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Chair: Marie-France Lalonde



Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 28 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Pursuant to the Standing Orders and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 18, 2025, the committee is meeting on its study of barriers to entrepreneurship among veterans.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Pursuant to the Standing Orders, members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

Before we continue, I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and our members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference—and I know there are a few of you this morning—click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[*Translation*]

For members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. For members participating via Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The committee clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

[*English*]

I would like to welcome back our members.

[*Translation*]

It's good to see you again this morning.

[*English*]

I would now like to welcome our first panel of witnesses. From Alberta Recoil Inc., we have Heather Vanderveer, owner. It's a pleasure, ma'am, to see you here. From Corporal4Life Apparel, we have Nicholas Stroesser, founder, by video conference. From Vimy Forge, we have Duncan McSporrán, managing director, also by video conference. Thank you all for joining us today.

You will each have five minutes to give your opening remarks. We will then have a series of questions from members of the committee.

For those who are online, please note that after five minutes, I will have to interrupt you, as I will throughout the questions if members extend beyond their allocated time. I am the gatekeeper of our clock, so I apologize in advance if I have to interrupt you. We'll try to stay within those time frames.

I will now invite Mr. Nicholas Stroesser, founder of Corporal4Life Apparel, to take his five minutes.

Nicholas Stroesser (Founder, Corporal4Life Apparel): Good day. My name is Nick Stroesser, and I am the founder of Corporal4Life Apparel, a veteran-owned and veteran-operated apparel company out of Windsor, Ontario. Today, I will be speaking about the barriers I have faced as a veteran entrepreneur. Those barriers are hiring, mentorship and capital.

I started this clothing brand as a way to show my pride in serving Canada. Since 2015, it has become a brand sold across Canada and the United States. We've even shipped orders to Europe and Mexico. We've had three bricks-and-mortar retail stores. Our brand is currently available in two national museums, two regimental kit shops and one independent store in British Columbia.

We collaborate on a line of craft spirits with a veteran-owned distillery. We sponsor fighters, race-car drivers and a youth hockey team. With a portion of our sales, we've been able to donate tens of thousands of dollars to various veteran, first responder and local charities. Just saying all of this brings me great pride. I still have big goals for this company, which will be accomplished, but how much longer will it take?

I started this company with no retail experience, no T-shirt design experience, no advertising or content creation experience and, most importantly, no money. I have self-funded this venture since day one, sometimes putting myself in financial peril just to keep the dream alive.

I'm fortunate enough to say that I've made it through some very tough times. I've hired and fired entire staff more than once. I've used my personal paycheque from my own job to pay wages. I've used personal savings and credit to ensure my stores' rents would be paid on time. It's never been a question of "if" this brand will be a huge success; it's always been "when" and "how".

My being a veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces has been a huge factor in the survival of this company. We've pivoted multiple times. We've even had to take a few steps back to see the full picture, but the brand has always moved forward.

I cannot say that this has been a self-built brand, because I've had a lot of help along the way from family and friends who have stepped up as sales staff and from other successful entrepreneurs I've met who have guided me when I had no clue what I was doing. I've even been given a rent-free space to turn into a retail shop.

I've been part of mastermind groups where I've paid fees to learn from and interact with business owners from across North America. I have also helped up-and-coming veteran entrepreneurs who have reached out in seeking my advice, which is absolutely crazy to me, but it means that I'm doing something right.

While I can say that the biggest barriers I have faced as a veteran entrepreneur are due to my own actions or my failure to act, I will say that it would have been nice to learn in a shorter time period what I have learned so far. I'm going to talk about what I believe would have helped me and could help current and potential veteran entrepreneurs. Some of what I will discuss has been talked about at earlier meetings by my colleagues, Dave Morrow and Grig Potapenko.

The first thing I would like to let veterans know is that entrepreneurship is a possible choice after service, and if not to start their own business, then to purchase an existing business where the owner is retiring or looking to sell. I've been asked more than once if I was interested in purchasing a veteran-owned business. I've declined, but there may have been a veteran out there who could have purchased an established brand.

On hiring, as mentioned earlier, at one point Corporal4Life had two stores operating in two cities two hours apart. Because I had no idea where to look for serving members, military reservists or veterans looking for work, I used social media. I was able to recruit six employees for my London store and four for my Windsor store.

For my last store, in Oromocto, finding staff was very hard. After a three-month social media recruiting campaign, I ended up hiring the first people—and only four—who showed interest at the last minute. I'm currently facing a similar problem in trying to recruit staff for the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto this summer. I still don't know if there is a database for veterans in search of employment. I've been reaching out to reserve regiments and social media pages to get the word out.

A veteran-owned business job bank where veterans and reservists could find each other for employment would be an amazing tool for companies like mine. One of our goals at Corporal4Life is to have teams across the country that can act as ambassadors and sales staff for events where I cannot be, effectively giving us a national footprint, aside from our online shop.

The biggest issue since the beginning has been funding. I don't think Veterans Affairs should be funding veteran businesses, as it has more important things to do, but I do believe that if Veterans Affairs or the government partnered with national banks to offer veteran entrepreneurs low-interest funding or even grants, veteran businesses would grow faster and larger, and it could help smaller companies survive at least long enough to give it a go.

Aside from using my own money and borrowing at extremely high predatory interest rates, I have never had an investor or a business line of credit. As of now, 11 years into the business, we are finally debt-free and cash-flow positive.

At this point in the business, I feel like I've done pretty well, but in looking back, I wonder if, with some help, I could have had the same successes even earlier on. For any veteran entering the business world, I believe the path could be much shorter and less painful if they had the things that I did not have while building this brand.

• (1105)

I believe if I had had the mentor, the funding and the ability to find staff, the company would be much bigger, we might still have stores and we would be able to help many more veterans than we currently do. Again, though, I have learned a lot and become not only a better entrepreneur, but a better human being by building this brand.

In closing, if veteran entrepreneurs have access to mentorship, funding and staffing, we can create an ecosystem of entrepreneurs who could create jobs and economic growth here at home and give purpose to those leaving the forces.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

For five minutes, from Vimy Forge, we have Mr. Duncan McSporrán.

Duncan McSporrán (Managing Director, Vimy Forge): Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

[Translation]

For everyone's benefit, I will continue in English rather than put my awful French to the test: It's mostly limited to the vocabulary of a soldier.

[English]

My name is Duncan McSporrán. I'm a veteran of 24 years' service in the British Army, including time seconded to the United States Army, and more recently here in Canada, where I spent two and a half years at the Canadian Army infantry school, responsible for phase two officer training and technical and leadership development of infantry non-commissioned officers. I'm a four-time founder here in Canada since transitioning from my service at the infantry school at CFB Gagetown in 2012.

Currently, I work at the intersection of innovation and entrepreneurship as a general partner at Tidal Venture Partners, and I am a founder of Vimy Forge. This is a national not-for-profit innovation accelerator for small and medium technology companies in the defence sector that's based in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Although my current work is largely [Technical difficulty—Editor].

• (1110)

The Chair: I am so sorry. We lost you. You muted yourself.

There you go. That's perfect.

Duncan McSporrán: Although my current work is largely in defence and national security, my focus today is veteran entrepreneurship in general. Veterans I've worked with or mentored include brewers, distillers, plumbers, electricians and people involved in hybrid rocket motor companies, as well as people in more general technology start-ups and creative enterprises. Their focus on bringing success to Canada is clearly not confined to one sector. They all universally use the mindset and skills developed in service to build businesses, create jobs and contribute to the resilience of the Canadian economy.

Across my experience in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, the fundamentals of this discussion are consistent. Veterans bring leadership, discipline, resilience and a demonstrated ability to operate in uncertain, high-pressure conditions. They are trained to take responsibility, to make decisions with incomplete information and to execute in complex environments. These are not abstract qualities. They align directly with what is required to build and sustain a business.

Where the difference emerges is not in the veteran. It is in the system they enter after service. In the United States, there is a clearer institutional and cultural signal that military service is a foundation for continued economic participation, including entrepreneurship. There are identifiable pathways through training, procurement and capital that make starting a business feel like a viable, supported next step. In the United Kingdom, although the scale is smaller, veteran networks, mentorship and targeted support create a relatively coherent environment for translating military experience into commercial activity.

In Canada, what I observe is different. We have strong individual programs, committed people and a number of very entrepreneurial

veteran-led charities and networks. Organizations such as Treble Victor Group, True Patriot Love and several veteran-founded social ventures have themselves been built by veterans who saw a need and created something new. However, from the perspective of a member leaving service, these do not yet consistently present as a coherent system. What our veterans encounter is less a pathway and more a landscape of valuable elements that must be found, interpreted and stitched together, often at the moment when clarity would be most helpful for the veteran.

From our vantage point at Vimy Forge and Tidal Venture Partners, this shows up in three practical ways.

First, there does not appear to be a clear front door. A veteran who is curious about starting or acquiring a business does not reliably encounter a structural progression from initial interest to testing and validation, to launch and then to growth or, if necessary, to trying again after a setback. In practice, the veteran entrepreneur is left to navigate the system independently rather than be guided through it.

Second, there is a misalignment between the pace and nature of entrepreneurship and the design of veteran support systems. Entrepreneurship is iterative and non-linear. It involves experimentation, calculated risk and course correction. Support systems, by contrast, are often built around predictable, linear outcomes. As a result, the system is often experienced less as support and more as friction at critical moments.

Third, there is an underused opportunity to connect veteran entrepreneurship more deliberately to areas of national priority. These include defence, security and advanced technologies—where veterans bring operational insight into real-world challenges such as logistics, communications, decision-making under pressure and others—as well as sectors like infrastructure, manufacturing, energy, health and local services. Without deliberate pathways into these markets, veterans—often exactly the experienced end-users who define the agile methodology—are often positioned at the margins or even outside of the areas where their experience is directly relevant and can have the most impact.

• (1115)

The Chair: Mr. McSporrán, we're almost a minute over. I sincerely apologize. Please take 10 seconds to complete your statement, and then we'll go to our third witness.

Duncan McSporrán: Absolutely. Thank you very much.

If I may leave the committee with one observation, it is this. The question is not whether veterans have the capacity to succeed as entrepreneurs. The question is whether our systems are structured in a way that allows that capacity to be discovered, supported and, when necessary, rebuilt after failure.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go now to our third witness, Heather Vanderveer.

The floor is yours for five minutes.

Heather Vanderveer (Owner, Alberta Recoil Inc.): Chair and honourable members, I thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Heather Vanderveer. I'm a Canadian Armed Forces veteran and a co-founder of Alberta Recoil, a veteran-led organization providing peer support, advocacy, consulting and training for military members and veterans affected by operational stress injuries and military sexual trauma.

Before I continue, I would like to pass on regrets from my business partner John Senior, who wished to be here today to testify, but unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, couldn't.

Today, I would like to speak to a gap within veterans policy that is often overlooked: Veteran entrepreneurship, particularly among female veterans, is not being adequately supported within existing systems. Despite commitments to gender equity and improved veteran outcomes, female business owners are still unintentionally being excluded from funding opportunities, partnerships and program development, especially when their work focuses on peer support, prevention, education and community well-being. These barriers are not always explicit, but they are persistent. Veterans bring significant strengths into entrepreneurship: discipline, mission focus, leadership under pressure, logistical problem-solving and, most of all, lived experience.

Veterans Affairs has acknowledged that military skills are transferable to business ownership. However, the system has not fully adapted to support veterans who choose entrepreneurship as their transition pathway.

Veteran entrepreneurs continue to face systemic challenges, including limited data and visibility, uncertainty around how business income interacts with VAC benefits, inconsistent decision-making when entrepreneurship is part of rehabilitation, transition times that do not align with the realities of building a business and administrative burdens that are particularly difficult for those managing service-related injuries. At its core, the system is designed to transition veterans into employment, not into building a business—and that distinction matters.

There is also an internal divide that must be acknowledged. Within veteran entrepreneurship, there is a noticeable gap between officers and non-commissioned members. Officers often transition with recognized credentials, stronger institutional networks and familiarity with procurement systems. These factors create clearer pathways to advisory roles and funded opportunities. Non-commissioned members, despite extensive operational leadership experience, often transition without those same networks or recognition.

For women, particularly those from non-commissioned backgrounds, this gap is even more pronounced. They face a higher credibility threshold that directly impacts their ability to succeed.

Through Alberta Recoil, we have delivered structured, three-day peer support workshops specifically for veterans affected by military sexual trauma. To date, we have supported over 125 participants. These programs were developed in direct response to the complex realities of military sexual trauma and are delivered in trauma-informed environments that reflect military culture, barriers to disclosure and the long-term effects of institutional betrayal.

Despite this work, women veterans continue to struggle to access support for these programs. There is limited recognition, limited integration and very little institutional uptake. In fact, we have had more success working with the RCMP and partners in the United States than we have with our own veteran systems.

To my knowledge, Alberta Recoil remains the only organization in Canada providing structured, multi-day, MST-specific peer support programming of this kind. We have collaborated with the SM-SRC, the military and the RCMP. We continue to show up, but credibility remains a barrier.

I will say this plainly. If my background were different and if I fit a more traditional or more accepted profile, this conversation might be very different.

What needs to change? First, entrepreneurship must be formally recognized as a legitimate transition and rehabilitation pathway within VAC policy. Second, there must be clear and consistent guidance on how business income interacts with benefits so that veterans are not discouraged from pursuing entrepreneurship. Third, funding and partnership opportunities must be more accessible to veteran-led organizations, including those led by women and non-commissioned members. Finally, credibility must be earned through outcomes, not assumed based on rank, gender or background.

Veteran entrepreneurs are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for the opportunity to contribute solutions, many of which the government has already identified as necessary. The capacity exists, the experience exists and the need is clear. The system simply needs to catch up.

● (1120)

I thank you, and I welcome your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will start our round of questions. The first round will be six minutes for each member.

For those online, I apologize if I have to interrupt you. I try to be a very strict clock keeper.

Once it's her turn, Madame Gaudreau will be addressing you in French. Please make sure that you have the right channel on at the bottom, so you can hear Madame Gaudreau speak to you in French if you do not understand it.

We will start with six minutes for Ms. Wagantall.

Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of you for being here today. We really appreciate your service and your very important testimony in this regard.

I'm going to start very briefly with Ms. Vanderveer.

Thank you so much. Could you briefly explain to me how you came up with the name "Recoil"?

Heather Vanderveer: Yes, I can. Many people ask about that one. It's a military term. You take recoil after firing a weapon. Even more simply, when a child touches a stove, they recoil back and learn not to touch it. It's not damaging, but it's a learning process. That's where we came up with the name.

Cathay Wagantall: That is what I expected. Thank you so much. The reality, too, is that life is like that, and quite often we have to recoil. I appreciate the creativity in a lot of the names of organizations that veterans have in order to help each other.

You mentioned the struggles that you feel women entrepreneurs have. Interestingly, we had someone else speaking here about being an entrepreneur who simply noted—and was not negative at all in saying this—that there are pathways for women and indigenous and Black individuals to get assistance from VAC. Are you not able to access that? Just give me an idea of the impact of that on your ability to run your business.

Heather Vanderveer: We have actually applied for funding three years in a row, and we have not received any funding from the SMSRC or the veteran and family well-being fund.

Cathay Wagantall: Were you given a reason?

Heather Vanderveer: When we applied the first year, we had been listed as "for-profit", which we had to change to "not-for-profit", but we were never given a reason as to why we were not accepted. It was, "Thank you very much for your application; however...."

Cathay Wagantall: It would be interesting to follow up on that to see what the uptake is and where the money is being spent.

Mr. Stroesser from Corporal4Life, it sounds like you have a natural ability to be an entrepreneur and to hang in there through things—

Nicholas Stroesser: I appreciate that.

Cathay Wagantall: —although I hear your perspective as being very different. Entrepreneurship is not for everyone, and you clearly show tenacity.

You mentioned that one challenge you're facing is hiring. Do you hire veterans only?

Nicholas Stroesser: When I had my first store, I did. That was part of the experience. Serving reservists and veterans was the goal. I've opened it up to family members if need be. I noticed, when I had my stores, that people appreciate the fact that they're speaking to a veteran or a serving member while they're shopping our products.

Cathay Wagantall: I can appreciate this in light of what your specific business is. It is very veteran-centric. At the same time, a lot of veterans are pleased to be involved—simply to be an entrepreneur within the whole system. I have to applaud those of you who take on entrepreneurship simply because of your desire to serve other veterans. I appreciate that.

Mr. McSporrán, I found it interesting that you talked about the incredible talents and gifts that our veterans bring to entrepreneurship. It was interesting to hear your perspective next to Ms. Vanderveer's in regard to the difference, quite honestly, in the uptake between officers and non-commissioned veterans and in their ability to get what they need and succeed.

Can you tell me where you focus most? I think we need an across-the-board approach, and yours seems to be focused more on the officer's side of the equation. Is that true or not?

• (1125)

Duncan McSporrán: No, not at all. It is focused on the entrepreneur and on providing support, particularly on the technical side, for companies at Vimy Forge that meet a need and requirement in defence. It's quite often the junior person—I'm sure the other witnesses will echo this—who comes up with the best idea. It's helping them translate that into something that has meaning to the people who make decisions.

If there's one thing I would say, it's that it reflects some of the comments.... The officer is often better equipped and has been better trained to deal with those types of higher-level discussions to force the point and to just get on with stuff. It does appear—and it is clear—that the work Vimy Forge does is not focused on officers or anything else like that. It's simply about the people with the best ideas.

Cathay Wagantall: I have one minute left for you to respond to this. You talked about not having a clear front door and the steps available to succeed the first time, but you also mentioned "trying again". This is, I think, really important to entrepreneurship.

Do you find a lot of circumstances where individuals fail initially? It's often not of their own accord, but it is a challenging way to earn a living and to provide a living for others. Where do you go with the "trying again" side of it? What do you do to encourage that? Canadians tend to be shy of that.

Duncan McSporrán: It's about helping people understand that if they have a failure, it's not the end of the road. It's part of the learning process. It's a training environment in its own right, in many respects, and it's about having supporters who understand that as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

For six minutes, we now have Mr. d'Entremont.

[*Translation*]

Chris d'Entremont (Acadie—Annapolis, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Thanks to all of you for being here today. Thank you for your testimony and for your service to our country.

I'll go in sequence, in the way that Ms. Wagantall went through the presentations. I'll go to Mr. Stroesser first.

You brought up a couple of points along the way about your business. Where did you get the idea of clothing? Is it something you might have been doing before you retired, or is it something that popped up as an opportunity after your service ended?

Nicholas Stroesser: A friend of mine I'd served with was visiting Windsor, where I'm from, and we were talking about our pride in service. I'm a T-shirt guy. I like to wear T-shirts. There was nothing out there specifically that I felt I could wear or wanted to wear. That's where it started. It's something that I felt comfortable wearing and that other veterans or serving members would like to wear as well.

Chris d'Entremont: My brother lives in Chatham and worked out in Windsor for a little while. He does have a few of your things. I've seen him with them at a couple of events.

Nicholas Stroesser: That's amazing.

Chris d'Entremont: You brought up the issue of trying to hire veterans.

Nicholas Stroesser: That's correct.

Chris d'Entremont: Have you used the ESDC website or the job bank? There is a section there for veterans. You still have to self-identify as a veteran on that platform. Did you have an opportunity to use the ESDC service?

Nicholas Stroesser: No, I have not, to be honest with you. As I said, the hiring I did was pretty much based on social media and word of mouth.

Chris d'Entremont: In your testimony, you were talking about collaboration with others and working with other individuals who are interested in setting up businesses. Have you had the opportunity to reach out to other organizations to support you? I know the time will run out in my question period, but what kinds of supports would you have required in view of how much money it would be to set up a business like you've set up?

• (1130)

Nicholas Stroesser: I was very fortunate. I met a gentleman from a company called CannaConnect. He's been a huge mentor for me since about five years ago. I was lucky to run into him. He has really helped me with any questions I've had. He helped me get a

store running out in Oromocto. Just having people available to help out with questions and mentorship is my biggest thing.

Chris d'Entremont: Then there's a second part of that question. If you're going into this sort of business, there is a transition. Normally when a person retires from the armed forces, we help to support them in retraining or what have you. Some of the testimony we had here in the last few meetings is that maybe you can transition that into some kind of support for entrepreneurship. Ms. Vanderveer talked about that in her presentation.

Would it be a large amount of money? Would it be a grant of \$50,000? What would be the best support for a business like yours?

Nicholas Stroesser: Honestly, I wouldn't have wanted to get a big amount of money at the beginning, because I wouldn't have known what to do with it.

These past 10 years have really helped sort out where my focus goes. That's how the business has survived, but even \$10,000 a couple of years ago would have been a huge boon to the business. I may have been able to keep a store open. I may not have been able to keep all three open, but Windsor would have had a shot to survive. With the COVID restrictions and such, it got to a point where I was using my own money for my own job. That's when it had to stop.

Chris d'Entremont: I'll move on to a couple of more questions with our other guests.

Mr. McSporrán, you talked about the U.S. and the program they have. We heard about that in a couple of presentations. You also talked about the U.K. having a program. What kind of entrepreneurial program could Canada consider to support veterans?

Duncan McSporrán: They could have a really well-funded program, to be perfectly honest. I think we have all the components necessary for it. It just needs to be centrally managed, governed and coordinated among all the different groups that are already there to support businesses. Some companies need investment. Some companies and their leaders need training. It's just about making sure that that's matched properly and meets the needs and requirements for them.

I think we have everything here. We just need that top-cover umbrella.

Chris d'Entremont: Finally, I'll go to Ms. Vanderveer of Recoil.

After hearing about your program and reading up a bit about it, I'm wondering whether some of the people who come to your organization have service-related trauma. What kind of veteran is coming to your program and accessing the services you provide?

Heather Vanderveer: The veterans we have coming to our program obviously have service-related injuries. We work especially with survivors of military sexual trauma, both male and female. We offer them one-on-one peer support. We work with the RCMP and other uniform services as well.

Chris d'Entremont: Entrepreneurial comes up quick.

Heather Vanderveer: Yes.

Chris d'Entremont: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Esteemed witnesses, it's a pleasure to have you here today. It's very encouraging to hear from you, as we must acknowledge the successes, and you're part of them. I have a few questions, and the first one is for Ms. Vanderveer.

On the subject of penalization, you say that women face a higher credibility threshold when seeking support. What does that look like, specifically?

[*English*]

Heather Vanderveer: What that looks like is that, for example, when my business partner and I first started the business, people recognized him as the face of the business. They always thought I was the administrative person. They didn't see me as a co-founder. They always wanted to speak to him. They always wanted to include him in the meetings. At times, there was a pause when he would say, "No, Heather is my partner, and so is my wife. Two females are co-founders of this business as well."

We've seen it numerous times with different organizations we've dealt with. They only want to speak to my business partner.

I hope that answers your question.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: So you wouldn't be recognized when you received support, whether it was coaching or mentoring, is that right?

[*English*]

Heather Vanderveer: Yes, that is correct. What we have also seen is that because this is dealing with military sexual trauma, many places we've gone to for funding like the concept of what we do, but nobody wants to fund it, or we're told that the SMSRC is already doing peer support or another organization is doing peer support. Unfortunately, the SMSRC's peer support is sorely lacking. Eight meetings do not constitute peer support.

It's the same with our workshops. We're the only one offering these workshops, and again, there's a lot of interest in what we do, but nobody wants to fund us.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Okay.

Madam Chair, I see that we're going to have to revisit this issue to identify veterans' entrepreneurial profile and the challenges they face. That will be good for our report. As we've just observed, the first challenge is to demystify the entrepreneur and the business, which must be valued and recognized. That's really important.

Esteemed witnesses, it reassures me to see that veterans do have tangible entrepreneur qualities.

Mr. McSporrán, I see that there's no special gateway with a tool box to support veterans who want to embark on a business venture, to make them aware of programs or offer them support from organizations, peers or even experts. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Duncan McSporrán: From my perspective, yes, and I think Nicholas would agree. There are local groups that may be able to support an individual and provide them with advice or mentorship, but there is no clear programmatic system that links all of the resources together from coast to coast. It doesn't matter whether it's a distillery or a high-end defence tech company.

That's part of what we're trying to address with Vimy Forge in the defence and security technologies area. It's to provide that tent that everybody can come into for support as small and medium-sized businesses. Four out of our 10 initial companies in the first cohort for Vimy Forge are veteran-owned or veteran-led.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you.

My last question is for you, Mr. Stroesser.

Although many organizations, both federal and provincial, can help you—and you can even find support in the private sector—it all comes down to this: Should veterans who want to start a business have access to support that differs from what's offered to anyone else, like myself, who starts a business, to coach them or even provide financial assistance?

Nicholas Stroesser: If I understand the question correctly, you're asking me if it should be the same for everyone. That's a good question, but I don't know. I know that, for me, as I said earlier, \$10,000 would have been a big help. For now, I have enough money to keep going, but I'm going to need more money at some point. I've also applied for grants and loans, but because of who I am, I haven't received any response or I've been turned down.

• (1140)

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Okay. I'll come back to this in the next round of questions.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Now we will start our second round of five minutes each. We'll start with Mr. Richards.

Blake Richards (Airdrie—Cochrane, CPC): First of all, as has been said already to the veterans who are with us today, whether in person or virtually, thank you for your service to our country. I really appreciate that all three of you came with ideas and solutions, which is really important when we're doing these kinds of studies.

I'm going to dig in on a couple of things, if I can. I'll start with you, Ms. Vanderveer.

You made the comment that there needs to be better guidance on how business income interacts with benefits. That sounded to me like a polite way of suggesting that perhaps some veterans are seeing their benefits threatened, lost or cut back as a result of earning business income. Could you clarify what you've seen in that regard? If that's so, it's a real problem that I think we need to make sure we address.

Heather Vanderveer: Yes, it is, Mr. Richards. For example, both John Senior and I are on disability, on diminished earnings capacity, so we are allowed to make only an additional \$20,000. The company is new. We have not received funding or grants, so there are days when we are barely keeping the lights on.

The whole premise of what we do is not to make money. I will just state that. However, when I speak with John Senior and with other veterans who own businesses, I hear there is always the fear that if they go above that \$20,000 threshold, their benefits will be decreased, and then there's nothing to fill that gap.

Blake Richards: It sounds to me like we have a situation here where we should be encouraging veterans to use their talents and skills, their very unique talents and skills, but there instead seems to be some disincentivization in terms of what happens with their benefits. You've identified a real problem, and I hope we can address that in our report.

Mr. Stroesser, you mentioned three things that you felt, from your experience and the experience of others you've worked with, could be better. You mentioned funding, which I think has already been addressed with some of the questions. I want to address the other two, which are mentorship and staffing.

You offer mentorship to other veterans looking to start a business. Is any of that referred to you by Veterans Affairs? Is there any connection of Veterans Affairs in that, or is this people who are finding you because they're not getting that support from Veterans Affairs?

Nicholas Stroesser: It's the second one. I've been doing this for 11 years. We're big on social media and we're a well-known brand. Over the years, I've had multiple veterans come up and ask for any sort of mentorship. I've pretty much given what I've received and what I've learned. That's something I'd like to do in the future—help veterans. I don't know where I'd be if I'd had that earlier on.

Blake Richards: Would you say there needs to be at Veterans Affairs some kind of coordination of veterans looking for mentorship, to connect them with other veterans who could provide that mentorship? Is that something that should be coordinated there?

Nicholas Stroesser: I believe so. I believe at one point Prince's Trust had something. I was actually approached five or six years ago about being a mentor, but at that time I needed a mentor. As

much as I wanted to be one, I really couldn't help. If I didn't have the knowledge, what was I going to give out?

Blake Richards: On the staffing side, you mentioned that you've reached most people through social media. Have you approached Veterans Affairs in this area? Do they have a repository of veterans looking for employment in a veteran business, or is this something that needs to be established? Could Veterans Affairs do better in coordinating opportunities for veterans looking for employment and for veteran-owned businesses looking for veterans to work?

Nicholas Stroesser: I'll be honest; I've only ever googled “Canadian veterans looking for work”, and that hasn't gotten me very far. I think if there was some sort of data bank of... I don't know if you can do reservists as well as veterans. I'm fortunate that I can speak to reserve regiments here in town and recruit directly. It would be nice to have a bank of individuals looking for work. I want this brand to continue to grow into different areas of the country, and I can't do it on my own.

● (1145)

Blake Richards: Thank you. I appreciate those insights.

Again, thank you to all of you for coming with solutions. It's so critically important to identify not just the problems but also the solutions. I think you've all come with some great suggestions today that I hope can make our report.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would like to advise the witnesses that Mr. St-Pierre will also be speaking to them in French and English. Please select the language of your choice for the questions.

Mr. St-Pierre, you have the floor for five minutes.

Eric St-Pierre (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Since I'm a Quebecker and a Montrealer, I'm going to ask questions in French, but also in English, for the anglophone witnesses.

Ms. Vanderveer, your work highlights approaches that are truly rooted in the reality of survivors. In your opinion, what elements of community-based models should be incorporated more systematically into public policy to better reflect the real needs of veterans, particularly in terms of complex trauma?

[*English*]

Heather Vanderveer: Can you rephrase the question, please?

Eric St-Pierre: Yes. Maybe I'll ask the question in English.

Your work highlighted the approaches that are grounded in the lived realities of survivors. In your view, which elements of community-based models should be more systemically integrated into public policy, or what lessons from serving the community should we integrate into policy-making?

Heather Vanderveer: I'm not 100% sure I understand what you're asking. For us, in terms of what we do in supporting survivors, we do what we do because we have found that the community doesn't understand the complexities of military sexual trauma and institutional trauma and betrayal.

Maybe that's why I'm struggling with in how to best answer your question. There is nothing in the civilian community that can support us. This is why we offer the supports that we do.

Eric St-Pierre: That's great. Thank you.

Mr. Stroesser, I'll move on to you.

I always love a good T-shirt, so I'm a big fan of the work you do. Thank you for all the work you have done. Thank you for your service.

Earlier you mentioned the challenges you had around accessing loans, or you mentioned something to the effect that the loans were quite expensive or seemed to be very prohibitive. I'm wondering if you could elaborate on your own experience with said loans.

Nicholas Stroesser: I've never been great with finances, so with that, obviously, the banks are going to laugh me out right away.

Shopify is the host of my website. It offers Shopify Capital, which doesn't have great rates, but it helps when need be. I've also had banks reach out. Well, I don't know if they're banks; I would call them loan sharks. I was denied at one point, and then all of a sudden it was, "Now you're ready for a big loan." Well, by then I didn't need it.

Again, I don't think giving me \$20,000 when I first started would have been a great idea, because I wouldn't have had a clue what to do with it, but maybe with a mentor and a bit of money, I could have avoided some of the blocks that I've hit so far. I'm not complaining about what I've done so far, but there are a few things that could have helped out and would have made it a smoother ride.

Eric St-Pierre: Thanks for sharing your experience.

Your business seems to promote Canadian identity and military service through the products being offered. I'm curious about how we can better support the visibility and market access of businesses like yours, especially around promoting Canadian products and Canadian content.

Nicholas Stroesser: I know there are a few websites out there that promote Canadian veteran businesses, products and stuff like that. I don't know how the government could get involved in that. I'm sure it could in some way.

Again, the biggest thing would be a bank, a grant of some sort or a low interest rate—for veterans who qualify, obviously. I've almost shut down numerous times, but I have a great job behind me that provides me with a great income. I'm hoping one day that corporate life will be that income, if I can get to that point. Just a bit of money and a bit of help would have probably carried me a lot farther.

• (1150)

Eric St-Pierre: That's great. Thanks for coming in today and for all the great work you do with your business.

I'll move on to Mr. McSporrان.

As part of our study on the barriers to entrepreneurship for veterans, do you see specific challenges faced by veterans who are looking to start, expand or grow their businesses?

Duncan McSporrان: Yes, I do, particularly in those high-value sectors that I look at particularly. It's literally about the ability to speak to people and to have discussions about how a business plan might evolve.

If you're looking at defence, I have a team here in New Brunswick that has a fantastic solution. They asked me for some help, and I said that, yes, I'd try to do the introduction, and the introduction I got to a world-class solution was, "We can't speak to them because there's no mechanism for us to make that look fair. We can't speak to them without speaking to the big companies."

The Chair: I'm very sorry. I have to interrupt. Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My next question is for Mr. Stroesser.

First, thank you very much for speaking French—your French is impeccable. It allows for a smoother conversation, since I can speak more quickly. Otherwise, I waste time.

We were talking about grants, guaranteed loans and interest-free loans. Do you think you're being discriminated against compared to ordinary people, like me, who started a business about 10 years ago?

Nicholas Stroesser: I don't know if I'm being discriminated against, but, as I said, my personal finances aren't always in great shape. So, even if I tell the bank that I need a little money for my business, I'm not eligible for a loan.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: So you're in the same situation as any entrepreneur who lacks the capital to start their business.

Nicholas Stroesser: That's right.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Okay.

What I'm getting at is that I realize we need reform and a review of the eligibility and award criteria to maintain benefits as long as people have job security. In business, it's always uncertain.

Nicholas Stroesser: Yes, that's right.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: In all testimonies, we've heard that every dollar earned above a certain threshold—I think it's around \$20,000—is deducted from benefits. So that's one thing.

Next, we must also ensure that veterans receive equitable support and that they have, at the very least, a list of available resources. In Quebec, for example, there's the Maison de l'entrepreneur. I'm thinking of people who provide assistance with human resources, among other things, with funding from Ottawa, funding from the provinces, and so on. It's all there.

Would you agree that you'd be in a good position with that?

I ask that you answer yes or no, because my time is up.

Nicholas Stroesser: Yes, certainly. As I said, one day, I would like to be someone who can help veteran entrepreneurs, but I'm not yet in a position where I can do that.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have about five minutes left before we change witnesses for the second hour. I will therefore give Mr. Richards and Mr. Casey the opportunity to ask other questions.

[English]

Mr. Richards, you have two and a half minutes, and we'll finish with Mr. Casey for two and a half minutes.

Blake Richards: For anyone who wants to answer it, I have a more general business-related question that is not specific to veterans. You might be able to help with it.

Over the last 10 years, we've seen a significant shift. It used to be, 10 years ago, that when a Canadian started a business, it was in Canada two-thirds of the time and elsewhere one-third of the time. Now it's reversed, and two-thirds of those businesses are being started outside of Canada.

I'm wondering if anyone here has any comments or thoughts around why that might be and if there's anything we could suggest that could improve that. Just put your hand up.

I'll start with you, Mr. McSporrán.

• (1155)

Duncan McSporrán: I'll give a quick answer. Obviously, this is very much in the technical space. Of all companies in Canada that receive \$1 million or more in equity, 50% are now outside of Canada. Part of the reason for that is that our start-ups are undervalued, and that's not just in the tech sector. We really don't place enough value on those start-ups, and when it comes to veterans, it's even lower, because I don't think we understand the value that veterans bring to the business ecosystem when they start a company.

Those are just my thoughts and opinions.

Blake Richards: Thank you.

I'd like to see if you have any thoughts on how we could improve that, but I want to give the other two a chance to comment on this first, if they have any.

Heather Vanderveer: Can you ask the question again, please? I'm sorry.

Blake Richards: What we're seeing is that more and more Canadian entrepreneurs are choosing to start their businesses outside of Canada. I want to know if you can elaborate on what you see as the reasons for that and what we might be able to do to help fix it.

Heather Vanderveer: Yes, I can, because we have been in talks with different organizations in the U.S. about the workshops and programs we offer, and right now there's a huge interest and a huge buy-in.

When we offer them here, the first thing we're told is that we do not have a degree in psychology, but you don't need a degree in psychology to offer peer support. Again, when we offer our workshops, they're not from a mental health professional. They're from a psycho-educational professional.

That is what we run into. When we present this in the States, they see the value of peer support.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Casey, you have two and a half minutes.

Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Stroesser, I don't have a question for you, but I have a request of you. Please have a look at jobbank.gc.ca/hiring/veterans. That is a veterans job bank. The committee would be most interested in your feedback as someone who has encountered some frustration. Please feel free to follow up with the committee once you have a look at that.

Nicholas Stroesser: Certainly.

Sean Casey: Mr. McSporrán, you didn't get a chance to complete your opening statement at the outset, and what you had to say I found fascinating. Can you go back and see what was left out and finish it now?

Duncan McSporrán: I'm sorry, Mr. Casey. That window shut when I went out from it, unfortunately.

In essence, it was really focused on the value that veterans bring in and, in particular, the way in which.... Everybody talks about "agile methodology" in business. The agile methodology is based on the focus brought by the end-user. Everybody forgets that the veterans coming out have been the end-users. That allows people, particularly in the defence and national security environments, to create the solutions we need nationally.

I'll use one statistic for you. The largest Canadian-owned defence company is CAE, which will be familiar to many. It's the 74th-largest defence company in the world. All the rest of our defence contracts are flowing to big companies where the IP doesn't sit in Canada. We can improve that by using small and medium-sized businesses that are set up by veterans who know the solution the forces need.

Sean Casey: Thank you.

Ms. Vanderveer, you mentioned a frustration around the interaction between benefits and entrepreneurial income. There has been a motion placed on notice to increase the threshold for those on the income replacement benefit by 75%. Do you think that would help?

Heather Vanderveer: Absolutely, it would help.

Sean Casey: Hopefully, that study will get adopted and we'll bring you back.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much to our witnesses.

For those who have served our country and who in so many ways continue to do so, thank you for your words of wisdom this morning.

With that, we will be suspending and welcoming our other panel.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

I'll make a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For interpretation, for those on Zoom, you have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

• (1205)

[*English*]

I would now like to welcome our second panel of witnesses. As an individual, we have Mr. William Steed, by video conference. From IMT Group, we have Mr. Arjun Grewal, lead, defence innovation. From VeCATS Inc., we have Mr. Joseph Blanchard, founder and chief executive officer, Veterans Entrepreneurship Hub, by video conference.

Welcome to the three of you. Each of you will receive the same five minutes.

We will open with Mr. Steed. The floor is yours for five minutes.

William Steed (As an Individual): Hello, and thank you for having me today. I'm very pleased to be part of this group. I just hope I can pass on a few instances that can be helpful, going forward, for other veteran entrepreneurs.

I've been running my business for eight years now. It started from the ground up with no working capital and basically no support from the banks, DND, Veterans Affairs or anything like that. What I found is that there's quite a community of organizations within the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs that are looking for programs that can help veterans in transition or working through PTSD.

I do a lot of work with veterans' organizations and some work with DND through Soldier On and the OSI clinics, which are two that I work with, and with military family support centres. I've done work with them hosting classes for veterans in blacksmithing. I also travel around western Canada and work with various veterans' charities. I work to support veterans and show them blacksmithing techniques. We do workshops, classes and things like that.

What I've found, and this is only in my experience, is that there isn't really a central depository of information available for an entrepreneur like me about how to be included in the Department of National Defence or Veterans Affairs programs so we can provide our services. That would have been helpful.

In all the work I've done to date, usually members of those groups have contacted me or have heard about me through word of mouth, or they've searched my website online or gone through Facebook or something like that. It's been very informal. There hasn't been anything that I have looked at for programs that I could be of assistance with to veterans going forward. That's basically one hurdle I've seen, so that would be something I'd like to hear some feedback on.

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

Now, for five minutes, we'll go to Mr. Blanchard.

Joseph Blanchard (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Veterans Entrepreneurship Hub (Vet-Hub), VeCATS Inc.): Thank you, Chair, honourable members of the committee and fellow presenters.

I am Dr. Joseph Blanchard. I'm a veteran of approximately 30 years. I'm the founder of VeCATS, Veterans Career Assistance and Transition Services, and have been there for 12 years. In the last six years, I've started an organization called the Veterans Entrepreneurship Hub, known as Vet-Hub.

Approximately 6,000 Canadian Forces members transition out of the service every year. These individuals bring with them a lot of skills: leadership under pressure, operational planning experience, logistics, security, technical expertise and a mission-first mindset. Despite these strengths, many face a critical question: Where do I fit into our civilian economy? For a growing number, the answer is entrepreneurship, but the system is not built for them. You've heard this in all of your recent meetings.

As for the core problem, veterans are not failing because of the lack of capability. They are facing systemic barriers, which include a lack of structured transition pathways into business ownership; limited access to coordinated training, mentorship and funding; a procurement system that today takes about three to five years, which is far too long for a start-up company to survive; difficulty translating military experience into business credibility; and the loss of identity, purpose and sense of community post-service.

Approximately 20% of all start-ups in Canada fail within the first year, often due to a lack of support systems, not a lack of talent. Through VeCATS programs, we support veterans in their transition. We help them with identity and career paths, building the skills that they need to survive in the civilian world and connecting them to opportunities that are available. However, we quickly realized that something larger was needed. This is where we started the Veterans Entrepreneurship Hub. The Vet-Hub is designed by veterans, for veterans, to enable successful business creation and growth.

Our model is simple. It's an infrastructure that brings together five critical components. One is training and education, which leverages the ETB, the veterans education and training benefit, and some of the CAF transition policies that are available. We have mentorship and leadership development, which will be a huge and critical part of Vet-Hub. Access to capital—or what I call the “financial runway”—for a business to be successful will include items such as start-up money for home-based businesses, angel investors, venture capital and, of course, access to government programs, with shared services and business supports very similar to what we get in the military.

You have a centralized component that will reduce significant barriers for these companies, where we centralize the HR function, the finance function, the marketing function and, of course, operational support. There's also procurement access and acceleration, which will create pathways for veteran-owned businesses to sell into government faster. One of those components, which I can speak to later, is the discussions with the deputy minister and her assistant deputy minister over at Public Services and Procurement Canada.

The strategic opportunity for us in Canada is where Vet-Hub becomes more than a support program and becomes a national strategic asset so that veterans are security-cleared, operationally experienced, and trusted within the defence and public safety environments. With the right structure, they can help accelerate innovation in defence, security and public services, and they can reduce procurement timelines from three to five years today to 12 to 18 months. That's based on a couple of factors. Number one is the security clearances for veteran-owned business. This aligns directly, of course, with Canada's priorities in defence innovation and supply chain resiliency, including economic growth.

What we are asking for is the ability not to build something from scratch but to formalize and scale Vet-Hub, and specifically to establish Vet-Hub as a national entrepreneurship ecosystem comparable to the women's, Black and indigenous entrepreneurship programs from over the last six years, which have received funding.

● (1210)

Creating a veterans' procurement—

The Chair: Dr. Blanchard, I'm so sorry. I forgot to mention that I am the clock keeper. Due to the time frame, I have to interrupt. I sincerely apologize. I hope you'll have more time during the round of questions.

Mr. Grewal, you have five minutes, please.

Arjun Grewal (Lead, Defence Innovation, IMT Group): Madam Chair and committee, thank you for having me. It's a true privilege to be here today.

Before I begin, I want to recognize something that isn't often said in rooms like this: Thank you for your pursuit of continuous improvement and getting informed opinions from veterans across Canada. It is really important to help inform continuous improvement.

Within the forces, soldiers share a lot of experiences. I feel the same thing happens on the outside, whether through entrepreneurial pursuits, retirement or other reasons. Sometimes in forums like this, it can be difficult to share new information or new experiences that can reflect that, so I want to take a little turn and really look toward the future.

We live in an unprecedented time economically, militarily and geopolitically, and we're looking to set the stage of these influential policies for future veterans as a result of the experiences that current soldiers will be facing over the next 20 to 30 years. For that, I'd like to share a bit of the context of my own journey.

I joined the Canadian Armed Forces when I was 17. That decision has shaped everything in my life since. My service was unique. It was at the outset of the global war on terror. I spent 13 years of my career with Canadian Special Operations, which had me deploy multiple times to multiple places.

I loved all of it. I had a fantastic military career. I owe a lot to the people I met and the relationships that were forged. My career was defined by genuine hardships and risks, but measurable impact at the same time. I consider all of that as feeding my current journey into private business and entrepreneurship.

One of the greatest strengths of that career, as I mentioned, was an organic network of friends, colleagues and mentors who formed around it. That network provided support during deployments, transition and entrepreneurship that no formal program could ever offer. I'm sure many of my colleagues and veterans would echo that. Associations such as the Blackstone Association and the Alliance of Canadian Defence Companies have created additional communities—like Joe is running as well—and are building them in the private sector for veterans to reach out to and help enable.

I'm married. I have two daughters. Every decision I made in uniform and every decision since then has been shaped by the support I've received from them. They embody everything I care about and everything that is Canada. Our families are extended by the bonds we formed within the service. As I mentioned, those networks run very deep.

Since leaving the Canadian Armed Forces six and a half years ago, I have dedicated my professional life to building a career serving organizations that connect military experience to civilian life, including BurnPits360 Canada and BurnPits360 U.S., a U.S. organization that forged the PACT Act, which is a U.S. veteran fund for toxic exposure. I've also worked with Blackstone Association and Erase PTSD Now by Dr. Eugene Lipov, who is advancing such approaches as stellate ganglion block and procedures to support veteran health care.

Today, I am a team member on the Military Casualty Support Foundation, which is run by the family that runs IMT Corporation, one of Canada's premier defence companies. I'm also the founder and CEO of the Arctic Training Centre, a northern Arctic-based training facility privately owned to help fill the gaps of not only the CAF but also our NATO allies.

What we're often asked when coming into this—I know I was when I shared my invitation with my currently serving colleagues and some of the ones who are retired—is “Why?” What's the effect we are looking to achieve through policy, education, information and changes? Well, I propose to the committee that a flourishing veteran is the single most powerful recruiting tool Canada has. When veterans are visible in our communities, in business and in public life, they attract others to service. I don't think anybody here needs a reminder of how important that is in today's world. When veterans disappear into silence, or struggle without support, we actually lose an edge as a country.

In that spirit, through this conversation I'll be contributing points around the education and training benefit; the veterans' employment market, which is building the current defence industrial base, in large part; and the future veteran, as I mentioned. The future soldier will become a future veteran. They will come to the civilian market with a new set of skills and a new view on the strategic landscape Canada sits in.

Thank you.

• (1215)

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

To all of you, thank you very much for your time.

We will now open the rounds of questions, and we'll go to Ms. Wagantall for six minutes.

Cathay Wagantall: Thank you so much, Chair.

Thank you to all of you for what you're contributing today. It's deeply appreciated.

This is the right time, as mentioned, for us to get really serious about this. It's interesting to me what I'm hearing today with regard to this decision to focus far more on veterans and what they can offer in light of where our country is right now and where we are with needing procurement in our national defence and with the commitment our Prime Minister has made.

I have a question. I don't know how it really fits in, but it impacts me in my riding. We have a lot of manufacturers across Canada that work in the area of providing all kinds of materials that are made into something specific across the world, but they are not engaged at all within our own country and within the military side of procurement for Canada. They would really like to be.

Our Prime Minister mentioned in a speech just this weekend that we will be doing national defence procurement using our own resources—our steel, our aluminum, our rare minerals and our tech—but he has not spoken a lot about who's going to get to do this. How do you see that working?

I'll ask Mr. Grewal, first of all, and then I would like to ask Mr. Blanchard. It seems that you have an inroad there. Is that true?

• (1220)

Arjun Grewal: I would say the inroad is a result of trying to be everywhere every time, and highlighting some of the values that not only I but other veterans bring to the table, especially in that context.

Being here and speaking here on behalf of IMT.... One of the teams I work very closely with is a manufacturing company—one of Canada's largest defence companies, as I mentioned—that is completely sovereign and Canadian-owned. I would say the private sector is now starting to rotate in that direction to look at how to onboard the existing talent across the forces and across the veteran community as well.

It is incumbent upon manufacturers and private businesses to do that outreach, whether it is on LinkedIn, on other social media channels or in veteran job markets, where we can help amplify that link and share it more widely.

Cathay Wagantall: I would suggest, then, that there should be a way for businesses that exist and are very effective around the world to be part of this dynamic and have the opportunity to employ veterans as well.

Arjun Grewal: Absolutely. One of the points I'd like to make is that this is, of course, a Veterans Affairs Canada policy. It should be coupled with economic policy, because incentivizing corporations to go out and buy veteran, just as we're buying Canadian, would be a boon not only to the veteran landscape but also to our economy.

Small businesses across Canada employ 5.8 million people. We have 6,000 veterans leaving the forces every year. If 20% of them were to start small businesses, that would be quite an economic engine.

Cathay Wagantall: That's right. There's no question that we need all hands on deck at this point in time.

You mentioned something that I would like to speak to Mr. Blanchard about. You both talked about the availability of the education and training benefit.

Mr. Blanchard, it sounds like you are quite engaged already. If I look at what we've been discussing at this committee about entrepreneurship and veterans, you have a significant inroad and handle on what is truly needed. Can you talk to me about access to the education and training benefit, please?

Joseph Blanchard: The ETB, or the education and training benefit, is available to all veterans. There are different stages. From zero to six years, there's \$6,100. From six to 12 years, there's \$48,000 or \$49,000. For over 12 years, \$99,000 is available.

We've been working with several universities and training institutions across Canada to connect through networks with the Veterans Entrepreneurship Hub, or Vet-Hub, to be able to meet companies and look at what type of training pathway we can create with the education partners that will provide an opportunity within, we'll say, the manufacturing industry.

Cathay Wagantall: As you were talking about your four areas, you said "we will do". Are these things that the Vet-Hub is not currently doing? When did you begin this process, and how are you financed?

Joseph Blanchard: Approximately six years ago I started Vet-Hub. I'll call it "bootstrapping the organization". Today, I'm working with a partnership on the east coast, where we're doing our proof of concept. We're going to prepare a proposal at the end of that with our vet dev organization down east, which we'll present to acquire money to build and scale the capacity of Vet-Hub right across the country.

• (1225)

Cathay Wagantall: I'm sorry; I'm not quite sure I understood. Who is your partner?

Joseph Blanchard: I'm in discussions with the Nova Scotia government, St. Francis Xavier University and ACOA.

StFX has an entrepreneurship wing that will deliver entrepreneurship training. It's called the Coady Institute.

Cathay Wagantall: You do have government support at this point in time.

Joseph Blanchard: The government support is mostly through discussions with members of Parliament and ministers. Through the procurement piece, I've met with Deputy Minister Reza and her team, and we're looking at an opportunity there.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Blanchard. I'm so sorry again.

Now, for six minutes, we have Ms. Hirtle.

Alana Hirtle (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much for being here, and thank you for your continued service.

I'd like to start with Mr. Steed.

What motivated you to pursue entrepreneurship after military service rather than pursuing employment in a larger or more traditional environment?

William Steed: I worked in the private theatre, basically, or private world, for quite some time. I bounced around quite a few jobs. I just never really seemed to fit in.

The way I typically did things was very forward and generally fairly aggressive. I attribute that to military training, which served me well while I was in the military, but it is very difficult for civilian companies to adapt to someone who comes into the organization as very forward that way and very mission-oriented. Once I signed on with a company, it was all for the company. It's just like the military; you're all for the military, so I was go, go, go. That was off-putting to a lot of companies, and I struggled with that.

I bounced around quite a bit, to the point where I just said, "Enough is enough. I'm going to do my own thing and start up from there." I basically grew it into a fairly successful business, and I have been enjoying it since then.

I encourage fellow veterans I work with to look at that as an opportunity as well. It's not for everyone, because there is a lot of stress, as the other business owners here will know, and you really have to pivot from the military way of thinking into the business way of thinking. It can be difficult, but for me it was almost a necessity, because I really didn't fit into a lot of companies that I was working for.

Alana Hirtle: What skills from your naval service informed your approach to operating a small business?

William Steed: Attention to detail was a big one, as well as always looking to adapt to any sort of roadblock that would come up, being quick to think on my feet—which is something that I attribute to the military for sure—and looking for ways around things.

Failure to adapt in the military is a failure. You have to adapt to equipment issues, personnel issues, environmental issues and things like that. That really gave me a head start in business, because things are coming at you five times a day that you may not expect, so you have to be able to adapt to them.

Those were the key things that I took away from the military that have helped me in business.

Alana Hirtle: That's wonderful. Thank you for that.

It's interesting to read about your business and blacksmithing and that you feel it helps veterans maintain focus and concentration. I'm thinking there's probably a very meditative aspect to working with steel.

Would you say that the hands-on aspect of blacksmithing helps veterans with managing their stress or their mental health challenges? We know that the physical and mental connection within the body is so great.

• (1230)

William Steed: Absolutely, 100%, and we've had some real success stories over the years with various programs we've put on.

I can give an example. One case we had was a very hardened special operator who spent years in the forces and suffered pretty badly from PTSD symptoms. When he took our two-day workshop at The Veterans Ranch in B.C., CBC came up and did interviews. He wanted to say his bit in front of the camera and CBC, and he actually broke down and said that this was the best he'd felt in years.

You're exactly right. We have a very meditative process. You're focused 100% on what you're doing, so your mind is clear. That seems to be an issue with a lot of vets suffering from mental health issues: Their minds are going a million times a minute. However, when you're blacksmithing, you have to focus on what you're doing. Otherwise, you get hurt, and pain is a great motivator for focus.

Luckily, I've taught thousands of people and we've never had an incident, and I want to keep it that way. We're very safety-conscious, but it always has to be in the back of the mind. I think that does help.

Also, creating something with your hands is very good for people. I think everyone should have some sort of creative outlet. We've introduced so many people to this, both civilians and veterans, throughout the years.

Alana Hirtle: That's great. Thank you.

I'm going to switch to Dr. Blanchard for a brief moment.

My colleague MP d'Entremont and I are both from Nova Scotia, so I was interested to hear from you. Can you expand very briefly on the partnership with StFX and the Coady Institute?

Joseph Blanchard: The opportunity I've been working on for the past year and a half is to put out the proof of concept and test it. The Coady Institute has all of the education and training, including the one-week boot camp. We used to do this with the POE, or Prince's Operation Entrepreneur, which is now the King's Trust. They don't do this anymore.

The Nova Scotia government is very interested in being able to fill this gap. They identified it as a gap in Nova Scotia for veterans. From that point of view, they've said, "Let's engage; let's start talking."

I've talked with ACOA, and they're very interested, not just from a Nova Scotian perspective but from an Atlantic perspective. We have the capability at StFX to run with the entrepreneurship training, and we're good to go.

The Chair: I'm so sorry, Dr. Blanchard. I'm looking at my colleagues with a very strong turn. It's my third time interrupting you, so I sincerely apologize.

Madame Gaudreau will have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

She will speak to you in French. Please put your earpiece in and make sure you can hear the interpretation clearly.

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Right off the bat, I said how pleased I was to see success stories like yours. So thank you. This will truly help us to make sound recommendations.

My first question is quite simple and it's for both Mr. Steed and Mr. Grewal.

Had you ever heard of the Veterans Entrepreneurship Hub, or Vet-Hub, before today?

[*English*]

William Steed: No. I've taken the information down, and I will be researching it.

Arjun Grewal: Joe and I know each other and have crossed paths a number of times, so yes, I've heard of it.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Excellent.

Now, my questions will be for Mr. Blanchard.

Since you have proof that a service like yours, which is potentially available to everyone but not everywhere in all provinces and in Quebec, what do you think about conducting a census of all organizations that provide support? Let's face it: Peer support is much more beneficial than general support.

Do you agree with me that it would be a good thing to start out with a comprehensive tool kit to provide support to veterans who are at the end of their career and are curious about business, or who want to start a business?

• (1235)

Joseph Blanchard: Thank you very much for the question.

Right now, there are many different organizations in Canada offering the same services. Many people are unaware of them, whether in British Columbia, Quebec or Nova Scotia. They know there are programs available to them, but that's it. In Canada, there is an opportunity to centralize all these efforts so that everyone can go to one place and find everything.

I've spoken with a few companies in Sherbrooke and an association that, like Invest Ottawa, helps people in the tech sector. However, it's pockets like that that are scattered all over the place. There's no centralized body.

My efforts, and the efforts of my new board of directors and my team, are aimed at centralizing everything and reaching out to veterans to let them know that there are educational and mentoring opportunities, and people who can help them, such as CEOs, CFOs and so on. Also, we're going to have money to help them start their business. It's not just for high-tech companies. It could also be a home business, a small carpentry business or something like that. In addition, we are a support unit in marketing, human resources, and so on.

In my field, I've seen this all across Canada. Now I want to know more about all the different things out there, such as the Veteran Business Network Institute, founded by Caleb Walker, who is a member of our board. We want to centralize it for everyone and communicate the information to everyone, not just on military bases, stations or shipyards, but also in rural regions, such as northern Quebec, Rouyn-Noranda or places like that.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Excellent.

Mr. Blanchard, you talked about a percentage of entrepreneurs who will, first of all, go through a lot or even not succeed in business, unfortunately.

Do we have the percentage of veterans who fail when they start a business?

Joseph Blanchard: Today, no. I'm striving to secure us more money to conduct studies. I have a Ph.D. in business administration. My specialty is entrepreneurship. I started another non-profit organization, an institute for research on veterans. We need more information in Canada about businesses. The Prince's Operation Entrepreneur has seen more than 6,100 people participate in its week-long training camps at various universities across Canada. However, there isn't any data on the successes and failures. There are no statistics for that.

I would like Canada to start having statistics so that it's possible to know how many of the 6,000 participants succeeded in the first year, and whether, for example, 50% of participants failed in the first year because they lacked money, education or mentorship from an experienced business owner.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Absolutely.

One of our recommendations will focus on traceability, but we will also have to get figures so that we can identify the gaps and address them. You have put us on the right track. Thank you.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Gaudreau, I very much appreciate the fact that I didn't have to interrupt Mr. Blanchard this time.

[*English*]

Starting our second round is Mr. Viersen for five minutes.

Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for their service and for being here today.

My questions are for Mr. Grewal.

I was just reading a press release from March 26 about the government's plans to spend half a trillion dollars on defence procurement over the next decade. I'm interested in a couple of things. First, are you seeing a shift in defence procurement? Are you seeing that money coming out in your direction?

Second, you talked about this northern camp where you do training for us and our allies. I anticipate that you interact with soldiers from other countries. Which country is doing a good job of that, and how do we get our veterans...? I assume our veterans have a talent pool, battlefield instincts and all this kind of stuff.

Warfare is changing. We can't necessarily just write it out on paper. For some of this stuff, a soldier is going to see something and say, "We need this." Coming to the committee and telling us about this takes a long time, so having veterans embedded in this whole process would seem to allow us to have some of that instinct.

Can you address those three areas?

• (1240)

Arjun Grewal: Absolutely. Thanks for the question.

The short answer is, yes, we are starting to see the investment. Those dollars flow down the hill into everything from start-ups to enterprises, through avenues such as BDC, which does such a good job of supporting start-ups writ large, with entrepreneurship across the citizenry, not only for veterans. That money is being deployed and it's starting to move.

On the veteran context and buy Canada, we would love to see "buy veteran". To show and prove some incentives for working with companies that are veteran-run, veteran-owned and sovereign would be a boon for that economic development question. We often work hand in hand. Frankly, we fought in the same wars and we do the same training, and we commiserate and hang out after service as well, with all of our Five Eyes and allied friends and our former colleagues.

A number of countries have invested in this space, which goes to my earlier point about this being equally an economic policy and a veteran policy. Our friends and partners down in the U.S. have the SBA, the U.S. Small Business Administration. That has a very dedicated avenue and some pathways for veterans. Capital support is immediate through their economic development agency, not through their veterans affairs. Even military spouses have familial avenues for starting businesses and supporting businesses. That's one highlight that I think we can learn a lot from and implement quickly.

As for numbers for my preparation for this meeting, \$1.6 billion has been deployed through that program over the last 20 years. They see a return on investment of almost \$1 trillion of economic impact a year from that. It's a return on investment for the Canadian population, which puts a lot of money, time and effort into training soldiers, who can then come out and leverage those learnings, that knowledge and that risk-taking, which is a large part of entrepreneurship.

Arnold Viersen: I followed with interest the war in Ukraine and saw how quickly the tactics of war have changed. In some ways, it's the very high tech versus the very low tech. It has been interesting to see the drone warfare and how we bring back netting and things like that. That's the battlefield instinct that I was talking about.

Part of it is about developing that through experience, and then you enter the private sector and have an idea for a business, but some of that can take years to develop. That's more like an R and D area.

The Americans have DARPA. They put out a lot of research investment through that. Do you see anything like that happening in Canada, or do you have a recommendation for something like that?

Arjun Grewal: We do. DRDC is a premier global organization under DND. Could they be more visible? Absolutely. Could they do more to integrate with soldiers—who still maintain the attributes of service after they leave service—to serve Canada? I would count myself in that. Many of my colleagues who have served also amplify and echo that.

DRDC, DND, ideas, minds...there are a number of avenues to them. They're clunky. They're slow. Today's conversation isn't necessarily about them, but I think Canada is moving in the right direction in that space, and building businesses from the end-user lens is going to be an enabler.

Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

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

For five minutes, we have Mr. d'Entremont.

Chris d'Entremont: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I always take home some interesting points when we have these presenters.

What I'm finding super interesting is the things that we make. An entrepreneur can do a whole bunch of different things, but I like it when people make things. Today, we've had T-shirts, blacksmithing and respiratory protection as we go around, and I'm really interest-

ed in how someone gets from a career in the armed forces to looking at entrepreneurship and then building something.

My first question is for Mr. Steed. Quickly, where does blacksmithing come from? What kinds of products for sale are you making? Thank you for the program you're doing with other veterans to get them into the business of blacksmithing.

• (1245)

William Steed: That's a great question.

While I was in the military, I was sent to technical school—fleet school, basically—in Halifax. I did an 18-month course there on engineering. There was a machining component. There were hydraulics components. We basically did second-year engineering. I was at the TQ5 level, but it was an excellent program. It was 18 months long, and I got a lot out of it.

When I left the military, I used that training for an apprenticeship in millwrighting. I was credited with three years towards that apprenticeship because of my military experience and training, so that was super helpful. They've changed that program for my MOC, and they do not offer quite the level that I received when I was in, which is unfortunate, but going forward, the military has its reasons for that.

I worked with metal. I worked with steel. I worked in manufacturing for different companies and really like to see things being built. I started blacksmithing as a hobby and started making small items for people.

Now what we do in our shop is decorative gates, decorative railings, art pieces and things like that, and a few small items as well, but we've transitioned more to architectural blacksmithing. Some of the stuff we've done could be larger projects, usually for businesses or individuals and home-based projects. We're creating what I like to call functional art. I like to make my pieces beautiful when they go out and have the customer very happy.

Chris d'Entremont: The next time you come out east, I have a couple of blacksmith spots. Le Village historique acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse would love to have you come spend some time showing them how to do some of their work.

I'll go to Mr. Grewal for a few moments.

You're building some cool products too. As a retired firefighter, putting on a BA is probably not the most fun thing to do in the world. What kind of products are you finding yourself building or at least accessing, or being able bring to the military and first responders?

Arjun Grewal: It's great to know that you have some end-user experience on that as well.

Gas masks and SCBAs are great pieces of equipment, but we use them for everything. There are very unique conditions and environmental and operational scenarios where those are overkill. The respiratory protection piece is important. The work I do with BurnPit-360 in the U.S. is important, and bringing that advocacy up here is part of it.

The reason I add that context is I think that's why we build things: to innovate, get better and continue to serve soldiers of the future who are going to benefit from the lessons we've learned. You see a lot of the veteran groups and business owners working in that direction.

We also, as part of IMT Group, build Canada's arsenal of 155-millimetre munitions. We're very proud of that. We work closely with other partners to commercialize those and get them into the supply chain for the Canadian Armed Forces and our allies. Building them is pretty exciting as well. Being an end-user who's been downrange receiving fires and executing fires and then being part of the supply chain to build them is something, to other committee members' points about building.... That's a driver.

Chris d'Entremont: Thank you.

• (1250)

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

Thank you, Mr. d'Entremont.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Witnesses, thank you for the high quality of your testimonies, which will enable us to draw a lot of recommendations.

Madam Chair, since I really don't have much time, I'd like us to now debate the motion that I put on notice on March 23. It concerns a very important matter—like this one, in fact—that we have held a number of meetings on. We have received a lot of emails.

Last Friday, I was at Ste. Anne's Hospital, where I spoke with a former EX3 from the forces who had to wait three years to receive care. He told me that he had to live in his car, even though he was married and had children. We really need to hear more to know what's going on. It's like a coin. There are three sides: the front and the back, but also the thickness, and I don't think we have gotten there yet.

I hope this doesn't turn into a partisan sparring match. This is for the good of our veterans. The goal is not to throw out the baby with the bathwater, but to shed light on this in a respectful way, to help our veterans, to be on the right track and to course correct if necessary.

The Chair: Ms. Gaudreau, you have 40 seconds left in the two and a half minutes you were given. You want to debate the motion, but we have three witnesses before us. Since I don't know how long that will take and there are 10 minutes left in the meeting, out of respect for the witnesses, I would like to release them before opening the debate on the motion. It's your legitimate right to ask for that, of course.

[*English*]

Out of respect, we will be saying goodbye to our three witnesses.

Thank you for your service. Thank you for everything you were able to contribute today. I really enjoyed listening.

With that, I will release the three of you.

Members of Parliament, we will continue to debate Madame Gaudreau's motion.

I will suspend for 30 seconds to say goodbye to Mr. Grewal.

• (1250)

(Pause)

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now continue.

Ms. Gaudreau, I don't know if you wanted to take the floor again.

[*English*]

Oh, it's Mr. Richards and then Mr. Casey.

Blake Richards: I will keep this brief because I'm really hopeful that we'll be able to pass this motion quickly.

I'm supportive of the motion, but I have one small suggestion as an amendment. I have certainly heard a lot of concerns, both in the meetings we've had and otherwise, that need to be explored further.

I'm fully supportive of and agree with the motion put forward by Madame Gaudreau, but I will move the following amendment. In her motion is a list of types of witnesses. I would add the Union of Veterans' Affairs Employees.

Obviously, when we studied this previously when it was first brought forward, the union expressed a lot of concerns. They seem to still have some concerns. I think it is important to hear their thoughts around this, so the amendment is to add them to the list of potential witnesses.

• (1255)

The Chair: We will discuss the amendment proposed by Mr. Richards.

Mr. Casey, do you want to speak to the amendment by Mr. Richards?

Sean Casey: No.

The Chair: Would anyone like to discuss the amendment proposed by Mr. Richards?

Do I have agreement on the amendment, or is it passed on division?

(Amendment agreed to on division [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Now we're on the main motion.

Mr. Casey, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Sean Casey: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The motion before us today is the result of a motion tabled on November 25, 2025, by Ms. Gaudreau. That motion proposed three meetings for this study. An amendment to add the minister to the list of witnesses was also proposed by Mr. Richards on November 25 and was adopted. We are now about to begin meeting number four. I understand that the committee decided to extend this study by dedicating a fourth meeting to it, even though I have no recollection of that.

I will speak to the motion before us today. The first line of the notice of motion tabled on March 23, 2026, is important:

That, in light of the testimony heard during the course of this study...

At that point, we had heard testimony from two meetings: March 21 and March 23. This motion is apparently based on the testimony heard up to that point, namely the testimony from Mr. Carter, Mr. Laidler, Mr. Bernard and the representatives of WCG Services, Veterans Affairs Canada and Lifemark. Those are all the testimonies that form the basis of this motion.

That leads me to ask myself the following question: What was said in those testimonies, which apparently form the basis of the motion, that required us to double the time allocated to this study? In my opinion, the answer to that question is that there wasn't any justification for that. It could have been said that there was something in the tabled documents, but there weren't any before March 23.

It's now April 13 when we're debating this motion, and, of course, we have heard other testimony since the notice of motion was tabled. That includes the testimony from the ombud, who said that 2% of all the complaints her office had received over the past three and a half years had been about this. Out of those complaints, she found six examples that were unfair. All of those complaints have been resolved, and no systemic issues were found. We also heard from the minister, who said the same thing: He had received almost no complaints from committee members or from other members.

What is the basis of the motion, then? It clearly isn't the testimony we have heard in this study.

I wonder whether it's justified to retraumatize the veterans who will be invited here. We have heard, through third parties, that the veterans we received were concerned about having to repeat their stories several times. However, they will be invited here to do so again.

• (1300)

That's my concern. Apparently, there is no basis for this motion.

I want to put those comments on the record. We're ready to vote today, but I want to be absolutely clear that I think the motion is not justifiable, given the way it's being proposed.

As you know, when we set a schedule and come to a decision, then change the route and the implementation, I have a real problem with that. We're still here. It's mission creep.

Thank you very much.

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

I would like to tell all the committee members that, pursuant to the motion that was adopted by the entire group before this debate, a fourth meeting has been added to the three initially scheduled meetings. That means we have two and a half hours left. I want to make sure that everyone is aware of that.

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, when a study is proposed, it's because we want to investigate. It's because there have been whistle-blowers.

In any case, this may not be the case for you, but since I was appointed as the veterans affairs critic, a lot of people have been coming and going. It's important to get to the bottom of this. If everything is going well, that's great, but if things aren't going so well, the situation has to be corrected.

I tabled the notice of motion on March 23 because we were told that things were going fine. If the organizations tell us that things are going fine, I start to have questions. The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs is also one of the committees that the public listens to the most, because we're talking about their lives. Obviously, these people said to themselves, "Come on!"

It isn't a matter of hearing from people to retraumatize them or harm them. On the contrary, it's a matter of having professionals, union representatives and researchers contribute to the study's findings. Right now, if we were to compile all the testimony and table the draft study, I can tell you that not only has a lot happened since March 23, but it would be a serious failure to hear the truth.

For me, there were still some organizations left to meet with. If the Partners in Canadian Veterans Rehabilitation Services had come to us and said, "here are our flaws, and here's what we're going to fix", that would have been one thing. However, that isn't quite what was said. We were instead told that, given this or that, things were going fine. However, that isn't what I'm hearing. Not a day goes by without a veteran calling me. I don't know if you get calls, but I do.

Obviously, I think that nothing in life but politics goes through major change. I have no lessons to take from my colleagues on either side. In fact, right from the start, I asked that we not engage in partisanship to try to save one side and protect another.

We want to get to the bottom of this, and we're calling for three more meetings. There are people we have not seen. We'll be able to complete the study properly so that everyone is respected and heard.

• (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Casey, did you want to request something?

Sean Casey: We're prepared to pass it on division as amended.

The Chair: Just to make sure, I think I'm hearing that in the spirit of collaboration, members are willing—and that's not for me to preamble—to accept the motion on division. Is that agreed?

(Motion as amended agreed to on division)

The Chair: With that, I will adjourn.

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