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Mr. Stephen Fuhr

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.)): I'd like to welcome everyone to the defence committee this afternoon to continue our discussion about diversity within the Canadian Armed Forces.

I'd like to welcome, from the Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association, retired Lieutenant-Colonel David A. Quick; from the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Edward Lerat, third vice-chief; and by video conference from Calgary, Alberta, Tasina Pope, indigenous advocate.

Thank you all for coming today.

I'm going to yield the floor to retired Lieutenant-Colonel Quick.

Sir, the floor is yours.

Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) David A. Quick (Member, Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association): Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, vice-chairs and honourable members of the committee, thank you for the invitation.

I am honoured to appear before you to make this presentation to aid you in your study on diversity in the armed forces and the experiences of indigenous peoples in the military.

The Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association, the CAV, is a nationally and internationally recognized veterans organization. We are in our 40th year of representing our indigenous members—first nations veterans, Métis veterans, Inuit veterans, RCMP veterans and Canadian Rangers. The CAV is a full-spectrum veterans organization with members from all eras—World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War to the present day.

The CAV national website has a very large group of dedicated followers, and has surpassed 750,000 visits. The CAV maintains 20 groups on social media that span the country. The CAV is dedicated to promoting a career in the Canadian Armed Forces.

My name is retired Lieutenant-Colonel David Quick, CD, professional engineer, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. During my 38-year career, I've held positions in both command and engineering in the primary reserve and the regular force, which include the 1st Canadian Division headquarters, the standby high readiness brigade for UN operations, and the Canadian Forces Intelligence Command. I was a commanding officer of 724

Communication Squadron, Canadian Forces Station Debart and Canadian Forces Station Alert.

The indigenous heritage of my mother's family in the United States was not spoken of and not discovered until 2005, thus my personal experiences as an indigenous person are limited. But upon discovery of my indigenous heritage, I became a member of the Echota Cherokee Tribe in the United States.

From my experiences, in 2000, when I took command of Canadian Forces Station Alert, I met a young soldier with shoulder-length hair. I asked him about his hair and he proudly stated that he was aboriginal and was embracing his culture. At that moment I realized the station command structure respected his decision and supported him. During my tour in Alert, I never encountered any derogatory comments or ill will against any indigenous person.

Once I became a member of the Cherokee tribe, I was always permitted to participate in the NDHQ Defence Aboriginal Advisory Group. This included monthly meetings, work time for group business, and spiritual and cultural activities. I felt my chain of command supported my participation.

Retired Warrant Officer Iris Felix, a Mi'kmaq signals veteran, was offered the opportunity to become a recruiter for the day. This program provided sufficient training to assist trained recruiters discuss opportunities in the Canadian Armed Forces with potential indigenous recruits. Iris travelled to Newfoundland and spoke with many indigenous youths about the opportunities and benefits of serving. She found this program exhilarating and rewarding. She only wished that she knew if anyone enrolled.

Another member, Richard Blackwolf, a Métis veteran of the Cold War era, served in the Royal Canadian Navy aboard destroyers HMCS *Skeena*, HMCS *Saskatchewan* and HMCS *Yukon*.

He recalls that HMCS *Cornwallis*, the recruit training base, had a great interest in indigenous recruits. He was interviewed several times to consider becoming a radio special operator in the clandestine navy radio special branch. During the Cold War, the interest in having indigenous sailors as radio special operators was the fact that they had no family, friends, or other persons in Europe and in the Soviet Union who could be used to coerce them into divulging classified information.

Richard's experience in the navy was positive, with opportunities for advancement in the field of anti-submarine sonar systems and digital electronics. Diligence and high marks in fleet school electronic courses and in factory equipment training courses garnered respect. One's race or background was never an issue with the ship's companies with which he served and the training classes that he attended.

• (1535)

Richard Blackwolf noticed a marked change in the navy starting in 1966 when it became politicized, with the imposition of amalgamation resulting in the loss of the Admiralty, with the imposition of integration resulting in the loss of the Royal Canadian Navy and, in 1969, with the imposition of a bilingual quota of 28% French speakers imposed on all ranks in the Canadian Forces. In his opinion, a quota based on a language was detrimental to advancement in rank and training opportunities and created divisions in the navy that had not existed before. Despite the politically instigated turmoil in the Canadian Forces that occurred in the late sixties, which caused him to end his career in the military, there is a realization today that times have changed, and he is an ardent advocate of a career in the Canadian Armed Forces for indigenous youths.

Moving back to my experiences, the only negative experience that I've had was from my time with the National Defence headquarters defence aboriginal advisory group. Members of the group had difficulties obtaining permission to attend the monthly meeting, which is a sanctioned meeting, along with group events. I noticed that non-commissioned members from locations some distance from the Major-General George R. Pearkes Building were unable to attend meetings and group events.

When I engaged these members, the impression I was given was that the supervisors did not want to lose productivity for a two-hour meeting plus travel time. Even when the local aboriginal champion, the commandant of the Canadian Forces Support Unit, stated that he would engage the person's chain of command, these people declined, as they felt there would be retribution from their supervisor though their yearly performance assessment. In my opinion, the higher chain of command supported the participation of indigenous members in meetings and activities, but the practice at the supervisory level was imperfect.

I understand the difficulties that supervisors, both military and civilian, have with limited manning and maintaining shift schedules in order to complete their work. It appears that some supervisors consider time away from work for a perceived extracurricular meeting or event is not acceptable. I recommend that more emphasis be given to diversity policy, the implementation of this policy and the legal requirements of this policy in leadership training at all levels.

The Canadian Aboriginal Veterans Association is an impassioned advocate of a career in the Canadian Armed Forces for indigenous youth. Advocating for a career in the Canadian Armed Forces takes the form of a youth-dedicated page on our national website that provides a comprehensive look at all branches of the Canadian Armed Forces and the variety of employment opportunities available, to stimulate enrolment and a career in the Canadian

Armed Forces. It has been our collective experience over the past four decades that the overall experience of indigenous soldiers, sailors, aviators and rangers has been positive. A common refrain of our veterans is that they would serve again if they could.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, vice-chairmen and honourable members of the committee, for your interest and kind attention.

• (1540)

The Chair: Lieutenant-Colonel Quick, thank you very much for your words and your service to Canada.

I'm now going to turn the floor over to Ms. Pope, from Calgary.

The floor is yours, ma'am.

Ms. Tasina Pope (Indigenous Advocate, As an Individual): Good day. *Aba wathtech*.

My name is Tasina Pope. My indigenous name is *Îyâ To Wiyâ*, which means Blue Mountain Woman.

I come from Treaty 7 territory, which holds the Stoney Nakoda First Nation, Blackfoot Confederacy, Tsuut'ina Nation, Métis region 3 and all who call the land their home.

I was voluntarily released in 2018, which turned into a medical release. I felt confused, not having an indigenous woman mentor within the non-commissioned member rank. There was competition amongst all female ranks, and belittling behaviour. Very few meaningful relationships developed during my time in the Canadian Forces. There were few to no cultural practices of indigenous spirituality. I was denied the right to grow my own hair, which I had to do secure a permanent position within my first home unit, which was delayed by two years. I was also denied the opportunity to attend close family members' funerals. In an indigenous community, attending funerals honours the family clan.

My story is about enlistment, which unfortunately included attempted suicide. I voluntarily released to come back home, and during that time I got a medical release.

It was pointless even attempting to apply for other benefits that I might have been entitled to. I had to voluntarily release due to the passing of my brother. When I came back to the reserve, my only brother was murdered in the summer of 2016. My mother died of a broken heart in the fall of 2017.

Grieving these deaths has been challenging and difficult. I am trying to suggest changes to policies, given what I experienced as an indigenous woman while in the Canadian Armed Forces. Because of all that, I was not even able to go to post-secondary institutions. I was short three months on a six-year commitment.

Since utilizing the veterans transition program last year, I am starting to feel normal once again. Thank you, *isniyês*, to my family and to my husband for the support I have gathered by coming from the military to my community.

My recommendation would be to automatically promote all indigenous, Inuit and Métis people, including visible minorities, within the Canadian forces. I believe a three- to six-month time frame from May to August of this year can be achieved.

Other recommendations are to initiate a mentorship program. Re-issue letters of re-enlistment opportunities for past veterans. Current Canadian markets have limited employment opportunities—not just the reserve division, which I read in past reports that were sent out. Many indigenous women have vocalized on social media their concerns about having limited resources sent out to them.

Establish a yearly newsletter. Send out mass letters to veterans, reconnecting them through our military family resource centre.

Re-examine sexual harassment cases, and take into consideration the data showing that women are 90% of the victims. This is from “Operation HONOUR: Statistical Summary of Harmful and Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour—Incidents and Offences for Fiscal Year 2017-2018”.

I was isolated, and my own situation resulted in me being subjected to extreme mistreatment by my own chain of command. I faced years of scrutiny. Even after being transferred to an east-coast posting from the west coast, I faced an extremely unhealthy environment, which ultimately resulted in me being released from duty.

I had to avoid certain individuals while posted on the east coast, which was quite difficult, being in a small navy unit. Everybody is usually in the same environment.

• (1545)

Out of this, I am very grateful to have served not just my nation, but also Canada in general.

With that, I conclude my speech. Thank you for listening.

Isn'yés.

The Chair: Thank you, too, for your service to Canada. Thank you for sharing your story with us and thank you for your recommendations.

Vice-Chief Lerat, the floor is yours.

Mr. Edward Lerat (Third Vice-Chief, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I acknowledge the members of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

I'm honoured to be here as the regional third vice-chief of the FSIN, a collection of 72 first nations in the province of Saskatchewan. Within our group, we also have our Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans Association.

I want to acknowledge my colleagues here, Madame Pope and Mr. Quick, and acknowledge as well that we are in Algonquin territory.

I personally have a hard time talking about myself, but I can say this, though: I joined the forces in 1969, and to me, joining the forces and all its rigid protocols was not very difficult because I'd just come

out of residential school where the protocols were somewhat the same in terms of the rigidity.

I enjoyed the experience. I was there for three years and then had to go out and get experience in life because of the residential school and then the military. I basically joined the military because my brother was in there at the time.

After leaving the military, I came back to Saskatchewan and then had to get a lesson in life. I proceeded to do that, and as it did for many residential school survivors, it involved a lot of vices—alcohol, and so on. That was a vice in the army as well, but it wasn't a bad vice.

I want to fast-forward to today. We in Saskatchewan have a vibrant organization that places our veterans at the highest level in our developments. We have 72 first nations, with chiefs and councils in each one, and we're all collective in our developments moving forward. We also have treaty areas such as Madame Pope's Treaty No. 7, and I guess the peace and friendship treaties that are part of this specific area. I'm part of Treaties Nos. 1 through 11, which are economic treaties.

The Canadian Forces, as we've witnessed as a collective, has historically been ever evolving, an ever-evolving experience as witnessed by first nations. Today we acknowledge the many options for first nations to join the armed forces, from the aboriginal leadership programs and the aboriginal entry programs to the various summer youth training programs, including Saskatchewan's Bold Eagle program.

We acknowledge historically as well that our first-nation citizens, by way of treaties, were not obligated to fight in Her Majesty's wars, but come the First World War and the Second World War, because of the past system that restricted our people from leaving the reserve without a pass, many of them joined up. However, when they joined up, they lost their status or their treaty right to be an Indian, so you became a non-status Indian. Coming home from the wars, after going to fight for freedom, they found themselves in the same atmosphere that they left, the same positions that they left.

Getting back to where we are today, I'd like to focus on us celebrating our past, and of course, celebrating our youth going forward, such as this young lady. There are many challenges, but at the same time, still the successes.

Today, we acknowledge that there are many different opportunities for our first nations to become members of the Canadian Armed Forces, with the Canadian Rangers, reserve force and regular force.

There are many good things in the form of administration to protect the religious rights of first-nation persons in the forces, such as the right to wear braids. Out west, where we come from, and we do a lot of partnership with CFB Wainwright, there's the right to have sweats. They're not restricted to the first nations, but to anyone who wants to come in. That's our way. That's our church.

We acknowledge the anti-racism policies that have put included in the Canadian Armed Forces' administrative orders, which have gone a long way towards retaining our first nations.

•(1550)

In the midst of all this positive change, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the sad case of Corporal Nolan Caribou of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, a Bold Eagle graduate of three years before. The help he was denied has left a hole in his family and his loss is a great one for his community. We would like to thank the Canadian Armed Forces for taking responsibility. We await the resolution and look forward to the continuing changes to prevent such unfortunate incidents from happening in the future both to our soldiers and all soldiers alike.

It would be a disservice to take away from someone's experiences, so I acknowledge them, positive and negative alike.

Standing committee members, it is my experience that there is more of an interest among our youth to be a part of the Canadian Forces than there are available spots in Saskatchewan. For every spot, there are 10 applicants to get into that spot. There are many challenges in coping with the changes that come from being away from their homes and starting within the Canadian Forces. There is difficulty in transitioning from a Bold Eagle to the reserve force service, questions they don't know how to ask, and career management. Diversity is a challenge. There is difficulty in knowing where they fit in. Many find the recruiting process itself to be confusing and challenging. However, the effect on our communities of our youth joining the Canadian Forces has been greatly positive, and service with Canadian Forces has been a source of pride to many first nations people. We celebrate them as role models and honour them as they have honoured us in their service.

The positive change presented by the Canadian Armed Forces has been noticed, and it is exciting to look forward to when our children, our warriors, come home, because they have always been warriors. When they go in, they're warriors for the Canadian government as well.

I want to talk briefly about Bold Eagle and its success as it goes into its 29th year. It started from an agreement between the North Saskatchewan Regiment and the Prince Albert Grand Council in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, to provide a summer program for our youth, who would in turn use it as a springboard into the military or to continue their education, or go into the RCMP. The program instills that leadership pride in them. The success of that program has largely been due to the partnership between the Canadian Armed Forces and the first nations, and also the fact that we are able to infuse a huge cultural component starting for one week that helps them acclimatize into CFB Wainwright. A lot of current servicemen who are of aboriginal descent are part of that program as role models.

I think we went from 10 individuals initially to now, in the catchment area of Western Command, to some 180 applying. We have spots for 180 and will probably finish with 150 of our youth. The program is successful in ensuring that there is someone there to assist them when they are having problems with loneliness, or the individual problems that our children have when they're away from home.

We have two elders, a female and a male. We've been so successful that we're getting caught up in one specific culture and

imposing on another culture that's maybe from a different area, but it's a good problem to have because the success of our youth in it continues. Our youth continue to want to be part of that program.

•(1555)

I also want to talk a little about ALOY out of Kingston. Bold Eagle requires grade 10; ALOY, grade 12. Within the military, there are two types of services, as you all know: non-commissioned officers and officers. While Bold Eagle can lead to someone becoming an officer, most of those who become Bold Eagle are non-commissioned members bound. ALOY is focused on officers entirely. ALOY focuses on education as much military training, and we acknowledge that one year of training that leads to officer training is equivalent to one year in the regular force.

We acknowledge all of those good programs that are out there. We look forward, and we're always looking for that better day. At the same time, at the end of the day, as chair of the Bold Eagle management committee, along with co-chair Lieutenant Colonel Lee Mossop out of Wainwright, we are cognizant of our success. We're always looking forward to sharing that. You see that with Black Bear out of Cagetown and Raven out of Esquimalt.

The partnerships with the Canadian Forces are vital to our people. We've always been there. We go back as far as 1812, when our people were part of that process. We want to encourage. Diversity is important to us.

Thank you again. I know I'm running out of time, so I want to say that I'm grateful to be here. I haven't been to one of these committees in about 20 years, and it's always a pleasure to come to talk to our leaders from across the country.

The Chair: Thank you, Vice-Chief Lerat, for your words, and your service to the country as well.

For those of you who haven't been here for 20 years or haven't been to a committee at all, my job is to keep the conversation moving. My colleagues will hold me to account here.

If you see me waving, and you're speaking, that means you should wind down your thoughts within 30 seconds, so I can move on to the next speaker or questioner.

I'm going to yield the floor to MP Robillard for the opening seven-minute questions.

[*Translation*]

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

My thanks to the witnesses for being here. My questions will be in French, of course.

The number of people from indigenous communities in the Canadian Armed Forces...

[*English*]

The Chair: Wait one second while we get them set up with translation.

I'll stop the clock.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: The number of people from indigenous communities in the Canadian Armed Forces has progressed a little since the objective of 3.5% by 2026 was set. However, in recent weeks, this committee has heard that the progress should speed up because of the many recruiting initiatives. My first questions will therefore be on recruitment.

The auditor general's report on recruitment in the armed forces emphasized the importance of identifying and removing obstacles to employment for the designated groups.

My first question goes to LCol Quick. Can you tell us about the perspective of indigenous members of the armed forces on recruitment? Were you told about any obstacles to becoming a member of the armed forces?

[English]

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: I am not aware of barriers imposed by the recruiting system on any indigenous people joining the Canadian Armed Forces.

The recruiting process is a vanilla process; everyone is treated the same initially. Then they are given direction on whom they are supposed to be trying to recruit more of, what the need is, and then they try to adjust to that.

I have not heard of anybody being challenged or that there was a barrier for them recruiting, especially after talking to Iris after she was a recruiter for a day. She said it was great going out and talking to these people. She did not see any barriers. If she had seen something that was not right, she would have told me about it.

Thank you.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: My next question goes to Mr. Lerat. In your opinion, what communication tools could be used to lead more members of indigenous communities to consider a career in the armed forces?

[English]

Mr. Edward Lerat: I would say it's the recruitment process in the communities. In many cases in Saskatchewan we have people who are interested, but it's a matter of getting them to the cities from the far north to first of all get some assistance in filling out their application. The application is somewhat confusing.

At the same time, for the medical tests in those areas, our people have to go south instead of maybe having a doctor come in and test 10.

Logistics, then, is a huge problem in recruiting. I know the interest is there. It's just a question of getting them to the places they have to be.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

My next question goes to LCol Quick.

In recent weeks, witnesses have emphasized the importance of a culture that accepts diversity in the armed forces. Can you tell the committee about your feelings about the armed forces culture vis-à-vis indigenous people? What progress can be made?

[English]

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: Throughout my career, I personally have always been accepting of other people. I was raised that way by my mother. I grew up in a community that was diverse to begin with, with Europeans—German, Italian, Portuguese, also French. There were all sorts of people where I grew up. I think my first girlfriend was a Portuguese girl who walked me home every day. I told her to wait for me while I grow up so that we could get married. I have always been that way. I think many people are that way. I have seen cases of people being prejudiced, but I have never allowed prejudice to interfere with my command or the way I worked in my units.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: There are about two minutes left. If you like, you can pass it to another member. Otherwise I'll move on to the next speaker.

I'll move on to MP Gallant.

The floor is yours.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and through you to our witnesses.

A number of years ago—I think it was in the early 2000s—I had my first visit to Randall's riding and spent a week on HMCS *Vancouver*. After the week was done, we got on a plane that was full of youth who'd been to camp Raven, I believe they called it. The exuberance, their recounting to one another their best experiences... I often wondered afterwards what percentage of people who participate in that program are able to enrol at some point in time, either as reservists or full-time.

Mr. Edward Lerat: Let me respond to that.

They're all eligible, and that's the encouragement we give going in—that they go into the forces.

Of course, at the end of the program it is their choice. Some will decide to continue with their school; others will go back and be leaders in their communities.

We found that much of the spillover recruitment, and I gave you the numbers in terms of the applications, was from Bold Eagle recruits going into the various areas. We encourage this, because you get to travel. When I was 17 years old, to travel to the east coast was something outside of the reserve.

To encourage those specific focuses of long-term commitment, I believe that the armed forces—let me say the new armed forces—are very tolerant and more supportive of, I won't say indigenous people, but people who are different from, I guess, the white race.

• (1605)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: All right.

Colonel Quick, first of all, thank you for your service. We've heard a lot at this committee about boosting enlistment and attracting women, indigenous Canadians and visible minorities. I'm curious to know what piqued your interest in joining the Canadian Armed Forces.

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: Well, as a young lad, I was in Cubs, in Scouts. One of my heroes was my great-uncle, who passed in the First World War. He had won the Military Cross and bar. That was the start of my family history in the military. My uncle was a tail gunner during World War II. I always admired him. I spent a lot of time with my uncle.

Actually, I became a member of the Legion before I was allowed to.

Voices: Oh, oh!

LCol David A. Quick: As a young lad, I learned to play the bagpipes through the Royal Canadian Legion, and when I joined, I immediately joined the Legion. In our community, the Legion was strong. It made people think about what was possible and why you would want to join the military, which I did.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What kinds of reasons for joining the Canadian Armed Forces do you hear from other indigenous veterans and Canadian Armed Forces members, either from your own service or from your work with your organization?

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: I'm not sure if I can speak for everyone else. I transferred from the primary reserve to the regular force because I couldn't get a job after graduating from university. I was the seventh in my class of 35 electrical engineers to get a job by joining the regular force. One of my classmates ended up joining later on because he couldn't get a job.

Initially, I think you look at where the person's from. A lot of times it's financial. There might be no financial opportunities where they are. The armed forces is a stepping stone to a better life. For instance, when I joined the regular force, I didn't know if I was going to like it. I set up a plan so that if I didn't like it, I could return to the reserves. But I loved it. I've been in it now for 38 years, so that tells you right there.

It's like anything else; you don't know what you're really getting into, at first. Some people try it. If it works out for them, if they enjoy it and they're challenged, then they'll stay, but if it's just a mundane job where they're pushing a broom around an armoury day after day after day, you'll lose them.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: There are approximately 33,000 American Indians currently serving in the U.S. armed forces, or about 1.7% of the total force. That's compared with 0.9% of the overall population in the United States being of American Indian in descent. Should Canada be taking any lessons from the Americans as to how to better recruit indigenous citizens into the Canadian Armed Forces?

• (1610)

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: I do not know how the Americans recruit indigenous people. I believe we are moving forward in a proper way. We are going out to them and engaging the indigenous youth.

The other day I was talking to an old friend of mine from the sixties era. He told me how the Royal Canadian Regiment used to go up north in Ontario to recruit. They wanted indigenous soldiers because they made better soldiers than the young guys from Toronto.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: New Zealand in particular is held up as an example of how to properly recruit and promote indigenous armed forces members. New Zealand Maori make up almost half the army, and 19% of their armed forces, as compared with just 4.4% of the population. The Maori warrior culture is also incorporated into their army. All recruits are given a Maori initiation rite that takes them into the warrior tribe. Can Canada learn anything from New Zealand's example in the promotion and incorporation of indigenous culture into the armed forces?

The Chair: Unfortunately, I have to hold it there. Your time is up.

I yield the floor to MP Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thanks to our witnesses for being here today, and thank you to all three of you for your service to Canada, not just as active members but also by being here today to talk about how we can make the Canadian Forces better. It's very important to bring both positives and negatives to the committee, so I thank you for that.

I also want to bring greetings from Georgina Jolibois, the MP for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River. She very much wanted to be here today, but the House of Commons is dealing with indigenous languages in one place and we're dealing here with indigenous people in the military. She couldn't be in both places at once.

When she came to Parliament, she came to me directly, as the NDP defence critic, and began to advocate, saying she had been a mayor in northern Saskatchewan for 12 years and used to see Canadian recruitment taking place regularly there. She wanted to know what happened to that, because there are a lot of people who would like to have the opportunity to serve, but they don't get the information, don't find out about it and don't even know the possibility is there.

She was commenting on the decline in the outreach that took place in northern and remote communities. Have any of you observed the same kind of thing—that we're going in the wrong direction on that?

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: I think I can answer that.

I believe it all comes down to one simple thing: money—the cost of sending these teams to remote areas, the time it takes. The funding is not there anymore. Throughout my career as a senior officer, my God, I've had to sharpen my pencil so many times to keep my budget under control for what I needed to do, not what I wanted to do. There's not enough money out there.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Lerat—I'll get to Ms. Pope in just a second—you talked about the difficulties with applications, logistics and medical exams. Are there any existing programs you know of where we've tackled that problem by taking resources to people who would like to apply, rather than trying to bring the people somewhere else?

Mr. Edward Lerat: We have taken the sergeant with the Royal Regina Rifles on staff. We've seconded him to assist in that process to get out into the remote communities, and then we've taken him out there. He's opened the door for the recruitment officers to be involved there, whether through Skype or...

But it's still those same exams—medical, fitness and so on—that they still have to travel for. I think, if we were to coordinate—and it's totally doable—Armed Forces Day in our northern communities, fly in.... Our youth are inspired by what they see. In today's age of communication, I don't see how there couldn't be a more focused drive on recruitment.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Okay.

Ms. Pope, you talked about some very difficult experiences you had, but I commend you for also giving us some ideas of how to prevent those in the future. You talk about the importance of indigenous women mentors; that was a lack you found. Can you talk a little bit more about how that might help retain, if not recruit, more first nations people into the military?

• (1615)

Ms. Tasina Pope: When I was in it, I didn't really see a lot of indigenous women. As someone who came from post-secondary education and went to the recruiting centre and into basic training so quickly, I felt that if I'd had a mentor, even at the Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu institution, maybe there would have been more connection, not feeling so homesick the majority of the time.

I feel it would be very beneficial. Currently, even in my own indigenous community, we do have something similar to that in effect.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Since there is a shortage of indigenous people in the Canadian Forces, do you think indigenous elders could fill that kind of role in the initial stages?

Ms. Tasina Pope: Yes, sir. There are plenty of elders who I know are wanting to be proactive in that. I feel it would be very beneficial, again, even for me as a young indigenous person.

If I might expand more on the coordination of the recruiting centre to indigenous communities, I've actually coordinated that on my own time to bring recruiting centres out to my own reserve. We also have two isolated satellite reserves, so on top of that, I myself had to actually go and coordinate with the recruiting centre to come to our communities, and I'm not even employed by or enlisted with the Canadian Armed Forces.

I know there is a lack of funding in every department, but I feel we could utilize veterans, even, who are not in the forces.

Mr. Randall Garrison: If we have a goal of having greater diversity, we have to put the resources behind that goal. You've given us some very good examples of ways to do that.

I know I'm running out of time. I want to thank you for mentioning the Raven aboriginal youth initiative, which takes place in my riding. It's a Royal Canadian Navy initiative, but it's only 24 students every year. It's a very successful and popular program, but a very small program. It's another example of where we found something that works, but we need to do a lot more of it.

Mr. Lerat, you were talking about Bold Eagle. What's the enrolment situation at Bold Eagle? Can you remind me again? You said something in your presentation about how many people you can take and how many want to get in.

Mr. Edward Lerat: Our intake is 180 this year. It went up from 100 to 150 and now we're at 180; it usually gets static at about 150. Our catchment area is so huge now and there's no quota for any specific province. It's who's out there recruiting that usually determines who fills the spaces first.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Do you find that it's happening by who knows about the program from previous attendees?

Mr. Edward Lerat: Well, it's previous attendees, and we have one recruiter on staff with each of our provinces, in the Prairies anyway—Saskatchewan and Manitoba. This is funded by our aboriginal Indian affairs department as an investment in the youth. This recruiter goes out to the career days and to various functions where our youth are going to be gathered. Our youth like to see it, so he takes his backpack and dresses in full camo and they're out there trying on his backpack.

That's a huge incentive. It kind of paves the way. We have an excellent relationship with the recruiting office out of Regina as well.

The Chair: I'm going to have to leave it there, and give the floor to MP Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Chair, thank you very much. I'd like to thank all three of you for being with us this afternoon, for your service and for your testimony this afternoon.

I want to start with a personal anecdote. When I think of the Canadian Forces and our indigenous peoples, this is something that springs to mind immediately in my experience as a parliamentarian.

In 2016, I had a chance to travel to France and Belgium with the then-Minister of Veterans Affairs. It was a very profound and powerful experience for me as a German-born member of Parliament. In the course of that trip to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme and Beaumont-Hamel, I had a chance to meet Master Warrant Officer Stanley Mercredi who was of the Mikisew Cree First Nation in Alberta. The chief warrant officer at the time was honoured to be the carrier of the eagle staff. After the ceremonies were over, I had a chance to talk to him a little bit about this ceremonial instrument and he explained the significance of the eagle staff. He said it is unique because it represents the indigenous warrior heritage. It's an indigenous tradition that had been incorporated into military ceremony. He also told me at the time that this was the first time—in 2016—that the eagle staff had ever travelled outside of the borders of Canada for a significant military ceremony.

I wanted to put that to you in the context of a broader discussion that this country is going through on reconciliation. Is an instance like that, or any incorporation of indigenous traditions directly into the protocols of our military, something you would look at through a reconciliation lens? It's only one step, and some people might say it's a small step. What else can and should the Canadian Forces do to match what we're doing on other fronts, with respect to reconciliation in Canada?

• (1620)

Mr. Edward Lerat: Coming from Treaty 6, 4, 8, 10, and 1, we cover seven different tribes, but one thing we all have in common is our eagle staff. Our eagle staff is symbolic of our religion and our protocols. To us, it's most honourable. The eagle staff is front and centre within the Bold Eagle program. In essence, it's our way of showing our colours, just like the flags are there, and so on. In terms of reconciliation, what better way is there of showing you're accepting a culture than by publicly displaying, as part of a parade or a ceremony, that eagle staff?

I'm really for diversity. Other nations may have other ways of showing their culture, but ours is the eagle staff. It is the highest of honours.

Thank you.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Lieutenant Colonel Quick and Ms. Pope, I'd like to hear from both of you briefly on this.

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: Ms. Pope should go first.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Sure.

Ms. Tasina Pope: I was thinking maybe to incorporate a smudge room, and then honorariums for elders. From my perspective, elders have the equivalency of a mayor or higher status, so it's to honour the individual, because they may pass away the following day. Those are little steps that could be incorporated.

Other than that, just don't have fire alarms operating in the vicinity of a smudge while it's being conducted, because there are cultural properties in that itself. That's just another aspect of my understanding, so that's something I would like to see in almost all military facilities, and even in messes.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Lieutenant Colonel Quick.

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: This is probably a good time to bring this up. My last posting was with the director of casualty support management, and I was also the acting CO of the JPSU on a number of occasions. One of the dilemmas as the CO of the JPSU is care of the ill and injured indigenous member.

I was not allowed to tackle this when I was acting CO—the boss wouldn't let me do it—but the problem as a commanding officer is that you are limited in what you can do to help the indigenous member in his treatment program. The medical authority does not recognize spiritual healing. Therefore, they will not support allowing a member to go to a healing lodge or any other spiritual or cultural treatment. With the changes in the powers of the commanding officer, the commanding officer used to be the one who granted sick leave. He no longer has that authority; it's a medical doctor who does that. If a person wishes to take on spiritual healing, then that person must take leave and pay their own way to treat themselves.

I know of ways you can get around that, but I don't want to discuss it, and I would never tell my regional commanders how to circumvent military regulations. It's just that now it's up to the member to pay for their own treatment.

• (1625)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you for that. Those are some very practical, helpful insights.

I have very limited time left. I wanted to circle back, Lieutenant Colonel, very briefly to your comment that the chain of command might get it but supervisors on the ground less so. What could the Canadian Forces do structurally to rightsize that issue?

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: The senior officers do not see what's happening at the lower level. It's up to the CO to talk to his junior officers to find out what's happening at the lower level. The junior officer has to talk to his warrant officers, his sergeants and his men. If the leadership is not doing this all the way down, then it's broken.

When I was in command, I always talked to my men. Where the warrant officer could not hear them, they could talk to me. I don't think that's happening anymore. Everyone's become a manager, not a leader. How do we re-instill this? You have to give the junior officers authority. I had more authority as a lieutenant than 10 years later as a captain in Ottawa.

The thing is, the soldiers are afraid that if they go against their master corporal or their sergeants, their evaluation report will be poor and they won't move ahead. I'll tell you, I've gotten some of those evaluation reports where they couldn't understand. "What did I do wrong? No one told me I was doing badly." This is how they punish them, and there's no recourse on this.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We're going to five-minute questions now.

MP Fisher will get the first question.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, folks, for being here.

Ms. Pope, thank you for being here virtually. I certainly appreciate your testimony.

I want to close the loop here.

Mr. Lerat, you stated that there is interest among indigenous Canadians in joining the military.

Lieutenant Colonel Quick, you talked about there being no barriers on entering the Canadian military. I'm left asking: Why the low numbers? Why are the numbers so low? Is it more of a retention issue? Are we getting young, indigenous members in the Canadian military and then they're leaving? You paint a rosier picture, maybe, than I had envisioned.

I guess I'll go with Mr. Quick on that first.

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: Regarding my statement that I do not know of any barriers, the last time I was in a recruiting office was in 1983. If there are barriers, someone would have to tell me that. No one has ever told me that there are barriers.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Mr. Lerat, you said the interest is clearly there. Are the numbers too small? Are they opening up, for instance, the Bold Eagle program to 25 members only? Do they need to open up the programs to larger numbers?

Mr. Edward Lerat: I think we have the numbers. It's a matter of ensuring that our individuals who are in Bold Eagle at that very young age are exposed to those role models who are able to resonate and connect with them. I'm not saying just first nations, but those who have the experience.

For us, it's the role models. It's someone who is your race and who you see as successful.

Coming out of Bold Eagle we've had a few officers—two of whom I know specifically—who are now back in civilian life. One is a chief and another is a consultant. But our most steady focus on our success as first nations people is a gentleman by the name of General Paul. He's out of Loretteville in Quebec, but he is first nation. I've had the pleasure of crossing paths with General Paul when he was out west. I use him as an influence on the young by saying, "You could be this."

The more models we have.... In Bold Eagle, we try to ensure the training staff are first nation, and then we have the support staff who are RCMP or city police for that one week of cultural training. But getting them from there into the reserves, and then into the regs, the armed forces, still remains a challenge.

• (1630)

Mr. Darren Fisher: Ms. Pope gave us a couple of recommendations.

Mr. Lerat, could you give us one recommendation for how we could increase recruitment?

Mr. Edward Lerat: We would like to see first nations or aboriginal recruitment officers at the recruitment sites.

Mr. Darren Fisher: That's excellent.

Ms. Pope, I have 40 seconds left. I hate to belabour this, because Mr. Garrison has already touched on it, but I was fascinated by your thought about the indigenous mentorship program.

If the numbers were increased and we had more indigenous or first nations in the Canadian military, do you feel that you would still need an official program of indigenous mentorship?

Maybe you could just touch on that in 20 seconds.

Ms. Tasina Pope: Yes. I feel if the individual or the mentee could choose a mentor of their choice, there would be a long-term commitment to the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Darren Fisher: The numbers went up, and you said you didn't see a lot of indigenous women. If the numbers in recruitment went up significantly and you were surrounded by more indigenous women, would you still recommend the mentorship program?

Ms. Tasina Pope: Yes, wholeheartedly.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It was a pleasure.

MP Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): I'm going to pass my time to Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you to the witnesses. I'm not normally a member of the committee—I'm an occasional replacement—but I found this very interesting. I thank each of you for your testimony today.

I want to focus on recruitment. A lot of my questions have already been addressed. I want to focus, though, on military service. And thank you again to each of you.

It's not for everyone. My father was a vet and my uncles were vets of the Second World War. They did not make a career of the military. There were six boys and they all made it back safely. My father was in the army and my uncles were in the navy. What I experienced, as a parliamentarian, was four or five days in the military. I chose the army first, in Wainwright, and then I went into the navy on the *Winnipeg*. I quickly found that I didn't like the navy and the repetitive nature of the navy, but I thought it would have been very interesting to have had a career in the army. But, again, I didn't know what I would have been getting into if I would have chosen that as a career. That was a common theme—that people didn't know what they were getting into.

Mr. Lerat, you mentioned loneliness. You recommended that there be indigenous people in recruitment, but Ms. Pope said that she experienced isolation, an extremely unhealthy environment, to the point where she left. She talked about loneliness and felt that she needed that mentor person as she went through that.

My question is this. Is it for everyone? How do we properly let people who are indigenous know better what they're committing to? You said you didn't know what you were getting into, yet you liked it. How do you screen people and let them know this is what the life in the military, in the Canadian Forces, is going to be like so that people know what they're getting into? Would it be helpful if in the recruitment they were actually being mentored at the front end? They would get into it and be supported in all of these practical ways, and people would know what they were getting into. Would that be helpful?

• (1635)

Mr. Edward Lerat: That's a really difficult question to answer, because different individuals will have different reactions to joining the forces. To me, it was easy. My brother was there, and what was good for him was good for me. However, now, in our current situation, we place so much more emphasis not only on priests but on our holy men and women, as well.

Our church is somewhat different. I was raised Roman Catholic in a residential school, but have since gone to what we call "the red road" in our society. It's the same. We're all linked in by the Creator, whether it's God or whatever you call Him. We all respect the different denominations.

Getting back to your question, though, about how you would explain to an individual, a youth, that this is the real life of the forces, it's difficult for me. In terms of retention I know that, as Madam Pope indicated, our sacred ceremonies and our protocols are helpful to us as first nations—and not only to us as first nations, just like a church, but it's open to everyone.

However, elders and elders' attachments to bases, to areas where our aboriginal people are employed, especially when they're going in.... When I went in, I went to Cornwallis. That's a long way from the reservation outside of Regina.

At the same time, though, there was the camaraderie that I established. I wasn't too exposed to non-first nations or to negroes, so it was all a learning experience for me as we went forward. At the same time, we were all one. We were units. We were a collective. If one was down, you'd kind of pull him up.

That camaraderie is similar to Bald Eagle. What happens in Bald Eagle is that it's a team approach, but it's a team approach that is supported by those whom those individuals trust. I'm not saying they don't trust others, but it's easier to talk to an elder, as they are part of your culture.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Do we have time?

The Chair: I think you're a little bit over the time, but I was letting you finish. I appreciate your remarks.

I'm going to yield the floor to MP Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you to everyone for their excellent presentations.

I'd like to direct my first question to Ms. Pope.

You might not know the answer to this, so don't feel fussed about it. I was just curious, as you were speaking, if you know how many indigenous women are actually in the Canadian Armed Forces, whether it's the forces or the navy. Do you have any idea about the numbers.

Ms. Tasina Pope: At the present time I don't even think there is data gathered on that specific question. I know this could probably be a good opportunity to gather that data and present it in a diagram, but off the top of my head I don't know.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay. I think I'll definitely look into this to see whether we gather that data, because I think it's important for us to do so.

Why did you join? Often people, particularly when they're young, join because they have a sibling or know someone or have a group of friends who are going. Why specifically did you join?

Ms. Tasina Pope: I enlisted because both of my elders, all my great-grandparents, unfortunately passed away. Those were the first deaths in our family in over 60 years. During that time I could not comprehend it, and I withdrew from post-secondary institutions and just walked into the recruiting centre and signed up.

• (1640)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: There was some trauma happening in your family and you just thought you needed to do something different, and that seemed to be something that appealed to you. You joined the navy. Is that right?

Ms. Tasina Pope: That is correct, Madam.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Did you meet any other indigenous women at all?

Ms. Tasina Pope: Maybe five, in total. However, most of us were scattered around. We didn't have an cohort established or consider that we needed to unify ourselves.

In my under six years of being enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces, I've maybe only seen four or five successful indigenous women.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Do you think it would have been helpful if there had been a way for you to identify other indigenous women within the armed forces, so you could form some sort of a network to support each other?

Ms. Tasina Pope: Yes.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: What would that look like? Do you think the Canadian Armed Forces should be offering that as a program?

What could that look like in providing that way of bringing people together?

Ms. Tasina Pope: I think a program is a suitable start. Maybe implementing a pilot project would be beneficial to a lot of indigenous young girls and women. I believe that would be a step in the right direction.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay. Thank you.

I'm very curious. I think there are a lot of amazing recommendations here. I think it would be helpful to have an indigenous woman go out to certain places to help with the recruiting of other indigenous women, because they're out there, to say that this is their experience.

I also love the recommendation, and I don't know, Mr. Lerat, if... Sometimes I translate a recommendation to something even bigger.

I think one of the key things you talked about is this important need to be able to prepare those who want to join. In my own mind, I put it as almost like a preparatory program that includes cultural training. It could be one year or six months and people to understand what the forces are, what the navy is, what the life is like, whatever it is they might want to go into. I found that very helpful.

Mr. Lerat, this is following what Mr. Fisher was talking a little about. You mentioned there were 10 applicants for every one job. I want to understand this. Is it that there were only a limited number of jobs in Saskatchewan and people wanted to stay in the area, so there were 10 applicants for every job? Could you explain that comment?

Mr. Edward Lerat: I was referring to recruitment into the forces and the processing.

I want to refer specifically to the area that I'm most involved in, the summer program for youth. The interest is there, but the positions are not filled, because of what I indicated before: the inconsistencies in meeting timelines.

I think we may look at doing things differently. Our thought-making and decisions are on a collective. We try to ensure a collective. We need to find a way of ensuring that a team goes out with our Bold Eagle youth development initiative coordinator, with the recruitment officers.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thanks very much.

The Chair: MP Martel.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here.

We know that the Canadian Rangers do an exceptional job and that we need them. We also know that many indigenous people are members of the Junior Canadian Rangers. Are there statistics on the number of Junior Rangers who then join the Canadian Rangers?

[English]

Mr. Edward Lerat: I don't have any.

● (1645)

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Can you give me an idea of the mindset of the indigenous members of the Rangers?

[English]

Mr. Edward Lerat: From what I can understand, we have the Ranger program in northern Saskatchewan primarily for search and rescue. At the same time, it also enhances and complements the services of the RCMP and conservation officers who are not there.

The Ranger programs are in northern Saskatchewan specifically. They could be expanded. I think we'd like to see them expanded because of the valuable work they do to keep our communities safe.

How that translates into the military.... I know that on some search and rescue missions or in some emergencies, such as the massive forest fires we experienced in Saskatchewan a couple of years back when the army came in and assisted, many of our Rangers were part and parcel of the effort and worked quite well.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: What do the indigenous Rangers think about Arctic sovereignty and to what extent do they feel a sense of affiliation to that mission?

[English]

Mr. Edward Lerat: In a word, yes, absolutely. Part of the security of Canada is focused on that as well. I can't speak for the Innu in the far north, but I know the role they play in northern Saskatchewan, which is a little way from the far north. We're proud of them.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: I have one last question. How would you describe the collaboration between the regular forces and the indigenous Rangers? Can you give us an example of a successful collaboration between the two groups?

[English]

Mr. Edward Lerat: I think I just did with the forest fires and the coordination of the Rangers. I'm not telling you, and I haven't—and I wish I could tell you—that they are a unit. I can't do that because I have not witnessed specifically their coming together.

I can give you witnesses on the RCMP and Rangers coming together to jointly perform tasks for the community, whether it's out searching for missing hunters or assisting in community events. I could tell you instances of that, but I can't comment on the Armed Forces. I wish I could.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Okay. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: MP Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: We may have inadvertently focused on recruitment to the regular forces. I want to ask a little bit about reserves. It would seem to me that if there's an interest in serving, the reserves might be a good way for first nations to become involved with the Canadian military.

If you look at the list of communities where we have reserve units, they're not very northern and not very concentrated in places where there are first nations people in this country. Supposedly, reserves are supposed to create a presence across the country. It seems odd, when I look at the list, that they're so heavily focused in urban areas, really, and not in more rural and remote areas.

I wonder whether you have any thoughts about those two things: first, whether reserves would be a good option for a lot of first nations people; and second, about the availability of reserve postings throughout the country.

I'll start with Ms. Pope and come back to the room.

Ms. Tasina Pope: There was a previous discussion that brought forward the point that reserve units are in charge of their own mandate of bodies. I'm hoping that with that consideration the reserve units themselves could emphasize bringing in diversity by hiring indigenous people. I know, though, that we usually have to put the "X" in the box to meet the merit system requirement.

I wonder whether these reserve units could change their application process to require a basic literacy level, because most of the applicants can't do the advanced one. Through 2016, Statistics Canada proved that our people, or my nation, lacks the basic literacy level. There might be flexibility in the positions themselves to allow, rather than a petty officer second class or sergeant in a given position, more indigenous people to be in a local setting for them. That is something they might consider.

● (1650)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

I'll hand it over to the two gentlemen in the room, on the question of reserves.

Mr. Edward Lerat: I think that's an excellent suggestion.

We in Saskatchewan have cadets in the various first nation communities. We're looking at our population statistics probably closing in on 50% of our 140,000 first nations, and most of our youth, being in the urban centres, in the cities, now. But at the same time, there are still some first nations—Beardy's & Okemasis—who have started and gone through a reserve training and gotten their certificates. It worked well there because they're probably an hour from Saskatoon, where the parade squares are and the armouries and the units. So, it works well and I think it would work better in semi-isolated communities farther north. That's my response to that.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Do you mean if we put a reserve unit in La Loche, or some place like that?

Mr. Edward Lerat: Yes, absolutely, in La Loche, Stony Rapids, Black Lake, Fond du Lac. I could go on and on.

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: Being a reserve officer, I'll say you're totally correct. The units are in populous areas. When I joined the reserves, the unit did its own recruiting. They have limits. In my battalion in London, we had to turn people away from joining because we only had so much money every year to hire—to enrol people and pay them. Other units had lots of money, but of course they wouldn't share, because that's not how we do things in the military—or at least in the army.

You need to have the units in the areas where people are. I remember there was a time—I don't know if it's still true—when reservists could actually get funding, travel money, to travel to their unit for training purposes during the normal training season. I don't know if that still exists now or not. But for people to travel maybe 50, 80 or 100 kilometres, to go training every week, one weekend a month, that cost starts adding up and your pay is now paying for you to travel for you to do your work.

The Chair: That ends our formal questioning. I know MP Bezan passed his time over to colleagues. I want to give him an opportunity to ask a question.

James.

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

I want to thank all three of you for appearing today in front of our committee. I want to thank all three of you for your service to Canada.

Colonel Quick, I recall when you were commander of JPSU and your service there in working with our ill and injured. Thank you.

Ms. Pope, when Madam Gallant was speaking about how New Zealand was working with the Maori and the initiation process they had, bringing them into the warrior culture, you were nodding in agreement quite a bit. Would you suggest that those types of rites of passage would help with recruitment and retention of indigenous members in the Canadian Armed Forces?

Ms. Tasina Pope: Yes.

Mr. James Bezan: What would you have in mind for a Canadian model?

Ms. Tasina Pope: I know at least one that's maybe diverse is a powwow. It's a cultural gathering. That's a first step, at least, to go in that direction.

Every culture is different across Canada, formerly called Kanata. I wouldn't want to generalize this to all nations. I don't want to upset a lot of elders across the nation here. I would suggest maybe finding a consensus with each of the units or the reserve units, and then with the surrounding indigenous communities that reside on the territory, to see what they would like to incorporate.

•(1655)

Mr. James Bezan: You would have to incorporate that regionality, then, to be respectful. I get that.

Ms. Tasina Pope: Yes.

Mr. James Bezan: You also mentioned—and I believe that Colonel Quick did as well—about the lack of understanding of the cultural and spiritual needs of our indigenous members, who can't even get sick time to go to do a healing lodge.

Do we need to do more work with our chaplain service and be able to provide that type of spiritual assistance to our indigenous members?

Ms. Tasina Pope: Yes.

Mr. James Bezan: I'll go to Colonel Quick and then Mr. Lerat.

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: Currently there is an aboriginal member who's assigned to the chaplain here in Ottawa, who's the aboriginal adviser on spiritual affairs. But that's only here in Ottawa, so it's at the highest level. How long will this position be there? We don't know.

Mr. James Bezan: My understanding is that that individual is really there for HQ, to provide advice to the CDS and the vice-chief of the defence staff and—

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: No, he's there for the chaplains.

Mr. James Bezan: And for the chaplains as well....

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: But he's a sergeant—

Mr. James Bezan: Okay.

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: The commander of the army has as a champion a master warrant officer, Master Warrant Officer Greyeyes—the last person who I remember was there.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay.

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: He's the adviser to the commander of the army, and also the indigenous champion.

So there are people throughout, if the chain of command wants to establish a position for it. But it's like anything else: it takes resources. You take from Peter; you have to pay Paul.

Mr. James Bezan: Right.

Would it be better then for each local unit, wing, and naval base to be working with the local spiritual leaders of the communities in the region to provide that support to indigenous members?

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: I totally agree with that. A local elder is the elder for the RMC ALOY. He's from that area. He is paid by RMC to be their elder. Excellent work is being done with him. That's a good model to follow.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay.

As you know, or maybe you don't know, we are in third reading of Bill C-77 that would make to the military justice system. It incorporates the Supreme Court's Gladue decision, which ensures that indigenous members of the Canadian Armed Forces have the right to be treated based upon culture, rather than the hard regimens of the forces. Do you see that as a positive move as well?

LCol (Ret'd) David A. Quick: Yes, I see that as a positive move.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay.

Mr. Lerat.

Mr. Edward Lerat: I have mixed feelings on that specifically. I have my own personal feelings, but I'm not here to provide my own feelings, as I represent my organization. Having said that, we as first nations have our own customs, our own traditions, and each region has its own protocols. If we're in Wainwright, we're in a treaty territory. If we're over in Kingston, then we're in, I believe, Mohawk territory. But, as I said, we have one Creator and everything is focused on that. Protocol-wise, I really think it is a good idea to incorporate that, not only for first nations but also for those who find this attractive to the individual's persona.

Mr. James Bezan: As you know, and as we've talked about, often when you're doing recruitment in the armed forces you want to be able to see yourself in the armed forces. I know that Brokenhead Ojibway Nation in my riding in Manitoba has a high participation rate in the armed forces, both in Canada and the United States,

because of the legacy of Sergeant Tommy Prince, the most decorated indigenous member of the Canadian Armed Forces, a member of the Devil's Brigade in World War II. He fought in Korea.... He had just an amazing service record.

Now, Ms. Pope, you were saying that you only came across four or five other indigenous members. I look at things that are happening today, and at Jody Wilson-Raybould, who has this great legacy of being Canada's first indigenous female justice minister. How do you feel about the treatment she's received from the government today?

• (1700)

Ms. Tasina Pope: I think it speaks for itself in regard to how indigenous women are usually marginalized and continue to be marginalized even in other institutions. I'm hopeful that indigenous women will not be martyrs anymore, but continue to lead positive, inclusive change. I wish the best for her because I know it's hard being a politician out there for the community.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. I think that's it for us today.

I want to thank you all for coming. We appreciate your time and we very much value your input. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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