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Chair

Mr. Stephen Fuhr

Standing Committee on National Defence

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• (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

I'd like to welcome you all to the defence committee to discuss your appointments. I'd like to congratulate everybody.

Pursuant to Standing Orders 110 and 111, we have the Order in Council appointment of Ms. Jody Thomas to the position of deputy minister of national defence, the appointment of William Matthews to the position of senior associate deputy minister of national defence, the appointment of Gordon Venner to the position of associate deputy minister of national defence, and the appointment of Geneviève Bernatchez to the position of Judge Advocate General of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Congratulations.

I was told that each of you will speak, so I'll just run down the line.

Ms. Thomas, you have the floor.

Ms. Jody Thomas (Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, I am honoured to appear before this committee to speak about my new role as deputy minister of national defence.

In April, I addressed this committee when I was appointed as the senior associate deputy minister.

I spent the better part of my time speaking about my personal and professional life before coming to National Defence. Of course, those details haven't changed.

[*English*]

Today I'll focus my remarks on what has happened since I became senior associate deputy minister, as well as the challenges that lie ahead of me as deputy minister.

First, let me say how proud I am to be speaking at this committee today with my two colleagues, the senior associate deputy minister and the associate deputy minister. I am also enormously proud to be here alongside the Canadian Armed Forces' new Judge Advocate General, Commodore Geneviève Bernatchez, who is the first woman to be named to this very important office.

Last week I assumed the role of deputy minister. I worked very closely with former DM John Forster to ensure a smooth transition, and I wish him the very best in his well-deserved retirement. As the senior associate, I saw first-hand what a hard-working, dedicated public servant John was. My first week as DM only served to deepen my admiration for all that he accomplished. His steadfast determination to deliver on programs and commitments was matched only by his dedication to building strong relationships with leaders across the defence team.

Together, under his leadership, the defence team was able to move the agenda forward. In particular, working as the mental health champion has been fulfilling for me, and I look forward to continuing in that role in the years ahead. It is important to continue discussing mental health and ensuring plans are in place to support the defence team, both military and civilian.

[*Translation*]

But the launch of Canada's new defence policy has been monumental. I am grateful to have been with the department for its release.

The Defence Team leadership truly understands that Strong, Secure, Engaged, or SSE, as we call it, is a once in a generation opportunity. It is an opportunity to transform the way we support the Canadian Armed Forces and prepare for the defence of Canada over the next 20 years.

[*English*]

This is an opportunity we won't squander. We will deliver this policy because it's what's expected of us.

I'm proud to have recently been a part of the joint suicide prevention strategy between National Defence and Veterans Affairs. It was the first SSE—"Strong, Secure, Engaged"—initiative that the Department of National Defence delivered on, and a clear signal that no effort would be spared in quickly implementing the initiative to better care for people. That's really what it's all about. None of the tremendous work the Canadian Armed Forces does can happen if we don't care for its members properly. I'm pleased to report that everyone at the Department of National Defence is on board with the rapid implementation of people-focused programs and services. I am fortunate that I was appointed to this position at a time when the relationships between the military and the civilian parts of the defence team are strong.

As we usher in a new era of growth and development for Canada's military, we could not ask for a better leader for the Canadian Armed Forces than Chief of the Defence Staff General Jonathan Vance. I intend to build on the relationships that have been created and continue in John Forster's footsteps as we commit ourselves to the tremendous task of delivering SSE's initiatives.

On the departmental side, I have a great team working with me towards these goals, and I am fortunate to have welcomed two extraordinary new deputies to help lead our organization through this transformational change. They will introduce themselves in detail, but I wanted to speak about what each of them brings to their role.

• (1535)

[Translation]

In the role of associate deputy minister, we have Gordon Venner, former assistant deputy minister of policy in the department.

[English]

SSE was delivered and developed under his strong guidance and leadership. Few people in the department have such a depth of understanding of this policy and its initiatives. More than that, Gordon brings decades of foreign policy experience to the role, having served as Canada's ambassador to Iran. He is widely considered to be among the public service's most capable policy minds.

In the role of senior associate deputy minister, I am pleased to introduce Bill Matthews, the former Comptroller General for Canada. In addition to his proven financial acumen, Bill has a track record of project management leadership through organizational change, which will serve our department extremely well through his tenure.

I can safely say that Gordon, Bill, and I have gotten off to an excellent start working together. Let's hope they think the same.

We have a strong leadership team at the Department of National Defence, and I'm enthusiastic about our prospects for successful implementation of our defence policy.

Succeed we must. The criticality of the work performed by our department cannot be understated. The women and men at DND are key enablers who support the Canadian Armed Forces in defending Canada and our interests at home and abroad. Whether it's thwarting terrorist activities overseas or rescuing civilians from natural disasters at home, the Canadian Armed Forces rely on the support of the department to do their jobs as well as they do, and I intend to strengthen that support even further during my time as deputy minister.

The policy is essentially a reset for DND and the Canadian Armed Forces. Every effort we undertake as a department is now geared towards the successful delivery of its vision and its goals. With 111 initiatives set out within SSE, implementation is going to be complex. As a start, my focus is on completing the groundwork that will set us up for successful delivery of this policy over the long term. That's not all flashy announcement-worthy work. It's not, by any stretch of the imagination, but it's work that must be done.

To start, the chief of the defence staff, Bill, Gord, other defence team leaders, and I can track each and every initiative that has been announced as part of SSE. The CDS and I are alerted when things are running behind schedule, and together we question, push, guide, and encourage forward momentum across the department.

Part of what allows us to do this is the department's analytics software. We're using it to its full capacity. It's a tool that we've had in the department for 10 years, but we're using it and finding it especially valuable for SSE implementation. The software ensures that everyone in the department can understand and track progress on any SSE initiative at any time, and since all defence team leaders have the tracking software on our desktops, we can dive into initiatives ourselves. It's early days, but progress is good on populating the system. That kind of transparency is motivating, and it sends a clear message through the department that we're pressing ahead and committed to staying on track.

We're also growing the defence team by recruiting, staffing, and training in key areas for growth, but that takes time, and we need to speak about it with frankness and honesty. Last week, at a Canadian Global Affairs Institute event, senior CAF leaders and I had the chance to discuss the challenges we face in staffing specialized positions that we need filled to deliver SSE, including procurement specialists, engineers, and cybersecurity experts. Our task is not to hire as many people as we can, but instead to find the right people with the right skills to fulfill the right roles. That takes time if we want to get it right, and we do, but it's worth the time and effort because we will be better off in the long term. It's more of that groundwork that I mentioned earlier.

Even as we do that, I'm focused on the overarching priorities of SSE, which are first and foremost the care of Canadian Armed Forces members and their families. Initiatives related to the care and support of CAF members are, naturally, no-fail initiatives. They will be treated with urgency because people are at the core of this policy.

[Translation]

You'll hear the chief of the defence staff often say: "People first, mission always". That's very much a guiding principle for the rollout of SSE, as well.

But giving Canadian Armed Forces members the tools to do their jobs well is equally important.

[English]

The Canadian Armed Forces cannot be what they need to be without the right equipment. We get that, so we're implementing the capability and equipment-related initiatives at the same time as we're taking care of our people, and we're doing it with equal fervour and energy. Our materiel team is diligently streamlining its processes to reduce the time it takes to get the equipment our troops need, and we're committed to changing the narrative about DND's relationship with the defence industry once and for all.

With a policy reset of this magnitude, the defence team will be relying heavily on exceptional support from, and collaboration with, other government departments and central agencies, such as finance, Public Services and Procurement Canada, the Privy Council Office, Treasury Board Secretariat, and others. We need solid partners in each of those organizations to deliver SSE.

My role as DM is not only to guide the department in maintaining forward momentum but also to build the trust and confidence within these organizations that DND can manage the implementation of SSE. When our analytics software alerts us that something has gone off course, it will be my role, with the CDS, to keep the key leaders of those partner organizations informed, so that we know how we'll resolve issues and get back on track. I'll work with other deputy ministers, the Clerk of the Privy Council, and defence stakeholders from all sectors. We'll need all hands on deck to deliver this policy. Strong collaboration is critical to see this through.

● (1540)

We'll be keeping you informed throughout the rollout of this policy as well, keeping lines of communication open and continuing this dialogue in the months and years to come.

Mr. Chair, if there's one more thing I'd like to convey to this committee, it's the pride with which I'll fulfill my duties as the deputy minister of national defence. This department is in my DNA, with generations of my family having served and still serving. I don't take my role for granted. The people who work at the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Armed Forces members we proudly support, and the goals we're working toward—I'm privileged to be a part of it all, and I'm delighted to lead the department in the months ahead.

[Translation]

Thank you for your attention.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Thomas.

Mr. Matthews, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Mr. William Matthews (Senior Associate Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

I consider it an honour and a privilege to have been appointed senior associate deputy minister of the Department of National Defence.

I am looking forward to working with Deputy Minister Thomas and Associate Deputy Minister Venner as we implement the government's new defence policy: Strong, Secure, Engaged.

I am eager to bring the experience and skills I have acquired in the private and public sectors to this position.

I will have two areas of primary focus. The first area is procurement. The implementation of Strong, Secure, Engaged will require a high volume of procurement activity.

The second area is the transition. There is important work to be done to close the seam between the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada. That work rests at the heart of improved support for our veterans and their families. It's important for the Canadian Armed Forces members, too. We must ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces members have the support they need to prosper as they transition to civilian life.

[English]

This is an exciting time for everyone at the Department of National Defence. "Strong, Secure, Engaged" was a significant and much-needed policy reset. As part of the consultation process, the defence teams solicited input from internal experts, Canadians, other government departments, and our allies. "Strong, Secure, Engaged" will ensure that the women and men in the Canadian Armed Forces are well equipped and well supported for the next 20 years. I look forward to working with my new colleagues as we move forward to implement "Strong, Secure, Engaged" and improve our support to the Canadian Armed Forces.

When it comes to the enormous task of implementing the new policy, I believe I have two areas of strength that will enable me to add value.

Before joining the public service 13 years ago, I was an associate partner with PricewaterhouseCoopers and IBM. The past 13 years of my career in the federal public service were spent at the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, mostly within the Office of the Comptroller General, and for the past three years, I served as the comptroller general of Canada.

During that time I obtained extensive experience developing, implementing, and interpreting Government of Canada policies in the areas of financial management, internal audits, procurement, and project management. In addition to costing, my experience in the areas of procurement and project management will be most beneficial in my new role.

In addition to being responsible for the policies in these areas, I was the functional leader of the related professional communities. Internal audit and financial management communities in government have set a very high standard in the areas of talent management and professional development. In the areas of procurement and project management, while I acknowledge there is still work to be done, I am incredibly proud of the work that was accomplished there to build and strengthen these communities.

Implementing “Strong, Secure, Engaged” will be challenging, and problems will be encountered along the way. Collaboration, openness to change, and good financial management practices can prevent and solve problems. I look forward to playing a leadership role in all those areas.

I also have experience in helping to grow organizations and communities in times of change. I know that will be very useful as we grow the defence team to implement “Strong, Secure, Engaged”. For example, when I joined the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat in 2004, only 1,100, or about 35% of the government's financial management community were designated professional accountants. In 2016 that number had grown to over 2,500. That growth is critical to ensure taxpayer dollars are well spent and to allow parliamentarians to exercise their critical oversight role. A focus on value for money and high-quality reporting is something I plan to maintain at the Department of National Defence within the framework of SSE.

I'd like to touch again upon the care and support of our people. SSE is centred on improving the quality of life for our military members, veterans, and their families. I believe many of these lessons can be applied to our civilian workforce as well. The well-being of employees is essential to the success of any organization. We cannot do great things as an organization if our people are not well cared for. Employees who are well supported are ready and eager to serve.

Closing the seam between the Department of National Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs was a priority in the mandate letter of the ministers of both departments, and that priority is reflected in “Strong, Secure, Engaged”. As Deputy Minister Thomas noted, we've already started delivering on “Strong, Secure, Engaged” initiatives related to the Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans, but there is much more to do, so the work continues. The transition and veterans support pieces will be among my priorities as the senior associate deputy minister.

●(1545)

On a more personal note, mental health is an issue that has recently begun to receive the attention it deserves. This matter is very important to me. I currently sit on the board of directors for the Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research in Ottawa, as well as chairing their finance and audit committee. I find this role very rewarding and I look forward to continuing in that capacity.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for having me here today and for giving me the opportunity to introduce myself. Thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Matthews.

Mr. Venner, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Mr. Gordon Venner (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee. I will be brief.

I am pleased to appear before you today as associate deputy minister of national defence.

[English]

It's a tremendous honour to do this job. Working alongside the defence team that you see here, together with Chief of the Defence Staff General Vance and the entire Canadian Armed Forces leadership team is an immense privilege.

Over the last three years, I have worked with the Canadian Forces to help enable and facilitate the tremendously important work they do. Whether fighting forest fires and floods at home, deploying abroad to provide humanitarian assistance, or standing up for our values in conflict zones, the Canadian Forces do great work every day on our behalf. Being part of the team that supports them means that I get to come to the office every day confident that the work I do is important and meaningful and helps to make Canada and the world a better place.

It's not just a tremendous honour to start this new position alongside Jody and Bill and the new Judge Advocate General; it's also a great moment to take on new responsibilities.

Earlier this year, the Department of National Defence concluded the most comprehensive review of our defence policy in Canadian history. We now go forward on the basis of a sound policy footing. I'm particularly proud of the broad consultative process that kicked off that review. The online process, which resulted in over 20,000 Canadians sharing with us their comments and questions, would have been technologically impossible not that long ago. The round tables we convened with experts across the country were well attended and allowed our ministers and parliamentary secretary to hear directly from knowledgeable Canadians. Of course, dozens of members of Parliament, maybe some of them at this table today, held their own consultations in their constituencies and were kind enough to share the results with us.

Let me also commend the excellent committee work done in this House and in the other place; it contributed to our deliberations.

Mr. Chair, I come to my new responsibilities with a different background from most of my colleagues. I spent most of my career as a diplomat. I am, and always will be, a proud product of the Pearson Building. I hope this experience will help me to be of service to our minister and to Jody Thomas as they lead the department forward.

I served as the assistant deputy minister in the Global Affairs department, responsible for Afghanistan, among other countries, at a time when we still had a significant troop presence in that country. I've been responsible in the Global Affairs department for the Middle East twice in my career, and I have found that experience invaluable since we deployed our troops to the region under Operation Impact. I spent 12 years working in the Europe branch and in our mission to the European Union in Brussels. I found that useful, as Canada has assumed a new job as one of NATO's framework nations while deploying to Latvia for an enduring mission.

I've also, Mr. Chair, spent considerable time working with international organizations such as APEC, the OECD, the G8, and the G20. I am finding that time spent working in these organizations is applicable in other international and multilateral contexts, such as NATO, NORAD, or the counter-ISIL coalition.

Mr. Chair, the challenges facing the Canadian Forces at this time are considerable. The rapid pace of technological development alone means that we have considerable work ahead of us to ensure that our forces can do the work we expect from them. Our rapidly changing geostrategic environment, described in chapter 4 of our new defence policy, sets out some of the other challenges we face. If you haven't had a chance to read it, I particularly recommend that chapter. It's only seven pages long, and I think it sums up some of the tremendous challenges in the environment that shapes our work today.

One lesson I learned while working on Middle East issues and while serving as our ambassador in Iran is that long periods of stability can often disguise underlying social turmoil, occasionally resulting in rapid and even revolutionary change. Just think of the Arab Spring or the Iranian revolution. Periods of instability mean that our Canadian Forces must maintain high levels of readiness. We never know when they will have to deploy on short notice to far corners of the globe to deliver humanitarian aid, help prevent tragedies, or fight chaos and destruction.

In the months ahead, I hope to help the Canadian Forces maintain readiness, renew themselves for upcoming challenges, implement our new defence policy, and adapt to a rapidly changing world. Working with Minister Sajjan, Jody Thomas, General Vance, Bill Matthews, the JAG, and other DND leaders, I am confident that we have the team we need, a team with complementary skill sets, well balanced to respond to both the predictable and the unexpected.

• (1550)

If I have learned anything from working with the Canadian Forces these last three years, it is that teamwork is critical to responding to all great challenges. Of course, that team will need to transcend national defence. Modern threats to our security mean that we need to work as part of a seamless whole-of-government effort. Indeed, our team needs to work effectively with other levels of government.

[Translation]

I spent some time working in provincial and municipal government early in my career and I know that effective cooperation across levels of government will be just as important in dealing with security threats in the future as it has been in coping with natural disasters in the past.

Mr. Chair, I look forward to being part of the team.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Venner.

Go ahead, Commodore Bernatchez.

[Translation]

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez (Judge Advocate General, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am honoured to have the opportunity to appear before you today.

As the 15th Judge Advocate General, I am proud to follow the worthy line of my predecessors, especially as the Canadian Armed Forces Legal Services Branch prepares to celebrate 100 years of service in support of the rule of law and democracy in Canada.

[English]

I understand that you have been provided a copy of my biography, so my intention is to briefly identify the role and function of the Judge Advocate General and my vision for the office and the work we do.

I am appointed as the Judge Advocate General to perform two distinct roles as set out in the National Defence Act. First, I have the responsibility of superintending the administration of military justice in the Canadian Armed Forces. Second, I act as legal adviser to the Governor General, the Minister of National Defence, the department, and the Canadian Armed Forces in matters relating to military law.

Canadian military law includes military justice, as well as the law pertaining to the governance, administration, and activities of the Canadian Armed Forces. Together, as a team, members of the Office of the Judge Advocate General act with purpose. We enable the provision of client-focused, timely, options-oriented, and operationally driven legal advice and services in support of the Government of Canada and defence priorities and objectives.

[Translation]

To that end, we work in close collaboration with our colleagues in other departments, including our colleagues in the Department of Justice, as well as the legal services of the Privy Council Office and Global Affairs Canada.

Under my command, the office will continue to play a key role in helping decision-makers understand and place into context the legal aspects of their activities.

• (1555)

[English]

The Office of the Judge Advocate General is made up of 200 regular force and 48 reserve force legal officers, seven senior non-commissioned officers, and 91 civilian support personnel serving across Canada and abroad. The Office of the JAG is composed of the directorate of military prosecutions, the directorate of defence counsel services, as well as the following five divisions: military justice, administrative law, operational law, regional services, and the chief of staff.

I have command over all officers and non-commissioned members posted to the establishment of the Office of the Judge Advocate General. Legal officers must all be members in good standing of their respective provincial or territorial law societies. They are officers of the Canadian Armed Forces. The duties of those legal officers are determined by or under my authority, and in respect of the performance of those duties a legal officer may only be under the command of another legal officer. This relationship reinforces the obligations of the legal profession and ensures the provision of independent legal advice.

In 2010, 29% of our lawyers were women. Today, 35% are. It is important to highlight that half of our new legal officers are women. As you may be aware, about half of the lawyers who now enter the legal profession in Canada are women. This demonstrates that our current numbers are reflective of the broader Canadian legal profession.

As stated in Canada's new defence policy, our most important asset is our people. Along with my senior leadership, we are setting the conditions to ensure that our people receive the care, the services, the professional development, and the support they require to succeed. We also foster a culture that encourages diversity as well as inclusion. This is central to attracting and retaining talented and qualified individuals.

The areas of law for which the Judge Advocate General is responsible include military justice, military administrative law, and operational and international law.

[*Translation*]

As Judge Advocate General, I exercise authority over everything related to the administration of military justice in the Canadian Armed Forces. I am responsible for ensuring that this system operates effectively and in accordance with the rule of law.

As Canadian courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, have repeatedly confirmed, the military justice system is necessary since it addresses the particular needs of the Canadian Armed Forces with regard to discipline, efficiency, and morale. It is a system that is an integral part of Canada's legal mosaic, which continuously evolves and which must remain consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[*English*]

Military administrative law also forms part of the legal backbone of the Canadian Armed Forces. My administrative law division provides strategic legal support to the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence on a wide range of matters dealing with all aspects of a military member's career, from recruitment to release and transition to civilian life. As the overarching priorities of Canada's new defence policy relate to the care and support of Canadian Armed Forces members, my administrative law division plays an important role in supporting the chief of military personnel in the implementation of the policy's objectives. The administrative law division is also continuously involved in providing legal advice and services in support of a range of strategic priorities, including the implementation of Operation Honour.

Last but not least, my operational and international law division provides legal support to the Canadian Armed Forces and the department in relation to the conduct of domestic and international operations. The practice of operational law is something that truly makes the practice of military law different from that of our civilian colleagues, particularly in the deployed context.

There are currently 19 overseas missions supported by deployed legal officers or with personnel from my operational and international law division. Further, over the last several months, our legal officers have advised on domestic operations such as the Canadian Armed Forces deployments to assist Canadian civilian authorities in

their emergency responses to ice storms in New Brunswick, to floods in Quebec and Ontario, and to wildfires in British Columbia.

Mr. Chair, I do not take my appointment as Judge Advocate General for granted. It is a tremendous privilege to lead the women and the men who enable departmental and Canadian Armed Forces decision-makers to conduct their multi-faceted operations, whether at home or abroad, in accordance with applicable laws while meeting Canadians' expectations.

Thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Commodore.

We'll go to formal questioning. If you see this while you're receiving a question or giving one, it means you have 30 seconds. This helps me do my job. I would appreciate it if you check with me every once in a while.

At the end of formal questioning, there's a motion on the table from Mr. Bezan. He'll move that at the end, but in the interim, I'd like to move to the first round of seven-minute questions.

Mr. Robillard, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will ask my questions in French. I am actually pleased to see that French plays a significant role in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Venner, you shared your biography with the committee. It shows an extensive background in international issues. How will this international experience guide your actions in your new role as associate deputy minister of national defence?

Mr. Gordon Venner: Thank you for your question.

As I said in my opening remarks, my experience is sort of varied.

[*English*]

I'm surprised to discover, given the variety of things I had to do as a diplomat, how much of it is useful in my current responsibilities. That's because of the tremendous diversity of tasks we've asked the Canadian Forces to take on around the world.

I spent some time working in Europe. I spent 12 years with my crew working in Europe. I've had to make two trips to Latvia, and I find that we have issues that deal with how the NATO relationship with the European Union is going to develop, particularly in the context of Brexit. We wonder how that is going to change both our defence relationship with the United Kingdom and the role the European Union is going to end up playing in national defence issues, particularly as the United Kingdom leaves. Perhaps there's a different balance of views within the European Union on how its own defence posture should evolve.

Indeed, NATO is constantly talking about how its own relationship with the European Union should work and what kind of partnership it should develop with the European Union. If you'd told me 20 years ago, when I was working on European issues, that these issues would come around in this context, I would have been astonished.

The experiences that I had working in the Middle East were some time ago now, but I'm surprised at how enduring some of the underlying issues are in the region. The disputes, some of them, are hundreds of years old, and they'll be with us a lot longer, so I'm not surprised that some of the same problems I was dealing with as a diplomat are coming back to play out again in a slightly different context.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you, Mr. Venner.

Ms. Thomas, during your last appearance before this committee in April, you mentioned that you wanted to champion the cause of mental health in the Department of National Defence.

Since April, what have you done about it as senior associate deputy minister of national defence? What do you intend to do now as deputy minister of national defence to champion the cause of mental health?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Thank you for those questions.

[English]

In the seven months that I was the senior associate deputy minister, we had launched a number of activities for supporting the conversation about mental health.

I have held question-and-answer town halls on mental health at CFB Halifax and CFB Esquimalt. We launched the Not Myself Today campaign within the department; this campaign gives an opportunity for managers and staff to talk about their mental health. We worked very hard over the last seven months. We continued the work that had started before I arrived with the Department of Veterans Affairs to pull together, publish, and announce the joint suicide prevention strategy.

Two weeks ago we held a healthy workplace day in the department and invited Séan McCann from Great Big Sea to come and speak to us about his experience in using music to help heal people who are suffering from mental health problems.

That's a very high level of what we've done. It's a continual conversation and discussion in the department, whether it's on the Canadian Armed Forces side, the civilian side, or jointly, to ensure that the Department of National Defence is a healthy workplace.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

Ms. Thomas, how do you see your role in supporting Canada's new defence policy "Strong, Secure, Engaged"?

[English]

Ms. Jody Thomas: I'm very happy to talk about my role in terms of SSE. I see myself as a partner to the chief of the defence staff in

driving implementation. We have changed the entire governance of the department in order to manage implementation so that every level in the organization that has a role also has a view into what needs to be done. As senior associate deputy minister, I chaired with the chief financial officer and the vice-chief of the defence staff a committee that oversaw the beginning of the implementation, the analysis of all 111 initiatives.

We are using analytics. We're not expecting people to do this on the side of their desk. We're not expecting people to guess at where they are in terms of implementation. We've put together a very robust program to look at every initiative and enter the data into the system by milestone, date, complexity, and risk, and we align that with when the money should come into the department so that we don't lapse money or overspend and we ensure that we're meeting the targets expected of us. We're using technology to do that, rather than graphs and spreadsheets that people keep individually, so that the CDS and I have an overall view of the entire thing.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Yurdiga is next.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you to the witnesses.

My first question is to Commodore Bernatchez. In your opinion, do parts of the military justice system need to be modernized, and if so, what parts?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: There is no doubt in my mind that the *raison d'être* and the necessity of the military justice system continues to endure. It's a system that has been recognized by our highest tribunal as responding to the very specific needs of the Canadian Armed Forces for maintenance of discipline, efficiency, and morale.

There is also no doubt in my mind that it is a system that must always continue to progress in order to ensure that it remains very well aligned with Canadian values and with Canadian legal requirements, including the charter. In my view, it is system that we need to continue to evaluate to ensure that it progresses.

There are different areas. There is a solid backbone that has been recognized by the courts as well, and as the jurisprudence continues to progress, we'll have to ensure that we maintain a consistent review of the system so that it keeps pace with the legal requirements.

• (1610)

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

Another question is about the SSE. How do we implement it with your organization or your department? Will you be part of that implementation?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: It is my foremost priority for the Office of the Judge Advocate General at this moment that we assist and support the departmental and Canadian Armed Forces clients in the implementation of SSE. There are several initiatives in which we will be and are engaged to ensure that the legal authorities are in place and that the department and the Canadian Armed Forces fully understand the legal parameters moving forward.

We did a little exercise when I first took office to see how we needed to align our services to ensure that we responded to the departmental and Canadian Armed Forces requirements. We soon realized that we'd probably be one of the rare organizations that would be very much involved in support of the implementation of SSE by advising departmental and Canadian Armed Forces authorities moving forward.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

My next question is to Madam Thomas. In your opinion, what are some of the strengths and weaknesses of “Strong, Secure, Engaged”, and how long will it take to be fully workable?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Well, the “Strong, Secure, Engaged” initiative is workable now, but it's a 20-year program from start to finish between day one and the end of the last procurements. The strengths are it is broad, inclusive, and reflective of broad consultation with parliamentarians, the public sector, industry experts, academics, and people within the department. I think it is reflective of where Canada needs to be from its perspective as a player in the world, and the fact that as we exercise traditional Canadian soft power, there has to be a strong Canadian Armed Forces as well.

Its only weakness is that we are trying to get it all done at once, and that's not a weakness in the policy; it's probably just our eagerness to implement it. I don't think it has any large weaknesses. I think it is a comprehensive plan and it's a comprehensive look at what the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence should be delivering on behalf of Canadians.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Second, are you aware of any other country that has something similar? We don't want to reinvent the wheel, so are you taking some of the good and bad from everyone and making a program that's more efficient?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Mr. Venner certainly can give you quite a bit of detail on what we based it on, but my understanding is the United Kingdom and Australia put out very similar plans just before we did.

Mr. Gordon Venner: Actually, all three—the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand—did comprehensive defence policy reviews in about the year and a half preceding the launch of ours. They were all very generous with their time in helping us, and we learned some important lessons from each of them.

The thing we learned from the Australians that was particularly useful was the necessity to have a credible third party do outside verification of all of our costings, because we were looking at an extremely long period of time, 20 years, and we knew there would be a lot of expenditures over that time. We knew we would need to have outside experts, so we did. In fact, when we talked to the Australians about it, they said this is the accounting firm we used to do that process, and we recommend you use the same ones. When we talked to that firm, they said they could not only do the same thing for us as they did for the Australians, but they could actually give us the same accountants, and so they gave us the same people to do a lot of the work on the program.

From the New Zealanders we learned a lot about the consultation process. In fact, if you look at our original consultation document, you will note there's a strong resemblance in format to the one the New Zealanders used to launch their process. They were the ones who told us a lot about how to run that exercise.

The United Kingdom was also extremely useful. Theirs was perhaps the broadest and most comprehensive exercise.

We did talk to the Americans as well, but their system traditionally has been much more different. They have a legislatively mandated quadrennial defence review. It's a different exercise, and of course the scale is just entirely different.

• (1615)

Mr. David Yurdiga: That's all I have.

The Chair: That's what you have.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you very much for taking my questions.

The Chair: Mr. Garrison is next.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of you for appearing before us today.

Welcome back to the deputy minister now. As I was joking with her earlier, the last time we were here, we were trying to discover which parts of the organization charts she was in charge of. Today that's a lot easier.

I'm not going to ask too many questions. I have complete confidence in your record in the Canadian Coast Guard to start with and now at the Department of National Defence, and I know you'll get very good work out of Mr. Matthews and Mr. Venner.

I'm going to focus my remarks on Commodore Bernatchez. We don't often get to talk about military justice in this committee. It's a favourite topic of mine, but first I want to congratulate you on your appointment.

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: Thank you.

Mr. Randall Garrison: You're not only the 15th Judge Advocate General; you're the first woman to hold the office. However, that's not why I'm going to ask you some of the next questions. I think it's a milestone in a more diverse Canadian military to have you in that office, so it's very good to see you there.

I know that you've served about 20 years in the Judge Advocate General's office. Is that correct?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: Yes.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Then we know you have the experience to do the job.

One thing your predecessor was sometimes uncharitably criticized for was the failure to fully implement Bill C-15, the law that was passed more than four years ago on reforming military justice. I'm wondering whether this will be a priority and if you can give us any estimate of when the act would be fully implemented.

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: As we know, Bill C-15 represented significant modernization of the military justice system and had several clauses and several aspects to it that need to be implemented once the bill received royal assent in 2013. The bill incorporated recommendations that had been made by the Right Honourable Antonio Lamer in his 2003 report, as well as recommendations that had been made by the Senate committee in 2009.

It presented a gargantuan task for lawyers to be able to draft the regulations that would put Bill C-15 into force, and our team at the Office of the Judge Advocate General worked relentlessly over the course of the last several years to try to not only draft the regulations that needed to be put in place as a first order of business but also to look at the second, third, and fourth degrees of effect of having legislation that was modifying other aspects of the regulatory scheme of the Queen's Regulations and Orders.

I'm very pleased to tell the committee today that this gargantuan task, this adventure, is coming to fruition. We're looking at the finalization of this process. We remain extremely committed to seeing it come into force in the next little while.

Mr. Randall Garrison: That's great. Thank you.

Recently we had reports in the media, based on a small number of cases, about the number of prosecutions for sexual assault that resulted in a guilty verdict in the military justice system as opposed to the civilian system. I acknowledge they are small numbers, and we must be careful of percentages.

What do you think explains the difference? Can things be done that would improve the record? Does it take more training of prosecutors in bringing the cases forward, or a change in attitude within the military? Why is there a big difference?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: Thank you so much for allowing me to present a more complete and detailed picture of what the statistics actually look like.

The first thing I want to say is that like every crime against a person, crimes of a sexual nature present a real human trauma. The judiciary aspect is only a single facet, a very small facet, of how this entire problem needs to be looked at. We in the military justice system play an important role in addressing the issue, but this issue is addressed more broadly by our institution, the Canadian Armed Forces. I want to reiterate that it remains a priority to address these issues and ensure that a profound cultural change actually occurs within our organization.

You will have heard from the media last Monday that 23% of charges that pertain to crimes of a sexual nature were concluded by a finding of guilt. I was away from the city when this news hit the media, and my immediate reaction was that it didn't sound correct. I went back to my military justice division and asked the director of military prosecutions for his input.

What they were able to provide to me was that when charges are brought that pertain to a crime of a sexual nature, there are a number of charges that can be laid. Some of them will be for sexual assault, but in the precise military context, we also have access to charges that are not available in the civilian system, such as disgraceful conduct, drunkenness, and abuse of subordinates. These charges are often brought as an alternative to the sexual assault charge under the Criminal Code of Canada.

It is quite possible, then, that either one of two things is going to happen. In the military justice system, as in the broader criminal courts, those who are accused have rights. They're entitled to a vigorous defence, and the verdict is based on the evidence adduced before the courts. It's quite possible that the evidence will not fully support the charge of sexual assault but could support the lesser

charges I just mentioned. This is what usually happens when there is a finding of guilt. In fact, when we look at the statistics from 2014 to March 2017, there were 18 cases related to sexual assault in the Canadian Armed Forces, which resulted in 10 convictions, so the statistic is more like 56%.

Convictions or findings of guilt are not necessarily the proof of a healthy and functioning system, so I want to caution here that this is only one indicator of how the system is functioning. It doesn't give the entire picture.

• (1620)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Alleslev is next.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much. If you'll indulge me for a moment, as a former air force officer, I can't tell you how incredibly proud I am to have you in front of us today and for you to be the reflection of our Canadian Forces and our civilian Department of National Defence. This shows a system that is working extremely well, and it is something to be proud of.

We have a great policy now. We've looked at putting in some significant money. We have chosen senior executives who reflect the new priorities. Among these could be foreign policy by other means, which is the military, and that requires someone who understands the integral relationship between foreign policy and the Canadian Forces, particularly at a time when we're finding unprecedented global instability. Our military will be called on increasingly in this environment. We've given more priority to money and equipment, and now it's more about execution, program management, and accountability.

We have someone who is more than capable of delivering on that. We have someone who's going to ensure that all the balls in the air get looked after, someone who'll ensure that our military justice system is moving forward into the 21st century.

I would like to leverage some of the questions that my honourable colleagues asked, particularly in light of the military justice system. I understand that there was a significant review of the code of service discipline, particularly in summary trials. A report was developed, or so I understand. Was there in fact a report recommending what the significant structural changes in the summary trials should be, and if so, where are we in that process?

• (1625)

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: Thank you for this question.

My predecessor mandated a court martial comprehensive review. It pertained to the court martial system, and extensive consultation occurred. The team that carried out the review also did a fantastic job at comparative analysis.

When I took on the position of Judge Advocate General, I had an opportunity to look at the draft report with my military justice division. There were some aspects of it that I wanted to have clarified, because I was brand new at the job and needed a little bit of time to better understand certain aspects. The team was mandated to provide to me on July 21 a draft interim report for me to review.

We are currently in the process of reviewing this report, which I think will not only form the basis of a great opportunity to engage in a dialogue with parliamentarians, the Canadian public, and members of the Canadian Armed Forces as to what the Canadian military justice system is and where it should go, but will also enable me to formulate policy and legal analysis recommendations to the Minister of National Defence and the chief of the defence staff toward the modernization of this piece of the military justice system.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: With respect to Commonwealth colleagues such as the U.K. and Australia, I understand that we're possibly a little bit behind in terms of the modernization of our military justice system. Is that an accurate statement?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: It would be difficult for me to look at it that way. I think that we all have different legal frameworks that apply and different regimes that will allow us to do things in a certain manner, so I don't think that we're behind. I think we have differences, and there are reasons for those differences.

What we need to look at now is whether the court martial system and the wider military justice system continue to respond to Canadian laws and to Canadians' expectations of what their military justice system is to deliver.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: When can we look forward to perhaps seeing a report?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: I would very much like to be able to put as much of it as possible on my website soon. There are certain aspects of the report, though, that I think will be classified under solicitor-client privilege because they contain either legal advice or policy analysis for recommendations to the minister.

My default position will be to communicate as much as possible to the public, to engage them in that dialogue, and to ensure that we get the feedback we require in order to advance in it while protecting the pieces of it that I need to protect because of professional obligations.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: If you had to highlight the single greatest challenge that you see at the moment to the Canadian military justice system, what would you say that is?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: What is the greatest challenge to the military justice system?

This may be a reflection of the newness of my experience in the position, but my sense is that it's a system that is not widely understood, so the challenge, really, is to ensure that there's a comprehension. I think that comprehension can only happen through my ability to come to you and to have a conversation with you to answer the questions that pertain to that system, and to do the same with the Canadian public and internally within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: There is a perception out there, though, that there's a challenge with respect to access to justice for the victims or the people bringing forward a charge.

How would you respond to that?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: With respect to this perception, we're really trying hard to ensure that it is not the case. Especially since the Deschamps report, we've learned a whole lot over the last several years as an organization, as a wider department, and as CAF, but also as a military justice system.

The director of military prosecutions has put in place a series of new policies in order to enable access to the military justice system. He will, as a matter of priority, ensure that those trials that pertain to sexual offences get treated first. He will explain the process to victims. He will ensure that victims are consulted as to the jurisdiction that will be taken. He will also ensure that victims have the ability to present the impact that the matter has had on their lives.

I think that we're doing more and more. We're learning not only from other jurisdictions, the civilian jurisdictions, but also from growing and maturing.

● (1630)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I want to sincerely thank all of you for the work you have done and that I know you will continue to do in this area.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen, for five minutes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations to all of you for the new roles that you're undertaken, and best of luck as you proceed forward on them.

Commodore, can you tell me, at a very high level, what you think the differences are, both in reality and by perception, between the military justice system and the civilian justice system?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: At a very high level, both systems have to respond to the requirements of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Both systems are anchored in the Canadian legal mosaic, so they're both part of that big organism. They're part of that wider fabric.

Courts martial have the same powers and the same rights, basically, as superior courts of criminal jurisdiction. There is a judge who is independent, appointed by the Minister of National Defence, based on recommendations made by—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It sounds very equal.

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: There is an independent prosecution service.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Do you think that's the perception?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: No, I don't. That's what I was trying to convey with the last question. From my vantage point right now, as the new Judge Advocate General, there's a lot of education that needs to be done.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I heard you say that, and that was actually going to be one of my follow-up questions. When you talked about education and mentioned getting information back to us, I interpreted that to mean Parliament or the parliamentary committee. Where else do you think education is required?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: Within that context, technical briefings would be wonderful. I'd love to provide that in order to ensure there is a wider understanding from parliamentarians.

As far as the Canadian public is concerned, there needs to be more proactive engagement with the media on my part, the part of the director of military prosecutions, and the director of defence counsel services to ensure that the media understand what the military justice system is all about, and internally as well.

The previous question alluded to the fact there was a perception from victims that they did not have access to that system. What it says to me as the superintendent is that we also need to work in ensuring that our own constituency, the Canadian Armed Forces members, understand what their military justice system can do for them.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: My riding is Kingston and the Islands, so I'm not that far from here. We have a base there, as I'm sure you know.

One of the problems that we've had historically is incidents occurring on the base. In Kingston, our base is really intertwined with our community. It's right in the downtown area. Especially when we've had some high-profile cases, whether it's in relation to events at RMC or individual conduct on the base, there has been a question from time to time as to why things are handled differently in military court versus civilian court.

A lot of that has to do with what people see in movies and how they perceive the differences. There is something really serious here, and I'm glad to hear you touch on it, which is specifically about how you educate the broader public. The broader public has a perception that what goes on in a military court is not as open, transparent, forthcoming, honest, and fair as it really is. I'm not trying to discredit it; I'm just talking about the perception.

You've already elaborated on that, but I'm curious if you see similar problems, although maybe not to the same degree that I do. How will you commit to helping repair those relationships?

• (1635)

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: I fully agree. There needs to be transparency. There not only needs to be an appearance of transparency, but real transparency of the system, to lay it out there for people to see.

The centre of gravity for me right now is legitimacy. I want to ensure that the military justice system remains a legitimate one, because it's part of the wider Canadian legal mosaic. If that system suffers from illegitimacy, it's the wider judicial system that suffers from illegitimacy.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I will say that something really works. RMC students are much better behaved than Queen's students, so something is working.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there.

Mr. Hoback is next.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): First of all, I want to congratulate you all on your appointments. I think you should pat yourselves on the back for your careers and how well you've done. Lying ahead of you are some interesting challenges for sure.

One of the challenges I look at, as we listened to witnesses on the Ukraine study, is that we're starting to see new types of warfare, such as hybrid warfare. We're looking for different types of personnel now in our departments. How do we go about attracting those personnel and competing with the private sector, which has very unorthodox means and manners of attracting those young employees? When you are looking for cyber-specialists or engineers and programmers, how

do you compete with an Amazon, which has a doggy park and all kinds of other things, and an employee may work on the staircase just as well as in the office? How do you look at bringing these types of people into not only government, but into the military side of government?

I'll start with you, Jody.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Thank you. It's a really interesting question and it's a topic that we have on the table constantly. It's never off the table, in fact. Bill has been with us a week, and he's probably been in three meetings already where we've talked about how we're going to attract people.

We can't compete in some ways with the Amazons. We're never going to have doggy parks and pool tables in our workspaces. As well, we have two kinds of employees to attract: we want some people in uniform and we want civilians. We're trying to make the workforce as flexible as possible, meaning you can be an IT specialist in your civilian life and also be part of the reserve cyberforce. You don't have to give up one for the other. You can serve in uniform and as a civilian.

We have created a defence team HR strategy in which we're looking at what positions absolutely have to be in uniform and what could be civilian positions, so that we focus the capped number that the chief of the defence staff has for members of the regular and reserve forces on the things that you absolutely have to be in uniform to do, situations in which he has to direct you to do something to cause an effect and you must be in uniform to do that.

For everybody else, or others, how can we transition those positions to civilian positions? We are going to job fairs. We are doing the Women in Force program right now to try and attract women into the armed forces and give them a view of what it's like. We've reopened the Collège militaire royal in Saint-Jean to ensure that there is a bilingual francophone learning institution for people who want to learn primarily in French versus in English, although cadets out of both colleges are bilingual. We're using all the traditional methods, but we're also trying to do things such as make offers on the spot if we're in a job fair at a university.

Mr. Randy Hoback: You have the flexibility and the freedom to do that.

Ms. Jody Thomas: We do for the civilian side. We're compressing recruitment time on the military side.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I guess General Vance would be the one I would question on the military side about how he's going to try to compete with the Amazons in the same fashion.

Mr. Matthews, you talked a bit about procurement and the process of procurement. I've heard complaints from different people that if we gave you guys an extra \$10 million tomorrow, you wouldn't be able to spend it because you wouldn't get it through the process in procurement. How are you looking to streamline that process through Treasury Board so that we actually get what's required for our military in a timely and practical fashion? I'm hearing a lot of complaints that it isn't practical because it's no longer timely and it's no longer capable of doing what we need it to do, if that's a fair complaint.

Mr. William Matthews: Mr. Chair, the procurement issue is a serious one for implementing this new policy. Some of the things that we need to acquire are frankly very complicated and are going to take some time. Other things are less complicated and shouldn't take as much time.

It's not a challenge we can crack by ourselves, but I'll highlight a couple of key points for you. Number one, under this plan, defence will have additional authorities to buy low-complexity, low-risk items, and that will speed things up. It's a phased growth in the authorities, so we have to prove to our central agency colleagues and others that we're delivering. Those authorities will grow over time, which will allow more streamlined procurement.

On the broader picture in procurement, everyone agrees the process is broken. No one quite necessarily agrees on what the process is, but one of the key things happening outside of defence is that PSPC and the Treasury Board Secretariat are working on a procurement modernization effort, because it's both the directives and the policies that need to be fixed. The thing we can do inside defence to make it easier is to make our engagement with industry more streamlined. We, I think—again, I'm one week on the job—tend to get too detailed about our requirements, rather than talking about a capability we need and having that dialogue, rather than diving right down.

It is the work that goes into requirements definition that takes the time, and if you get that wrong, you end up stepping backwards. That's the key thing we can do inside the defence department.

• (1640)

Mr. Randy Hoback: I'd think the process would be outside the requirements. The requirements are the requirements, but the process is something that's streamlined so that no matter what the requirement is for what you're purchasing, it can happen in a timely manner.

Mr. William Matthews: But it's on us to get to the requirements definition phase done faster. That will—

Mr. Randy Hoback: That's basically the issue.

Mr. William Matthews: Yes.

The Chair: Ms. Romanado is next.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you so much for being here today. It's a real pleasure to see you again after our spoof videos on women in defence and security. It's a real pleasure, and I'm honoured to have you all here today.

We heard a little bit about SSE. We talked a little bit about the fact that we went out and talked to folks. I've been to 12 bases since March, talking to military, to veterans, and most importantly, to the families. I'm the mother of two serving members, so in terms of the regular force, you got two out of me, and that's all you get.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: With respect to transition, though, as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I can say that we've heard a lot about the difficulties military members experience in having to transition due to medical release, especially the difficulties for the families who are supporting them. Given that

SSE has an objective of increasing the regular force by 3,500 and the reserve force by 1,500 and that we just heard a little bit about how we want to have as flexible a workforce as possible, I'd like to get your opinions on how we can help support those who are transitioning out of the military and how we can be creative in keeping them in the family a little longer.

I know the CDS alluded to that at the joint suicide prevention strategy in terms of the universality of service, the different classifications of employee. Could you talk to us about that and give us your thoughts on trying to keep members in the forces longer? We've invested millions of dollars in their training and we'd like to keep them in the family.

Could you elaborate? Thank you.

Ms. Jody Thomas: I can start, and then I'll ask Bill to continue, as he'll be taking on the responsibility for this file.

The CDS has been direct and very clear that there is a difference between employability and deployability. We need to look very carefully at universality of service and how we can retain some of the very talented and well-trained people who still can serve a function within the Canadian Armed Forces, even though they may not potentially be able to be deployed. He's looking at those policies with the commander of military personnel, and it's a complex situation. We have to get it right, because if we make mistakes, we compound problems.

Again, it's one of those things that we're having continual and thoughtful discussion about, which I think is useful. We're not just putting pen to paper right away and leaping to a conclusion about how this is going to work.

We have created, as you know, transition units. Those transition units are really critical, because we're no longer releasing people until they're ready to be released, until the foundations for their future employment, for how they're going to manage their lives upon release, for how their families are going to cope, are in place. That's extremely important.

We forget that people come into this organization often at age 17, and it's all they know. It's all their families know. It's all of their friends, all of their relationships. In many branches of the armed forces, everything is centred around the base. Then when that cord is cut, they feel very isolated. The work that the chief of the defence staff is doing, again with the commander of military personnel, is looking at ensuring that we don't cut that cord too quickly, that people are ready emotionally, physically, financially. We've done all that transition work with them so that they understand and are ready for what's ahead of them.

At the same time, the Department of National Defence should be the employer of choice for people transitioning out of the Canadian Armed Forces. We should be trying to find as many jobs as we can for them within the department and within the public service, which is a very good thing. However, the benefit of some of the attention that has been received by Veterans Affairs and the department post-Invictus, as an example, is the growing number of private sector employers who want to employ people who are transitioning out of the armed forces. I think we are benefiting from an all-time high, probably since World War II, of appreciation for the quality of people who serve in the forces, their dedication to this country, and the fact that they can be employable in any number of industries and private sector organizations.

We are passionate about this, and there is a lot of work going on. The bottom line is the chief's direction that we don't release people until they're ready.

• (1645)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Bezan is next.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations to all of you on your appointments. I know you'll do well in your positions.

Ms. Thomas, we've met on numerous occasions, and I know there is nobody better for this job than you.

Commodore Bernatchez, you were replying earlier to questions from Ms. Alleslev about the court martial comprehensive review. Are you going to make that report public?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: Yes, and thank you for allowing me to clarify what I would like to do. The default position will be to make public as much of it as possible, and that would be done through the Office of the Judge Advocate General's website.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you.

As a follow-up to Mr. Garrison's comments on Bill C-15—I believe I was parliamentary secretary at the time we brought that through—quite a bit of concern was being expressed at that time by civilian organizations like the Canadian Bar Association about transparency, accountability, and how summary convictions were being applied in the military.

In the implementation process going forward, is there going to be more of that transparency and sharing with Canadians on how convictions are reached and punishment is meted out?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: Over the last several months, the director of military prosecutions has had much more engagement with Canadian media to do just that, to explain to the Canadian public the process that was followed and the results.

We saw a little of that last Monday. This is as a result of an engagement with Canadian media to ensure education was being provided. We'll see more of that moving forward.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Venner, when you talked about the defence policy, you said that a lot of it was shaped after what Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom had done in theirs.

With your background in foreign affairs, were you not at all concerned that the U.K. and Australia in particular did their policy reviews on defence and foreign affairs in concert? A foreign affairs policy informs the defence policy, and the defence policy helps with projection of a foreign policy. Why was that step missed in the Canadian process?

Mr. Gordon Venner: I can't speak to why the government decided to do a defence policy review and not a foreign policy review. It's a decision above my pay grade.

The United Kingdom did their policy review not just in the context of a foreign policy review but also in the context of an entire government spending review. They did an A-base review of every department in the government; defence was only one part of it. That may have had something to do with part of the logic behind why they chose to go the way they did.

Mr. James Bezan: But if you look at the way the U.K. and the Australians wrote theirs.... One thing I'm very happy to see was that in our own policy review process that we took on in our consultations, we put our soldiers, sailors, and those employed in the air force front and centre. They are the key part of the resource that we have as the military. They were at the beginning of the policy, and I support that 100%.

However, some of the criticism we've heard is that it's only in chapter 4 that we get down to geopolitics and geostrategy and the threat environment. You said that it's only seven pages out of a 148-page document. Some of the criticism is that the threat analysis should have been further up in the report and it should have been more substantive than what we've seen.

Mr. Matthews, in your bio and in your remarks you mentioned that you serve on the board of directors of the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre. How long have you been doing that?

• (1650)

Mr. William Matthews: I've been doing that for approximately four years.

Mr. James Bezan: You're doing this as a volunteer?

Mr. William Matthews: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. James Bezan: I appreciate your doing that. The Royal is a great organization, and the work they're doing on operational stress injuries for veterans and our current serving members.... Your volunteerism is to be commended.

Mr. William Matthews: Thank you.

Mr. James Bezan: How much more time do I have?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. James Bezan: Will we have a chance to circle back?

The Chair: Yes, we will.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay.

Mr. Matthews, to follow up on Mr. Hoback's comments about the challenges with procurement and the comment that we need more procurement specialists, how are we going to do that? Can we do that within the Department of National Defence, and move military procurement strictly as a national defence initiative?

Mr. William Matthews: Procurement recruitment is a government-wide issue. Obviously defence is a big consumer of procurement specialists, as well as the department of PSPC. That recruitment plan needs to be joint at some levels. Obviously there is a specialty in military procurement.

Our big seller in recruiting is that it's going to be interesting work. That is our competitive advantage over others. You're buying things that are just fascinating to buy.

The way we can do it includes partnerships with universities. We have a partnership with the Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa to train folks. There is going to be more of that sort of thing, getting out to colleges and being proactive and so on.

The second piece we have to look at, and we've just started this internally, is if corporate organizations in Canada are downsizing, is there any way we can get those folks up to speed more quickly? I don't know the answer to that yet. We've just floated that question and it's early days.

It's about getting the right people, not just putting bums in chairs, frankly.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Rioux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Thank you.

The new National Defence policy is ambitious, but it has been received with enthusiasm by all the troops. I think the skills of the people responsible for implementing it reassures all members of the committee.

Congratulations on your appointments. We are very honoured to welcome you today.

The focus of the policy has been on the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as their families. This is what Canadians have clearly told us.

My colleague from Kingston and I have a number of things in common, including a military college in each of our ridings: the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston and the military college in Saint-Jean. My colleague has raised an important point, namely that it is necessary to connect the military world with the civilian world. There are many things we can do about it. For example, we have a responsibility to further promote the professionalism of the people of the Canadian Armed Forces, their commitment and the sacrifices they make.

There may be a second point that we can advance.

Mr. Matthews, I really liked your introduction. You said that you will focus on procurement and the transition to civilian life.

There will be major changes in the rules for procurement. The transactions, as a whole, will be done directly with the department, while the major purchases will continue to be with Public Services and Procurement Canada. I think it's an opportunity to connect with the civilian world because you have to inform people about those changes.

Mr. Matthews, how do you plan to connect with the civilian world to explain this policy and its impact on innovation and job creation in Canada?

Mr. William Matthews: Thank you for your question, sir.

I have only been in my position for a week, but I can say two things about the connection with the civilian world.

First, the deputy minister has already mentioned her intention to follow the progress of each initiative. More than 111 initiatives are under way, and we can begin to connect by communicating the progress we have made in this regard.

• (1655)

[*English*]

In terms of the jobs that are created as a result of the strategy, that's a secondary impact that I think is a little more difficult to communicate.

I think our focus for both the civilians as well as the men and women in the forces is that by implementing this policy, we are ensuring a well-equipped force as well as properly supporting the families and the men and women, either while they're in the forces or as they transition. It's a whole that you have to think about together.

The database is available to all employees; they can monitor it. You can then look at the public reporting that will happen as well. I think that is key in terms of making those links.

That's all I will offer for the moment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Venner would like to add a point.

[*English*]

Mr. Gordon Venner: I would just make a quick comment on what you were saying at the beginning about the importance of people. It relates to the comment that Mr. Bezan made earlier when he said the geostrategic environment is in chapter 4 of the document. One of the reasons you don't get to it until chapter 4 is that chapter 1 is about the people.

Part of the reason it ended up at the front of the document is related to the comments I made at the beginning about the tremendous consultative process and the 20,000 people who participated. We can't be certain, because people were allowed to participate in the consultative process anonymously if they chose to, but we're pretty clear from what we read online that a lot of the people who chose to participate were family members of serving members, or they were veterans, or they were serving members themselves who had just as much right to participate in the process as anybody else. One of my favourite comments left online was from someone who said that our Canadian Forces are the best in the world, and they deserve the best available aircraft, ships, vehicles, and boots. I had the feeling that the guy who wrote that comment had walked a mile in our boots.

[Translation]

The Chair: Is that all?

[English]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Do I still have time?

The Chair: You're out of time, unfortunately.

Mr. Garrison, you have the last formal question. You have three minutes.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you. I want to go back to Commodore Bernatchez.

I appreciate your forthrightness with us today. As I said, we don't often get a chance to ask questions on military justice.

I have a very large military base in my riding. One of the questions that's come up very often is on who is responsible for investigating and prosecuting sexual offences involving a member of the forces and a non-member, such as a civilian employee or even a family member. Who has the responsibility for investigation and prosecution?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: Let's start with the investigation. It will depend largely on a variety of factors, including who's the complainant, who's the victim, and who is the alleged offender. There will be discussions between the national investigation service of the military police and the civilian police of jurisdiction if there is doubt as to whether the civilian police would be better suited to investigate, given all of these factors.

Once the investigation is completed, if it has been investigated by the civilian police, there could be a transfer back to the military. At that point there might be sufficient information to indicate that the military justice system would be better suited to prosecute the case, or it may be that it will stay within the civilian system and it will be the court of civilian jurisdiction that will prosecute.

It is an issue of what's best suited, given the specific circumstances of the case at hand. These circumstances are looked at very closely by the different actors.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Okay. Thank you.

About a year ago, the Minister of National Defence wrote to the victims ombudsman's office. I'm not sure who this question goes to, because I'm not sure who's responsible. I'm looking at the parliamentary secretaries as well. He said that it would be a priority

of the government to fix the disparity between victims' rights in the military justice system and those in the civilian justice system.

Is there something under way to prepare the legislative changes that would be needed? That would be the Department of Justice, but is someone working with them actively now, since the minister said a year ago that it was a priority for the government?

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: Thank you. Is this question directed at me?

Mr. Randall Garrison: I'm not sure whether preparation of new legislation falls under you or the deputy minister in this case.

Ms. Jody Thomas: I'm not aware of the work on that specific issue, so I would have to get back to you.

• (1700)

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: My answer would have been that it is very much a political decision as to whether a bill would be presented by this government in that context. I'd be a little ill placed to answer.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I'm just asking if the work is going on, since the minister said it was a priority.

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: I'd like to say, though, that even if we don't have a bill moving forward in the House at this point, there's a lot we're doing right now to ensure there are victims' rights. Not all of it requires legislation.

As I said earlier, our director of military prosecution is doing a great deal to ensure that everything that can be done without legislation is implemented. The military police are doing exactly the same thing. There's a sexual misconduct centre that has been put in place to support victims of sexual crimes, sexual harassment, and it provides support to the victims throughout the process.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Great. Thanks very much.

Ms. Jody Thomas: If I could add something about the sexual misconduct reporting centre, it's now running 24-7 and is responding to calls from military serving members, civilian members on bases, victims, and people who have been accused. It's fulfilling a huge gap, obviously, in information and advice. It's also supporting family members. It's absolutely anonymous. We track stats, but we don't track details and we don't publish details.

It's been a very useful source of information to help the commodore in her work, help Rear-Admiral Bennett in her work on Operation Honour, and help the civilian human resources team and the military human resources team. It's a very useful service.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I'll say again what I've said in public many times: I give a lot of credit to the military for having tackled harassment and sexual assault in a way that other public institutions have failed to do, even though there's more work left to be done.

The Chair: That ends our formal round of questions.

We do have time, and people have been signalling to me that they want to ask more questions. I'll go to Leona Alleslev, James Bezan, and then back to you, Mr. Garrison, if you would like, for a maximum of five minutes each.

Ms. Alleslev, you have the floor.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Excellent.

I want to take a bit of another tack, because we talk about industry collaboration and collaboration with civilian organizations. Once upon a time, we used to be known for our research and our academic collaboration.

I'm wondering if you could give us any insight on any plans to enhance our relationship with the academic community around collaboration and around increased research, particularly in our complex security and defence environment?

Ms. Jody Thomas: It's something we're very happy to speak about, and I'll ask Mr. Venner to jump in. He's going to be responsible for this area.

As part of the defence policy, we have a program that we're hoping to launch shortly, called IDEaS. It's about innovation in science and tech.

Perhaps we know we have a problem, and it might be something very simple, such as cold feet in the Arctic. Traditionally, you put out an RFP that says we need new boots that keep feet warm in the Arctic, but you don't know how. Now what we're doing is saying, "We have this problem. Our boots aren't keeping people's feet warm in the Arctic, so how do we solve that? What do you have?" We compete the problem rather than competing a product or a solution for a product. It's based on a program in the United States that's been very effective for innovation for the U.S. Armed Forces, so we're looking forward to getting that launched shortly.

Our science and tech group in the Department of National Defence is world-leading. The work in the research they do is really quite extraordinary. We just celebrated their 78th anniversary, and the wall of things they're responsible for, just everyday inventions you didn't realize came out of the Department of National Defence, is really quite remarkable.

We're investing a lot more money for defence research establishments in the IDEaS program that will change the nature of their work and engage with industry and with academics—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Fantastic.

Ms. Jody Thomas: —and then we also have the defence engagement program that Mr. Venner can talk to.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Then, of course, my colleagues would be disappointed in me if I didn't ask my standard question, which is, how are you measuring success? We have 111 initiatives, but they're not all equal, so what would you say are the true top three priorities?

How are you measuring them? What are your three key challenges, and how are you measuring those?

Ms. Jody Thomas: We're using analytics, the analytic system I spoke about, to measure achievement in terms of the successful implementation of each initiative. Everything is important, but some things, though, are further down the road. We're aligning implementation with the money coming in, and it's very well planned.

We've also aligned our departmental results framework with "Strong, Secure, Engaged" so that the key outputs we'll be measuring for the departmental results framework will show Parliament what we've done: here's what you asked us to do, and here's how we've done it. This is aligned against SSE so that we're not doing one-off reporting. Everything is very holistic, a cohesive look at what's being done in the department.

The challenges are many. If we want to recruit 100 people and we only get 95, then we feel we've not succeeded. If we don't get the money spent in a particular year, that's going to be problematic for us, and if we're not seeing the increases in productivity, for example, in the turnover procurement projects, we'll see that as a challenge.

On the whole, though, I think we have put in place the foundation to succeed. We're taking it very slowly and very systematically. We know who's doing what. We have a collective understanding of what needs to be achieved, and that was step one. Initiative 71 might have meant something very different to the person who is a lead versus the person who wrote the initiative, the CDS, or the DM, so a collective understanding is really critical.

It's a big undertaking. Success is going to be measured in days, weeks, quarters, months, and years. We feel that if we align what we achieve with the funding, hit the milestones that have been laid out in the system, and manage the risk, we'll be doing very well. In six months we'll have a better view than we do now. We're looking at outputs and measuring the what, not the how.

• (1705)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: That's outstanding.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I didn't want Ms. Thomas to feel left out after I asked everybody else questions in the last round.

One thing in the SSE is the commitment to hit 1.4% GDP, although we know some of that's coming through creative accounting. Can you explain what some of that shell game is?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I'm going to have to disagree a little bit with the premise. I don't see it as a shell game at all.

Mr. James Bezan: Well, you were talking about some spending being taken from Coast Guard, from Global Affairs Canada, and from Veterans Affairs Canada, and being added to the defence envelope.

Ms. Jody Thomas: Yes. NATO has a standard of what you can include and what you cannot include.

Mr. James Bezan: I thought we'd been using that standard for the last 20 years.

Ms. Jody Thomas: We weren't using it all. I came from Coast Guard, as we all know. Some of what Coast Guard did to support the Department of National Defence or does jointly with the Department of National Defence was included, but not all of it, so I asked questions that hadn't previously been asked. For the maritime security operations centres and for search and rescue, the infrastructure managed by the Coast Guard that supports all of that communication should be included, because the operations centres require that communication infrastructure to do their job. All that was being included were the people staffing the centres, as opposed to the infrastructure that supported them. I don't see that as a shell game; I see it as complete costing, and it has to go through a very rigorous process.

Mr. James Bezan: Is that the extent of it—

Ms. Jody Thomas: Yes.

Mr. James Bezan: —or are we using some of the Coast Guard vessels and patrols? Is that going to be added in?

Ms. Jody Thomas: No, it is not.

Mr. James Bezan: You were very clear last time you were here that Coast Guard is a civilian organization without even constabulary authority, although we should maybe expand it to include constabulary authority, especially in policing our international waterways.

How does it work, then, on veterans when there's talk of veterans' pensions being added in?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Other countries do include that. We have a study—

Mr. James Bezan: What percentage of GDP is that going represent?

Ms. Jody Thomas: It's not very much. I'm not sure if Gord knows. I don't know the exact number. We'll certainly get that for you. We have a complete breakdown of that 1.4%—what's in, what's out, and what percentage it all is—and we'll be happy to give it to you.

Mr. James Bezan: I'd appreciate seeing that.

Mr. Matthews—and this is also for Ms. Thomas—you mentioned the definitions surrounding “procurement” and “requests for proposals”. We definitely have seen a start and stop, start and stop, and start again on Canadian surface combatants. That has turned some of the manufacturers off from even participating.

Is there any way we can clean up this process so that it moves more quickly? Where do the changes in definition for the RFP originate? Is it over at procurement services and the old public works department, or is it at national defence?

• (1710)

Ms. Jody Thomas: Do you want to answer?

Mr. William Matthews: I can start.

Understand I'm still getting up to speed on some of this stuff, but thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

My understanding is that we are expecting bids in shortly, within the next month or so.

You're right that the process has had a few stops and starts, but my understanding is that it's back on track. When we're through this, we'll have to look at the stops and starts and see what we've learned so that we can apply it to future procurements.

I'll have to turn to the people who've been in the department a little longer than I have to add to that answer.

Ms. Jody Thomas: It's longer by seven months.

Mr. James Bezan: It was your file.

Ms. Jody Thomas: It was my file.

The RFP is to be closed on November 17. We're not anticipating, nor do we desire, any other extensions. That RFP has to close. Every delay costs us money. We understand that completely.

A lot of the stops and starts on this procurement were caused by how we gated it, and that was done deliberately. We would ask for information from the bidders, and we would analyze it and allow them to ask us questions. We answered every question before we moved on. If there were 400 questions, every single question was answered. That added delays, but it also allowed for clarity in terms of the submission we're going to receive from the bidders. We may have been overcautious, but we didn't want an unsuccessful procurement. We didn't want this RFP to close with no successful bidders. We may have put too many stops and starts into it so that we could assess the information and ensure that there was complete clarity on the bidder's side. We'll do that review.

Mr. James Bezan: At the end of the day, we have lost bidders.

Ms. Jody Thomas: We have, but I think we're going to have some very strong bids. Time will tell. I don't know absolutely the number at this time, but that's going to happen in a bid this complex. It was the first one in quite some time. I'm hoping the diligence and caution that were put into it will pay dividends at the back end of the procurement.

The Chair: The last question goes to Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Chair, she offered to send an undertaking. I just want to make sure that gets—

The Chair: Yes, I was going to circle back to it at the end, but if you could forward that to committee, Ms. Thomas, we would very much appreciate it.

Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to stay on budget matters. Last week we had a fall economic update, and I wondered whether there were any impacts on the defence department budget. Some have alleged that there was money removed or returned to the treasury that was being underspent.

Can you tell me if there were impacts on the defence budget in that update?

Ms. Jody Thomas: I'll get Bill to elaborate, but the fall economic update provided just accounting changes and adjustments. The accrual position changed a bit but the cash didn't, and we are receiving more money. There were no cuts to the department in the economic update. In the tabling of supplementary estimates (B), the change in funding to the department is a net increase of \$1.56 billion.

Mr. William Matthews: To add to the deputy's comments, Mr. Chair, one of the challenges that people have with significant spending involving assets in any government department is that on some days people are throwing out cash numbers and on others they are putting out accrual numbers, and people are often not clear which number they mean.

As the deputy mentioned, the cash numbers there, the accrual... If we extend projects out, we don't start depreciating or amortizing our assets till they're ready to be put into service, so the accrual tail on those things can be extended out. That was the distinction.

Mr. Randall Garrison: In terms of a budget for engaging in peacekeeping, the minister has made a promise that Canada is prepared to contribute up to 600 armed forces personnel. Where is that in the budget? The parliamentary secretary today referred to \$500 million. Is that budgeted in the Department of National Defence budget? Is it in the foreign affairs budget? Is it actually budgeted anywhere?

Ms. Jody Thomas: There is money afforded to peace support operations. The details of the operations are still under discussion, but money is being budgeted for peace support ops when the decision is made.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Would there be sufficient money in this year to support a mission that would begin in this fiscal year?

Ms. Jody Thomas: Should we begin a mission in this year, yes, there is.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Great. Thanks very much.

It wouldn't be complete unless I went back to the commodore again with one last question on military justice.

When Bill C-15 was going through the House, significant delays were being seen in military justice, and Bill C-15 was supposed to help in some ways with those delays. Then in 2016 we had a Supreme Court of Canada decision called *Regina v. Jordan*, which said that matters have to be dealt with within 18 months.

What is the situation on delays in military justice, and will you be able to meet the 18-month deadline? I know one case, a serious assault case, has already been dismissed as a result of delays. I would hate to see that happen again. What is the situation on the delays?

• (1715)

Cmdre Geneviève Bernatchez: The Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Jordan* obviously applies to the military justice system as well. We're bound by this 18-month delay. We've worked very closely with the prosecution services, defence counsel services, and the office of the chief military judge to ensure that delays will be cut as much as possible. As you've mentioned—thank you—there was one case in which the delays overran, but I'm going to touch wood and say we have processes in place now to ensure that this will remain very much the exception and never the norm.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you all for your service, and we wish you every success. The committee looks forward to working with you in the future. We have supplementary estimates (B) coming, so we know we'll see you soon.

I'm going to suspend for a second so that we can say our goodbyes, and we'll resume to dispatch Mr. Bezan's motion.

• (1715)

(Pause)

• (1720)

The Chair: Welcome back.

I'll give the floor to Mr. Bezan to move his motion.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to move the following motion:

That, pursuant to the Order of Reference of Thursday, October 26, 2017, the Committee consider the Supplementary Estimates (B) before the reporting deadline set out in Standing Order 81(5); and that the Committee invite the Minister of Defence to appear at a televised meeting on the Supplementary Estimates (B), 2017.

This was sent around to everybody in the last couple of days. It's the normal process.

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Jean Rioux: I have a motion to adjourn.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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