror stories of folks being told by hiring managers that they weren't suitable for the job because they mixed up crisis communications with emergency communications. Those things

happen quite a bit and it's very disheartening. The word gets out on Facebook and it gets out amongst the community and it creates a negative expectation.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Yes, we've heard that.

Mr. Ticknor, when were you released?

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** It was November 20, 2014.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** What was your expectation when you left, just as an example? How has that process played out?

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** I thought my skills would be directly transferable. On a personal note, to get into it, since you're asking—

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Go ahead, if you're comfortable.

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** I just found out on Friday that the individual who was in charge of releasing me from the Canadian Armed Forces was going through an epicentre of PTSD during the time I served under his chain of command. His releasing me was based on his faulty medical judgment of PTSD. That's another issue that can be addressed in reference to my personal file.

● (1555)

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Okay. Interesting.

**The Chair:** I just want to check and see whether or not we have Mr. Corcoz on teleconference.

We will go with your opening statement, Mr. Corcoz.

Colleagues, I'll interrupt the interventions.

Please go ahead.

**Mr. Florin Corcoz (As an Individual):** Good evening, everyone.

My name is Florin Corcoz. I am a veteran of the Canadian Forces, a former naval engineer.

I joined the Canadian Forces in January 2010, and I was voluntarily released in October 2013 from the full-time position, and in May 2014 from the reserve, a part-time position.

I am here to explain my experience in applying for job opportunities within the public service. I am a professional engineer with a licence in Ontario and Alberta. I received my bachelor's degree from a Romanian university. Additionally, I graduated with an M.B.A. from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia in May 2017. Emory University is considered one of the top 20 American business schools.

I applied for 10 jobs open to the public and to nine internal jobs. The list of jobs can be seen in the addendum to the memo I submitted this morning. I applied for jobs that required managerial skills, such as senior project manager, project manager, change manager and director. From a total of 20 jobs, I was able to have two written exams, but I didn't pass to the next level, an interview.

Additionally, I had some supplementary questions for a job as a regional regulatory compliance manager opportunity from the hiring manager, but I wasn't selected for an interview.

I passed the IT field test related to HR, to the next level of every single application, receiving the message that my application had been retained. I would be contacted directly if I were to be further assessed.

None of this could have been possible without help from a veterans adviser, Jen, who helped me a lot in updating my resumé and sharpening my interview skills.

Also, I was able to have a job interview for a DND engineering position in the Toronto area, but I applied by sending my resumé to an email address. My military experience didn't seem to have any impact and the focus of the interview was on my civilian experience only.

In conclusion, military experience and/or training received in the military doesn't seem to be a helpful selection criterion for the hiring manager, unless you are medically released. I say “medically released” because this is another type of application for jobs in the public service.

That is my statement.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Deltell, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

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

Thank you, gentlemen here in Ottawa and Mr. Corcoz in Windsor.

Welcome to the House of Commons, Mr. Corcoz, and on behalf of all Canadians, thank you for your duty in achieving what we are today.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to begin with you, Mr. Grant. Earlier you said that there was a lot of disappointment among veterans when they apply for the government program designed to give them access to the public service. Expectations are very high and, of course, there are disappointments. The program may generate more disappointment and frustration than assistance.

Should we, in your opinion, tell people right from the outset that there are no guarantees with that program?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** I agree with that, sir.

I would say that there is less disappointment now. There is much more information, and there are more resources. In 2015, when the new law came into effect, no one understood it. There were a lot of disappointments and a lot of people who did not get through the public service hiring process successfully. Those people were not happy.

Now, even the Canadian Armed Forces have a lot of public servants who provide information sessions. There are also information sessions given by Veterans Affairs Canada, resources on the Canadian Armed Forces website and that of Veterans Affairs Canada. The program is much better understood now.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** First of all, I'd like to thank you for the quality of your French, which I greatly appreciate.

**Mr. Alex Grant:** I am from Montreal, sir, from the West Island, the anglophone suburbs.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** So you are a Quebecker—we are very proud—and a great Canadian also.

Mr. Grant, do you think we should think about a private sector solution also? Of course, the Canadian government has control over the hiring of its employees, but do you think we should also develop incentive programs for private sector employers, to encourage them to hire veterans?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** Yes.

In my opinion, this would be part of the second phase of the Veterans in the Public Service Unit. Veterans Affairs Canada has a plan, a strategy with an action plan that includes private sector hiring.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** We probably would not be in favour of providing subsidies or things of that nature, but what would you think about a basic information data bank where veterans could enter their names? The government could guide people and help them to find jobs in private enterprise. As for private companies, they would, of course, have access to that bank. I'm not talking about subsidizing jobs, but about helping, guiding both veterans and private companies, to allow them to get in touch. What do you think of that idea?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** I agree with that idea. There are resources for veterans who want to find a private sector job, but I am not an expert on that.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Is this something you hear veterans say—that they are quite happy to work in the public service, but would probably be just as pleased to work in the private sector?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** In my opinion, the public service is incredible: good jobs, good salaries, and another pension. There are also holidays. Today, in calculating holidays, the public service takes time served as a military member into account. So there are a lot of advantages to working in the public service. Personally, I would say to every veteran to come and work for the public service, because we need their experience and leadership qualities. I am all for the public service.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** That is what I thought I had understood, and that is very good. We will always need them, all countries need an excellent public service. In Canada, we are very pleased to have one.

[*English*]

Gentlemen, may I ask you this, based on your experience? Is it okay for you if you go to the public sector, or would you like to also go to the private sector? If you have the same opportunities, the same chance to go to the public sector or the private sector, what do you think will be good for you?

• (1605)

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** Are you talking in reference to DND?

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Yes.

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** My situation is interesting. For me, personally, I'd rather go to the public sector when it has to do with housekeeping in DND affairs—for reference, medically releasing somebody.

In my situation, my boss was the top military police on base. That being said, he wanted me out. There was an assault causing bodily harm done by one of his subordinates. It was covered up, even though I had two witness statements and my impact statement. I suggest that he colluded with the medical authorities on base. I collected collateral information from documents that were, I suggest, systematically removed from my file, documents that show that I was an outstanding soldier. One of them was with regard to a medal that I received for doing the Nijmegen March, an 165-kilometre march overseas with weight on my back for four days. That was removed. It's no longer part of my file, but I kept copies of it.

The medical authority had the tenacity to say, “Apparently, Corporal Ticknor did well in his transcripts.” She had the clearance level to check my transcripts, but did not say, “Confirmed his transcripts with a GPA of 3.87 in police foundations.” She made it sound as if I was imagining it. I'm glad that you caught that one.

Also, her whole assessment was based on her attacking my relationship with my wife. We've been together for eight years now. She's working to get her Ph.D. at Brock, and I'm at Brock as well. She was a physiotherapist in Dubai when this was going on, and there's collateral information to prove that as well. She based all these assessments on “He says this”, “He claims this”, “His thinking is very rigid” or “It appears he has thought disorder, delusional disorder.”

When she finally found out that my wife was bona fide legit, she changed the argument and immediately said, “He has religious delusions.” She then said that I failed the chaplain school. I received a letter that was permanently removed from my military file from the head of the chaplain school, who is actually an expert in religious affairs, not a layman in the matter. His appreciation letter I have—this collateral information—to prove the dishonesty.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, I'll have to—

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** With that being said, he said that my judgment is impeccable and that I can be counted upon off and on duty to act professionally, as I'd been doing throughout the entire course. I served in the office as general staff member for the officers' course, and I have much more collateral information. I went off base for a second opinion from a higher-ranking professional on September 4, 2014—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Unfortunately, Mr. Ticknor—

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** —and that professional said that there's nothing wrong with me. They avoided that second opinion. They didn't—

**The Chair:** Mr. Ticknor, I find this testimony fascinating, but unfortunately, only because we have a shortness of time here—and I apologize greatly—we're going to have to go into our next round of questioning.

Mr. MacGregor—unless he wants to take up on the subsequent question that Mr. Deltell had started—has seven minutes.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to all of you for appearing today and providing us with your opening statements.

Mr. Grant, you talked in your opening statement about the three different cultures at play—DND, VAC and the Public Service Commission of Canada.

My father served when I was very young. I spent three years of my life living in Lahr, West Germany—from 1982 to 1985. It was a pretty amazing experience. I come from a riding that is basically a stone's throw away from CFB Esquimalt, so I have a lot of active serving personnel in my riding and also a lot of veterans because the climate on Vancouver Island is pretty agreeable.

I'm sure you'll agree with that, Mr. Hewitt.

I've grown up with that, but in my adult life.... I don't think many of us get to experience what the military culture is all about. I had an amazing experience in 2017 when the Royal Canadian Navy invited parliamentarians onto the base to go on board one of our frigates. I went on board HMCS *Vancouver*. They took us for a three-day trip out to the western test-firing ranges. We got to see every aspect of how that ship works, how the entire crew works together as a team and all of the skills that are on display in making that ship operational every second of the day.

I think that I can speak for all of my colleagues who were on that trip together when I say that we walked away with a very different understanding, but a very beneficial understanding, of just how it all works. I know that there was reference made to the fact that human resources specialists and managers of VIA Rail spent a day in military training.

I'm just wondering if the three of you could provide some feedback on whether that kind of experience might be beneficial for people in the Public Service Commission to find out a little bit more about the military culture and also to see first-hand the leadership training that's on display—you know, the fact that you have to be able to think fast in certain situations to make those decisions quickly.

•(1610)

**Mr. Alex Grant:** There is actually an excellent program. It's called the Canadian Forces liaison council. They'll bring nominated bosses to army bases, to air force bases, onto ships. The reasoning behind that is, if the employer—and it's for reservists—understands what these reservists do for their country and the skills they gain by their military experience and their military training, and they bring all of that back to their workplace, it's a win for them.

I don't know of any soldiers, sailors or airmen who wouldn't be proud to showcase what they do.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Mr. Ticknor, Mr. Hewitt, do you have anything to add?

**Mr. John Hewitt:** I'm not a sadist, but to put an HR person into an infantry trench for a few days, I think, would alter her life path.

I think she would think a little differently when.... There's a disconnect. To steel man their argument, they're trying to keep Canada as efficient as possible. Putting me in there is bringing down the efficiency, so how can we not lower the bar but just teach us and show us the rungs? Just show us the rungs, at least, at the bare minimum. We don't want to lower the standard. We're guilty. We understand that. We're not trained in that and we get it. We know where they're coming from.

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** In reference to there being structured organizations out there that are designed to restructure an individual to their skill sets transferable from the military to the public service, I also suggest that those organizations—or a branch-off from that organization—review any exigent circumstances that may have or have not been present in an unlawful release from the Canadian Armed Forces, if that individual is willing to submit important and relevant collateral information that can disprove or prove so.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** You've made mention of the experiences you've had. I think it's quite evident, from what I saw during my experience, that leadership skills are on display, as well as the ability to work in a team and the ability to also act quickly when the situation requires it.

In your experience, did those general skill sets count for something, or were they trying to make you fit into some very narrow definition when you were trying to get into the public service?

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** To go along directly with what you're saying and not advocating the case and how I've been unjustified.... With that being said, going online and reviewing different applications, I found it said that it had an equivalency for a university degree, which I'm not finished despite the fact that I have a GPA at 3.87 in police foundations and I graduated top of the class out of 140 police foundations graduates.

They wanted me to provide collateral information on leadership skills. I supplied that information of my leadership skills, where I was a lead hand responder, 55 people, in the automotive industry, building the Lincoln MKX, the Ford Flex and the Ford Edge for three years, doing sub-assembly for Ford Motor Canada—working for Automodular. There was no way that I could actually submit collateral information such as a reference letter to prove that. My

leadership skills were not deemed transferable. I found that was an issue, to specifically answer your question on that.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Mr. Grant, here's the final question. You made reference to the three departments and that there is no memorandum of understanding, but we do have the VPSU in operation since 2017. Ultimately I think this committee wants to make some substantive recommendations to the government for what can be improved.

Do we need someone at the very top coordinating all three, or is the VPSU at that mid-level integrating them well? Is there anything further you can add?

•(1615)

**The Chair:** Give a very brief answer, if possible.

**Mr. Alex Grant:** Right now, General Natynczyk has said to get on with it, and VAC has taken a leadership role. I'm just concerned about what happens when he leaves Veterans Affairs and whether that same sort of focus on that.... It's a complex space filled with good people, but yes.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Mendès, you have seven minutes, please.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here.

I think I'd like to pick up on Mr. MacGregor's question about the three departments, because I actually took note of all this alphabet soup that you were throwing at us.

Mr. Hewitt's comment about VAC being an insurance company really threw me. Is that a literal or a figurative statement?

**Mr. John Hewitt:** You'd have to ask the doctors. I phoned Veterans Affairs advocacy and I asked the lawyer's office, "What do I say? How do I compel them to get me evidence for you?" They wouldn't answer the question, so I don't know.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** How would you see it, Mr. Grant?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** Can I circle back to the first part of your question?

The Public Service Commission owns the Public Service Employment Act, and that was amended by the Veterans Hiring Act. When I said that they're all about transparency and fairness, they are. They want the staffing of the public service to be crystal clear.

There was some talk in prior panels about setting quotas. I would suggest that the public service would cringe at the use of the word "quota", so what I would recommend is having the deputy ministers in Transport Canada and the Coast Guard look at this. They have jobs where there's a pretty good correlation between military skills and civilian skills.

They can say, “Veteran hiring is important for the Government of Canada. What does it make sense for my department to have as a complement of veterans?” and then set that aspirational goal. I think the Public Service Commission would be happier with an aspirational goal set by a deputy minister than hard quotas. That's the department saying, “We've looked at what we do and we think that this is what we should strive for.”

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** It makes sense that you recommend that. I like the example you gave of VIA Rail and how the president asks for accountability on why the hiring was not done. Not when it was done, but why the veteran did not fit whatever position. I think it's important that managers are held accountable for not hiring. That was the example you gave, wasn't it?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** It was the example. I was inspired when I heard him talk. He was so pro-veteran. He was passionate when he spoke about wanting an explanation as to why a veteran was screened out, if they screened a veteran out.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** Exactly, and you'd have to have pretty good reasons to—

**Mr. Alex Grant:** Right, and obviously the directors say, “I don't want to go into the president's office, so give me that veteran.”

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** That implies that there has to be a lot of accommodation, but why would there be that much accommodation? I don't see it necessary. You were saying that you bring them down, Mr. Hewitt, but how would you bring them down? You have skills. You have talent. You have experience.

**Mr. John Hewitt:** Could I have the context, please? I don't understand....

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** You were saying at some point that you understand that, in the context of the public service, you may bring it down.

**Mr. John Hewitt:** I'm saying they have an efficiency bar, and I'm saying I think it's a bad idea to bring that bar down for us but I think they should show us—

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** How to get there....

**Mr. John Hewitt:** —the elevations of how to get there. Let us see what's going on and let us see how we can access that job.

We need accountability from the HR. I phoned them and I asked them where I went wrong, if there were any rubrics that they go by, and is there a consensus that I can get some answers as to what... or is everything arbitrary? They said they all kind of think the same, all the HRs.

I said, “So they can arbitrarily get us out, deny us for any reason whatsoever?” Yes.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** Deny employment or deny promotion...?

**Mr. John Hewitt:** Deny employment, yes.

There's no consensus. There are no parameters on what they... They can disqualify. I've been disqualified for experience being over five years. I've been disqualified for... I have a list of disqualifications.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** Not having enough experience...?

How would you explain that, Mr. Grant, that there seems to be this disparity between the aspirations of both the department and the public service and the realities that veterans face?

• (1620)

**Mr. Alex Grant:** This is a personal opinion, and I understand why the Public Service Commission, with new directions of staffing, has delegated as far down as they can. They empower the hiring managers quite a bit in making decisions about who does and does not get hired.

The thing that I'm advocating for is that there needs to be some oversight of that.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** A deputy minister would be the right person.

**Mr. Alex Grant:** No, I would say the director or the DG, at that level.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** Okay.

**Mr. Alex Grant:** There's oversight, obviously, of employment equity hiring, and I go back to that example. Yes, most veterans are not an employment equity group, but they're pretty darned special. The Government of Canada thinks they're special. They amended the Public Service Employment Act because of their service, so let's have a look at what's happening in that hiring space and hold people accountable.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** Do you have any other comments on the hiring, Mr. Ticknor?

I'm sorry, but we're forgetting our guests on the phone. We haven't asked them any questions.

Mr. Ticknor.

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** I agree with what you're going with. You were mentioning reference.... Yes, there need to be some higher accountability standards in reference to human resources delegating or implementing decisions on their own and finding out what the critical empirical mindset is and why they made those decisions. If somebody comes exhibiting certain skill sets that are deemed transferable and then is denied, there should be an appeal body present to overlook the judgment based on the HR.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Colleagues, I want to try to get in at least another couple of interventions, but I'm going to have to cut down your time.

Mr. Deltell and Mr. Drouin, you have three minutes each. Then we'll have to suspend to get our next panel of witnesses here.

Mr. Deltell, you have three minutes.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Grant, last week, we had the pleasure of welcoming some veterans to the committee. They told us that they understood the current needs, and the need to make room in the public service for minorities, visible minorities, women and LGBT groups, and so on.

One of their comments, which was surprising but entirely congruent with reality, was that they were four white heterosexual males in their fifties, and they did not fall into any of these categories.

What do you think about that?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** I don't think I quite understood the question.

[English]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** This is a very touchy one.

[Translation]

We all want to see balance, equality, gender equity. We want LGBT people, who were mistreated for centuries, to have their place in society, and that is quite legitimate. That said, the veterans who came to testify here were four white men in their fifties, English-speaking native Canadians, born here from families that have been present for several generations. They added that they were heterosexual.

What can they do to obtain positions in the public service, despite the fact that through certain measures, the public service is trying to bring in women, visible minorities, new Canadians and LGBT persons?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** I don't know how many people are hired in the public service every year, but I know it is a high number. There is a lot of room for a large variety of people. I am quite favourable to employment equity, but I am equally favourable to the Veterans Hiring Act. I think veterans are not targeted by employment equity, but they are special and should have a place in the public service.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** We will have our final intervention for three minutes, please.

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Grant, again, on that relationship that the Veterans Hiring Act has among VAC, PSC and DND, everybody has a piece in this, so nobody is necessarily responsible to properly administer the act. Therefore, as I see it, nobody is accountable to ensure that we have veterans in our public service. Should we try to make one person accountable for the act?

**Mr. Alex Grant:** The first thing I would like to say is that a lot of good people put a lot of energy into the VHA: the Public Service Commission, Justice, DND and Veterans Affairs. It predated my time there but I heard people talking about it. They're very proud of it and I really think they got it right. It's an act, so it's not prescriptive by nature.

One of the things we learned when we tried to operationalize it was, okay, who is taking the lead...? As of now, I would say that the deputy minister of VAC is taking the lead, but he's doing that because he's a man who takes charge.

What's going to happen in the future?

• (1625)

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** The other issue is that you mentioned that there are programs, and I'm sure that not every public servant or

manager knows about those programs like the individual placement and support program.

Would it be helpful—we will have to make recommendations—for veterans to know that as well? Once they apply, you can say, “By the way, there are programs that exist, and here they are.” You can facilitate the hiring for managers.

**Mr. Alex Grant:** There is so much happening when you're releasing. I was on a release and I couldn't believe how much was happening. There is so much information thrown at you at the second career assistance network seminars. You do a transition interview at the release centre, and then you're just catching your feet as a civilian. I know that the director of transition services in the Canadian Armed Forces gives comprehensive briefings and Veterans Affairs gives comprehensive briefings, so there's a layered thing happening there.

With regard to programs, again, I'm pro-VHA. I'm drinking the VHA Kool-Aid, but when you look at it, in the five years you get from your date of release or when your priority is activated, you can leverage all kinds of things.

First of all, if you're on medical release that gives you time to get yourself right, get yourself job-ready. You can leverage the education benefit and go back to school. You can leverage career transition services to get your resumé up, your interviewing skills up. You can leverage the veterans in the public service unit to help you if you want to get a public service job. There are a lot of resources. I just think we have to continue pushing the word out to veterans and those considering transition that they're there.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Mr. Drouin—

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I'm out. Thank you.

**The Chair:** —you've run out of time, which is always a problem in these committee hearings, particularly when we're having the testimony that you've provided.

First and foremost, let me say thank you for your service to your country, to all of you here present, and to Mr. Corcoz, who perhaps is still with us by teleconference. What I would ask is that if you have additional information you think would be of benefit to this committee, please submit any recommendations or suggestions to our clerk. It will help us form part of the final report, our final study.

Mr. Ticknor in particular, you indicated that you had many other pieces of collateral information—I think that is the way you put it—that you would like to submit to us. Please, sir, feel free to do that through our clerk. Even though you didn't get to it personally and in public testimony, it will form part of our final study and our final report.

**Mr. Donald Ticknor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Florin Corcoz:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you all for being here.

Colleagues, we will suspend for a couple of minutes until we get our next video conference witnesses ready.

•(1625) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

•(1630)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, thank you. If you can see the video screens, you'll see that we have two witnesses joining us via video conference.

We have by video conference from British Columbia, Mr. Thomas Harrison. We also have via video conference from Hamilton, Ontario, Mr. Ed Simmons, and in person we have Mr. Perry.

I believe all gentlemen have opening statements. We will start with Mr. Harrison, from Comox.

Make it five minutes or less if you could, please, sir. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Thomas Harrison (As an Individual):** Thank you very much for hearing me.

My name is Thomas Harrison, and I'm a chief warrant officer currently serving on my way out on a medical, 34 years in. I'm in education transition right now and that predominantly triggered me to talk to this committee.

In my year and a half worth of looking for work in the federal government I'm finding that I am very unsuccessful. I have it fine-tuned down to education. We have a lot of skills, but we don't have degrees. Can I go into a university class? I am doing university right now and excel absolutely, but I don't have that degree. I'm in six pools right now. I've been turned down in one and I have been retained in five, but I've been retained for the last two years without a whisper, as we say in the army: crickets. That's all I hear is crickets.

I'm not doing this search with a priority referral number, and I think that's significant. I think that any veteran has sufficient skills to be employed in the federal government one way or another, and shouldn't need a priority referral to get in the door. We have the skills. We work with the Canadian government every day.

I'm very disappointed in the process. Some of the tasking is certainly skewed towards a civilian approach, and I totally get that because the bulk of the recruiting is coming from civilian society. However, when we're doing things like judgment testing, we in the forces use very much a direct method. We use firm, fair and friendly in conflict resolution. When you start using those types of skills that you've learned over 34 years and put it into a judgment test, you can fail considerably in the judgment test because that's not what they're looking for. They're looking more for friendly and go to the supervisor all the time, not self-help, stuff like that.

In summary, my main point for being here is that I think all veterans have sufficient skills to stand alone and be employed within the federal government. However, a lot of us are getting screened out or just put in the queue never to be phoned again, and that's where I stand and that's why I'm here to talk to you today.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Simmons.

Mr. Simmons, if you could have an opening statement of five minutes or less, sir, I would appreciate it.

**Mr. Ed Simmons:** Hello. I'm Ed Simmons, a veteran of the Canadian regular army. I was invited to participate in this discussion about hiring veterans in the Canadian government. This was and is very important topic to me, along with finally being able to voice my opinion. The next step in the process was to send forms to be filled out. These forms triggered an anxiety, making me regret agreeing to participate. The fear of filling out forms has been torture for many years, dealing with Veterans Affairs. Now that the Legion has stepped up and understands my fears, I might have a chance. I think veterans would be better able to understand.

In 1961, I answered an ad for Canadian army recruitment. Age and education only put one foot in the door. After a long interview, physical and psychiatric background check, I was told to report for duty. The first day we were told to expect 50% attrition. There were close to 52 of us who made it through that phase of the training. The extreme discipline and training resulted in personal strength that would guide me in all future decisions.

After years of training, extreme emphasis on work ethics and accomplishing any mission, I felt the investment our government made in me had paid off. On completing my service with security clearance, training and all other skills, I didn't see a future in the military for me. With honourable discharge papers in hand, I approached the federal government for work and was turned away with no explanation. At the time, I considered it a horrible waste of an extremely large investment. If military efficiency and determination to achieve goals were applied to government departments, we would not have year-long backlogs, as in Veterans Affairs.

After living through the military experience, I believe government would benefit greatly from investments they have made in veterans. The veterans would benefit by having a way to continue to serve the country they love. In my opinion, a win-win situation is best for all. I hope these thoughts will have some impact on future hiring.

Thank you very much.

•(1635)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, sir.

Finally, we have in person, Mr. Alex Perry.

Mr. Perry, could we have your opening statement, please?

**Mr. Alex Perry (As an Individual):** Hello, and thank you for inviting me today.

My name is Alex Perry. I have served in the military for 17 years, with a mix of six years in the reserve and another 11 years in the regular force. I received a medical release effective May 8, 2018.

These have been my obstacles to reintegration and finding employment in the public sector. I have listened to your past sessions and I have created my own list of shortcomings. I also hope to provide clarifying information on past questions you've had for other witnesses.

I was given a DND case manager whose services ended when my contract expired, while VAC's case manager would not see me until I was 30 days from release. To my knowledge, they shared zero information with each other. Going forward, members should be put in touch with a VAC case manager as soon as they know where they are going to be released.

The burden to seek information about retirement or release is placed on the member. SCAN seminars are held annually. There is no set schedule for when they are run, and they run on a first-come, first-served basis. If you sign up for it and it's full, that's too bad and you won't get a chance to do it again. Priority should be given to those with early release dates.

As it stands, the release timeline is six months. It doesn't correspond with the application to school or with the commencement of classes. This should be extended to 12 months, with a nine-month vocational rehab to be used at the beginning of school or at the end of it, according to the member's wishes.

The SISIP LTD VAC rehab program is a 24-month program where CAF members are able to return to school with the option to leave six months earlier to begin school in their vocational rehab. One of the most important rules is that a CAF member must finish what they start—as in, the program of school—which limits veterans to only obtaining a diploma. In the few months that I've searched for employment, the majority of public service positions have required a degree. As alluded to by this committee, veterans are seeking more than entry-level positions, but they are unavailable to due to the lack of education.

The education and training benefit that VAC came to speak to you about does have its limitations. A member cannot be on the VAC rehab program while applying for the education training benefit, which results in the loss of the 15% top-up in pay. It used to be called the earnings loss benefit, but they've renamed it with the new rollout of benefits. You also lose the support of your case manager from VAC. You lose medical benefits as a result of that, too.

The service number that we're issued in the Canadian Forces should act as our federal employee number, like the PRI number. This would enable us to apply for public sector positions while we plan our departure from DND. Also, security clearance should not disappear the day you leave the forces. These two changes would greatly expedite the hiring process and give hiring managers the ability to fill vacant positions much more quickly.

I was able to secure a position with VAC in my hometown as part of a field placement with the college program I attended. I saw the biases that employees have towards veterans first-hand when I was asked—repeatedly and by numerous individuals—why I wasn't messed up like the rest of them, or how I had come out so normal. Simply walking into a VAC office and being greeted by two-inch, bomb-proof glass sets a tone for every veteran walking into each location. At times, staff appear nervous and unsure of how to

approach some members upon their entry into the office, therefore leaving those members not fully supported. The bias is that veterans are unstable, crazy and ready to explode at any moment. This came from the department tasked with aiding veterans. I can only imagine what the rest of them think about us.

Colleges and universities already have prior learning assessment and recognition—PLAR, for short—but the burden is placed on the member to provide all supporting documents, which we get in course reports throughout our career. To ask a veteran to save things for 20 of 30 years is a little ridiculous.

Some provinces are beginning to recognize the military driver's licence as an equivalent, allowing these qualified members to simply provide the appropriate documentation and be given the corresponding class of civilian driver's licence.

It has appeared to me that this committee is trying to find an easy fix to the problem—a one-size-fits-all approach—but that can't be done because every member who is leaving the military, whether it's voluntary or medical, has their own unique set of circumstances.

Thank you.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we have approximately 30 minutes left before we have to go in camera for some committee business.

I'd like to suggest we go to five-minute rounds. That will allow us to have six interventions.

We'll start with Mr. Jowhari, for five minutes, please.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their testimony and their service for our country. Thank you very much.

I'm going to start with Mr. Harrison.

Mr. Harrison, in your testimony you said you have opted out of the priority referral. You touched on why you made that decision, which was that you felt that your background, education and your experience of 34 years should stand on its own.

The government has put that priority referral program in place to help facilitate. Can you expand on why you chose not to?

**Mr. Thomas Harrison:** I'll clarify that right away. I'm actually not entitled yet to have a priority referral, because I am going through my medical release. I'll be released on September 30. They will not give me my priority referral yet.

In my particular situation I'm a chief warrant officer. I'm a leader of men. With my diagnosis they put me right out, right out of play. They took me away from the leadership role. I've been in academic transition for a year and a half, because they really didn't know what to do with me. I've been doing my academic, trying to get up to speed in degrees, and I've been applying without my priority referral number. I've been applying as a veteran. I'm being allowed to apply as a veteran.

Certainly if I had the priority referral number, I would be using it.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Okay, great.

**Mr. Thomas Harrison:** However, saying that, I have so many skills. As a regimental sergeant major at the largest army battalion in Canada, I worked with generals and colonels, and I can't get an administrative services level 2 job? It baffles me.

•(1645)

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I asked the same question of a number of witnesses in prior sessions. What are your thoughts on being able to develop a list of experiences that our veterans have through their service, and being able to map them to certain public sector jobs, to say, if you have this experience, then it will map up to this type of service?

During that six months prior, once a notice is given, then the case manager could work to make sure that transition happens and you get into the pool. What are your thoughts on that?

**Mr. Thomas Harrison:** It's a good idea. Our MOC, our occupation trades, have been trying to do that for a long time.

By trade, I was a supply technician, a logistician. However, when I got to chief warrant officer, I went to a totally different occupation. It's the chief warrant officer occupation. The only two trades that I know that are very transferable right now with Red Seal are our mechanics and our truckers, as I mentioned earlier.

If you were able to take a logistician and say, you can be in procurement, you can keep contracting, you can do administrative services, that would be fantastic. It would be helpful. It would help streamline the process and it would help give a little bit of levity to the veterans—knowing where they can go, left or right.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

I'm going to go to Mr. Perry.

Mr. Perry, you were saying you can't go on work rehab while you're on education. Can you expand on that? I'm not 100% clear on....

**Mr. Alex Perry:** Part of the requirements to apply for the ETB is that you can't be on voc rehab or the rehab program with Veterans Affairs. You have to take yourself off it, and it takes approximately four months to be approved for the ETB, from what I'm told.

I have to take myself off right now, even though I still have one year left of my voc rehab benefit. I would have to take myself off that. The money I would gain is \$20,000, but the money I would lose is \$9,600, so it's not that much of a gain. Even though I just finished college, I still have to pay for university.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** While you're on voc rehab, you will not be able to go to college and get a degree?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** Just college. I'm able to attend only college, not university.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Is there a reason for that?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** The two hands aren't talking to each other. The army has set up everything with SISIP, and Veterans Affairs deals with ETB. There are two different departments, two different sets of rules.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Okay.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** Is it the same in Quebec?

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Go ahead, you can ask.

**The Chair:** We have about 10 seconds only.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** Is it the same in Quebec?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** I believe so, yes. It's Canada-wide.

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès:** We don't have the difference between college and university—

**Mr. Alex Perry:** But part of the rules is that you have to finish what you start, so there is the two-year time limit.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deltell, you have five minutes, please.

[*English*]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, welcome to your House of Commons. Again, thank you so much for what you have done and are still doing for our country and our principles that you fight for.

First of all, I would like to go to Mr. Simmons, from Hamilton.

Mr. Simmons, you did say that you crossed over the door of the army in Canada in 1961. Am I correct?

**Mr. Ed Simmons:** That was the first day that I entered the military. It's when I started. When I left the military in 1966, that's when I approached the federal government and Veterans Affairs and asked for assistance. I asked if I could get a job with the federal government.

As I stated in my letter, I do have anxiety when it comes to forms. I've done pole climbing, jumping on and off moving tanks, you name it. I've done that without fear and I have no issue at all with it. However, when I approached the federal government, I was just dismissed. Again, when I asked Veterans Affairs for help, I was told, "Go away, don't bother us, you weren't here long enough."

The damage to my feet and lower legs has been an issue ever since. It wasn't until about 20 years ago that Veterans Affairs allowed me to put in a claim. I have a large filing cabinet full of rejections, paperwork, changes in this, changes in that, files and forms, you name it. Dealing with the federal government, Veterans Affairs and other sectors, has been nothing but a nightmare for me—and it shouldn't be.

I believe people that have been through the military would better understand what's going on. They would have a better focus. They have been trained extremely well and they know how to deal with people and how to goal orient. The commands were always, "You will" and then the command. It wasn't, "Okay, fill out this form, fill out that form, take your time, and we'll get back to you in a year." It was to be done now, but dealing with the federal government, it's the opposite effect.

• (1650)

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** We're talking about such a great journey. You're talking about 50 years of fight from your side. How did you deal with that?

**Mr. Ed Simmons:** I've had to hide my problems with my feet, because working with Westinghouse and then Camco General Electric appliances, we were required to wear safety boots and any modifications to them rendered them no longer suitable, so any modifications I had to do myself and pretend it never happened.

I managed but as time went on, it got more difficult. Now I'm having a great deal of difficulty getting around at all, and still fighting with Veterans Affairs and its forms. Even when I agreed to be part of this conference, the first thing that happened was that forms came at me. That's a weakness I have.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Mr. Simmons, thank you so much for your testimony. I deeply appreciate it. We see how tough it is and we are so grateful. Thank you.

**Mr. Ed Simmons:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. MacGregor, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Mr. Harrison, I'd like to start with you. I live in the Cowichan Valley, so it's really nice to see that map of Vancouver Island behind you. It makes me feel close to home.

I found your testimony to be something that we really needed to hear, the fact that you're still going through your medical. You've outlined the skills you have as a regimental sergeant major and the fact that you've interfaced with colonels, generals, and yet, you're still struggling.

Can you please illustrate, for this committee, some of the skills you had to be employed on a day-to-day basis in that position? We really need to hear that, and that's a hole we definitely need to address.

**Mr. Thomas Harrison:** Absolutely. Certainly, there was resource management—anything from deploying records, transportation, supply needs, suicide intervention. You're on there 24-7 with your BlackBerry. You're at the hospital or at the jail dealing with your troops.

There was conflict resolution, but not only to do with troops. Generals and colonels are also human beings with emotions and you're trying to talk them down off the ledge here and there. There is lots of liaison with different levels of government: municipal, provincial and federal or other countries.

There are, as we call them, dog and pony shows. Out of nowhere, city X wants to see the whole battalion. Just organizing that, doing the road route, the planning, the fuel and the safety behind that, doing a live fire with your troops, the safety briefs....

You're watching. You're accountable for absolutely everything. There is harassment and lots of conflict management and resolution. You use a lot of critical thinking skills on your feet, coming up with the best solution, based on your experience and common sense. It does get frustrating, but—

• (1655)

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** With your demonstrable, practical experience in organizing the resources of a vast organization, people, being on your BlackBerry 24-7...even with that skill set, you're hearing, as you said, crickets chirping when finding out where you're progressing.

**Mr. Thomas Harrison:** You got it.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** That's astounding.

**Mr. Thomas Harrison:** It's mind-boggling.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you for getting that on the record. I certainly hope we cite that in our report to the government.

Mr. Perry, before I became a member of Parliament, I spent seven years doing casework with all manner of constituents who had problems with various federal departments. A large number of them were veterans, so your testimony about DND and the hand-off to VAC is not new. It's existed for many years and still, for the life of me, I can't figure out why we have not simplified the system yet.

I hosted a town hall for veterans a couple of years ago. Every person who came to the mike complained about the fact that once you leave DND, you have to pick it up, run with it yourself and organize everything with VAC. I'm just astounded we're still having this problem.

I don't have much time, but you said in your opening statement that you're concerned that we might be approaching this as a one-size-fits-all, but we need individual approaches. Is there anything you can add about what that means in practical terms, maintaining a need to take that individual approach to veterans?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** Slow the whole thing down. I had five months from the time I found out my release date to the time I'd be in school. In that five months, I had so many life-changing things to decide on with no or very little support doing it. I was just another face, another number. I was just somebody else the person I was sitting in front of had to deal with.

They need a more personalized approach. Hold on to that case manager. I only met with my DND case manager three or four times, and she was the biggest help I had. Without her, I can't imagine where I would have been.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madam Yip, you have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** Thank you everyone for coming.

Mr. Perry, what is your job now?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** Now I am a full-time student, semi-retired.

I've done all the paperwork up to activating my priority hiring. I'm going to university because I need the degree that is required of me, and I'm going to have to activate my priority hiring before I've finished my schooling because of the five-year limit that's imposed. If that were extended to 10 years, I wouldn't have any issues.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Are you working with an adviser now?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** Right now, I'm not happy with the services I've received from VAC so I've cut them off from doing what I need to do. While I was there on my placement, I believe I learned all the skills I needed to take care of myself. I'm doing a better job than they did in the year prior.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** I know there was frustration between the two different departments. At any time did you think about approaching the veterans ombudsperson?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** I emailed them twice, Madam.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** And...?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** The first time was to do with my disability benefits. It took 18 months to receive approval, and that was far exceeding their 16-week goal they had at the time. The second time was when I wasn't happy with the services, and they just said that I needed more details to sort out the problem. Other than that, again, I just feel like it's a forum to complain and nothing actually happens.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Other than the things you mentioned, is there anything that maybe...? When you're getting your education, maybe with Veterans Affairs there could be some sort of matching, like a career or skills approach.

• (1700)

**Mr. Alex Perry:** It would be great if they had somebody in the military who would look at the courses you've accrued through your career and say, "This is the civilian equivalent of it."

For instance, I had to take an ethics class in college. I was deployed overseas twice. I carried live rounds in my weapon at all times, and I still had to sit there and do Ethics 101. The government paid for that. If you take out all those redundant courses that we're forced to do over again, that would pay for these people who are writing off the courses. You would save money. It wouldn't cost the government anything else.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** To your knowledge, there isn't anything.

**Mr. Alex Perry:** There isn't anything. It was up to me. I had to go and get a PLAR as part of one of my optional credits. I ended up finding a teacher who was willing to just write off my military

experience and give me that credit. Without that, I wouldn't have graduated.

Thank you.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Okay.

Did you have anything else to add there?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** No.

Well, there are a lot of courses. Anything that says "leadership" in the military should just have the wording changed to "management" for the civilian sector. Other than that, there are not too many courses that we do in the military, especially for my trade—the infantry—that are applicable to the civilian world. It's just the way it is, I know that, but I know there's still something that can be done. Right now, nothing's being done.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** All right. Thank you.

This is a question for Mr. Harrison.

You talked about judgment testing and said something about screen testing. Can you elaborate on that?

**Mr. Thomas Harrison:** Yes. When you get screened for an employment opportunity with the Government of Canada, they put you through some other tests. It will either be a writing comprehension test or what they call a judgment test. A judgment test is 300 scenarios at the office—it could be conflict, ethics—and they give you five multiple-choice answers and they ask you which is the best one to pursue.

I've taken two of these judgment tests. I passed; however, I find the judgment test actually quite difficult because, again, we are a very direct organization. We are trained—I was in for 34 years—so we handle things firm, fair and friendly. We call it the three Fs. We handle it quickly. Sometimes, yes, you need to go to your boss, but most of the time you can handle it at your level, or one level higher. The way they word things, it's "Janet has done something very bad"—

**The Chair:** Mr. Harrison, could I get you to wrap up very quickly? It's only because we have very limited time before we have to conclude the meeting.

Is that it?

**Mr. Thomas Harrison:** Yes. I would just say that most of the questions are civilian-based within a civilian office state. Sometimes they don't correlate to us, that's all.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Deltell, you have five minutes, please.

[English]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and gentlemen, thank you again.

Mr. Perry, you said a few minutes ago that the famous phrase "one-size-fits-all" is not a good approach. This is true for your situation and for so many other issues.

As you know there are three arms: the army, the navy and the air force. I was wondering whether there is any link between those three arms? Is each and every case special, is everyone very unique or do we have some, I would say, trademarks of the military men—the army, the navy and the air force?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** I believe everybody is unique. I haven't spoken to many people from the other fields, but they usually have positions that are trades, so getting out of the military, there's a civilian equivalent of it. Whether that position is government-run or not, they're all unique, every single one. I have multiple friends who all got medical releases, too, and every one of our cases is different.

• (1705)

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** If we talk about specific jobs, like those who work on tanks, there are no tanks in civilian life but there are a lot of planes and a lot of boats in civilian life. Isn't it easier for them, the people from the navy and the people from aviation, to get a job in their skill area, in their experience? They work with very high-tech planes, F-18s—well, maybe no more, but at that time it was.

Don't you think that it's a little easier for skilled workers who had a job to do in the navy and air force, instead of the guys who work on the tanks or other military issue with the regular army?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** Yes, absolutely, because there's an equivalent. For me there's just police forces. Any job with a gun, that's basically what I'm qualified to do right now.

For those other trades, they have military courses that can be granted on the civilian side, so to have to send them back to school, that's a redundancy, absolutely.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** You talked about the fact that it's too late when you talk about the six months. Would you suggest having more time for that?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** Absolutely, because when you receive a medical discharge, you're not prepared for it. You have a lot of things to decide, even where you're going to move to once you're released from the military and everything that goes along with where you're going to live. There are so many things.

For me to go to school, I had to decide what I wanted to do for the rest of my life in five months, and I had already got my release message after the deadline to apply to college, so I had zero time—a lot of sleepless nights.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** One-size-fits-all is not good, for sure.

**Mr. Alex Perry:** No, there have to be options.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** What do you see, 12 months, 18 months, 24 months?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** I see a minimum of 12 months. Six months is far too quick to make all those decisions. They give us the option to appeal the decision, and they can extend that up to three years right now, but I appealed mine and I got a six-month extension. That didn't do much for me.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Our final intervention is from Monsieur Drouin, for five minutes please.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** No, he doesn't get it.

**The Chair:** Oh, it's Madam Ratansi. Okay, we'll take that.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** I'll give you two minutes.

Thank you all for being here. We've been studying this because we realize that there is a problem with transitioning veterans into civilian life, and we were wondering what the status was of the priority hiring.

You have told us what we have heard repeatedly, that there is a disconnect between the military.... You know, if I were in Afghanistan and I needed help, I would come to you. The Public Service Commission doesn't understand your skill sets and that's where there is a problem.

The reason I say that—and I was chuckling to myself—is that when I first came to Canada and I had a university degree from London, England, they told me that my equivalence was grade 12. I thought, “I did Cambridge and Oxford. What are you talking about, saying grade 12?”, so I can see where you're coming from, but I think that is because there's probably a great deal of ignorance of what you do.

With the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs and PSC, I think the responsibility should really be with the Canadian Armed Forces, because it is the one that trains you. It has a curriculum that is probably far superior to that of a university degree.

I think you were thinking that we were trying to find a solution, a one-size-fits-all. We're not. We're listening. We're in a listening mode and asking what it is that we can do.

Trust me; I don't know what a warrant officer does, but you do something that's so great that I wouldn't even know what to do with it. I think if we could find a way in which universities and colleges, who get their money because you have to pay to go to college, agree to the equivalence provided by the military—the military has to take the lead—would that work so that your qualifications would be equivalent to a university degree? What are your thoughts, all three of you?

**Mr. Thomas Harrison:** I'll jump in. I believe it would work, but can I suggest that we educate the federal government?

We have a lot of corporate CEOs come in and watch what we do. However, we don't have any human resources people from DFO, Treasury Board or Agriculture. They don't know what we do. Can they not come in and see what we do? Could it not be coordinated, probably through the Canadian Armed Forces, that we bring in human resources managers from the federal government who go to the air force, the navy and the army and see what these people do, so that when they see their resumé's, they know what they do and what they can contribute?

•(1710)

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** That's a good suggestion, because I think our analyst can take that suggestion and put it in our report, and we can forward that.

When you talk about "them", perhaps the PSC—the Public Service Commission, which comes under this committee as well—should have a training session. I have been to Cold Lake, Alberta, to do the military part of it. All MPs are invited to do it so that we understand what you are doing.

Maybe that would be right, but how many human resources managers can we send? Perhaps we can bridge the gap—because there is a gap in understanding—in some very innovative ways, rather than the staid ways. When you talk about federal governments, sometimes people mix up MPs as government. MPs are there on a temporary basis. The bureaucracy stays full time.

If we can get ideas from you, whether you think about it now or later, I think that would be extremely important for us. That's my suggestion.

Mr. Perry, six months before you leave the military, do they give you enough tools to say, "I'm a medically released veteran and I will be going from here to there." Do they give you enough tools to work with so that you can transition in a smooth manner?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** I believe some tools are there for us, but again, it's on the member to seek them out. One option given to me was to go to the JPSU, but I didn't want my file switching hands that many times, so I opted out of it.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** What is JPSU?

**Mr. Alex Perry:** It's the joint personnel support unit. That's where they send injured members to possibly heal, and if they don't, they end up releasing them. I've heard from my friends who were in that unit that it was a little smoother and helped them a lot more. Again, because of my five-month timeline from my release, I didn't want to have to go to another unit, possibly have my file lost, or this or that thing screwed up, so I opted out of it.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Harrison—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, we're completely out of time.

To all of you who attended today, whether you're in person or by video conference, I want to thank you for your attendance. Again, to underscore what every member of this committee believes and feels, we want to thank you for your service to your country.

Should you have further suggestions or recommendations—we heard some very good information today—and you want to have that information transferred to our clerk, I would encourage you to do so directly. The information you provide will help form part of our final report. I strongly encourage you, should you have any further recommendations, to contact our clerk as quickly as possible.

With that, gentlemen, once again, thank you, all.

We will suspend now, colleagues, for a couple of minutes to get ready to go in camera for some committee business.

We are suspended.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*





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