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## **Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, April 8, 2014**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Greg Kerr**



## Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC)):** We have a really busy schedule this afternoon. This thing called votes, this pesky thing that goes on, interferes with the time a bit. We're going to try to get one or two of the other witnesses in early, if we can, and get started there.

Thank you for being here.

As you know, we're continuing the review of the enhanced new Veterans Charter, and we're very pleased to have our witnesses here today.

I think the clerk has talked to you. We look for a presentation of up to 10 minutes, if we could, from each of you, as I understand.

I'm going as they're listed here. It's David Fascinato and Mr. Derryk Fleming. Mr. Fascinato is here as an individual, and Derryk Fleming is here from the CBG Veterans Well Being Network. Thank you for coming.

You know what we're up to here. We look forward to your presentations.

If you're ready, either one of you can start.

**Mr. Derryk Fleming (Member, 31 CBG Veterans Well Being Network):** I would like to thank all the subcommittee members on this panel for offering the group I am here to represent, 31 Combat Brigade Veterans Well Being Network, an opportunity to present to you here today.

When the original new veterans act legislation was brought into law, it had all-party support and the blessing of the Royal Canadian Legion. I raise this point simply to draw attention to the whole issue itself. It is vital that this subcommittee find a way to look past the upcoming election in October 2015 and treat this issue as a national issue, and beyond simply a party issue.

The men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces proudly wear a Canadian flag on their uniform, and its incredibly disheartening to many when they see needs of veterans and their families unnecessarily politicized and positive changes held up for purposes other than what is required to uphold the dignity and respect that our veterans have rightfully earned.

A transitioning is happening with the demographics of veterans around our country. The traditional image of the last generation was an elder veteran from either the World War II era or the Korean War. These veterans served with great distinction in our country and our

country recognized their service unequivocally. A transition is now happening amongst the citizens of this country where the image of a young veteran is now being recognized, and unlike the greatest generation before, this image is not fully understood and there are social issues now surrounding it that are a source of mental health issues confronting both veterans and active serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

The sacrifices made on behalf of this nation over the past generation have not been felt or borne by the general population and this has led to a serious disconnect between what we have asked of our soldiers, sailors, and airmen, and the true cost that results from being recognized as a major international nation on the world stage.

Federal dollars expended by itself will not solve the primary issues that have been the result of the Canadian Forces being deployed almost without respite for over a generation now.

I would like to look at this issue for the next few minutes framing the issue from the bottom up and from there, as our elected representatives it is your decision to make, how you see the federal government living up to its commitment that took place when each of us swore the oath of service.

The first issue I'd like to address is stigma. Stigma is a social issue. It's not an individual issue. To truly improve outcomes for our soldiers and veterans, this I believe is the number one priority that needs to be addressed. 31 Combat Brigade Veterans Well Being Network was created to support a network for the much more dispersed veterans in our communities who do not have the support network in place to alleviate the isolation and alienation many of these veterans feel in their home communities. Stigma is the reason they withdraw into the isolation and begin the downward spiral. There are excellent supports in place that provide veterans the life skills to interact fully and lead meaningful lives in their post-service years. Some of the supports include: service dogs, OSI support groups, and one program in particular that my wife Shellie and I attended was Can Praxis in Alberta.

31 Combat Brigade Veterans Well Being Network has proven exceptionally valuable in the response time it takes for a veteran or a spouse to reach out at any hour of the day, holidays included, and literally within seconds, there is a response from one of more than 700 people involved now with our group.

I can't believe there's any other support network in this country that is that responsive and it costs the federal government precisely nothing.

32 Brigade, which is in the Toronto area, has been so impressed by the group that they're now modelling it for their own area. In less than a week, they have over 500 members.

The success of this has now spawned a second brigade level and the goal is for it to hopefully expand more nationally. There are five division areas in this country and all it takes is leadership in one of those areas and literally, we have a ready-made template that could be replicated. Again, it costs nothing to the federal government.

The role of these veterans well-being networks is not to provide direct services per se. It's there to support and stabilize the veterans and to make sure that they do get to the services that the federal government has provided and are in place.

• (1535)

Just so there's clarity, for a lot of those agencies, if you don't call during business hours, you're not going to get the help you need, but for a lot of these veterans, as long as we can touch base with them immediately, we can help build that level of trust so they can come forward and overcome that stigma.

Stigma as a social issue needs to be addressed directly toward the general Canadian population. I believe a two-tier approach is necessary. A sustained general awareness campaign over several years can have a huge impact in changing the mindset of the general population toward veterans with PTSD, OSI, or TBI. However, a general awareness campaign also requires local leadership in every municipality where veterans in need are located. Veterans Affairs Canada case managers must be empowered to directly assist a veteran in his community or place of employment, to educate and inform colleagues and employers. This is urgently needed.

The Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion could be empowered to have a mandate where no local VAC service office is located, to advocate for that veteran in need. This should also be addressed. It's incredibly damaging when the mass media report an incident and the label of PTSD veteran is the lead. To be fair to Canadian media, they have been more responsible than other media that also broadcast into Canada. The federal government does need to look at how incredibly damaging and debilitating it is for all of us to see a fearmongering label attached that ferments an outcome that divides us from the general population we served.

Veterans issues are inseparable from family issues and the ultimate goal for the new Veterans Charter, as you reform it, is I believe we have to look not only at the veteran but at the veteran's family as well, because they're the ones who truly support that veteran the most.

I cannot stress enough the more you support the family as a whole unit, the better the health outcomes for the veteran in need. Spouses and children need to be reflected by more than a simple line in the equation. Much can be done in this area and a holistic approach is required to supporting these veterans and their families.

On retraining and career choices, I believe much work has been done with the new Veterans Charter, but even more work can be done, providing more opportunities in the retraining and career choices of soldiers transitioning. I fully believe that a great deal of work can be accomplished in this area. When I look back to a year ago, I looked at this issue in great despair, seeing such a waste of

human potential and the incredible amount of talent being unused and undervalued in the civilian sector. I do want to give credit to the federal government; in the last year, some significant changes have been made. More could be done but at the same time at least we're seeing movement on this issue, and I applaud you for that.

On the federal hiring initiative, the Canada Company, one initiative in particular I'd like to raise is a local initiative called Delta Company and it's located in Windsor within our area of responsibilities, within 31 combat brigade. I would like to draw special attention to something I believe would be of great value that currently is not in place.

Many soldiers have been attached to the joint personnel support units at various Canadian Forces bases in this country. These injured soldiers still have much to offer our nation. Some will return to their home units after they recover from their injuries. Others will need to transition to other career paths. My civilian career after my service has been one where I teach adult learners, and I also run the original pilot program of the Canadian Forces cooperative education program. I took over the reins of this program in 2002 from its original creator who was Lieutenant-Colonel Wayne Hill of the Lincoln and Welland regiment.

Since 2002 I have recruited junior and senior high school students into the Canadian Forces primary reserve. About 30 of them served most recently in combat roles as infantrymen or gunners in Afghanistan. I recognize the post-deployment changes from some of my own experiences, and I believe we owe it to this youngest generation of veterans to do our best to reintegrate them fully. They and their families should not suffer from a lack of understanding and awareness as many veterans before them have. That used to be the norm and not the exception.

Many of these soldiers in the joint personnel support units by their own choice may be better served by reintegrating them into their chosen post-service communities where they will be provided support by the local reserve unit and area. But I want to stress it's important that the Canadian Forces regular force budget still absorb that.

•(1540)

A 6- to 12-month transition from being employed full time by the reserve unit initially, where their self-esteem and skills honed can be upheld and shared with less experienced soldiers, that transitions towards the end to full-time civilian employment opportunities within the private or other public sectors by the end of the transition period. In a sense, we created a program to bring civilians into the military. We could easily create a program to take soldiers and veterans and bring them out of the military back into a civilian career and retrain them.

Local relationships need to be developed between the home units, educational institutions, local employers, labour councils, and municipal governments. It needs to be flexible, and adaptable to the needs and interests of the veterans and their families. The federal government's role here is really to get out of the way and encourage local leadership to happen. Not every fix comes with a big cheque from Ottawa or the provinces involved. This is where I mention the perspective from the bottom up for the veterans most in need.

One of the reasons why I didn't come forward for 23 years is, as any veteran knows, there's always someone worse off than you—there always is—and you always step aside to make sure they get the services they need. That's just part of the military ethos.

The local reserve units can provide these soldiers with the social support and networking opportunities they will not have being kept on one of the main bases and shown to the gate on the final day of their contract. It is also about developing the long-term support contacts they will need that extend well beyond the end of their regular force employment contract. This is about long-term best outcomes and not short-term fixes.

I reflect on the work of several members of Parliament here and how they have helped veterans in their home communities. There are many of you, but to illustrate a point, a close friend of mine, Blair Davis, was helped by MP Peter Stoffer, in the House of Commons itself. Equally admirable was my MP, Rick Dykstra, who went above and beyond, at my request, to assist a veteran in distress neither of us has ever met, but reached out on our 31 CBG Veterans Well Being Network to identify the need. I was able to coordinate with his office staff to assist a veteran in Alberta by contacting the appropriate member of Parliament.

The reason I raise that is that I don't think that story gets told enough about how you guys do cross party lines. This really is a national issue, not a partisan issue. Hopefully, it will not be a wedge issue in the next election.

This is reflective of good governance, and no one party has a monopoly on it. We elect our representatives to stand up for us, and all too often the good work gets overlooked. Much needs to be done, but much has been done, and I am here asking for you to look at this issue from the bottom up instead of just the top down. You will find more reasonable and prudent outcomes when you change the perspective.

I have had issues of stigma myself within my own work environment, and still currently do. I do not fault any one person or agency there. Stigma can be overcome by education, awareness, and courage. People fear what they do not understand and the

Government of Canada has made a conscious decision over many governments of both parties to allow the disconnect to grow between our small professional armed forces and the primary reserves that augment them and the general population that requires their services for both internal and international commitments. If we don't close the gap on the disconnect, the issue of stigma will not be resolved, more needless lives will be lost, and more families will suffer.

The federal government does have it within its ability to close this disconnect. We need this government to tell our stories, to advocate for us when fear, ignorance, apathy, and indifference lead to stigma. No veteran should ever be left behind in this society. When you make changes to the new Veterans Charter, the hope is that is what will happen.

Thank you very much for your time.

•(1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Fleming, we appreciate that.

Now we'll hear from Mr. Fascinato, please.

**Mr. David Fascinato (As an Individual):** Good afternoon.

Mr. Chair, honourable members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, fellow witness, and guests, my name is David Fascinato, and today I will be sharing with you the story of my transition from the Canadian Forces into civilian life.

I joined the Canadian Forces army reserve in the summer of 2005, just down the street at the Governor General's Foot Guards in Ottawa. I was drawn to the military for a number of reasons, the most prominent being that I wanted to challenge myself and to do so in the service of others. At that time I was enrolled at the University of Ottawa, but I knew that something was missing from my life. When I joined the army, I came to understand the role I could play in helping others and to better the communities in which we served.

As I completed my initial training for the army, the war in Afghanistan was heating up. The narrative was shifting, as it became evident that we, as young soldiers, were being prepared to fight in a conflict overseas.

In 2009 I was selected to join the military's psychological operations capability, a unit charged with managing the perceptions and behaviours of select foreign audiences in support of military and political objectives—or, as I like to say, we were the folks who were tasked with building consensus and alignment with local stakeholders and mission partners to ensure the delivery of governance, development, and security programs.

I was deployed in 2010 for eight months to Kandahar province, Afghanistan, with Task Force 1-10, or the 1st Royal Canadian Regiment battle group. In reality, however, I ended up working more with our American allies from the 10th Mountain Division, U.S. Army.

I like to think of my time in Afghanistan with fondness, believe it or not, for it was and still is one of the most precious and inspiring experiences I will likely ever have. Working on the front line, I built and managed relationships with local leaders, along with representatives of other government agencies, to ensure that we had a meaningful and lasting impact. We did this in the face of stiff Taliban opposition, who sought to dismantle our efforts through lies, intimidation, and fear.

Despite their best attempts, I saw first-hand that hope and cooperation could triumph in the face of coercion and violence. I'm fiercely proud of our accomplishments. While there were bad days—it was a war—I count myself infinitely lucky that the good days generally eclipsed the bad days.

Thirty days after stepping off that plane ride home, I was back in classes at the University of Ottawa. The transition was shocking—not the least of which had to do with coming back to winter in Ottawa—because I had returned to a life that I had paused and left behind two years earlier, not really being certain if I was actually ever going to get the chance to press play again.

I finished my studies and moved to Toronto in the spring of 2012, where I began the task of finding a job that would, technically, leverage my skills and experiences from the military. This is where I came into contact with Treble Victor Group, commonly known as 3V, an organization that seeks to enable ex-military leaders to succeed in business, a task that is accomplished through a shared set of common values, a strong network, and a strong strategic vision. Within three months of building a professional network across multiple sectors and industries, I finally landed a job at a large public relations firm in downtown Toronto.

Herein lies the mistake I made during my transition, and it's taken me about a year and a half to figure it out. It isn't my skills or experiences that make me unique, although they of course certainly help; rather, it is the attributes and qualities I bring to any potential employer that distinguish me from many other candidates. Whether it's my approach to obstacles, my ability to solve complex problems, my flexibility to adapt to change, or my openness to continuous learning and professional growth, these qualities were honed over the course of my career in the military, to the point where they are mature and valuable aspects of who I am as a young Canadian entering today's competitive workforce.

I tried too hard to make my skills and experiences fit, whereas I should have accepted and appreciated that I have a precious set of soft skills that enable me to adapt, overcome, and succeed in the face of adversity.

After a year in public relations, I recently left and began working as an independent consultant providing advisory services to a number of clients in the greater Toronto area. I'm also currently interviewing with members of the big four consulting firms.

In addition to my work with Treble Victor Group, where I currently coordinate events and communications on their executive, in the last five months I've also become involved with Veterans Emergency Transition Services Canada, or VETS Canada. This is a non-profit organization with charitable status that connects homeless and marginalized veterans with services and support. I'm a member

of the Ontario executive helping to launch that organization's footprint into the province for this spring.

I'm also a member of the Veteran Transition Advisory Council, or VTAC, where I sit on the marketing group and work with members of corporate Canada to address the challenges surrounding veteran transition and hiring. In that role, I also work with members of Canada Company on the military employment transition portal, or MET portal.

● (1550)

Needless to say, there are many aspects of transition that interest me greatly.

One parting thought, though.... In the military, one of the first lessons we learn is to shape the environment to enable our success. Through my efforts with Treble Victor, the Veteran Transition Advisory Council, and VETS Canada, I am attempting to do just that on a number of complex planes.

The second lesson we learn is to collaborate. Therefore to succeed, it is not up to any one organization, one department, or one party; rather, it is up to all of us to work together to ensure this generation of veterans is adequately supported and enabled to achieve the success for which they yearn, whatever shape or form that takes.

I know that I will continue my work in veteran transition to shape the environment by collaborating as broadly as possible, aided by all those attributes and qualities that the military helped to foster within me.

We have a generation of young veterans who have made a lasting impact with their varied and distinguished service in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and I implore the members of the committee not to forget that many of these young men and women now stand poised to make outstanding contributions in communities across this great nation. This generation of young veterans needs your support. They need to be enabled to succeed, not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it's the smart thing to do.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Chair, and honourable members. I look forward to any questions.

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

We will now go to questions from the committee.

We start with Mr. Stoffer, please, for six minutes.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

To the two of you, thank you not only for your service but also for your excellent presentations today. They are very articulate and very helpful for our committee as we go forward.

Derryk, you indicated that it was 22 or 23 years before you came forward because, as you rightfully said, so many of you are so proud and know very well that there are other veterans who may be worse off than you. You talked about the family aspect as well.

If you were writing the new charter aspect of it, my first question for you is—and then, David, I have one for you later—what aspect of the families would you include? It's not just spouses and children, but an awful lot of veterans, of course, are single, and they have parents who are possibly quite reliant on them as well. Perhaps you could just elaborate a bit more on the family aspects of the charter.

Thank you very much for coming.

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** To define the nucleus of a family, as we all know the traditional nuclear family has changed quite a bit over a while. It really is those immediate people who provide them the support, and they're doing it 24/7. They're the ones they turn to first. When they're sick, they're the ones who go to the drugstore or drive them to their appointments.

To me, it doesn't necessarily have to be the tradition of the spouse and the children. It could be parents, it could be common-law; whatever the orientation is fine. But it's those immediate people who are providing the support who should be recognized as that family unit if they're sharing a similar dwelling or they're in their lives every day.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** David, I have a question for you, and thank you, as well, for coming.

One of the concerns that I have—and I've spoken to small businesses in Nova Scotia—is that although they are more than willing to hire a veteran, or someone who has served their country, one of the concerns they have—and Derryk pointed out the so-called stigma—is that many of them feel they haven't had the training. For example, when a veteran is hired at company A, company A may not understand what triggers this individual or may set them off. If the person gets hired and then has to take off a lot of sick time because of stress concerns...

You're working with corporate Canada. What do you see as the shortfall, in many ways, of training corporate Canada or the business community to understand that some of these veterans they'll be hiring, although highly skilled and very good at what they may be able to do, may have certain psychological conditions that may need to be looked out for to understand what this person may be going through on a particular day?

•(1555)

**Mr. David Fascinato:** Interestingly enough I had the pleasure of working on the business case for why to hire a Canadian veteran, and how to craft that message and understanding to corporate Canada.

One of the interesting things I found in my study there was a statistic from a recent Ipsos Reid survey published, I think, on March 30 or 31, 2014. What I basically discovered here is that there is an ambivalence that's greater than any general stigma towards veterans. You can say that's generally a good thing because it's quite different

from the challenge that Americans face where there is a very strong negative stigma attached to potential veteran hires.

Whereas there is a negative perception in the United States about veterans, in Canada, from my understanding and from my research, there is actually a greater ambivalence or indifference toward veterans.

The challenge therefore is to craft a strong story of the veteran who can transition, who can bring those attributes, and experiences, and skills in a positive manner to those jobs in the corporate realm—or however you like to define it—and to do so in a most effective and efficient way. That's obviously in advance of any general negative stigma that might get out there.

It's always a challenging thing to deal with, mental health issues in the workplace, and there are general campaigns, such as Bell Let's Talk and others, that have taken great strides in ensuring that those sorts of issues can be talked about in an open and safe environment with employers. I think moving forward it would be proactive to engage those sorts of campaigns in order to raise the discussion level about those very important issues.

**The Chair:** Briefly.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you.

Derryk, you had talked about from the bottom up.

One of the things I think any government would have concerns about is ensuring that what are in most cases non-profit organizations—such as VETS Canada; Paws Fur Thought, Medric Cousineau's service dogs; Can Praxis—most of these volunteer groups are able to do the right thing on behalf of the veteran. And because their heart's out there, they may do the wrong thing, which in turn may hold back the veteran in some cases. In that regard, can you explain how the bottom up would assist the government in terms of that communication and cooperation to really do what is their purpose to do, to help that veteran and their family?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** When I think of the cost involved with medical care, having the mental health experts in place, having the infrastructure so that we have veterans agencies that we can go to, that's sort of the big structure. But when I referred to the bottom up, much of what's missing, honestly, is local mentorship.

The reason I say that is I've run arguably one of the most successful Canadian Forces cooperative education programs in the country since 2002. The soldiers who come through, it's almost like being an old football coach of theirs. I get them coming back again and again. I mean this is hundreds. A lot of them, what they're looking for, like I said, is mentorship. When the trust is there.... Because a big issue about PTSD is trust, it really is. It is probably the single most precious commodity that these young soldiers need. And when the trust is there, we can help direct them to where the appropriate resources are.

So as the federal government, as you expend resources, we want to make sure those resources are expended in a very accountable and effective manner, because when I mentioned about the guy— No one wants to see someone who really needs help do without. This is the whole reason I look at the bottom-up approach.

Having support groups, whether it's Veterans Canada helping the homeless or the Veterans Well Being Network, which costs nothing to the federal government, we want to bring these people to where those supports are in place.

The whole idea is you don't have to necessarily replicate the resources of 50 places, but we want to make sure that those veterans are aware of what's happening. We want to make sure before any damage is done to their families or their relationships or their place of employment, we want to get them to be proactive and get them to those resources. This can be replicated nationally.

In terms of hands on, I mentioned retraining and maybe bringing some people back from the joint program support units. Again local mentorship can make all the difference in the world. The one thing the Canadian Forces had in abundance, we had some fantastic senior NCOs and junior NCOs who are still in the area. These are the ready-made mentors in your communities. So when that reg force member who comes back from Wainwright or comes back from Petawawa.... The local economy in Petawawa can't absorb that many people transitioning out of the forces.

But if they come back to their home communities at least a little sooner, we can provide that local mentorship. We can help them transition. We can help them make the connections, whether it's through educational facilities, through the public sector, the private sector. These opportunities are there and they're sustainable. This is the reason why I say this, I really think the answer to really fixing the new Veterans Charter is to take a bottom-up approach, not necessarily a top down.

It's not that I want you to spend less money on veterans, far from that. But the whole point is saying, let's make sure that those veterans who are truly in need are the ones who get the help and there are no questions asked. The more that we can support and not necessarily have to—I don't want to say discard.... But to me it's such a waste to have a 25-year-old veteran who with the right support, with the right mentorship, can have a fantastic new career ahead of him. That opportunity doesn't happen because the leadership wasn't there, the support wasn't there—whether it's the family unit, whether it's the medical system, whether it's the local community, whether it's dealing with issues of stigma, the answer is really the bottom up. This way the sacred obligation can be met because we're using our resources more efficiently.

● (1600)

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

Mr. Dykstra, nice to have you here this afternoon and you now have six minutes, please.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I just wanted to point out that I hope I'm not the reason that a few of my colleagues have had to step out for a couple of moments to talk.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):** They'll come back as soon as you're finished.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** That line doesn't surprise me at all.

I'd like to thank both of you for being here this afternoon—Derryk in particular, being from my home community. You mentioned something about 2002 and perhaps David, you could comment on this as well. I do appreciate the comments you made with respect to trying to remove partisanship with how we deal with this issue.

You were looking at this system from the inside out in 2002 when you began your transition to what you're doing now. I guess my question for both of you is, when you left, did you know where to go right away in terms of beginning to deal with the transition? And second, do you think that folks like both of you are able to, in a very meaningful way based on the organization that you represent—Derryk in particular and David as a consultant more or less—are you able to assist our young veterans now so that they're not facing the same types of issues you may have faced in 2002 when you left?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** Absolutely. Not having that sort of perspective, it's almost frightening, right, because you have come from an environment that's one of the most supportive environments you can have.

I read this in an article maybe about six months ago, but it really struck a nerve with me, and it was the fact that for a lot of veterans it's actually quite shocking moving from a military environment into a civilian environment, where you don't have each other's back, right? You are that close, you are that supportive, you are that accountable to each other, and to be in a civilian environment where—I'm not knocking it, but it's a little more fend for yourself, it's a little more cover your back. You really don't have that same trust and that loyalty to each other. It's almost a very frightening scenario. As I said, for some of the veterans, they don't make that adjustment.



So for a lot of these bottom-up initiatives, that's what it's really about, to support them so they sort of get their feet under them, they get their confidence, they sort of learn how the new rules are played in this different environment, and then these individuals and their families can be successful for the next decades. This is the whole idea about being proactive and looking at it from mentorship from the bottom up.

And I don't think it can necessarily be imposed by Ottawa. The support needs to be there. The political synergy needs to be there, but a lot of this has to happen from the local level, and the federal government has to trust us, right, in the local sense. It's not asking for a blank cheque, but as I said, when I worked with Rick, it's basically give us your blessing, and if we need you to make phone calls or make discussions to help facilitate things, that's what we really need. That allows you to then focus on the big-ticket items. We can help a whole whack of veterans, but those most in need are the ones we don't want to see fall through the cracks.

• (1605)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** David.

**Mr. David Fascinato:** I'll speak to transition in two different planes here. One is that initial transition when I got off the plane a few years ago, versus the career transition, which happened more recently.

With regard to the first, I essentially came back from Afghanistan, as I mentioned. Thirty days later I'm sitting at the steps of the University of Ottawa saying "okay, back to class."

There are services of support there in existence for reservists to tap into for support, to make that initial transition a little bit easier, but they're really hard to come by, and there's kind of an absence of communication, more or less, with regard to if I had an issue. I saw friends first-hand who had issues coming back and who probably needed some resources. The services of support are there, and then the individuals over here, and there's no communication with how the individual might navigate the process in order to get the resources they need.

It's a long battle for many people, and I sat with my friends through many a long night helping them navigate those issues. So there's a communication thing. That's what I wanted to emphasize.

Second, I'm going to echo Derryk here with regard to the transition of the job. In my experience it comes down to grassroots organization groups like Treble Victor that I have first-hand experience with. It's a wonderful resource to tap into a community of ex-military individuals to find that mentorship, to find that guidance and leadership to help you navigate through that next phase of transition. You have made it back from the conflict. You have made it back to just a normalized life, let's say, and now you actually want to actualize your aspirations and achieve your goals, and that usually involves getting a job in the economy.

How do you do that? It's building that community, and building that network. It has been my experience, and I'm very grateful for the experience I've had with Treble Victor in building that professional network in the GTA. I know there are chapters that are growing throughout the country, so it's an organization that will grow in time, of course. And it is absolutely indispensable.

So to echo the bottom-up approach, there are groups advocating within that realm and that are ensuring there is continued support to the individual when and if they choose to make that initial leap into civilian life, as it were.

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

We're past the six minutes, Mr. Dykstra.

Ms. Freeland, welcome this afternoon. It's nice to have you here. You're up for six minutes, please.

**Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** First of all, thank you, everyone, for having me here with you. As you probably all know, Frank is at Vimy Ridge, so he has asked me to sit in. Thank you for that privilege. It's been really fascinating.

Thank you, Derryk and David. I've learned a lot from listening to you.

I've been really interested in particular, Derryk, in this point you have made a few times about the need for more of a bottom-up approach.

Can you speak to—and maybe, David, you will have some comments on this too—some systematic ways we could build that bottom-up approach into the whole policy?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** The first concrete one, I would say, is looking at the JPSUs, where if we can transition.... Of course, only of their own free will, but for those soldiers who know they're not going to re-up and are going to be transitioning back, instead of having them, say, in Petawawa for up to two years, where there's no opportunity to network, to develop more skills.... In the army, one of the terms you never wanted to be referred to as is what we used to call a "MIR commando". I can't believe the morale is very high for a lot of them, because they're not with their comrades in the battalion or in their unit or squadron.

For those soldiers who are looking for a new opportunity and a new transition, you already have the infrastructure. You're paying for it, right? With the local armouries and the some 50-odd local reserve units, you can absorb pretty much every one of those soldiers who would choose to make that transition and you can bring them back sooner. While they're there, they can then transition over from basically 100% of their day doing some type of administrative job at the local unit. Over time, it's almost like a reverse co-op like the one I run for the District School Board of Niagara, where they're transitioning out of the military and into a civilian career versus bringing young soldiers into the military.

It can be done. The opportunity is there. The infrastructure is already paid for. This is what I'm saying. You can get more value for the dollars you're already spending if we look at how they're being spent.

The other part of a bottom-up approach, again, is the mentorship. It's one thing for them to get new education or training, or to do almost like an adult co-op type of program, but there are the social networks, both with the local soldiers, in being able to integrate with these guys who will become their buddies, who will become their support network outside of their nuclear family.... But also, at the same time, they're getting a chance to be seen in the community, and that will help close the disconnect that I referred to in my comments.

The more opportunities where we see veterans out there.... If we can make the Helmets to Hardhats program more prominent or more successful.... There are a lot of opportunities whereby we can close the gap that currently exists, where we have this highly professional Canadian Armed Forces but it's small and it's out of the way. Unless it's on a news clip, for the most part the average Canadian does not see it.

•(1610)

**Ms. Chrystia Freeland:** To follow up on that, Derryk, do you think that, for example, as part of this transitioning, people should begin their job search and that sort of thing before they go?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** Before they leave the military? Absolutely.

I'll give you an example: the Helmets to Hardhats program. To have them learn a new trade is awesome, but in the long term, to make this self-sustaining, what I truly believe is necessary is not only to teach them skills such as becoming an electrician or a plumber or working in HVAC, but also to teach them the business skills, because small business is the real generator of jobs.

The first person who's going to hire another veteran is a veteran. For these veterans who get into that Helmets to Hardhats program, if we can, say, over four to five years, also give them the training so they can manage their own business, the expenditure that you put into these programs now is going to pay huge dividends down the road, because it will become self-sustaining.

**Ms. Chrystia Freeland:** David, you've done that transition very recently. Do you have any more thoughts on how we could actually act on this bottom-up approach?

**Mr. David Fascinato:** One point I'd like to make is that the success I've witnessed has really been centred on collaboration between various organizations within that veteran transition realm. I'm speaking to Treble Victor, VTAC, and even VETS Canada, where I think ultimately the bigger-picture effort is changing the discussion, changing the focus of the debate around veterans in business or veterans in transition.

It's something that, speaking to your earlier point about stigma.... So long as we concentrate on all the negatives, we sometimes forget the potential for positives. Unfortunately, sometimes the centre of the discussion is more divisive versus more collaborative.

When there's division, as I experienced in Afghanistan.... If I had disagreed with my DFAIT colleague and my CIDA colleague, no one would have benefited from the distribution of assistance for the population. Instead, when we were more aligned and were able to

come together and collaborate on those very important issues—everyone had an agenda, of course—we were able to actually have that impact at the end of the day.

Enabling those grassroots organizations, that bottom-up approach, and encouraging an environment in which organizations and people can work together towards a common goal of making sure that the generation that I'm a part of, the generation of young veterans, can succeed, that's really important. Because sometimes the barriers are ones that we put in place ourselves, but sometimes those are more easily dismantled than you might think.

•(1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Our time is up.

Mr. Gill, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

**Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank our witnesses for being here today and helping us with this important study.

As you know, we're obviously conducting a comprehensive review of the new Veterans Charter, which was proposed by Minister Fantino.

My question is for David.

David, as a serving member and reservist, can you elaborate on your experience while transitioning from deployment back to a being Class A officer?

**Mr. David Fascinato:** Certainly. It wasn't just because of the winter that it was a shock to come back to normal life. To elaborate a bit, I came back December 5 and on January 5 I was back in class. The last day of my technical contract as a Class C reservist was, I think, January 28, and then I was back to Class A service, temporary part-time contract work with the military while concurrently pursuing my studies.

It wasn't an easy one just because of the condensed timeframe, as you can imagine. Within 35 days I went from patrolling in southern Afghanistan, which is quite different from walking to school in the middle of January. Obviously, the transition itself was ushered along by my reserve unit, the Governor General's Foot Guards at the time. Generally speaking, it was a smooth transition. However, there are always things that kind of get in the way administratively, and prolong that transition. There were a lot of challenges with regard to medical documents, outstanding pay issues, and other things that were carried over from my time in Afghanistan, which had an impact and obviously caused a little bit of stress in my reintegration while I was just trying to get back to my life as it had been before.

Within about a year or so, everything was taken care of, and I would actually define that full transition, me really getting back into my life. When you're a reservist, it's a little bit different. It's not the traditional, regular-force experience. I did volunteer and kind of got plucked out, and then I came back and had to find an apartment, because I'd gotten rid of my apartment and sold all my furniture. That's challenging, but at the end of the day, it all came together after a little while.

**Mr. Parm Gill:** Very nice.

Can you tell us also what type of support you received from the military, even in terms of medical or mental health, if any?

**Mr. David Fascinato:** As is the case with any other serving member, I obviously underwent a number of medical and mental health assessments on my return. Those started, actually, in Kandahar before I got on the plane, and I think within six months of getting back I had completed all my screening. It was at that point in time, at that part of my transition, that I exited, but I can speak to my experience with various friends and colleagues who had more prolonged experiences of that. Again, this is the challenge of being a reservist, that sometimes we get to slip through the cracks for one reason or another. Even in my own case, actually, my medical files were lost, but they surfaced eventually, of course. Those things prolong things and cause a little bit of stress, but at the end of the day, we're all checked out.

**Mr. Parm Gill:** Did you encounter any barriers along the way? Do you have any recommendations in terms of how we can streamline the process?

**Mr. David Fascinato:** I raised the point earlier about communicating those services and supports that are available. It was sometimes a challenge, and I'd have to go hunting for those resources myself. I'd really have to go out and literally spend half my day sometimes trying to nail down various appointments, just to talk to someone about a concern or an issue, and more often than not that would just be upon my own initiative. I'd ask for assistance or support from various resources. As reservists, sometimes we just get pointed in the direction and told to go.

So communicating more effectively that there are those resources available and ensuring that there is a smoother connection as opposed to one that takes a lot of effort at times would go a long way to making sure that transitioning members receive the benefits that they deserve.

•(1620)

**Mr. Parm Gill:** Are you able to give us an example of a barrier or sort of a challenge that you have faced along the way that you wish you didn't have to?

**Mr. David Fascinato:** I'll speak to a friend's experience.

He was displaying symptoms of PTSD and he was having a lot of issues just getting an appointment with a military doctor to talk about it. He had gone through the screens and there were no issues that were flagged, but after a certain point of time after the screening had been completed, issues started and symptoms started arising. It was then difficult for him to get access to—to just simply have a conversation with someone, not even a re-assessment, but just to have a chat.

It was unfortunate that it took a lot of effort and a lot of hunting on his part, and on my part as a friend to support him. We have this concept of battle buddies in the military so we look out for one another quite closely, and so I helped him get through that. It took a lot of effort, but there was a pretty massive barrier. I could speculate that it could have been administrative, it could have been operational, it could have been systematic in terms of the actual organizational structure that we were trying to get ourselves into, but it was a challenge nonetheless.

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

Now Mr. Chicoine, please, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Fleming, I want to ask you a question concerning the transition period you mentioned in your opening statement.

You said it would be good that there be a 6 to 12-month transition period before the military person is released to civilian life. Afterwards you talked about the possibility of sponsorship. You also touched on a topic I find interesting, that of administration courses. Not only could this allow a veteran to offer his or her services to a business that works in the area of administrative services, but this could even allow them to start a business. I am thinking of a number of veterans who experienced some unfortunate circumstances. They used their lump sum payment to start businesses, but may not have had a good basis in administration, and experienced total failure.

In short, it would be interesting if you could go back to this matter of the administration courses. Also, do you think that the help of a guidance officer at the very beginning of that transition period could be useful so that a member of forces could be guided toward his fields of interest?

[*English*]

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** You raise an excellent point, I'm so glad that you mentioned that. I can think of a personal example where there was young soldier who had come back. I was his teacher. He came through the program, I recruited him. He went overseas, he was a gunner in one of the RG-31s. When he came back, he did get a lump sum, I believe it was in the realm of about \$75,000. He decided to launch a business and several times I stressed, again and again, not to jump in head-first unless he had the skills and the knowledge to make that investment properly.

His business has failed, so even though he got the lump sum and the federal government did provide it to him and there was an opportunity there, the money was essentially squandered because he didn't have the skill set.

For me, who has spent a good part of my life training adults or retraining adults, to see that mistake made it's like a train wreck. You see it coming, you're trying to tell them not to do this, but they still do it. That business could have succeeded. He could have created more small jobs if he had the skills and the training upfront.

A lot of soldiers—and I don't think this is a surprise to many—have ADD; they tend to be very impulsive. They just do things, they're go-getters. But that sometimes doesn't work well when it comes to business because sometimes that go-getter attitude can end up causing failure. So when we look at bringing soldiers back from the joint program support units, having that 6 to 12 months all depends on the needs of the individual. Maybe it needs to be 18 months. For other individuals, if they're really in better physical and mental health, maybe it only needs to be three months. It needs to be flexible so it's not like a prison sentence for these individuals. But I really think we need to create synergy in our local economy with our training and educational facilities. Whether it's colleges, universities, or the local school boards through the community ed programs, we can deliver programs very effectively so that the resources that are being expended by the new Veterans Charter to help these veterans transition is money well spent.

But the training and the transition and the mentorship and the support has to be in place before we cut them a big cheque. I truly believe that. There's one other thing I think we should mention too. For those soldiers who are very young and aren't able to handle that kind of money, one idea I thought about was looking at having the CPP, since it's an infrastructure already in place.... These young soldiers don't know...for most of them, and I'm a former NCO myself.... So for a lot of them when it comes to financial planning, for the most part, this is way over their heads. So at least if it's in place.... The idea is that, yes they can access it, we're not trying to babysit them, but at the same time, have the supports in place so that those sums of money that were set aside by the new Veterans Charter aren't being squandered in the first 90 days.

• (1625)

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** I agree with you totally. It would be good to practically force a veteran to follow those courses. I agree with you that it would be essential for someone who wanted to use all of his lump sum payment to start a business to follow some basic courses.

Would the services of guidance counsellors be necessary in that regard to assess all of that, or to direct someone towards something else if the counsellor saw that the person had no aptitude for management?

[English]

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** Yes. We wouldn't even need to reinvent the wheel here, whether it's through the community colleges, the universities, or even through the local school board. Most school boards have a business education council. You also have adult ed programs or community ed. These modules are already in place for the civilian population there. To have a veteran transition with support, we're not even reinventing the wheel here. But to have that opportunity for lifelong growth, to develop the skills so that we're making sure that we maximize their chances for success for

transitioning. What it does is it creates better outcomes, it creates hope for the families, it's win-win all the way around.

**The Chair:** We're right up against your six minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** You are telling me my time is up, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Fascinato, would you care to make a brief comment?

[English]

**The Chair:** Peter's got you well-trained, I'll tell you.

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** I thought you said I had a few seconds. I'm sorry.

**The Chair:** No.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Hawn, please, for six minutes.

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

Thank you both for being here.

I want to pick up on a couple of things. David, first you talked about the effectiveness of the screening. As you know, effects can be delayed for a number of years and we've experienced that throughout. Did you find your screening effective? It sounds like you did. But do you think there should be a sort of mandated screening within the first six months? Should there be sort of a follow-up mandated screening every year for a couple of years, or some increased frequency?

**Mr. David Fascinato:** Absolutely. I agree with that 100%, and even beyond one's technical service in the military as well. I believe there should be as much support as possible to individual members who have, for whatever reason or cause, that they went overseas.... They deserve the support at the other end. Whether they stay in the military or leave it the next day, I believe quite firmly that support should not cease, and that sort of screening would also go a long way towards picking up, as I mentioned before, certain aspects of operational stress injuries or post-traumatic stress disorder that might appear afterwards.

• (1630)

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Screening as a veteran carrying on.

**Mr. David Fascinato:** Yes.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Did either of you have any difficulty—you come from different generations—accessing your medical files, getting your medical files, or getting access to the information?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** For me personally, I had a... Our unit doctor actually gave me a copy of my medical file. He warned me back when I left that it would be a good idea if I had my own copy. That was the reason why I had it, and I wouldn't have thought of it myself.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Was that SOP or was he just doing it with you?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** No, he was doing it because he knew my history. He said it would be a good idea that I had this if I ever needed it. I can't comment for the average.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** David.

**Mr. David Fascinato:** In my experience, as I mentioned, my files were lost. They reappeared after a certain period of time, thank heavens. But it would be great to have access to those especially when and if I formally leave the military. It would be great to have access to those so that my family doctor could even access that stuff. Right now there's a massive disconnect when I talk about back pain, and it's hard to describe that to a normal doctor sometimes.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** I'll say listen up tomorrow. You don't know what that means, and that's okay.

We heard from Sergeant Bjarne Nielson. I don't know if either one of you know him. His is a great story of recovery from very serious injuries: loss of a leg, basically an elbow, and so on. He said something I thought maybe goes to the bottom-up idea. He said that, of the 100% that needs to be brought to bear to whatever situation, 49% comes from the government programs and benefits, whatever. But 51% is what he brings, the hard skills and soft skills attitude more than anything else. If you met this guy, you'd understand; you'd understand attitude.

Derryk, is that the kind of thing that's sort of writ large when we're talking about bottom up?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** This brings in what I mentioned about mentorship and support. When I raise the point about stigma for the average person, if they're not informed, their image is either the movie *Rambo* or it's news media on CNN.

Yet we have what we call vet-togethers. I attended one last Saturday. There were probably about 14 or 15 of us. So of those 14 or 15, 12 of us have PTSD. We have spouses; we have children. The whole thing is, it's not an issue when you get it. When I say get it, I mean you understand it. We pick up on everything in the room. I read people's body language very well. If there's no sort of apprehension, there's no issue at all. Really one of the best ways for someone with PTSD to integrate is to have good manners.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** I want to talk about stigma a bit more, and you brought it up, Derryk. The stigma, external stigma, is what the attitude is out there. That gets obviously internalized by the individual and they feel the impact, the personal impact of that stigma.

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** Yes.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** I'm going to ask you if we as a society and the media people have gone overboard with this. I've had a number of veterans come to me and say, "I'm having a hard time even getting an interview for a job". They tell me that they think it's because—and I've seen this too—there's getting to be an attitude that, if you

were a combat veteran, you must be damaged for some reason, because that's what we hear all the time.

It's not to say the stories aren't important to be told and so on, but it becomes so much the narrative that a lot of people are looking at anybody who was in uniform as somehow damaged.

How do we fix that?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** Part of it is.... I think it's a multifaceted one. We need to celebrate the veteran transitions in the communities. If you're at a base like Petawawa, you can't help but see that this is a military town. But for a lot of people in my home community of St. Catherine's, the Lake Street Armoury was built in 1906. For most people, they just see it as the castle. They have no idea what goes on there, and yet in that unit, you have at least 40 members who are veterans. Their stories aren't told, or once in a while, maybe on Remembrance Day.

For the most part, that's what I mean by the disconnect. If we can reconnect, that will take care of 49% of the problem right there. The other part is in terms of sensitivity training. Stigma comes from the population at large.

I know myself, I attended camp practices with my wife, and I learned quite a bit. I really can see now.... My voice never gets louder than this, but at 6 '5" and 280 pounds, if I look the wrong way, I could probably frighten someone. I had to learn that. Because with self-observation, I would say I wasn't upset, but the person beside me might take it the wrong way.

We feel everything. That's the best way to describe it, that 90% of communication is body language. And in terms of language, there's cadence, tone, and volume. You manipulate one of the three, and it changes the message. For us, that hyper vigilance, we can set other people off, but they set us off.

So for a lot of it, when I mention about having a Veterans Affairs caseworker being able to advocate for you—whether it's in the workplace or whether it's with housing—we need someone at the local level who can help that transition and support when we're dealing with people who think they know, but really don't.

• (1635)

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

Mr. Lizon now please, for six minutes.

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. You're very generous.

Welcome to both of you here, and thank you for your service. Welcome to all the guests and the veterans here with us this afternoon.

I would like to go back to the communications issue that both of you mentioned. I was just wondering if you would have any suggestions as to how to address it and the best way to fix it. If any of us decided to build a house and decided to be his or her own general contractor, I think once we approached the land and started getting the required paperwork, it probably would take us three times as long, or longer, as the person who does this on a daily basis.

What is the problem, from your experience, David? Is it that the people who are providing services do not understand your needs or don't understand the way? Would it be possible to create some kind of personalized manual that you can follow? I am so-and-so, I did this, I have these problems, this is what I have to do, and it's clear in front of me in the proper order.

Is this something that is possible or even partially possible? It's not possible? Is it a problem with people at service centres? Is it something else? How would you suggest we fix it?

**Mr. David Fascinato:** One thing that I would jump on is the concept of the battle buddy that I mentioned earlier. If you have someone who has done it before and can, to Derryk's point, be a mentor.... I'm talking about the initial transitions: stepping off the plane, the first six months or a year. I think it would help if there was a one-on-one touchpoint to help that individual navigate all of the overwhelming things that they're going to be dealing with. They have no idea that they will be dealing with it. That's even assuming that they're not bringing their own issues to the table.

The hill before you is that much steeper when you have other challenges confronting it. Having someone there to help so that you're not alone when you're calling up the mental health service line and trying to explain how you feel. Having someone there with you, not just on the other end of the line, can help the individual get through that journey and be more adequately supported. The other benefit there is that's ensuring more than adequate communication of the services and support that are available.

To the point about mentorship and your earlier point about communication, you just have to ensure that it's there. Right now, that's something that's generally lacking in my experience. I should caveat that with, I know what I went through in the ninth year of the war in 2010-2011 when I came back. It was probably far better than what it was in 2002 or 2003. I'm very grateful that there were incremental improvements, but that doesn't mean we should forget about what we've learned and not think about how we can improve moving forward.

• (1640)

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** It's important, when we look at the issue, to see if we can create a pamphlet or a template that will fix it.

PTSD comes in many flavours. I'll give you one example, The general consensus in the public is, well, they must have seen their friend get blown up. But anyone who's served in a battalion will know that, for example, the company clerk is the person who ends up having to collect and send their effects home. Or even a UAV operator who's looking at the thermal image screen or the night vision screen of when a UAV hits a target. There's a whole bunch of different ways that PTSD can be created, so really, one size doesn't fit all and you cannot take away the human aspect.

When I mention having a pamphlet, you're right, if it was someone who's completely untrained, absolutely. Having solid mentorship or a solid battle buddy, the role of that is to stabilize a veteran 24-7, so that they can reach out and they're not alone.

But it can't replace the actual human aspect of trained experts and we don't cross that line. For example, for us 31 CBG, we cost the government nothing. We cover an area that's roughly one-third of the province of Ontario, but has one-eighth of the country's population living within it, yet we don't provide medical services per se. We'll stabilize a veteran emotionally and then we will get them to the next level of critical care. Whether that's an OSISS group, whether that's to a hospital, whether that's to an actual psychologist, or whatever is needed, that's what happens.

Sometimes it's also quite simple. You have a veteran who is really withdrawn and they have no food in the fridge, like literally. It happens almost every week, you'll hear two to three times whether someone can drive someone because they have no one to look after them and they haven't had any food in their fridge for a day or two.

This is what I mean from the bottom up. We want to standardize everything because we tend to do that, but a lot of this is really local stuff. What will work in the Niagara region might not necessarily work in the Kitchener-Waterloo region. It might not work in the Kingston area. We have to tailor it. It's like building a house somewhat; it's custom or it's semi-custom.

What we really require from the government is that clarity and that synergy of thought to help the provincial government to see what they could do and what the municipal government could do. When everyone takes a vested interest in our veterans, that's one of the biggest things that we sort of feel we get left out of. We feel like we're forgotten other than the two minutes on Remembrance Day. Yet, for a lot of veterans who are amputees or have the silent scars, we live with this every day. So in some ways Remembrance Day is a little bittersweet because it doesn't translate into our everyday lives.

It doesn't have to be a massive budget expenditure. This is what I meant by the bottom up. If we look at all three levels of government, we look at the private sector, the public sector, and there's local leadership and where there isn't, you can mentor it from another region. We can basically coach all those main centres. We'll find where the veterans are, we'll make sure that their families are assisted. If you have a big infrastructure and you're paying for it 24-7, it's going to be utilized properly, but what it takes is organization and leadership.

**The Chair:** Mr. Rafferty, for six minutes.

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for being here today.

It's interesting that we started off this session talking about transitions, and continued to. It's interesting because almost every witness we've talked to has talked about the transition, particularly from regular forces to Veterans Affairs. It really seems to be a key part of improving the Veterans Charter, and almost everybody has talked, as you have, about family support and those sorts of issues. And I liked what you said, Mr. Fleming, about accessing the strengths and abilities of people, because I'm not sure that happens right now.

Some of the things people have talked about are things like caseworker continuity, for example. You leave the regular forces and suddenly you lose this caseworker you've had. You have somebody new; and you may have three or four, as people move and shift around. And that kind of thing is critical.

The other thing that was mentioned—and it seems to me to be a fairly easy thing to do—is ensuring that the day someone leaves, that he or she is automatically part of Veterans Affairs and given that number, because, as you know, many people.... For example, Mr. Fascinato, you may not really access Veterans Affairs for 20 to 30 more years, when you need something different that you don't need now, because you're a young man.

So the question is for both of you. How might that transition be improved? Second, there are some things I've talked about, but there are some things you might like to mention. The other part of that is, how do you think that should appear in the Veterans Charter to make sure that happens? Because that's just words. Someone still has to make that happen, but what would it look like in the Veterans Charter if we were to make sure that happened?

In Thunder Bay we have quite a large garrison, not regular. Some regular forces are there, but not many. The treatment of those two groups of soldiers is quite a bit different, whether you're reserve or whether you're regular. So I wonder if you could both make comments about those things.

Maybe Mr. Fleming, if you're ready?

• (1645)

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** The idea of having the soldier transition once he's transferred out of service and automatically having a VAC case file opened doesn't mean he's accessing services. But it could be as simple as sending them a questionnaire every six months or once a year. I'm going to give my supervisor at work credit. He's calls it "the steady drip". If they need the services, it's better to have... prompt and proactively before it becomes a crisis. So, I think that idea is an excellent suggestion. Right off the bat, they have a caseworker. It doesn't mean they're costing lots of money.

There's a second thing I want to point out, because I haven't heard it in the discussion we had today. In Great Britain, they actually look at some of the issues with their reservists versus their regular force members. They actually peg it at 1.5 times more than the regular force. The reason for it is that on the regular force bases, they do have those big support centres there. But when you think of the soldiers who served in Afghanistan, one-fifth of all the combat personnel—and most of these people were the ones outside the wire—were actually reservists. But when they come back, only two or three of them in that unit go back to their hometowns, and they don't

have those multi-million dollar services like they have in Petawawa, Valcartier, and Edmonton.

So there is a disconnect between the reservists, who took the same risks as the regular force personnel, versus the regular force personnel, and they are still back with most of their comrades who served, at least for a time before that transition happens.

When you think of the veterans who are the reservists, please don't overlook them in that new Veterans Charter. I honestly think they're some of the most at risk. I talk about the disconnect. They go back to these home communities and people don't necessarily recognize them. It's not like one VP just came back to Edmonton, or one RCR just came back to Petawawa, and the whole city knows or the whole town knows. But for Corporal Smith or Master Corporal Jones who just went back to Guelph, not everyone knows that. They can get lost in the system very easily.

So, somehow in the new Veterans Charter, please do not allow a discrepancy between the regular force members and the reserve force members, because they took the same risks.

**Mr. John Rafferty:** A veteran is a veteran is a veteran.

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** A veteran is a veteran. One standard, yes, please.

**Mr. David Fascinato:** Yes.

I was going to add, or Corporal Fascinato.

**Mr. John Rafferty:** Yes. Okay.

**Mr. David Fascinato:** Actually, I'm from Guelph, ironically enough. I'm not really sure how that happened. I didn't plan that.

Honestly, I'm going to sound like an echo here, but it is a convoluted process for reservists, speaking to my own experiences. There is an issue that you fall back into a sphere of anonymity after you have just come back from doing something pretty intensive, something that you have a tremendous amount of pride in, and then you're suddenly cut back into a society that is, generally speaking, ambivalent towards you and your accomplishments. Or you're just generally misunderstood because not only does no one really understand what you did, but the debate and discussion at all the various levels is radically different from what you experienced in your service overseas.

With regard to the new Veterans Charter ensuring that veterans from within the reserve do have a voice and their issues can be addressed.... For example, when I chatted about a friend who couldn't access mental health services, or even the fact that my medical charts were lost for almost eight months and it's because I was a reservist I was told, those sorts of things deserve more attention. The debate and discussion is rightly focused on members of the regular force, but when the focus is only on one aspect of serving members who went overseas.... Definitely there's a different set of challenges, and a unique set of challenges, for the reservists when they reintegrate into society. They're not going back to Petawawa with all their battle buddies. My battle buddies went back to London, Toronto, and elsewhere, while I went back to Ottawa. That's a challenge in and of itself. It's a reality that we had to face, and we got through it, of course, we're quite tenacious in our approach to ensure that we support each other, but it's not without challenge.

• (1650)

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

Mr. Galipeau, please, for six minutes.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for inviting these guests today.

You're both reservists.

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** Correct.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** You both served our country. You both have the same initials. You've both agreed to share your experiences with us, and we are grateful.

I've written about 10 questions I want to ask you. My first question is of a personal nature.

I'm concerned about your medical files, Mr. Fascinato. I'm glad they were recovered.

Do you know if their confidentiality was breached?

**Mr. David Fascinato:** Not to my knowledge. I believe, to clarify, they were just misplaced. There was no risk to the information.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Okay. I don't want to take too much time about it because I've got 10 other questions and I only have six minutes.

Last week I got to ask one question. The guy took seven minutes to answer.

**The Chair:** We're down to five minutes now.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Mr. Fleming, your experience is obviously different. You're of a different generation.

Can you elaborate on how the process has changed over time?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** I'm actually grateful in that we acknowledge it now.

When I joined the military initially in 1987, it was before you had mixed genders in the combat arms, and it was a very different military. I'm not saying one's better than the other. The Canadian

Forces today certainly has a lot better equipment than we had, but at least there's an awareness and more of an acceptance.

Really quick, something that really touched me was a video clip I saw on Rick Mercer's show, and the CDS was on there. Honestly, that's huge. A year ago I was very despondent about the fact that I was always one of the guys. I held up a lot of people around me. That's my reputation. I've been that way for decades now, 24 years. I hold up a lot of people. When I saw lots of people dropping, and I felt like I had no one else to help me hold them up, it just crushed me. At least what I see now, when I see MPs stand up in the House and defend my brothers, and when I see this government has taken actually really solid steps, where the hiring initiative for the federal government is going to give families hope, you guys are making a difference.

If you'd asked me a year ago, I would have said you don't get it. I think you get it now. I think it just has to work its way through and we have to improve upon it, but you get it now. So it's happening.

• (1655)

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** What type of support did you receive from the military in terms of medical, mental health, or...?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** There was nothing when I came out. Officially I came out in 1994, and—

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Did you encounter any barriers, and if so, do they still exist?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** I didn't actually reach out until the spring of last year. I can't say enough about my initial case manager and my current case manager. It was Kerry Wilkinson out of the Hamilton office.

They were fantastic, absolutely fantastic. They were knowledgeable. They had expertise and compassion. But you need that human element. I'm not trying to be partisan in any way, but you need the human element there. I have a smart app on my phone, and it's not the same as dealing with someone who gets it.

How you deliver that, I'm not questioning; but you need that human element there. You need someone to talk to when you need them.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** You've answered the next two questions already. Thank you.

We hear about complaints about the Department of Veterans Affairs. What complaints would you focus on, if you were sharing them with us?

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** It's the ability to talk to a case manager—

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** I'm talking about the delivery of service.

**Mr. Derryk Fleming:** Oh. It's the ability to get past the initial phone call trying to get in.

Once I talked to a case manager and she got it, wow, the services were there. It was fantastic.



The difficulty is that it's almost like there's a filter that is very hard to get past. Once you get past it, the quality of the personnel who are handling you and the dignity they provide you with are absolutely first class. But it's getting to them. In some ways I almost have to apologize to my colleagues at work. I was very depressed for more than a year and a half, and I had my hand up for a year and a half. I would call every four weeks or so, "Can I talk to someone?" I was told to fill out a form, and get this and get that. To me, it felt like it took forever. But once I was in, once I had a case manager assigned to me....

I have no complaints now. It's just getting to them; that's the thing that I think you need to fix first.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Mr. Fleming, you sound like—

**The Chair:** You're past the six minutes. It's fascinating how fast it goes.

Just before we suspend and before I thank everyone, we did have a piece of business. I understand there is perhaps a desire to do it on Thursday. I'm telling you that we're really squeezed for time on Thursday, so it means you would almost have to come in a little early before the meeting to do it.

This is just to get the analysts lining things up, while we're away for two weeks, in order to get the study under way.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** We could do it now.

**The Chair:** You want to get it done now?

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Sure. If it takes five minutes, we could do it now. We're basically giving direction to the analysts, right?

**The Chair:** Well, I don't want to debate it now for 10 minutes. I want to know whether we're going to deal with it now or deal with it —

**Mr. Parm Gill:** I'd prefer that we deal with it on Thursday, but....

**The Chair:** We'd have to come in just a bit early.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** We're okay.

**The Chair:** Okay: then you'll be instructed that we'll do the business thing early.

Sorry about that. I do want to thank you very much. It was very helpful today. We look forward to incorporating your thoughts into the study as we go forward.

**Voices:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** We'll suspend for a few minutes, and then we'll start again.

● (1655)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you to everybody who's here. We'll get into detail later.

We have this difficulty that happens on Tuesday nights. We are into longer committee meetings but we have votes that we have to go to and the bells go at 5:15. We're going to start the presentations, we'll stay here until 5:30, maybe slightly beyond that, and then we have to go upstairs. We'll break, we'll come back down after the

votes, we'll reconvene, and then we'll do the rounds with the committee.

So thank you for your indulgence and I just want to make sure... we changed the process a bit, so we're going to have Mr. Donald Leonardo, founder and national president of Veterans of Canada. We're also going to have Robert Thibeau, president of the Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones.

We'll start with you, Mr. Leonardo, and then we'll go to Mr. Thibeau, and probably by that time we'll have to suspend for the votes.

So thank you for coming.

● (1705)

**Mr. Donald Leonardo (Founder and National President, Veterans of Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hi, I'm Don Leonardo, I'm with veteranscanada.ca which is a social networking web site for those who have served in uniform, and it's a veteran community.

We have over 7,400 members registered in our veteran community. It's a place where they can meet old friends, make new ones, post blogs, comment on the blogs, and keep up-to-date on current events having to do with the veteran community. We had one member who reconnected after 50 years with somebody they went through boot camp with. So this is a big deal for them, to be able to hook up with old friends, and they can do it through our veteran community that has been up and running for over four years now.

So with that I'm going to continue our subject today, and that's a review of the new Veterans Charter.

The first thing I want to talk about is the fact that I am one of the members of the stakeholders that sit with Veterans Affairs. About four years ago, we came together as one group and decided that we were going to support each other. That support was that we wanted to go forward with the previous studies that Veterans Affairs paid for through the new Veterans Charter advisory group and their report, the special needs advisory committee and their report, and the gerontology report. So we wrote a letter to the minister saying that we wanted to see these...what was the number?

**Mr. Sean Bruyca (Retired Captain (Air Force), Advocate and Journalist, As an Individual):** There were over 300 recommendations.

**Mr. Donald Leonardo:** It was 300 recommendations to fix the new Veterans Charter.

We were told that this was going to be a living charter. I don't know who the doctor is who is going to give CPR to this charter, if it is living; we've had one change in ten years. You may say it's not ten years, but even if you come out with a bill tomorrow, it is still going to take a year and a half to implement, just as Bill C-55 did, That's one change in ten years—for a living document.

Why is the veteran community so upset? It's because we're sitting here and we have to do study after study, when the studies have already been done. You've spent millions of dollars having veterans come to sit in these committee meetings and talk about the problems in the new Veterans Charter. You've spent millions of dollars going through the problems within the veteran community and discussing how we can support the veteran better. You spent millions of dollars, but we're still not providing support for families or for the wife of an injured veteran when she has to quite her job to look after her husband.

A veteran is losing, even if he gets the earnings loss benefit; he gets a 25% pay deduction, after being injured. I'd like to know which member of Parliament here would take a 25% pay cut, along with all the bureaucrats and all the government employees. They were injured in the line of duty and have to take a 25% pay cut while they go through treatment, rehabilitation, and so on.

I've been through the new Veterans Charter from the start to the end of it. I'm now totally and permanently impaired, so I've gone through the whole charter. I can attest to it. Why should an injured veteran take a 25% pay cut and then his wife have to take a 100% cut while she looks after him?

We need to start listening to these recommendations from veterans organizations such as the stakeholder committee, the Legion-hosted veteran consultation group, and so on.

I support the three priorities that have been said over and over again by the Legion, by the National Council of Veterans Associations, and by the other stakeholders. I support the three priorities that the Veterans Ombudsman has brought forward over and over again.

I think it's time to make a change. We need it done quickly this time.

Recently, when I was told that I was going to come to Ottawa and speak before you...

Actually, before I go on with that, there is one thing that I forgot to mention; Sean just pointed this out.

The other thing is that in 1972, a sergeant who retired from the military got a pension when he turned 60, and it was indexed. He got a pension of about \$1000 a month. A sergeant who retired yesterday with the same amount of time and same rank will get \$3000 a month. If there is a cost of living or CPI increase every year, why is there such a difference between the sergeant who got out in 1972 and the sergeant who gets out in 2012? Can you tell me why?

The reason is that there were top-ups in the early 1980s and 1990s that topped up the National Defence salaries and left the veterans behind. Increases for the veterans have been under 2% per year. That's why they're falling behind. That's why they can't even afford to go into extended living, because even that costs more with Chartwell Retirement Residences.

We need to increase the amount of money that they get from even their own superannuation, and with the injured veterans we need to ensure that there's normal career progression, because they should not be penalized because they were injured in the line of duty.

As I was saying, I polled the 7,400 members of Veterans of Canada, and the immediate response was that the fact is that everybody is stalled at the gate before they even start the new Veterans Charter. A year and a half ago you had the study on VRAB, but it's time to fix the problem. The solutions that were put forward have not changed a single thing.

• (1710)

This is the entry into the new Veterans Charter, so I have a solution to the problem. I've passed out a handout. The solution is a new way to process and approve injury claims for veterans.

In embarking on the road less travelled, Veterans of Canada has canvassed its more than 7,400 members. The majority of our members want to see a better and fairer system put in place that reduces time and wait periods, a system that is proven and that gives the benefit of the doubt, as the Veterans Ombudsman stated previously.

Over the past several years there have been requests to have more veterans employed within the Government of Canada, even to the point that we have now put forward a bill that I feel is very good—I've been pushing for this for years—which provides for priority hiring for veterans.

Let's now offer some other jobs. Let's start the Bureau of Pensions Advocates up again so that we can hire veterans as claims processors. Making the initial claim is a stumbling block for veterans. They fill out the paperwork, but they never have the right documents, and then it is kicked back and we have a problem, because then they have to go through appeals.

If we went back to the pre-1996 Bureau of Pensions Advocates system and hired some claims processors to be with the Bureau of Pensions Advocates, we could have a checklist that indicates that the medical documents from National Defence are attached, the medical documents from Veterans Affairs are attached, and the medical documents from the civilian doctor are attached. This is an opportunity to have a proper claim submitted so that it can be properly adjudicated, and without haste.

The next thing is to get rid of VRAB and get rid of the current system of adjudicating and bring in an evidence-based system. Right now, with National Defence there is a medical review board, and it has been that way for years. It actually works.

Why not just mirror that National Defence board with Veterans Affairs? Hire ex-doctors and ex-nurses, ex-doctors' assistants, 6A and 6B medical people who served in the military—giving more jobs to veterans within the system—but have them adjudicate, because they're the people who treated us. They know the injuries we've had, they see the records, and they understand the x-rays—they were the ones who were doing this.

The only time they would actually see the claim is if someone had been out of the military for a while. The ones coming over from the military have already been adjudicated by the medical review board, so send it to the Veterans Affairs medical officer and he can sign off on it and just pass it to whoever puts numbers to it from the table of disabilities. This is a simple system.

Next, if they happened to turn down a claim, then the appeal process is this. In the U.S. they've started veterans' courts. And yes, they are for criminal cases, but we can have a veterans' court in each province, and either a retired or a sitting judge could sit in each province. On the appeal, your BPA lawyer sits with you and a Veterans Affairs lawyer sits on the other side and argues the benefit of the doubt, just as in a criminal case, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

This is a fair system, allowing for a judge who has spent his whole career on the bench to weigh the evidence presented and then make a decision. This is an evidence-based system that I am proposing.

Lastly, we now have some research that has been done in Kingston, and there is research that has been done all around the world, on veterans' injuries and problems. If that research team happens to find new information or evidence that shows that some of the claims they had turned down are actually legitimate, then we can have a database—this is the age of technology—so that instead of going through the whole process again, the medical doctor in charge of the Veterans Affairs medical review board will just ask them to take all the similar cases out and approve them because new medical evidence has been shown.

• (1715)

This is a very simple system that I'm putting forward. I think this would make the flow to the new Veterans Charter much quicker instead of having people wait four or five months for the first adjudication. Then it goes to the first appeal for another four, five, or six months. Some of these cases go on for six, eight, ten, or twelve years. Recently I was shown one from 1998. We need to speed this up based on medical evidence. That's the way to go. The consensus in the veteran community is that it would be a better process.

I thank you for letting me come and attend today. I hope I provided some solutions instead of just saying this is bad and that is bad. I hope I have provided you with some thought and some solutions, and I hope we can move forward helping those who are seriously in need of help.

I thank you.

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

I'm sure we will get to the questioning after the votes, as I see the bells are starting to go now.

We thank you for that.

We'll now go to Mr. Thibeau.

As I say, we have about 10 minutes or just a bit more, so keep that in mind, please.

**Mr. Robert Thibeau (President, Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones):** Mr. Chairman, honourable members of this Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, fellow veterans, ladies, and

gentlemen, I acknowledge the fact that we meet here tonight on unceded Algonquin territory and I thank the Algonquin people. I also thank the creator for the opportunity for me to address the concerns of not only aboriginal veterans, but all veterans.

My name is Robert Thibeau. I am the president of the Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones, an organization which represents aboriginals from across Canada, as well as North America. I also represent tonight the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. I received an email today sanctioning what I have to say today and they are in agreement with the majority, if not everything that I have said, especially as it deals with some of the issues that I will speak on. I also by memorandum of understanding with first nations veterans of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations veterans, and the veterans of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples....

This is my second appearance in front of this committee and I must say that once again, it's a privilege to be here and I thank you for that privilege.

Before I speak in regards to the issues on the new Veterans Charter, I believe it is important that I speak on issues surrounding aboriginal veterans. The historical military contributions made by aboriginals since the period of contact are well-documented and certainly have a major impact on how we view Canada today as a free and prosperous country. Aboriginal alliances and their contributions were instrumental in the failure of the Americans to gain any ground occupied inside Upper and Lower Canada during the War of 1812 and contributions after Confederation saw large numbers of aboriginals enlist to fight for Canada in both world wars as well as Korea. These contributions today to Canada continue.

What has not been totally recognized is the discriminatory practices against aboriginals, more so against veterans of first nations, regarding both the Soldier Settlement Act and Veterans' Land Act, which not only affected the veteran but also impacted the families as well. You may be surprised that both acts did not apply to status Indians unless they enfranchised, in other words relinquished their identity as Indians. Income benefits for spouses of those serving overseas...in a majority of cases did not receive those benefits or they were lowered by the Indian agent. The office of Indian Affairs had made a plea to Veterans Affairs that returning aboriginal veterans should be the responsibility of Indian Affairs and not Veterans Affairs Canada.

What I have just presented to you can be found in a paper authored by Dr. Sheffield entitled, "A Search for Equity." This paper studied the treatment of first nations veterans and dependants of World Wars I and II, and Korea.

I'd like to read an excerpt from an email I received from one of our veterans after I placed an email regarding my appearance here today. "Thank you for the information hereunder. I am familiar with the new Veterans Charter, having been a member of the Royal Canadian Legion branch 96 for the past 60 years and speaking personally as a WWII war service-related disability pensioner and as a warrior Métis, I have absolutely no complaints whatsoever."

He is not talking about our new Veterans Charter, he is in fact talking about his treatment when he got out of the war in 1945. The only comparison I might make would be the differences now between the present charter and the post-World War II excellent method of treating World War II veterans. Moreover, that refers to the veterans post-war processing on one zone 1945 discharge and the wonderful benefits derived thereof, namely the war service gratuity and the re-establishment credit.

This statement outlines the discrepancies all too evident in the new Veterans Charter today. There have been significant changes with the charter with respect to aboriginal veterans and how they are treated. The new Veterans Charter is now a hot topic of discussion, which includes all veterans and we are now included in that process. There are some issues which mirror veterans across Canada but there are others which are distinct to aboriginal veterans.

• (1720)

Now I would like to read some excerpts from the Prime Minister's announcement of the new Veterans Charter in 2006:

I would like to take this opportunity once again to thank these men and women for their efforts and to let them know that Canadians are proudly standing behind them and their mission....

In future, when our servicemen and women...leave our military family, they can rest assured the Government will help them and their families' transition to civilian life. Our troops' commitment and service to Canada entitle them to the very best treatment possible.

Regarding the earnings loss benefit, currently the benefit provides 75% of pre-release salary, terminated at age 65 for a totally and permanently impaired veteran. The Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones and its partners view this as unacceptable. Those who have suffered and are classed as permanently impaired should never be concerned that they will lose any financial stability, especially beyond the age of 65.

In addition, we, along with all our other veterans groups, believe that the ELB should be 100% and continue beyond age 65. As has been said, an appropriate table must be developed in a fair and just manner to ensure veterans with permanent impairments are looked after by a grateful nation. As has also been mentioned, it is the approach utilized by the Canadian courts in assessing the concept of future loss of income specifically addressing the projected lifetime earnings loss in a personal injury claim. So if this is applied to civilian workers who are not deliberately placed in harm's way by their employer, why should this concept not be applied equally as well towards all permanently incapacitated Canadian Armed Forces members?

The ombudsman's report of 2013 addressed the issues of the ELB, and his report is quite thorough. He addressed the PIA and the supplement, and, as noted, the average financial payments to those who qualify. Neither Veterans Affairs Canada nor the ombudsman provides any explanation about the discriminatory factors that mean

of the 1,428 totally and permanently incapacitated veterans, only 274 will receive all benefits, some will receive ELB only, and others will receive nothing. There appears to be a wide interpretation of the term "totally and permanently incapacitated". The disparity in numbers between those who receive both the permanent impairment allowance and supplement and those who do not make the benefits appears to be window dressing.

With regard to reserves, the policy awarding smaller benefits to a reservist is based on the deemed standard monthly salary of a reservist, whatever that amount may be. This policy may provide soldiers for hire on the cheap, but it places a higher value on a regular force soldier involved in the same incident with identical injuries than it does on a reservist. Both regular and reserve force individuals with like injuries will suffer the same incapacitation throughout their lives and should receive the same salary considerations and minimum rates of the recommended table payable to a totally, permanently incapacitated veteran. The charter must be changed to provide equal and appropriate benefits to all totally and permanently incapacitated veterans.

With regard to veterans who are over age 65, some, but not all, disabled veterans will have a CFSA pension benefit and will also have accumulated credits towards their CPP benefit that should enable them to sustain themselves after the age of 65 when ELB benefits are cut off. That is for some.

About 274 totally and permanently incapacitated veterans receive both the permanent impairment allowance and supplement until aged 65. These individuals may or may not be able to prepare themselves for post-65 financial requirements. However, a totally and permanently incapacitated veteran who did not receive the permanent impairment allowance or its supplement and also has a CFSA pension and insufficient credits towards the CPP is placed in a financially precarious position. Once again we strongly argue the case for those permanently impaired veterans and the responsibility of the government and Canadians to honour the social contract that has finally been acknowledged to some extent by the current minister.

The ombudsman has completed a great deal of work in consultation with veterans, and his report should be closely scrutinized.

With regard to the disability award, this benefit is generally misunderstood and is awarded for pain and suffering only. The fact that it can be paid in a lump sum or increments is irrelevant. It must not be seen as an income replacement benefit, because it is not.

●(1725)

The ombudsman has pointed out that the value of the maximum benefit has not kept pace with awards of Canadian courts to civilians who were not placed in harm's way, as were Canadian Armed Forces members. It is unfortunate that this anomaly was not corrected in 2011 with the other amendments of Bill C-55; however, there is no reason why this cannot be done now, and this must be a priority of the government.

It is also our view that the Equitas lawsuit is a negative blemish on this current government. It is our view that this should be withdrawn instead of wasting funds to pay for unnecessary court costs at the expense of those who have sacrificed a great deal for this country, and who also saw Afghanistan as a mission in which we very much had to be involved. Now it's time to step up and look after them in the fairest and most equitable way.

I know I'm going a little over the time. Please bear with me.

Communications to remote and rural communities are concerns that will impact those affected by the recent closures of the Veterans Affairs offices. How do we ensure that information regarding benefits is delivered to our veterans on reserves or those living in remote areas? Remote reserves in B.C. are only one example where, as a result of those office closures, aboriginal veterans, as well as other veterans in northern B.C., will now have to travel upwards of 16 hours to seek information from VAC. I do not believe that Service Canada is an alternative.

We must also consider the Canadian Rangers, who will in all likelihood become clients of Veterans Affairs in the future. As a look ahead, and without the creation of another bureaucracy, we should look at the resources that may be effective and are already there. The army chain of command operates in the remote regions in northern Canada, and therefore they are in direct contact with those soldiers. It may well be possible to utilize military trainers who are attached to those soldiers as a capable resource to deliver and possibly to provide brief presentations on Veterans Affairs and the benefits those soldiers may be entitled to.

For those communities that do not have high-tech computers or communications capabilities—and there are many—maybe we could be using the Canadian Forces recruiters to provide information to veterans as a secondary duty in order to ensure that information makes its way to veterans, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal.

With regard to veterans health services, there has been talk in recent years, and now Health Canada and the provincial government of B.C. are in the process of transferring health funding directly to first nations in B.C. The issue here is that we cannot allow the historical negative practices of the past to affect aboriginal veterans and the responsibility that Veterans Affairs has to those veterans. Steps must be taken to ensure that the health problem of an aboriginal veteran does not take any of the money that has been given in a health funding envelope to reserves. To resolve this issue, consultation across Canada must identify veterans who are under Veterans Affairs care and entitled to benefits, or who will be future clients of Veterans Affairs, and must ensure that interdepartmental communications lead to concrete agreements in the interests of veterans and not at the expense of community funding.

Finally, some of our Canadian aboriginal veterans have completed service with the United States armed forces. They have served in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Their entitlements and benefits provided are under the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, or DVA. The problem is that in order to access these benefits they need to be inside U.S. borders. I would ask that efforts be made between VAC and the DVA to work out some form of an agreement that addresses the issue of travel for access to those benefits.

I'm not asking VAC to take over the responsibility, but in consultation with DVA, please see if there's a way we can address that.

The new Veterans Charter, when introduced, was unanimously accepted by all political parties, as well as the military chain of command.

●(1730)

At first glance, it appeared to address the needs of veterans and their families but over the years it was discovered to be deficient in some areas. One can appreciate that nothing is perfect, and the NVC must remain a living and working document.

We must come together as one, both veterans and politicians, to reach a consensus on how best we can look after the needs of those who have sacrificed for this country. Public support for this military and its veterans is at its highest level since the end of the Second World War.

A new generation of Canadians has looked upon our soldiers, sailors, airmen and women with pride and with honour. Veterans deserve to have the government answer, as best it can, the needs of its veterans and not forget the families. While financial compensation is only one part of the issue, health care is also a concern, and we must ensure that those benefits are available.

In addition, the families of those who have deployed around the globe have also suffered from the ghosts of war. They have stood shoulder to shoulder with loved ones who have deployed to areas where human life has not been kind. We must look at these family members as well, and we must reach out and touch the families the same way we're asking you to touch those veterans.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the excellent work that has been completed by our Veterans Ombudsman, as well as recognize the Royal Canadian Legion Dominion Command for their continued hard work in addressing concerns on behalf of veterans.

History has not necessarily been kind to our aboriginal veterans and their families, but I see hope in the future, hope that as a veterans community, all issues of concern for all veterans of Canada will be equitable and just. I must insist that this committee disregard partisan politics and address veterans issues and concerns with one voice.

I challenge everyone on this committee to look at the issues and not party platforms. All Canadians have acknowledged the sacrifice of all veterans of all conflicts and peace missions of the 20th and 21st centuries.

I thank the chairman and all members of this committee for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the aboriginal veterans, their families, as well as all the other veterans.

*Meegwetch, merci, qujannamiik*, and all my respect.

• (1735)

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

Believe me, we weren't going to leave until you were finished. I'd rather see us all have to run upstairs than miss your presentation.

I appreciate your patience. We're going to suspend.

We'll go back and vote. You guys can entertain yourselves, and we will be back as soon as the votes are over.

The meeting is suspended. Thank you.

• (1735)

(Pause)

• (1815)

**The Chair:** I'd ask committee members to take their seats. I'd also ask the witnesses to take their chairs, please. We are under a tight time parameter.

Okay, folks, as we said before the break, we have two more presentations and then we'll do our questions. We're hoping to get this in basically by 7:30. We'll do our best to do that.

At this point we welcome—not for the first time at the committee—Sean Bruyey as an individual. Also we have Harold Leduc back. It's good to see you both. I know you're going to be presenting us with all kinds of very thoughtful information, so I'm pleased.

Mr. Bruyey, you're going to go first, are you?

**Mr. Sean Bruyey:** Yes, Harold has thrown me to the dogs first. Thank you, Harold.

Thank you most sincerely, everyone here, for the invitation to speak today. It's a privilege.

Nine years ago Parliament passed the legislation we now know as the new Veterans Charter, or NVC. The elected members of the House of Commons never debated any of its clauses. They have yet to give serious independent and binding consideration to the dramatic changes that the NVC made to the relationship between Canada and those who were and are prepared to lay down their lives in her service.

In good faith, and I really emphasize in good faith, far too many people accepted the shoddy construction of the NVC because government promised to keep the renovations going. Near stagnant incrementalism, a dirty word in the first 50 years of veterans benefits in Canada, has become the sad new social contract between Canada and our veterans and their families. As the unaddressed recommendations accumulate, will the NVC become increasingly unfit to provide adequate shelter for our veterans and their families in the coming years? Veterans Affairs made pretenses to the glory of post-World War II veterans benefits. The originally aptly named Veterans Charter provided a host of programs for all veterans, whether they were injured or not.

In 2005 and in 2011, I testified to numerous parliamentary committees, providing evidence that the new Veterans Charter was not a charter at all, but a cynical repackaging of already existing programs with but a few limited additions. As for consultation, Treasury Board is unequivocal that consultation must be “clear, open, and transparent”. As well as incorporating input from the stakeholders, consultation must also clearly justify in detail why input is rejected in any final drafts. Such two-way exchanges have never occurred in anything called consultation carried out by Veterans Affairs Canada. Perhaps it is no surprise then that VAC in its latest senior management brief considers project code PC-20, titled “Expand Outreach, Consultation, and Engagement of NVC Programs” closed.

I was first to publicly raise concerns regarding the NVC along with Louise Richard, shortly followed by Harold Leduc. The bureaucracy's outrageous attempts to discredit me are on the public record, thanks in large part to media attention and legal proceedings. What is not on the public record is the bureaucracy's motivation. They were hoping to silence me and intimidate my colleagues. A genuine debate on the merits of the new Veterans Charter is not in the interests of Veterans Affairs Canada.

Canadians go to war. They fight, die, lose limbs, minds, and families at your orders for our values, for our nation. They sacrifice to care for all of us. We do not do all this for bureaucrats, even though they may think differently. Then why is it that Parliament either through inaction or inability has failed to stand up to the bureaucracy? Senator Dallaire has put on the record that the minister in 2005 promised biennial reviews in committee. However, it took four years before the committee wrote its first report with 18 recommendations. Four years later, we are at it yet again with witnesses fighting to have implemented many of the same recommendations you included in your 2010 report.

Bureaucrats claim to have fully implemented and addressed 10 of your recommendations. However, I am unaware of any announcements of appropriate compensation for family members who take care of severely disabled veterans. Similarly, I am waiting for proof that VAC implemented “...as soon as possible the 16 framework recommendations made by the New Veterans Charter Advisory Group...including those entailing legislative and regulatory amendments”. One component of those recommendations: 100% earnings loss tracking career progression and typical career earnings.

But this is just a small sampling of the 160 recommendations that the deputy minister and her office claim they implemented. The DM certainly has the resources to creatively devise such claims as her staff has increased 500% in the past few years while veterans witness the closure of district offices and the removal of trusted front-line worker positions at those that remain. While veterans lose their trusted VAC workers, suicides continue, families fall apart through VAC inaction, veterans languish waiting for or being denied programs, Deputy Minister Mary Chaput has received her performance pay every year since her arrival at VAC three years ago. Is it any wonder veterans are angry? Why are Parliament and the Prime Minister allowing bureaucrats to receive their performance pay while these senior bureaucrats fail to implement Parliament's recommendations? You're the bosses.

● (1820)

There are greater problems with the NVC than just the empty and specious rhetoric coming from Charlottetown. I have tabled 30 recommendations to consider for this comprehensive review in my report titled, "Severely Injured Veterans and their Families: Improving Accessibility to Veterans Affairs Programs for a Better Transition."

As both sides of the committee table have clearly observed, a VAC availability of programs does not equate to accessibility. Why, for instance, should widows or spouses of incapacitated veterans be time limited on any programs? In the Pension Act, all programs are payable effectively on the date of application. Why, then, is the earnings loss benefit payable when "the Minister determines that a rehabilitation plan or a vocational assistance plan should be developed"? Why are deductions for ELB increased annually when SISIP long-term disability, the public service disability plans, and many workers compensation plans freeze these deductions on the date the income replacement begins? Such pettiness is endemic in the new Veterans Charter.

Government is quick to march out the hypothetical, 24-year-old corporal from the Veterans Ombudsman's report who is projected to receive from VAC \$2 million over his lifetime, ignoring that \$350,000 of that must be repaid in taxes when none of the Pension Act benefits are taxable. The sad reality is that this corporal does not represent the norm.

As of September 2013, of the 76,000 Canadian Forces veterans who were clients of VAC, just 941 received the permanent impairment allowance. One can only receive this allowance if one is declared totally and permanently incapacitated, or TPI, the most seriously disabled veterans. Of this TPI population, only 38% have a disability assessment as high as this hypothetical corporal. Of those, only 22% are under the age of 45. This corporal represents fewer than 77 individuals or 0.1% of new Veterans Charter clients.

The ombudsman noted that of all the recipients of the permanent incapacity allowance, only one receives the highest grade of \$1,724.65 monthly. As for the highly controversial lump sum, which now stands at \$301,275.26, only 148 or 4.35%, of all lump sum recipients have been awarded this amount in eight years.

It's interesting to note that these actuarial comparisons assume that VAC adjudicates similar injuries under the NVC at the same level as the Pension Act. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

The average award given out by VAC prior to 1995 for World War II veterans was 40%. After adjudication guidelines changed in 1995, the average award for all veterans sank to 25%. Since the introduction of the new Veterans Charter in the middle of the harshest and most violent combat to which we've exposed our military service since Korea, the average award is sitting at now just over 15%. Not only is a disability award inadequate, but access to this benefit is heartlessly stingy.

Yes, there are other programs, certainly. Currently only 14% of lump sum recipients are receiving additional benefits, and only 2% have any long-term economic assistance. Of all those totally and permanently incapacitated, none are allowed to access career transition or vocational services.

We already dehumanize those who most suffer from their service to Canada, the TPI veterans, by freezing their economic potential at a fraction of often artificially low military salaries at release. By preventing access to education and job assistance as a nation, we are in effect saying to them that we believe that our most disabled veterans do not deserve to benefit from lifelong learning and vocational experiences, all proven to lower health care usage and increase well-being incomes on all levels.

Contrary to the claim that the NVC offers opportunity with security, the reality shows something completely different. Canada Pension Plan disability, once accused of being insensitive and lacking compassion, now allows disabled recipients to receive \$5,100 annually without reporting it to CPP if they're employed. Even if a TPI veteran were to have CPP overlook these earnings, the VAC income loss program would deduct every single penny. Contrary to claims by VAC officials, veterans are not focused on disability, nor were they under the Pension Act. Even with these onerous deductions, 35% of TPI veterans have a salary over \$5,000, indicating to us that they would rather work and have their hard work mean little or nothing at all economically than not work at all.

● (1825)

Section 35 of the Pension Act states: "No deduction shall be made from the pension of any member of the forces because the member undertook work or perfected himself in some form of industry."

The Pension Act offered much security for the veteran to explore as many opportunities as they wished. Sadly, the NVC incarcerates our most suffering veterans in a psychological and financial prison of frozen human potential for the rest of their lives.

As for families, the legislated mandate of the department defines both veteran and family as equals. However, families while the veteran is still alive cannot access programs independently, and the NVC only pays for family treatment insofar as it supports the veteran in his or her rehabilitation program.

We say we care about the career and health sacrifices of veterans' spouses who do much to care for our seriously disabled veterans. In spite of repeated calls we do not provide these spouses with any attendant allowance whatsoever.

In 2005 the bureaucracy promised case management and psychosocial rehabilitation as part of a slick sales job to sell the NVC to an unsuspecting Parliament and population. However, psychosocial rehabilitation does not exist in Canada in any measurable, consistent, and accessible format as we speak today. VAC did not have a viable definition until 2009, the same year the department was searching for a definition of "case management" in one of its own research reports.

Arguably Canada had the world's best rehabilitation programs for veterans returning from World War II. We can achieve great things once more. One path to repeat this excellence is to sincerely pursue psychosocial rehabilitation for both physical and psychological disabilities, but it will take investment and more than a senior bureaucrat's loathing of taking risks. Incidentally, this is the wrong personality type to be developing any new approach to an old social contract. They're acceptable administrators, but very poor innovators.

If we do nothing about the many NVC programs that are a disincentive to work, that focus on disability rather than ability, if we continue preventing opportunities for seriously ill veterans in our communities while we threaten their security, we know that this will increase health care costs. It will increase treatment and pharmacological drug use. Such short-sightedness will negatively impact the health outcome of their families while lowering the life expectancy of our most seriously injured.

Would it not be better to provide access to life-enriching education and opportunities to seek employment without penalty while these veterans in turn begin to pay more taxes, hence offsetting some of the disability costs? Does that not make better economic sense?

All veterans and their families, especially the most seriously ill, fulfilled their obligation at government's orders without delay, without complaint, and without excuse. All they rightly expected was that government would honour their end of the social contract immediately, expeditiously, and for as long as those veterans and families live.

For our most seriously injured and their families, miserly constructed and administered programs have soundly violated this quid pro quo. Government is clearly not holding up its end of the bargain.

Prime Minister Harper during the launch of the new Veterans Charter in 2006 promised:

In future, when our servicemen and women leave our military, they can rest assured the Government will help them and their families transition to civilian life. Our troops' commitment and service to Canada entitles them to the very best treatment possible.

This charter is but a first step to according Canadian veterans the respect and support they deserve. This was a promise from the current Prime Minister, not one from a century ago.

The dire situation where even the most loyal and timid of veterans organizations is speaking out has become a very loud alarm clock for our elected officials to stand up to the bureaucracy, and finally stand up for our veterans.

We must applaud this government's commitment to victims of crime. However, if this government is willing to come to the aid of those innocent persons who are victims of mindless violence, it should do no less for those men and women that the government has mindfully ordered into harm's way.

Thank you.

• (1830)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bruyca.

We'll now go to Mr. Leduc, please. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Harold Leduc (As an Individual):** Honourable Chair, committee members, thank you very much for the privilege of presenting before you. I'm here with mixed emotions because my case of abuse is still ongoing with the government and I think it's horrible. However, I will do my best to present and stick to the facts and the reason why I'm here.

I would like to start with a quote: "The biggest thing in Canada at the present time is the whole pensions question." That was written by Major J.L. Todd, a member of the militia pensions and claim board in 1915. He said if this question was not removed from politics, we would have pension troubles in Canada. So here we are with those problems.

The blueprint to the problems we face today with the new Veterans Charter started in my estimation in 1995 with pension reform. As we know they had a whole new look at the World War II Veterans Charter as it was applied to World War II veterans and veterans who served in Korea as well. They realigned and got rid of some of the programs that were no longer usable or no longer required by the aging veterans.



But what they didn't do...and there were only two Canadian Forces veterans who presented during that whole pension reform. It was me and a gentleman named Luc Levesque from the Gulf War veterans. We didn't know what that whole study was all about. We presented on Gulf War issues.

Had we known what it was about and that they were taking away benefits, there would have been a different outcome because the alarm bells would have sounded then.

However, that changed the whole way that the government did business with veterans. Canadian Forces veterans are not considered in any of those reforms. In fact, benefits like the pensioner training regulations that specifically state right in it what Canadian Forces veterans qualify for were taken away.

If we fast forward a little bit and not too far forward, in 1999 there was a review of the veterans care needs study conducted by Veterans Affairs and part 3 was done on the Canadian Forces. What they found is that Canadian Forces had immediate transition needs. What was also happening is that the SISIP program was failing with National Defence. So Veterans Affairs made a conscious effort to overtake SISIP. That's why today the new Veterans Charter is an actual duplicate of the SISIP program. So now we have two programs in place when we only need one.

The new Veterans Charter was not designed to look after veterans in aging. Veterans Affairs said they would look after our aging needs after they sorted out the new Veterans Charter. Here we are, this many years later and they still haven't looked at them. In the meantime, the programs that we qualified for like long-term care and others are being sunsetted. They're being taken away from us while we're being distracted by this constant struggle with the new Veterans Charter.

During our time with the Canadian Forces advisory council, I did some research and I found.... I dug up all the orders in council that sent men and women in Canada to World War II, to Korea, and to the Canadian Forces operations on peacekeeping missions and wherever. I came out with a matrix and I put it together. According to this, we're all equal under the laws of Canada: Canadian Forces veterans, Korea, World War II, we're all equal.

Veterans Affairs brought that to the Justice Department. Justice Department came back with a legal opinion saying I was absolutely right. The bureaucrats at Veterans Affairs said they didn't have to treat us the same. When that was said, representatives from the Legion, the army, navy, air force, National Council of Veterans, Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association, Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping, and Gulf War veterans were in the room. Every one of them except for the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association, which I was the national president of, said that they would follow the Legion's lead.

Now, prior to that, the National Council of Veterans, the Legion, the army, navy, and air force boycotted the Canadian Forces advisory council and anything to do with Canadian Forces veterans to ensure that World War II allied veterans got access from our government to the long-term care veterans independence program at World War II level and the Last Post Fund burial benefits. That's knowing that we were in consultation with the government of the day and they had

clearly said that we qualified for those benefits. It's just a matter of opening them up to us.

● (1835)

In the final analysis, we didn't get those, and it's right on the Treasury Board's website. It says that we didn't get those benefits as a calculated risk for giving them to allied veterans.

We've been treated as second-class citizens since then in the veterans community and, to be quite frank, we've been discriminated against by those veterans' organizations that should have said, when the Department of Justice came back with their legal opinion, that "regardless of our bias towards World War II veterans, we believe you should all have the same benefits". We wouldn't be here today if that had happened. Another travesty of justice is that the veterans who were sitting around those tables were collecting Pension Act benefits if they were disabled, so there you have veterans collecting Pension Act benefits advocating a lesser benefit for any who came beyond us. I opposed it from the beginning.

When the clause-by-clause came out for the new Veterans Charter, we were called to Ottawa with the minister and told, "Okay, here's the clause-by-clause: have a look at it." We said okay and asked when we could discuss it. We were told that it was too late, that we couldn't talk about it, and that if we wanted to make any changes, what would happen.... This was from the minister of the day, and I'm not discriminating between one party or another one when I speak of ministers and government. I served for the Government of Canada and I sacrificed under the Government of Canada and it doesn't matter what party is in, because in my opinion, and I believe in the opinion of a lot of people, veterans issues should be non-partisan. We were told that we couldn't refer changes to the clause-by-clause, but we would be called back when the bill went through the legislative process at the first and second levels of both the parliamentary and Senate committees, and we could make our changes and there would be consultation.

There was absolutely no consultation and, as we know, the bill was rammed through the parliamentary process. Edgar Schmidt from the justice department worked in that area, and he has been on the record as saying that for years before the previous government, and for the years following into the current government, new bills were not given the scrutiny of the charter. That's one of the points that's being argued in the courts in Vancouver: the honour of the crown. So the new Veterans Charter as it stands now, and the enhanced new Veterans Charter, do not meet the smell test of the Canadian Charter of Rights.

I'm not going to go on. We've heard enough of what other people have said. I personally believe that you are not getting good advice from the veterans organizations. There has been no consultation from day one. In June of 2013, I sent throughout the broader veterans community some facts, as I'm laying them out today, and I put them out there to get veterans engaged in a dialogue. It was successful right up until August, when I decided to close it down. I engaged the veterans organizations. One or two of them came back and were involved, but the major organizations would not consult. If they consult with their members, which is rare, they will not consult outside of their groups, so if they call themselves a consultation group, they're consulting among themselves.

I know for a fact that they didn't come up with those points that they put out on the urgent issues of the new Veterans Charter. They didn't come up with those through study or consultation with the broader veterans community. They came up with them...what I've been told by some very respectable people is that they decided that those were important issues. Because the reality is—and we've heard some statistics from Sean—that when Veterans Affairs was putting this thing together, this new Veterans Charter, they knew that 80% of veterans were collecting 20% or less for disability benefits. They knew that figure, but what they did is they promoted the higher rate of 100% disability.

What I also have to say is that I remember what the minister of the day said when I questioned why they were ramming this new Veterans Charter through when it hadn't...at least let's make it a regulation so we can work on it and do something.... But they said, "Look, we've put it by the Chief of the Defence Staff and we had consultation with all of kinds of people." I asked, "Did you tell the Chief of the Defence Staff what you're taking away?" She said no. The minister said, "No, we didn't tell what we were taking away, but he's agreed to it, and he's no dummy." Those are the kinds of words they were saying. So the fact of the matter is that Veterans Affairs created the lump sum to rob disabled veterans of their lifelong disability benefits to pay for all the programs of the new Veterans Charter.

• (1840)

The new Veterans Charter is designed only for transition, not for lifelong, so the enhanced new Veterans Charter benefits and the recommendations of ELB beyond the age of 65, that's not what the new Veterans Charter is all about. The new Veterans Charter looks after transition into the work force and civilian life.

One of the things that Veterans Affairs did, after the Justice Department came back with their legal opinion, is they did a cost analysis of treating Canadian Forces veterans equally with World

War II and Korean veterans. They found that it would cost \$4 billion to treat us equally under the Pension Act alone. So they used that figure and their first figures with Treasury Board were, "We will build a suite of benefits for \$4 billion", because they knew that would be the cost payoff for the Pension Act benefits.

Now we have to separate out the disability benefit of part 3 from the new Veterans Charter because the Pension Act was not a problem. The problem that the bureaucrats were using is that since the government allowed currently serving Canadian Forces members to collect benefits while they're still serving, the bureaucrats said they are putting a burden on the Pension Act, which is not true.

They also said veterans are putting a burden on the Pension Act. What they weren't saying is that the government was negligent in providing Canadian Forces veterans with supporting benefits for transition and onward living since 1947.

So the whole this was built, in my opinion, on a whole bunch of misinformation. The misinformation continues. Although I'm having a great struggle with the current minister over my personal issue, I've gone to them and said, "Please ask these people to stop misleading Canadians".

The ombudsman put out information in his report on the new Veterans Charter. He gave scenarios where the benefits would be \$2 million for a person aged 24 over their lifetime. What he didn't say—and he left out of there purposefully because it was broached before the report went out—was that the same person collecting Pension Act benefits, which are still alive and well today, would get an additional \$2 million over his lifetime and a lot of these other problems that we're talking about wouldn't exist.

So the ombudsman is putting out good information but only partial information. We have the veterans organizations doing the same thing, and we have misinformation coming from the government as well. Where does that leave the veterans?

You folks sitting around the table will be engaged in this as long as you're elected officials. We have to live with the consequences of these decisions and since the new Veterans Charter came out, it's been nothing but a fight.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Leduc.

We're going to Monsieur Chicoine first.

• (1845)

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** I thank you, gentlemen, for being here with us today to help us with this study. I should mention that several of the comments and recommendations you made were also made by other veterans' groups, which only serves to reinforce all of these observations.

However, in my opinion, there is something we have not heard enough about, and that is the help that is available for families, be it for wives, husbands, children or other close relatives.

We were told that it is extremely difficult to obtain help, in particular for the spouses. We heard outside of this committee that some had to leave their jobs to take care of a spouse who was suffering from acute post-traumatic stress. They are offered very little psychological assistance.

I would like some more specific recommendations on what should be in the charter to help the spouses or relatives of veterans who are the most seriously injured.

[English]

**Mr. Sean Bruyca:** Would you like me to go first?

Monsieur Chicoine, that's an excellent question.

In my report I have some very specific recommendations. First of all, let's treat them as equals. Give veterans and family members their own identification card so that they can access programs independently. The first program to access independently should be health care costs for the family. Those should not be pegged to the disability of the veteran and they should not be pegged to whether that veteran seeks benefits at this point under a treatment program. They should be able to seek those benefits for treatment independently, especially if it's a totally and permanently incapacitated veteran. That's without question.

The next thing is I think we should entertain the fact that, at the very least, they require their own independent attendant allowance, a benefit that they receive for being a family member of a totally and permanently incapacitated veteran.

I would also recommend that, during the initial two-year transition after the military, they perhaps be given access to the earnings loss program. That's when the toll on the family will be greatest, as they all learn to adjust to these new circumstances.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** Does anyone else have anything to say on that topic?

[English]

**Mr. Donald Leonardo:** Yes, I would love to be able to answer your question on that.

I'm going to give you a story of a soldier suffering from PTSD in Alberta. His wife and four kids were in the vehicle and the RCMP pulled them over because he was confining his wife and four kids thinking that he was in the Hells Angels and driving his minivan down the road. He was having these delusions. He got pulled over by the police, and they arrested him for confining his wife and

family and they sent him for psychiatric care. Now he has a wife and four kids who have no money, because he holds the bank accounts.

I called the MFRC, and I found out that the military family resource centre does not look after veterans. I was surprised that they wouldn't look after the families of veterans who are in the Edmonton area.

So then I called OSSIS, operational stress injury social support, which does look after veterans in that area, but it is a program that is very underfunded. If the program were better funded, there would be better support for, in this case, a wife and four kids, who actually were being evicted at the same time.

This family ended up being split and heading for a divorce because there was no support for this family when he was arrested and incarcerated and sent for psychiatric care. The family was lost. There was no clergy even. OSSIS could have a whole list of clergymen from the Edmonton area who could go and sit with the family and help them through a situation like this.

There are lots of possible solutions, but first we need more support for OSSIS, and we need to expand that program, because the MFRC does not support the veteran's family at all. I would like to see more support, more money put into OSSIS, more people working for OSSIS, and I would like them to start partnering with clergy so that there would be full treatment for body, soul, and spirit.

• (1850)

**Mr. Harold Leduc:** If I could jump in, you ask an excellent question.

[Translation]

I apologize, but my French is not good enough for me to answer that question in your language.

[English]

That was a priority with the Canadian Forces advisory council, those very questions that you're asking, from what I've heard earlier. That was the priority. We've put a lot of time and effort into the needs of the families. That was translated in the new Veterans Charter for the spouses as, if a veteran is 100% disabled and can't continue, then the spouses can get the benefits to get their own retraining and whatever, but that doesn't address the needs of the family. While the veteran is disabled, the spouse becomes a 100% caregiver, and there is absolutely not enough for them and the kids.

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** I certainly agree with the issue on OSISS. I also agree with Sean's description of an allowance for spouses. I'm a fortunate guy. I have a spouse, and the other thing that sometimes I get a little annoyed to hear when we talk about spouses is that we're normally talking about a wife, well: I'm a husband whose wife served in Rwanda and also served in Afghanistan during Operation Medusa as a physician's assistant, so she's seen a heck of a lot. I'm fortunate because I don't need those issues. I've spoken to other veterans.

There was one veteran in particular who I was dealing with in Gagetown, a young corporal engineer who came back and who had been involved in an IED explosion and had seen comrades die. I'm not sure, but Gagetown seems to have had a good effect on him in getting the care that he needed because his wife and he mentioned his son as well. Maybe there is something going on in some bases, but it's not blanket across the board. That's what has to be corrected. OSISS is an excellent organization but, again, as Harold and the others have said, it's underfunded, so we have to look at how we help families out. The ghosts of war are affecting those people as much as they are the veteran. That's what we have to make sure that we never forget.

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

Before I go to Mr. Lizon I'm going to point out that our meeting comes to an end at 7:30. I'm going to ask both the questioners and perhaps responders if you can be a bit more specific because there are going to be some committee members who aren't going to get to the questions at the rate we're going. I just want to warn everybody on both sides.

Thank you.

Mr. Lizon for six minutes, please.

• (1855)

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Again, welcome to all the witnesses and guests here. Thank you for your service.

We've heard many witnesses over the course of this study, the review of the Veterans Charter. At the end of the day the committee will have to do the report and propose recommendations. We've heard different opinions and not necessarily exactly the same as you presented here today. For example, on the ombudsman's report we had a group here who said, "Well, why are you even wasting your time? You should just go by his report, implement his recommendations and that's good enough."

Gentlemen, if I can ask you, I don't think we can improve the charter in one shot. If we can make changes incrementally, what would be the priority you recommend that we actually do?

The second question I have is to the organizations on family services. What kind of services do you provide for veterans' families?

**Mr. Harold Leduc:** I can jump in on that one.

I don't know if we have the same translation of incremental. The lump sum was a solution to a problem that didn't exist. The lump sum is the most controversial part of the new Veterans Charter. People say that this is better than the old regime. There was no old regime. From 1947 until 2005, there was only the Pension Act for Canadian Forces veterans. You can only compare the other programs of the new Veterans Charter with the World War II Veterans Charter. We don't have to recreate the whole thing but we have to go back to the drawing board somewhat and put it in line with the Canadian Charter of Rights.

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon:** If I can jump in quickly, on this issue we had witnesses here who actually said that the problem they see is with the amount that's offered. It's not really with the—

**Mr. Harold Leduc:** And that's fine, and those people weren't at the table with me when this was happening, and it was just pure discrimination between Canadian Forces and World War II veterans. I did propose that we extend the benefits and programs of the World War II Veterans Charter to Canadian Forces veterans, the way they did it for the Canadian Forces veterans who served in Korea. Remember, the Canadian Forces Act changed in 1950. So we qualify for those benefits. There was no need to recreate it.

As I said, the new Veterans Charter was simply a duplication of SISIP. To get rid of SISIP was what Veterans Affairs wanted to do, and they were going to deal with the aging and other programs elsewhere. So I think we need to fix the inconsistencies right now.

**Mr. Sean Bruyca:** Harold's perspective is correct. If, of course, we had a wish and a dream that we could go back and rewrite this whole thing and recreate the original Veterans Charter for modern Canadian Forces' veterans, absolutely. However, the reality is right here and I know that you guys are under some pretty tight constraints in terms of budgets, but you need something tangible, doable, right away.

I take you at your promise, Mr. Lizon, that this is not the first kick at the cat, because the minister in his testimony to the Senate on March 26 said that this could be our only kick at the cat, and that was quite disappointing. So I would hope that, first of all, we have regular, legislated parliamentary reviews of the new Veterans Charter every two years that are comprehensive. So we repeat this every two years, and that would be part of one of the legislative changes.

I'll let Don speak about the three priorities, but in terms of the family I wanted to add for Mr. Chicoine's benefit and yourself that when a relatively healthy veteran is transitioning and going through rehabilitation, we pay half of the child care expenses. But when a family is burdened with spouses losing jobs and suffering career consequences while caring for the severely disabled veteran, we provide no child care whatsoever. Absolutely 100% child care for TPI veteran families. It's a no-brainer.

The other one is that because many of those family members cannot pursue their original career, we should open up the vocational rehab to them, not just if they're TPI veterans, but open the education to both of them. It shouldn't be one or the other. The TPI veterans should be able to expand under vocational and professional exposure to the community, and the wife or husband should be able to reconsider what their participation will be in a new career while taking care of the severely disabled.

**Mr. Donald Leonardo:** It's really hard to really trust what you're saying. To say, "What are your priorities?" and "Trust us, just give us your priorities for now and trust us, we're going to make more changes". It's only been one change in 10 years. As I was saying, it's only eight years since 2006, but by the time any changes that come from this committee are implemented, it's going to be another at least 18 months by the time it goes through Parliament, gets gazetted, and goes through the system. So it's hard to trust when you say, "Give us your three priorities", but I will, and those are the three priorities that we provided from the stakeholders and from the veterans consultation group, and from the Veterans Ombudsman.

The three priorities are:

The earnings loss benefit must be improved to 100% of pre-release income, continued for life, and include increases for projected career earnings for a Canadian Armed Forces member.

The maximum disability award must be increased consistent with what is provided to injured civilian workers who receive general damages in law courts.

The current inequity with regard to ELB for Class A and Class B reservists less than 180 days for service attributable injuries must cease.

It's time that we start doing something here and start providing the benefits, because as I was saying, not one of you would take a 25% pay cut, so why would you expect an injured veteran to do the same?

Thank you very much.

• (1900)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** The only thing I'll add to that...everything I'm agreeing with at the table right now, the three priorities.

We sit here as a committee, and we sit here as a group of veterans and other people who are in the room here that are associated with the veterans, and I remember back in 1996, I think, when I was a sergeant major up in Wainwright. It was shortly after the disbandment of the Airborne Regiment, in which I was proud to have served, so it hurt very dearly. I remember that the Department of National Defence, a government agency, actually sat down and developed the charter, which covered eight specific points. We took, I don't know, about a week down in Cornwall to discuss those points.

We're sitting here, as a group that comes together, and it's not the same group who comes together all the time. Is there a possibility that somewhere down the line you can get something together where...? I don't care if it's travelling across the country as a group; I think what you need to do is stand up and look face to face at the individuals who have served in Afghanistan, who are hurting from Afghanistan, whether mentally or physically or both. Stand in front of them and find out what those answers are.

It's nice to be sitting in a cushy office. It's nice for me to be sitting here too, because I have a cushy little place down in Kingston. But I think I understand a little bit more about what these veterans are going through, because I have a veteran at home as well.

One of my aboriginal veterans brought up a good point: don't use time as a weapon against veterans. I think that's what we have to consider.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'll warn the committee that after the Liberal Party finishes up, we'll probably have time for one more from each side. You may want to decide now who that will be.

Mr. Hsu, welcome. It's nice to have you here. You have six minutes, please.

**Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of you for coming today to the committee and to help out with this study.

My question is on a topic that was addressed by you, Mr. Bruyey, so this is mostly for you, but I think everybody else should chime in.

I'm interested in this concept of psychosocial rehabilitation. I'm wondering if this approach is something that can bridge a problem that's been identified—namely, this gap between the time spent in the forces and time where somebody is taken care of by Veterans Affairs Canada—and minimize the number of veterans who fall through the cracks. I'm wondering if this approach is something that could bridge that divide.

You also spoke about families who have to take care of disabled veterans, and families who fall apart because of the stress. I'm wondering if you could also speak to how the family fits into psychosocial rehabilitation.

**Mr. Sean Bruyey:** Certainly.

As I said in my original presentation, psychosocial rehabilitation, as we understand it now, exists as a set of principles but is not actually consistently practised. However, I believe that if a working group could be set forward between Veterans Affairs, with veterans and families on that working group of course, and DND, we'd come up with basically the principles being applied.

With regard to those principles, there are a number of treatment modalities, but one of them is an active care team. This active care team essentially would consist of anywhere from 10 to 12 multidisciplinary practitioners. It would include such people as medical doctors, of course, but it would also include professional coaches. It would include as well someone who would help them fill out the forms for their disability benefits. We're talking about seriously disabled veterans, and no seriously disabled veterans should be filling out their own forms. This is patently absurd.

Next you would have individuals who would help them with basic care needs in the home. When someone suffers a severe either physical or psychological injury, all of life is relearned. It's relearned in terms of self-esteem, it's relearned in terms of motor skills. All of those skills are not being addressed. They can't be addressed in a once-a-week appointment in a psychologist's office.

This 10- to 12-member practitioner team would have no more than 100 clients. These practitioners would be dedicated to only these 100 individuals. This process would last certainly over the transition period, so over a period of months, and the families then could be brought in with regard to the principles of psychosocial rehabilitation in terms of education. There would be intensive modules for teaching the family how to interact, support, and understand when that veteran screws up at home, because God knows, seriously disabled veterans screw up a lot at home. The families don't understand and often take it personally.

If we had a work team of true integration, that would bridge the gap between the transition experience and the hand-off from National Defence to Veterans Affairs. It would ensure a seamless, a truly seamless, transition. This team would be available to those veterans 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That's what we really need, because that's what the disability is, initially. It's trying to manage it 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

•(1905)

**Mr. Harold Leduc:** I agree with what Sean said, and I would add that we need to retrain the adjudicators at both Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

The application process is dead simple. I know there have been articles put out on it, but all you need is a connection to service and a diagnosis. You don't need any medical opinions. You don't need a whole bunch of paperwork. It's simple, but the adjudicators have gone off the application process. At the department level, it is mostly a resource issue. The application process is so simple that we need to get back to the basics. That would help the families very much.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I want to extend that question a little bit with Mr. Thibeau's remark in mind about not using time as a weapon against veterans. It looks as though some work needs to be done to implement psychosocial rehabilitation to figure out how exactly it could be realized. I'm wondering if this is a case in which instead of trying to figure it out you should maybe just do a pilot and figure it out by doing it.

Do you have any comments on that?

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** When you mention time as weapon, we have to consider how long we have been sitting here at the table. This is now 2014, and the issues have been on the table for quite a number of years now. So, yes, there has to be some sort of a pilot. I approached people for a pilot program dealing with aboriginal veterans, which is open to any veteran. It may work. I don't know.

The other issue I'll bring up is that when we start talking about all these medical people getting involved, let's not make a mistake by looking at people who have never dealt with a veteran or a Canadian Forces member. You have to start looking at our back door, because there are people out there who will be trusted more if they are sitting in front of that individual as well as that family, I believe. That's something I think should happen.

As for pilot projects, let's throw them on the table and find out which ones we want.

**Mr. Harold Leduc:** You know we had these same discussions back in the late 1990s and early 2000s on the exact same topics.

Suicide was one of them, and now we have this one about family. We have to be listened to.

**Mr. Sean Bruyey:** Absolutely. In terms of tangible doable things now, we're not too far off from that, but the problem is that we have many practitioners operating independently; there's no coordination between the two; and those practitioners are not dedicated to those particular clients. So what we have to do is bring that team of DND and VAC together and set out a budget immediately for a pilot program. We could have two teams of 100 transitioning veterans each for a total of 200. We could allocate those people and they could go through. There's a learning process of course. Everyone understands that there would be a lot of mistakes, but by God I think we'd come out with something very good at the end.

•(1910)

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

We'll now go to Mr. Hawn, please, for six minutes.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you all for being here.

I know I'm going to run out of time, so I'm going to throw out two or three things and let you chew on them.

Sean, I basically agree with most of your recommendations. A couple I disagree with and a couple I agree with partially or whatever. This is going to sound like a crass question, but it's the reality, and you've mentioned that. Philosophically cost is no object; practically speaking there are limits. So I guess to what Mr. Lizon said, if you could put some priority to these, that would be helpful. That's not to say the ones at the bottom don't matter; it's just that there are some practical realities that we have to deal with.

One of the issues I've been seized with for a long time is access and barriers and burden of proof. We can argue about the amounts of various benefits and so on, and those are all fair points. How much would it alleviate at least part of the problem if we lowered the burden of proof—i.e. dropped the insurance company mentality and made access easier? By that I don't just mean burden of proof, but I mean things like turning an 18-page form into a 5-page form—which is happening, by the way—and making sure the website is more friendly for those who can use the website and so on. How much would that go to it?

The other one is I'm tabling a private member's bill tomorrow that isn't the be-all and end-all, but it will address at least partially the issues of transferring medical information from DND to VAC and giving the member control over his or her own medical information. I can't go into details, because it hasn't been tabled yet. If you could chew on those three things.... I'm sure you have a cost to this. Is that a fair statement?

**Mr. Sean Bruyey:** No, I've asked—

**The Chair:** Please, very succinctly....

**Mr. Harold Leduc:** I adjudicated over 5,000 claims approximately with the veterans review and appeal board. I can tell you that the premise of the new Veterans Charter, there are three access points. One is with the Pension Act disability, the other one is with the part 3 lump sum, and the other one is no disability but you have a transition need. So the burden is very low.

As I said earlier, with respect to lowering the burden of proof, it's written right in the legislation. It can't be any clearer that we have to retrain the adjudicators.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Okay.

Your comment....

**Mr. Sean Bruyey:** Yes. Super.

So, yes, I've got my query into Veterans Affairs. I'm sure they'll be providing me with those cost estimates shortly.

You're absolutely right. Access is a huge problem. What I tried to do in my report was provide, basically, existing programs, that all we had to do was just open that door to another population that, in essence, is receiving something similar. For instance, the permanent impairment allowance supplement should be made available to people with exceptional incapacitated allowances. That's an easy door to open.

In terms of burden of proof, Harold's absolutely right, the burden of proof can be provided. We lower that burden of proof based on a career review medical board, right? For the people who are released for medical disability, clearly that should be all they need when they walk into Veterans Affairs to receive their pension.

As far as the priorities...I'll do my best to prioritize those for you, but I think you'll notice that most of them will allow for just a quick wording in the legislation and there's access, done.

**Mr. Donald Leonardo:** I would say that we need the adjudication system changed to a medical evidence-based system. We need to disband the VRAB so that it's an easier transition system. Where the National Defence medical review board...their word is taken.

They're all doctors. If they say you can't fulfill the obligations of your trade and you're being removed from the military for medical reasons then that should be transferred to Veterans Affairs without adjudication. It should just have a rubber stamp by a medical officer.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** What about the case where a guy comes back 10 years later?

**Mr. Donald Leonardo:** Pardon me?

•(1915)

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** When a guy comes back 10 years later... Because if I come back now—

**Mr. Donald Leonardo:** Then you have your own mirror version of the medical review board.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** VAC would have to have that.

**Mr. Donald Leonardo:** Yes.

But then they're not going to be as busy because only the veterans who are out would be going through the new medical review board. That's an evidence-based system, where you provide a proper claim

in the first place, prepared for you and with you by a claims processor.

**Mr. Sean Bruyey:** Just a quick one to add, the ombudsman came forward in a recent proposal that as soon as a member joins the forces a VAC file is opened up on him. That medical file becomes shared between the two departments.

I would add to that—here's another wish list—rather than us fighting for veterans benefits and costing during times of restraint, why don't we start setting aside money for a member when he joins? We know how to cost tanks, we know how to cost planes, but we don't know how to cost disability. I'm sure that any number of private firms would help us with actuarial analysis and have us put aside that money so we never have to go through these battles again during times of restraint.

**Mr. Harold Leduc:** I would like to add to that. When the agreement was made that currently serving members of the Canadian Forces would be able to draw disability benefits while they were in, there was an agreement between National Defence and Veterans Affairs that National Defence would do all the work for the first-line application, and as soon as the bill was passed, it fell through because National Defence doesn't have the resources.

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** One issue on what Harold just talked about, the best tool that you have may be attaching DND medical with VAC medical. I don't think it's been mentioned here, but a lot of those issues may very well have been corrupt in the way that people were collecting pensions when they went in and said that they couldn't do this because they needed this filled out for the disability form, and then turned around and wanted a G202 medical to say that they were fit. I'm not saying it was rampant, but for sure it's there. This may curb having that happen when a person joins.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Some people do game any system, that's just human nature.

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay, we've reached the end of the time on that questioning.

We're going to Mr. Stoffer for the last six minutes, please.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Again to the four of you who are here and to all the veterans in the room, thank you for your presence and thank you for your tremendous presentations. I'm blown away every time we have veterans come before us. Their families give tremendous advice to us, and we'll take you very seriously in a cooperative manner with my colleagues across the way.

Don, a very quick question to you. For the first one, the Canadian Bill of Rights that's out there is basically a document hanging in halls. It really has no legislative teeth. One of the problems we have is there's no preamble of the new charter. In your estimate, should the bill of rights be included in the new Veterans Charter, in our review?

**Mr. Donald Leonardo:** I have to say yes. In 2006 when it came out, I thought we had something there.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Yes, sir, I appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. Bruyey, thank you again for your presentation, and again your thoughtfulness toward these recommendations is truly tremendous.

On the earnings loss benefit, which we've heard repeatedly, it's 75% taxable, but we've heard conflicting evidence. Should it be 100% taxable, or should it be 75% non-taxable? Seventy-five percent non-taxable is better than 100% taxable. But in your opinion should it be taxed at all, or should it be 75% or 100%?

**Mr. Sean Bruyey:** You're absolutely right, Mr. Stoffer. In terms of dignity, non-taxable would be better. However, that does cause a problem. We do have fiscal realities that if it's earnings lost, and we have to deduct other earnings against it, it's hard to deduct taxable earnings from non-taxable benefits.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Yes, that's right.

**Mr. Sean Bruyey:** So I would compromise and say, 100% taxable, and that way we can see taxes to the government, which is what they're looking for right now.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Very good.

Bob, I just want to bring greetings. Mr. Kerr and I both know this gentleman, Noel Knockwood, who is a Mi'kmaq elder from Nova Scotia, and a Korean veteran, and he's still with us, thank God. I'm sure if he was here now, he'd want to wish you his aboriginal greetings from the Mi'kmaq territory of Nova Scotia.

Sir, you brought up a very good point about communication, and it's something we don't think of very often, those extreme rural communities where veterans would be, in the far north, in the high provinces, on reserves. I'd like to just give you a minute, if you don't mind, because I have a question for Harold. How can we better improve the communication of information from government to those first nations people in order that they can get the information they so desperately need in order to access the benefits they deserve?

● (1920)

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** I mentioned two organizations.

The Canadian Army that deals with the north...and that is one of the populations that we've forgotten about in all of our talks. I did have a good conversation with ITK, the executive director there, and that was one of his concerns as well. We're talking about Canadian Rangers now, who have served in the north for years and have done an outstanding job doing that. Finally, they came under the umbrella of the Canadian Army, which to me means they're going to be looked after better.

Now we have to make sure that the information that they so need, and maybe they don't necessarily know that it's out there, is available. So we have to make sure that government is transparent in making sure communication gets out, whether it's through, as I said, the Department of National Defence—the Canadian Armed Forces

going into the communities as they do—or recruiters going into communities, whatever.

The other issue may very well be tying in, as best we can, with both the Assembly of First Nations and with the aboriginal veterans groups such as ours that deal with the first nations veterans of Canada. Computers are not the answer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you, sir.

Harold, the final question is to you, sir.

Thank you very much for coming here from B.C. today. I'm sorry for what you're going through with your ongoing concern, but I appreciate your steadfastness in dealing with that issue.

Sir, we can have the greatest charter or the greatest set of standards for veterans that we wish, but if you don't have access to it, if you have to fight tooth and nail to get it, if you have to have this document and that document.... And as I heard the other day, a double amputee should never have to fill out a form—I thought that was a great one. One of the biggest problems I found with the charter is getting access to the benefits. You can get a lump sum, but you can't get PIA or ELB. You have to fight, and fight, and fight, and you have to fight with the Veterans Review and Appeal Board to get that.

We all sit here and give you the gold-plated charter plan, and it means nothing if you have to fight with that VRAB in order to get it. So I'd just like your view on that, being a former VRAB member yourself. How can we improve that entity so they actually listen to what you're saying, what we hope to say, and make it easier and more accessible for veterans and their families—and RCMP members, for that matter, but that's a separate thing—to get access to the programs?

**Mr. Harold Leduc:** There's not enough time left in a day.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Sorry, sir. I know that's why I left you for last.

**Mr. Harold Leduc:** It comes down fundamentally to what my presentation was about.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Yes, sir.

**Mr. Harold Leduc:** People are not following the spirit and intent of the legislation.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you.



**Mr. Harold Leduc:** They're not following from the charter on down with this new Veterans Charter. Access is so simple. When I first joined the board, hearings were 10 minutes. We would give an introductory comment, and we'd say what's missing. What's missing is your link to service, or we don't have a diagnosis. It's that simple. We're all supposed to be working together. The legislation is written in a way that you should have access, except for contradictory evidence. But the way the adjudicators are trained now is the complete opposite. As I say, you don't need all these medical files.

The veterans legislation was written to be non-adversarial. The process was written to be non-adversarial. It's the only one in Canada, and it has to stay that way. I can't imagine having government lawyers on the other side, and people battling to give these guys their due. The Bureau of Pensions Advocates was developed in the 1930s because the government and the people of Canada thought it was horrible that World War I veterans and Boer War veterans would have to pay out of their own pocket to hire lawyers to get their disability benefits. Now here we are in 2014, and we have veterans paying out of their own pockets to take the system to Federal Court because the system is broken. We should be having Bureau of Pensions Advocates' lawyers represent veterans at Federal Court.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** There's an idea.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

As I said, the government and the official opposition are going to lose their last question, but Mr. Hayes has time for one. The last member on each side won't, so you have to be succinct.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC):** I will be succinct. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Leonardo, you're the founder and national president of Veterans of Canada. Are you here today as an individual, or are you here representing the group that you are president of? The reason I ask is that one of your recommendations was the elimination of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. You have 7,400 members, as you pointed out to us. Do they share your concerns? Have you undertaken a methodology to vet what you've brought here by your membership?

• (1925)

**Mr. Donald Leonardo:** Thanks, it's a very good question.

Yes, I did. This idea of a new adjudication system was written because of the feedback of our members. A couple of years ago

when we had 6,000 members I put this out to them, and I got instant feedback. I can show you the spreadsheet going back to when I did it. It was over two years ago because of the review you had on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board a year and a half ago.

I wrote the plan with Sean's help in changing words around to make sense and then put it back to the members and the members' comments on this system were all positive.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Thank you.

This will be a short one too.

**The Chair:** Make it really short.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** I still have the time.

**The Chair:** I'll decide that, but you get one more short one.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Mr. Thibeau, you had mentioned that you agree with many recommendations, but there are some concerns unique to aboriginals. In your opening statements I'm not sure if you captured all those concerns. If you did I accept that and we will use that. If you did not, if there are other concerns that are unique to aboriginals that we should be considering, I would ask you on behalf of the committee to please put those in writing for us.

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** I will.

What I have given you is what I sent to my membership: the first nations veterans of Canada, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, and the ITK, and the response I got was that's the start, so we're digging.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Okay.

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** There may not be that many more, but we have to make sure we try to capture as much as we can.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, I appreciate it.

**The Chair:** You were very cooperative. I'm leaving on a happy note. Remind the members that we're convening at 3:15 on Thursday to do the business before we get into the other. We agreed earlier that we would do it on Thursday.

I want to thank the witnesses not only for excellent presentations, but for putting up with the confusion for a while and getting back. So thank you very much for being here.

The meeting is adjourned.





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