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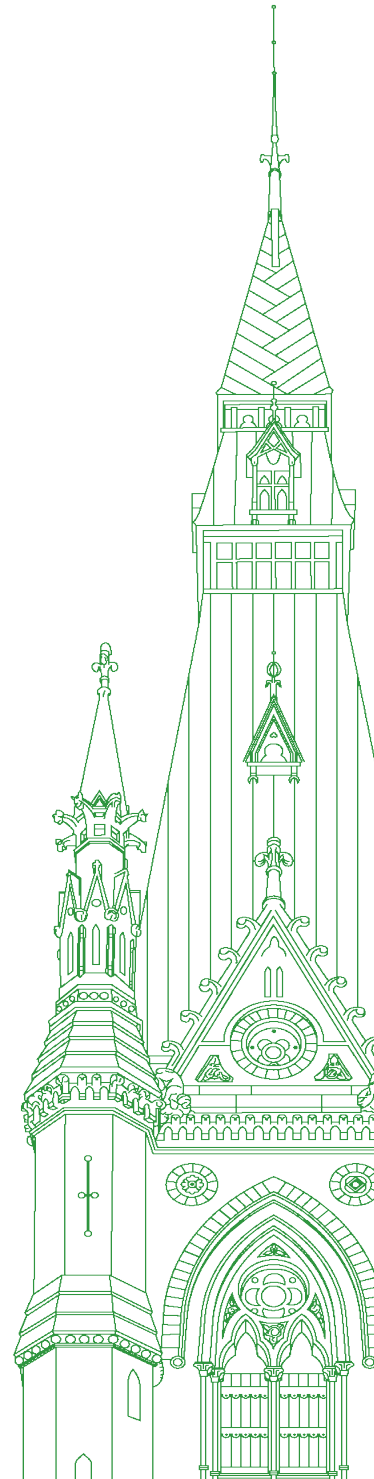
Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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Monday, October 5, 2026

Chair: Marie-France Lalonde



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• (1530)

[Translation]

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

Welcome to meeting number 42 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on May 27, 2026, the committee is meeting to begin its study on the civilian recognition of military skills.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members and witnesses may attend in person or remotely using the Zoom application.

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

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, 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: French, floor or English. Those in the room can always use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

[Translation]

For members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. There are no members on Zoom today. We're all in person.

I would now like to welcome our first panel of...

Mrs. Chatel, do you have a point of order?

Sophie Chatel (Pontiac—Kitigan Zibi, Lib.): Madam Chair, I just want to say how happy I am to be joining this very fine committee. Thank you very much.

I would also like to point out that we have two new vice-chairs, the first vice-chair, Mr. Barrett, and the second vice-chair, Mrs. DeBellefeuille. I would like to congratulate them.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Chatel.

Yes, we held elections at the last in camera meeting. Two members have been elected as vice-chairs.

Mrs. Chatel, I would also like to welcome you to our committee, which you are joining as parliamentary secretary.

I would now like to welcome our first panel of witnesses.

[English]

As an individual, we have Mr. Angus Cameron, veterans advocate. From the Veteran Business Network Institute, we have Mr. Caleb Walker, director.

Mr. Walker, you are joining us by video conference. I am very happy to see you.

Each of our witnesses will have up to five minutes to deliver their opening remarks. We will then proceed to a series of questions with the members of the committee.

Mr. Cameron, I will open the floor to you for five minutes.

Angus Cameron (Veterans Advocate, As an Individual): Good afternoon, Madam Chair, vice-chairs, committee members and veterans.

First, I'd like to thank Veterans Affairs and members of this committee for the opportunity to speak with you today on the important topic of civilian recognition of military skills.

For those who may not know me, my name is Angus or Gus Cameron. I'm a veteran of the Royal Canadian Navy. I spent many years having the privilege of advocating for veterans and their families, particularly in Nova Scotia. My efforts have taken me from local community initiatives all the way to Parliament Hill, advocating for issues such as veterans' record of service cards, veterans' licence plates, support for aging veterans and reducing barriers faced by former service members.

One thing I've learned throughout that journey is that veterans are remarkably resilient people. They are problem-solvers, leaders and mentors, yet despite these skills, many face challenges when they leave the military and attempt to explain the skills they have and what they are capable of doing to civilian hiring managers.

I want to be honest from the onset. I am not an expert on the technical details of civilian credential recognition, occupational equivalencies or labour market programs. There are other skilled individuals in this room who know those subjects far better than I do. What I do know is veterans. I have spent countless hours listening to veterans' stories, helping them navigate complex systems, supporting them through challenges and working to improve their quality of life.

In these conversations, a common theme appears again and again. Many veterans feel their years of military service, training and experience are not always fully understood once they enter the civilian workforce. A sailor may have managed complex technical systems worth millions of dollars, an infantry soldier may have demonstrated leadership under immense pressure and an aviator may have maintained equipment to standards that leave no room for error, yet when service ends some veterans discover they must start from scratch to prove they possess skills they have already spent years mastering. This can be very frustrating and, more importantly, it can mean missed opportunities—missed opportunities for veterans, for employers and for communities that would benefit from their experience.

The good news is that progress has been made. Programs such as the military-to-civilian occupational equivalency tool help veterans translate military occupations into a language that civilian employers can understand. Career transition services help identify transferable skills and career opportunities. The national veterans employment strategy is encouraging employers to recognize the value veterans bring to the workplace. Education and training benefits provide opportunities for veterans to obtain additional certifications and qualifications where needed. These are all positive steps in the right direction. However, I believe there is still work to be done.

Civilian recognition of military skills is not simply about paperwork or certifications. It is about understanding the value of service. It is about ensuring employers, professional bodies, educational institutions and governments recognize the knowledge, discipline, adaptability and leadership that military members have developed throughout their careers. It is also about removing unnecessary barriers. When a veteran leaves the Canadian Armed Forces, they should not have to spend years convincing people of their worth. The focus should be on helping them transition their experience into new opportunities as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

As someone who has spent much of my advocacy work helping veterans access benefits, services and support, I can tell you in full confidence that successful transitions matter. Meaningful employment matters. Being recognized and respected matters. Many veterans are looking for a chance to continue contributing to their communities after service. They are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for fair recognition of the training, experience and commitment they have already demonstrated while serving Canada. I believe this is a goal all of us can support.

As we begin today's discussion, I look forward to hearing the expertise in this room and learning more about the initiatives already under way. I also hope we can continue working towards practical solutions to make life easier for veterans and create stronger connections between military service and civilian opportunities. After all, if we truly value the service of our veterans, we should value their skills, the skills they gained while providing that service.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to veterans. I look forward to today's discussion.

• (1535)

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

Certainly on behalf of all our members here, thank you for your service, sir, and your years of advocacy.

I will now invite Mr. Walker to do his presentation.

You have five minutes, Mr. Walker.

Caleb Walker (Director, Veteran Business Network Institute): Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the invitation.

My name is Caleb Walker. I served 20 years as an officer in the Canadian army, did three tours to Afghanistan and retired as a lieutenant-colonel. After I took off the uniform, I spent several years as a country manager for WithYouWithMe, helping veterans move into technology careers. Today, I'm a director at 123 Cyber, where, together with the Commissionaires, we're building a veteran workforce of fractional company security managers for the Canadian defence industry.

I've seen this problem as a veteran, as someone placing veterans and now as an employer. The message is simple: Canada doesn't lack skilled veterans; it just lacks a way to see their skills. Let me show you what I mean.

The Canadian Armed Forces has an online tool called MNET that matches military occupations to civilian jobs. I entered into the tool "infantry chief warrant officer". That's someone who has 30 years of service, several deployments and who, typically, works with the command officer to do HR management for 400 soldiers. The tool matched them to an HR director, which is good, but every HR director posting I found asked for a university degree, which the soldier doesn't have.

Today, AI screening software rejects the applicant before the human even reads the file. I watched this happen to a friend. He'd been responsible for 60 soldiers. He applied for a federal public service job, but he didn't even get screened for an administrative assistant position because his military leadership doesn't count as relevant experience.

I see three reasons for this.

First, Canada has no national skills framework. Australia, by comparison, holds a country-wide licence to a skills framework for the information age, free for anyone to use. Its public service, its contractors and its training providers all describe digital skills in the same language. In Canada, every employer or university invents its own, and military experience fits none of them.

Canada does have a skills for success program, but that covers only nine foundational skills, like reading, numeracy and collaboration. I can't describe what a chief warrant officer, who's managing HR for 500 soldiers, actually does, or what a cybersecurity manager needs to know. What Canada lacks is a common framework for occupational and technical skills that employers, training providers and governments all use.

What does this look like? As an aside, Canada invested \$250 million into an upskilling for industry initiative, which is run by Palette Skills. All the training is in silos, with no common skills framework. If you have been trained in agricultural technology, there's no way to translate those skills to clean technology. All different training providers use different skills frameworks.

The second issue is that we default to degrees, and our own programs reinforce it. For veterans with 12 years of service, VAC's educational training benefit is worth up to \$96,000, but only about \$6,000 of that can go to short courses. More than 90% is locked into college or university programs. A veteran with a mortgage and a family, who needs a three-month certification, can't use most of it, so most of the money stays in the system.

Third, until recently Canada paid little attention to the defence industry, so that industry never became a natural landing place for veterans in the way it does among our allies. At Lockheed Martin in the U.S., about one in five employees is a veteran. At Babcock in the U.K., it's roughly one in seven, and at Raytheon Australia, it's more than one in three. In Canada, we don't know the number because no one counts it. In the United States, every major federal contractor must report how many veterans it hires every year.

Here is the evidence that skills aren't the problem. At WithYouWithMe, we placed 130 veterans into federal IT jobs. We did it by upskilling them, building them up for two years with civilian experience they could put on paper. In the commercial sector, after hundreds of attempts, we placed zero. In Canada, it's just too fragmented, and there's no incentive to hire veterans. What works is defining the role and assessing people against it. That's what we are doing right now with the Commissionaires. We recruit the veteran, we train them and we certify them against clearly defined security roles. Those veterans help Canadian companies meet the security requirements to compete for defence contracts. As defence spending grows, this is the kind of pipeline Canada needs.

This isn't a veterans problem only. Newcomers in Canada and anyone whose skills are learned outside of a classroom hit the same wall. Fix it for veterans and you'll fix it for them too.

I have three recommendations: One, adopt a national skills framework, starting with the federal public service and defence suppliers, and map military occupations to it. Two, let veterans use their full educational and training benefit on short, industry-recognized certifications. Three, require federal defence suppliers to re-

port veteran hiring, as most countries do, including the United States.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Walker. Thank you also, on behalf of this committee, for your years of service and, certainly, for being an advocate for the network institute.

We will now open the floor for the first round of six minutes.

Mr. Barrett, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

Gentlemen, thank you both for your service to Canada. We're tight for time, so I'll try to move through short questions with short answers to solve a long-running problem.

I'll start with you, if I could, Mr. Cameron. How soon before release should the transition to civilian employment actually begin, and is it your belief that the support is starting early enough right now?

Angus Cameron: I believe that it should start as soon as possible. I know there's a program that you can take part in during your last six months once you get your release date, but, really, the veterans who have a lot of years of service should be thinking about this question way early, like maybe even a year or two before release. I think the information should be made available to them, and I think they should start thinking about it early.

Michael Barrett: Mr. Walker, I'll ask you the same question on how far in advance we should be prepping our releasing soldiers for civilian employment.

Caleb Walker: I would take a different tack. It's a broken system if you have to start planning for your transition 10 years before you transition out. There should be some underlying frameworks or translation that's done for you so that it becomes relatively easy to switch over to your new role and, if you want to make sure your military is mission-ready and mission-focused, they shouldn't be spending two or three years. That's expensive. You can't really spend that time.

Most mid-level managers are doing operational deployments. They have their children, and they have other commitments. If they're also going to be planning for their exit at the same time, they'd end up doing everything badly. Give them time to prepare, yes, but that shouldn't be the main focus of your military career. You should instead have ways to adjust your skills to larger society quite quickly, and then it should also be tracked and championed.

Companies should be reporting how many veterans they are hiring, particularly in the defence sector, so that it becomes easy and something that people want to do. They will want to hire veterans because then they can report that they're hiring veterans.

• (1545)

Michael Barrett: Mr. Walker, would you say then that there's value, when we're recruiting, in telling people what their opportunities are with these jobs later and what civilian equivalency might look like?

Take a look at a particular trade. I was a lineman. If someone sees that the average time of service for a lineman is, let's say, 15 years, and they're going to reach.... It's a small trade, and sergeant is the most common rank that they retire out at. Should we draw a straight line at recruiting to show that most soldiers find post-military employment in this field?

To build on to that, when we look at college diplomas right now, there are lots of schools that also say that if you complete this diploma, you can apply it through a PLAR to a different university and then only need to complete one additional year of schooling.

You can leave as a sergeant from the line trade and, by only taking this six-month upgrading, which is covered by your release benefits, then you'd have employment and the salary range would be x . Should we be that forward thinking so it isn't something they're trying to build during their career but, in fact, is something that we've already developed for them?

Caleb Walker: Yes, exactly. One of the best ways out there to recruit is to have a bunch of successful 40-year-old veterans who did time in the military. It's quite common in other countries.

Obviously, in WithYouWithMe, I used to work with our Five Eyes partners, and Canada has a weird relationship with the military where you basically have to serve 20 or 25 years; otherwise, did you really serve enough? Compare that to the American military, where it's once a marine, always a marine—three years.

You should be really identifying how that service jump-started and enabled you into it. As you stated, we should be able to use the skills from being a sergeant in the infantry and say, you basically have all the skills required so here's a quick update for six months. You have children and a family, and you have to support them, so you can't just take four years off to do a bachelor's degree.

I'll be honest with you. I work in the defence industry. The defence industry is screaming for talent right now, so you'd want to start propelling all those senior NCOs with all those experiences and skills, give them quick updates, and then they're delivering support.

Michael Barrett: If I may, I'll ask for a quick answer from both of you.

Do you believe that the government exploring expanding the principle of giving preference in federal contracting to companies that employ a minimum percentage of veterans would be to the advantage of Canadian enterprises as well as our retiring members of the Canadian Forces?

I'll give each of you about 15 seconds for a reply.

We'll start with Mr. Walker.

Caleb Walker: Yes, and I actually talked at the last.... I think it was on veteran entrepreneurship. I think having something like that would not only enable small and medium-sized businesses but also enable all Canadian small and medium-sized businesses as well. That's what they do in the States.

Michael Barrett: Thank you.

Mr. Cameron.

Angus Cameron: Yes, absolutely, I agree with your statement. They should do that. You might treat your veterans well, but you also have to remember that when they retire, they're going to be contributing to the communities, cities and towns across Canada. Your investment is long-term. That's a good thing to remember.

Michael Barrett: Thank you both.

Thank you, ma'am.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will have six minutes for Mr. Clark.

• (1550)

Braedon Clark (Sackville—Bedford—Preston, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here today and for your service.

Thank you to all of my colleagues for agreeing to take on this study. I think it's one that we all agree is very important and time-sensitive in a lot of ways.

Mr. Cameron, I'll start with you, if I could.

Sir, it's great to see you. I know the work that you've done on behalf of veterans in Nova Scotia, so thank you for doing that.

I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about your personal experience, the work you did while you were in service, the skills you developed over that period of time, which I know was quite a substantial period of time, and how you were able to transition those skills—or in some cases perhaps not—and maybe the lessons we can learn from your personal experience in this regard.

Angus Cameron: Okay.

I had a good transition into the civilian field after 26 years of service. I took that six-month program where you find an employer that will hire you. He doesn't even have to pay you, because you're still getting your military pay. You just work eight to five, or eight hours per day or whatever the case, with this civilian employer. You get comfortable with the job and working in the civilian world while you're still serving. That was a six-month thing. I worked for a dive company, and I was their deckhand on a boat.

When I retired after the six months, I went to school in P.E.I. to become a boat captain. I got my tickets and I came back to the company. I ran the boats for the dive company. I did that for 16 years. It was a great transition. I have no complaints whatsoever. I was lucky. I'm a marine engineer, and I was able to get my small boat marine engineering ticket along with my captain's papers, so I was a dual ticket on the boat. I was saving the company money because it didn't have to send another guy.

I had a good transition, and I support the six-month trial with a company when you're getting ready to release.

Braedon Clark: You had a bit of a soft launch, if I could say it that way, to figure out what was working and what might not be working.

Angus Cameron: I did.

Braedon Clark: Last week, we were all in our constituencies. I was at the Bedford Legion, which is one of the legions in my riding. I'm sure you've been there and are familiar with it. I knew this study was coming up, so I was just shooting the you-know-what with some of the veterans there. They said they thought the issue—and you touched on this—is not that the skills aren't there. Obviously, the skills are there. It's just that there's a translation piece that seems to be missing too often.

In your mind, could you pinpoint, in your experience personally and then in working with veterans, what that gap is that exists in translating those skills, and what's the number one thing we should be thinking about to try to close that gap?

Angus Cameron: I think some of the problem is provincial. The federal government sets out a plan to transition veterans, and then it gets to the province and the province says, "No, you can't be a Red Seal. This is Ontario. You can't do it." In Nova Scotia, you can do it, but you can't do it in New Brunswick. You can do it in Saskatchewan. Therefore, we have to have a standard here. We have to go across Canada and get a standard. We have to talk to the provinces to say, "Listen, a marine engineer in Nova Scotia is the same marine engineer in Alberta," and that kind of thing.

Braedon Clark: I'm a former member of the provincial legislature. I know the chair is as well, so you're preaching to the choir on that. I think that's a really important topic: transferability.

Angus Cameron: Yes.

Braedon Clark: If you have one skill in one province, it should be very easy to port that.

Mr. Walker, I'll just touch on a couple of things with you in the two minutes I have here.

In your opening comments, you touched on some major companies in other allied nations. I think you mentioned Raytheon Aus-

tralia, where one-third of the people employed are veterans. You also mentioned that we don't have that data accessible in Canada. In those other countries, do those things happen organically? Are they required? Do you know how they get to that level of participation, which is really high?

Caleb Walker: In the United States, all contractors are supposed to state how many veterans they hire. They have to, and it's relatively easy to do. There's also the 3% of all small and medium-sized businesses that have to be veteran—military and service-disabled. It increases the number of veterans in the defence supply chain with just those two small programs and ends up being massive. In my previous testimony to the House of Commons, I think I reported that something like \$80 billion goes into veteran-owned small and medium-sized businesses in American defence because of that rule in particular.

Yes, other countries track it. Canada doesn't. I guess whatever you track is what's important to you, so companies don't see a reason to do it. There's a huge opportunity here, I would think, to include that in terms of reporting on contracts. That way you can have a better understanding of how much engagement we're having with it.

• (1555)

Braedon Clark: In about 20 seconds—I know I'm putting you on the spot here—you touched on the defence industry. Obviously, we're spending a record amount on defence. Nova Scotia has a huge defence industry. I would assume that this would be an area of low-hanging fruit. There are obvious synergies and skill transfers. That's fair to say, I would assume.

Caleb Walker: Yes. I was hoping it would be a relatively easy one to jump into. I would recommend that.

Braedon Clark: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Gentlemen, Mrs. DeBellefeuille will address you in French.

[English]

I hope you're bilingual, but if unfortunately you haven't mastered our French language, make sure you have the translation in English for your understanding.

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for six minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille (Vallée-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. You really are a role model. This is the first time I have been given such a fine introduction to ensure that the witnesses understand me properly, so thank you very much.

First, I have to apologize, because this is my second meeting as critic on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Please excuse my questions if they seem to be elementary, but I will learn. I'm a fairly quick learner.

Mr. Walker, I read the 2023 report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs entitled "National Strategy for Veterans Employment" and all its recommendations. Today, I understand that we're assessing the gaps between what was requested or recommended to the government in 2023 and what the situation is now. Has there been any progress? If you had to give a grade, would you say that the government has made enough progress? Have there been any improvements following the 2023 report, in which parliamentarians around the table identified gaps and made recommendations?

After that, there was also the 2023-24 departmental plan, which prioritized a core responsibility, as part of the national strategy, to ensure that veterans have a better transition to civilian life.

Do you think there has been an improvement as a result of the 2023 report and the adoption of the departmental plan?

[English]

Caleb Walker: Without having the metrics in front of me, I think it would be hard for me to say—other than to give my own opinion. First, as discussed in my introduction, I would say that Veterans Affairs has an impact in only a small way on a larger problem that affects the workforce of Canada. It's because there's no actual real skills framework across the country. There is one for university degrees, where there are frameworks that are captured across the country, but for college apprenticeships and everything else, as was already discussed by the other witness, they don't translate between provinces. It's a mishmash of provinces, universities and employers. In that case, in a larger system, it's part of a broken system.

That being said, I think VAC actually has an Agile contract, where they get a company to help veterans find jobs. They help them write résumés and they help them move forward. From the feedback I've gotten from people who have used that service, it's been quite good. It's helped a lot of people.

It seems as though they're doing a good job in what they can change, but it's part of a larger broken system. I guess that's my feedback.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: My understanding is that there are a number of initiatives, but there doesn't seem to be a Canadian discussion table that brings together representatives from all the provinces so that they can, among themselves, make decisions on the recognition of certain skills, which could be transferred to the education sector, whether at CEGEP, for Quebec, or at university.

My understanding is that there are certain initiatives, but there doesn't seem to be a common desire to create a forum for discussion so that the provinces and Veterans Affairs Canada can negotiate. It's a known fact that education is under provincial jurisdiction and that the provinces are therefore essential partners in the national strategy.

Do you think discussions with the provinces are being held in a formal way? Is there a discussion table? Do you think the government is able to mobilize all provincial partners to address the issue of education and reach certain agreements on the recognition of basic skills, for example?

[English]

Caleb Walker: Yes, I think this is part of a larger strategy that I've heard the Prime Minister talk about: how we should be trying to have the same amount of economic movement between the provinces, compared to north and south. There are trade barriers, skills barriers and employment barriers between the provinces that are holding us up across the country. I mean, for everyone, as military members, you move across the country. It's not uncommon that your spouse's work is medical and a nurse or a teacher has to up-skill or change their training and skills for every province they work in because there's no translation, for some reason.

Hopefully, as we're dealing with some of these larger problems within the economy, we will try to have everyone on the same common framework, not just for universities but for apprenticeship skills and upskilling. It's important not only for veterans, who are a very small population. It's important when you onboard newcomers into the country and have immigrants joining the workforce. It's important for people who leave the workforce and join, and it's important for people who have to change careers quickly. We have to sort that out going forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Walker. I'm sorry. Our time is up.

We will now start our second round for five minutes with Mr. Tolmie.

Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to congratulate my colleague from across the aisle who said he went out shooting last week, even if it was just the breeze. I don't believe he hit much, but....

I'd like to thank our witnesses for joining us today. Thank you for coming back, Mr. Cameron and Mr. Walker. I believe you've been on this committee before and we've done some questioning.

Mr. Cameron, I think you have one of the most Scottish names, and I see your Cameron tie. I was just in Scotland. My dad used to call it "the holy land". I was over there just recently.

I have a couple of questions.

Mr. Walker, I'm going to start with you. We hear in the news about people losing their jobs—500 people, say, or whatever—and then we hear about people getting jobs. Sometimes these jobs are part-time jobs, and people are counted as being employed. Should the government, when measuring veterans and their employment, include pay, skills, contentment and full-time versus part-time work when they're doing their measurements?

Caleb Walker: Yes. If they don't already do that now, then yes, they should be. Obviously, you want to have as successful a veteran community as possible. If their job is not making enough for them to live, effectively, that would be an issue. That's an important statistic.

Also, if they are working part time, you want to know. A lot of veterans, because of their age bracket when they leave the military, or just because they have pensions, do choose to work part time. Yes, all that information would be important in starting to understand the veteran community. I don't think we have a lot of statistics on the veteran community in Canada, which is an ongoing problem.

• (1605)

Fraser Tolmie: Okay. I have another question for you before I go to Mr. Cameron. You mentioned AI, and a lot of what's been presented today is about key people in key positions and is competency-based. How do we overcome that for veterans who have these life skills and abilities so that they can find meaningful employment and be those key people who are put into key positions?

Caleb Walker: Hopefully, the technology is going to help people who already know how to do their job well to be able to do it faster. It's like what you've seen in the computer programming world with how these 10x programmers are able to do more with AI. There are key skills, particularly in the defence industry, that veterans would have. Actually, AI and technology should be able to make those veterans 10x veterans in those industries as well.

You have 10x salespeople. You have 10x program managers and project managers, who are able to use technology and AI to do their jobs quite well. I think there are key competencies in security, leadership and probably other aspects to most of the veteran community that, when they match in with AI, would be quite useful.

Fraser Tolmie: Okay.

Caleb Walker: There are probably larger things to talk about than that.

Fraser Tolmie: I'm sorry. We don't have enough time, but thank you for taking a stab at it.

Mr. Cameron, you said meaningful employment matters and recognition for service matters. Quite often, we see in the U.S. that military service is a vehicle for employment and future employment, and we don't see that as much here in Canada.

Do you feel that Canadians don't recognize veterans as much in future employment when they're looking to recruit and hire?

Angus Cameron: I think it's getting better. It wasn't so great back in the day, but I do see myself being thanked for service with "thank you", "how are you doing" and that kind of stuff. I do think that veterans are being recognized better as of late.

Fraser Tolmie: You deserve it, so thank you for your service, gentlemen, and for your time. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now have Ms. Royer for five minutes.

Zoe Royer (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First and foremost, I want to thank our witnesses, Mr. Cameron and Lieutenant-Colonel Walker, for your extraordinary service to Canada, your 26 years and your 20 years.

I know a little bit about that. My husband is a veteran. He served 22 years in the air force, and he was also a military engineer. His last tour was actually in Bosnia, and then he retired. At that time in Canada, I think there was some kind of national movement with human resources companies that were working with municipalities, because they were recognizing the transferable skills that officers from the military had and putting them in areas of municipal management. His second career was in municipal management, but I think it was in recognition of those transferable skills.

My first set of questions will be for Lieutenant-Colonel Walker. I just want to highlight those three points that you made: adopting a national skills framework, veterans being able to use their full benefit, and then defence suppliers using veterans in their hiring practices. I know that the national skills taxonomy from Australia is very new, but they went through a lengthy consultation process.

Can I ask you this? What are the three most important skills that employers often overlook when they are considering a veteran?

Caleb Walker: It really depends on what industry you're talking about.

I'll narrow it a little to the defence industry. That's growing considerably. They understand the security space quite well. Since so few people serve in the military, it's actually a pretty useful skill. There are a lot of technology companies right now—dual-use companies—that are trying to get into the space and really have no idea what the military does or what capabilities they need. Veterans really understand that space.

In the defence industry, as well, most veterans will understand the compliance requirements you need, such as what kind of security you need internally for your company to keep it safe and in compliance so that it can sell contracts going forward. There are aspects that are quite important for the defence industry holistically.

The veteran community is actually quite diverse. There's a great difference between a general retiring and a master corporal retiring, for example. What I would say, if I focused in holistically on the junior NCOs, for the most part, is that a lot of them are still very young, very motivated, quite creative and typically are trying to get the job done by using quite a bit of initiative. You would usually see those people in a role where they are given a problem that most people would just give up on. They would work through the problem and solve it. A lot of the successful defence veteran-owned businesses in Canada right now are run by ex-sergeants, for example, because they know how to hustle and how to make something out of nothing.

That's not providing a very good answer to your question, but it's a very diverse population. There's a lot of hidden talent in the junior NCO and the senior NCO cohorts.

• (1610)

Zoe Royer: I guess if we were to develop that similar national framework, it would really create that common language around describing skills. I would add just a couple more, such as deployment and logistics. I know that there's a whole gamut.

Your program—

Caleb Walker: Actually—

Zoe Royer: Go ahead, please.

Caleb Walker: I probably ran out of time.

Typically, in the United States, with all the companies that sell to the American government, you see them overrepresented in logistics, cyber, security, consulting and IT. Most of those companies that supply the United States government are overrepresented by veterans and veteran-owned businesses.

Right off the top, everything that the Canadian government is looking to build right now with its defence investments would be overrepresented by the veteran community.

Zoe Royer: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

We'll go to Mrs. DeBellefeuille for two and a half minutes.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Cameron, from what I have heard, you are a regular at our committee. I want to hear your thoughts. If you had a single recommendation to make regarding all the discussions and debates on the transition from the military to civilian life, what would it be? What recommendation should we defend at all costs?

[English]

Angus Cameron: I was aware of people releasing prior to 1991. I remember when employers were really excited about having a veteran or a retired military member come to work for them. I see, nowadays, where maybe some employers are hesitant because there's a misconception—since we've been on missions that resulted in conflict—that a lot of veterans releasing are damaged and disabled, that they might have PTSD and are going to call in sick a lot,

so they wouldn't be a great person to hire for that job. That needs to go away.

We're the same now as we were prior to the Persian Gulf, when I deployed. There are military members who went to Afghanistan and came back. It seems to me that employers are hesitant. I guess education is the way to get rid of that hesitation. That's my opinion.

• (1615)

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

We now go to Mr. Diotte for five minutes.

Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): I thank the two veterans for attending this committee and for their service, of course.

As you know, this committee is studying how well military skills and qualifications transfer into civilian jobs after Canadian Forces veterans leave the military. There are some challenges.

First of all, I'd like to ask Mr. Cameron if he could give some specific examples of military members who have left the forces. What kinds of skills did they have? What did they apply for and what did they have to go through to get accepted in that job? For instance, say somebody was trained as an electrician and couldn't be hired as an electrician somewhere.

Angus Cameron: I'm aware that the training as of late has been reduced to address retention. In other words, they don't want to train us to this great, big, high level, because we're going to leave.

However, that's not the case. We want to do our careers. We want to do our time. Giving us less training just to get by and do our job is not a retention tool to keep people in the military. I think our training needs to come back up to a level where we are valuable to the military and also in the civilian world.

Kerry Diotte: Mr. Walker, go ahead.

Caleb Walker: Typically, I see it mostly in the senior NCOs, to be honest. For the most part, officers have a university degree. Canada likes university degrees for a variety of reasons—probably because most federal government employees have university degrees—so they typically find jobs out there.

It's not uncommon for senior NCOs to have decades of experience and knowledge, and the ability to do the majority of jobs. Most warrants and sergeants do officers' jobs when there are not enough officers, so they have all of the capability to do it.

In terms of individual examples of that.... Successful stories are not part of the public narrative or in the conversation very much, so a lot of the soldiers don't know what's possible. They think, "This job doesn't really match me very well, I'm not enjoying it, and I don't make a lot of money doing it, but I guess this is the kind of job I can expect."

You want to change the narrative around it. You want to champion and celebrate people who have successfully transitioned and are now doing really important jobs. A lot of that starts with a larger framework for the country, because it's that population that gets really chewed out because of the lack of a degree or something, going forward.

Kerry Diotte: Mr. Walker, you said that Canada doesn't really have incentives to hire veterans. Are there incentives that you're aware of to hire veterans in the U.S.A. or with other militaries?

Caleb Walker: Yes. Follow the incentive and I'll show you the outcome. In the United States, it's a population that's tracked nationally, so companies will let you know how many veterans they employ. Then there are certain benefits for companies to hire veterans as well. There are all kinds of programs like that.

I used to be in this space quite a lot. There's really no incentive for a company in Canada to hire a veteran. There are other programs. It's probably more likely that they get hired for some reason other than for being a veteran.

If you're looking in the diversity and equity groups, veterans never really come up in Canada. That's very different in other countries. It's probably because the defence industry has not been that important in Canada until very recently. Hopefully, that change and the importance of building that up will require a whole lot of veterans who are commercially savvy and have great experience to provide. Hopefully, they get brought into the sector and that becomes a very important piece of it.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, for the last five minutes in this round, we have Ms. Hirtle.

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

Good afternoon, gentlemen. Thanks for being here today.

I'll ask both of you this question: The thing that I'm wondering, first and foremost, is whether there are skills that are more—and, conversely, less easily—transferable from military work to civilian work.

Perhaps, Mr. Cameron, you could answer that first for me.

Angus Cameron: Sure.

I was talking to a friend, and she said that the combat arms trades are hard to transfer to the civilian world. You can have a master warrant officer or a chief warrant officer who just moved 200 peo-

ple—and all their gear, equipment and everything else that went with that—from A to B successfully, and set up. What is that skill? How does that skill translate? That job could never have been done unless he had the skills to do it.

There needs to be some kind of investigation or committee put together, or something, to talk about the skills that are not written, I guess you could say.

Alana Hirtle: That's an excellent point. Thank you for that.

Mr. Walker, what are your thoughts?

Caleb Walker: As a person who came from those trades—the combat arms trades—I used to jump out of airplanes and blow stuff up. Those skills are not particularly useful in a civilian company, though it depends on what kind of company it is—whether it's a legal one.

There are lots of other aspects around that, which are quite important. You see that a lot of people from combat arms are great at working in large companies: management, building strategy, briefing, leadership and selling. They have to sell a plan or an idea to their soldiers, or they have to sell a plan to their boss for it to get approved. A lot of those skills are the ones you want to pick up in a skills framework, in order to easily show that this is what you're getting. You're not just getting a person. I didn't blow stuff up 365 days a year. There was other stuff I used to do.

You have to talk more about those capabilities and roles compared with the traditional ones.

Alana Hirtle: I bet the blowing stuff up part was fun, though.

Caleb Walker: Yes, it was.

Alana Hirtle: I'm sure. That's cool.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Alana Hirtle: Mr. Walker, your program requires veterans to demonstrate a commitment to growing their business. I'm wondering if there are particular skills or areas of knowledge where veterans commonly seek additional support.

Caleb Walker: Yes, it's very hard to start to build a business as a veteran, to be honest. I've been on other panels that discuss this.

Traditional sales roles are not something that veterans are very comfortable with. They have a bad opinion of salespeople because the only time they ever meet them is when they're buying a car or a house, and they don't like those ones. However, they have the skill in them. They just have to know what that is.

Really, for business fundamentals, it could just be quick, small upskilling. You don't have to go and do a two-year MBA or a four-year business degree to learn those skills. A lot of people have started businesses without them, but more of that microtraining, upskilling and enablement would help them. Just getting the business fundamentals of accounting and everything—maybe just for a few weeks—would be a lot more useful than broadly saying that everybody has to go and do an MBA.

That's typically how most people learn their jobs anyway. A lot of salespeople start with a humanities degree, which doesn't teach them how to do sales at all. They learn on the job. They get mentored and become good at it.

That would be an example of it that I see, from the 200 to 300 veteran business owners I work with.

Alana Hirtle: Thanks. I used to work in business development, so I hear exactly what you're putting down there.

I'm going to run out of time, so I'm going to quickly ask both of you whether there are community organizations that you know of that help with the training of veterans for new roles outside the armed forces.

Mr. Walker, you can go first, quickly.

• (1625)

Caleb Walker: Yes, there's Helmets to Hardhats, which is great for trades. They're helping a lot.

That's kind of it.

Alana Hirtle: Mr. Cameron, do you have any that you would like to add?

Angus Cameron: I'm not aware of any. That doesn't mean there aren't any.

Alana Hirtle: That's fair enough.

Thank you both, gentlemen.

I'm two seconds shy.

The Chair: Yes. That's very good.

This will conclude our first panel.

I want to thank our witnesses for your service, for coming today and for sharing your comments and recommendations with us.

I will now suspend for about five minutes so our next panel can take their seats.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I would now like to make a few comments for the new witnesses.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses for this second portion of the meeting.

We have, from Collège La Cité, Annie Chartrand, vice-president, student services and business development, and Frédéric Thibault-Chabot, vice-president, academic and research.

[English]

From Morrow Consulting & Training Inc., we have Mr. David Morrow, chief performance officer.

[Translation]

Each witness will have five minutes for their opening remarks. Committee members will then ask their questions.

Ms. Chartrand and Mr. Thibault-Chabot, you have the floor for five minutes.

Annie Chartrand (Vice-President, Student Services and Business Development, Collège La Cité): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for inviting us to participate in your work on civilian recognition of skills acquired within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Collège La Cité, in Ottawa, offers nearly 90 programs in the fields of skilled trades, health sciences, emergency services and administration, to name just a few. We work hand in hand with employers and our public partners to effectively tailor training to labour market needs. Our college's language of training is French, but we teach technical language in French and English, which enables our graduates to work in both official languages.

The recognition of prior learning is a strategic priority for La Cité. We firmly believe that when a skill is demonstrated and relevant, it should get the recognition it deserves, which means, for example, that a person should not have to retake training for the sole purpose of confirming it.

Military members develop strong technical and professional skills, often accompanied by qualities of leadership, creativity and know-how acquired in the field. These skills and qualities deserve to be formally recognized and equivalent to certain learning units, for example, or even full courses.

To put this in concrete terms, we can quite easily imagine that a drafting and survey technician in the armed forces who wants to become a civil engineering and construction technologist could have all their courses in topometry, computer-assisted drawing and structures be recognized, for example. That pathway ultimately makes it possible to obtain all the credentials and micro-credentials for working in the skilled trades.

In addition to its approach to recognizing prior learning, La Cité advocates skills-based training. That enables us to assess what someone already knows how to do, identify what they need to master and build a tailored pathway to bring them to the career of their choice as quickly as possible.

Here's another example to illustrate this point: A veteran, say in artillery, could take carpentry training at the Centre des métiers Minto, in Orleans, learn how to build residential buildings and get a full-time job after just two 14-week semesters.

La Cité has expertise, infrastructure and programs that can be mobilized to serve the Canadian Armed Forces, veterans and the federal government to design tailored pathways for individuals or cohorts. In addition, with a federal capital investment in our infrastructure, we can double the intake capacity in the skilled trades.

In concrete terms, we find two approaches particularly promising. First, there is the training approach with predetermined pathways and recognition of prior learning. Here, we're thinking of the earlier example of someone who, after their military career, wants to embark on a new career in civil engineering.

There's also the entrepreneurial approach, with support and assistance in innovation. Think of La Cité's business administration programs, which can be taken online from Halifax to Victoria, as well as our expertise in applied research. It's an opportunity for veterans to put their expertise to work in the innovation and commercialization of dual-use technologies, thanks to dedicated support that leaves them with 100% of the intellectual property.

To take advantage of these two approaches, members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families need clear information about college pathways before leaving military service. La Cité can also help implement support measures, such as those included in the education and training benefit, to take into account all the challenges that veterans and their families face when it comes to transitioning into the labour market.

We aren't claiming that all the mechanisms are already in place. However, we clearly recognize that the post-secondary sector has a vital role to play. La Cité is able to immediately contribute to the government's goal of accelerating the transition of veterans and their families toward promising careers, while addressing critical needs in priority sectors across Ontario and Canada. To that end, La Cité is ready to work closely with the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence to implement concrete solutions, starting with an area where demand is particularly urgent: the skilled trades.

• (1635)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

I will now invite Mr. David Morrow, chief performance officer, for five minutes.

David Morrow (Chief Performance Officer, Morrow Consulting & Training Inc.): Good afternoon.

There are a lot of familiar faces here, and I think I might need a permanent seat over here. I don't know.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

David Morrow: I appreciate you guys continually inviting me. My offer still stands, by the way. As a consultant, I'll gladly offer my services, but I digress.

My name is Dave Morrow, and I served in the Canadian Armed Forces, for those who don't know me, for 15 years, including a deployment to Afghanistan in 2010. Today I'm also a founder, author and coach who has worked with veterans for over seven years, and I'm proud to say that I just started my own non-profit called the H2K Foundation.

I'm here to tell you that we are locking capable veterans out of the civilian workforce, and we're doing it with the very system meant to support them. Here's the core of it. When a veteran is injured and receiving disability benefits, the potential to translate military skills into civilian employment is severely limited. It's not because the skills aren't there; it's because using them puts your benefits at risk, so veterans stay on the sidelines. We have trained, disciplined people, people this country needs, and we have given them a direct financial reason not to work.

I know this first-hand. Before I had Veterans Affairs benefits, I worked as a teacher with no barrier and no hesitation, but once I was receiving benefits, my path back into the workforce narrowed sharply. The incentive flipped. The same skills that made me employable now came with a cost, because earning could mean losing the support I'd been granted for a real injury.

Disability benefits in the military context are not the same as in the civilian one, and I think this is hurting our community. If a civilian employer forced its employees to work out every morning or sent them into an unsafe work environment, let's say one with bullets flying over their heads, and they got hurt, they'd have every right to sue them. The military member doesn't have that right.

If I'm 80% disabled, it doesn't mean that 80% of my body doesn't work. It means my quality of life since joining has been reduced by 80%, and the only way to try to make me whole again is cash from Veterans Affairs Canada. This doesn't mean I can't make a meaningful contribution to the workforce. If I can work, it's despite my injuries, but I shouldn't be forced to choose between gainful, meaningful work and my injury benefits.

That's the trap, and I'm one of the lucky ones. I built a company. I found a way forward. Most veterans I coach do not have that runway, and they tell me the same thing that I lived: The system makes them choose between their stability and their contribution.

My ask to this community is simple. If we are serious about recognizing military skills in civilian life, we can't stop at credential translation. We have to fundamentally rethink how we compensate injured veterans. As it stands, we are not protecting them. We are sidelining them. We are taking people with the exact skills our country needs to thrive, and we are telling them to stand down.

Recognition of military skills is meaningless if the compensation structure punishes a veteran for using them. Fix the translation of skills, yes, but fix the disincentive at the same time or nothing changes on the ground.

I'm happy to take your questions, and I'm happy to share what I see every day with the veterans I work with.

Thank you.

• (1640)

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

We will now start our first round for the panel of our second hour.

Mr. Barrett, you have six minutes.

Michael Barrett: Thanks very much to our witnesses for being here.

I'll start with our witnesses from La Cité.

You talked, I think, about GIS in your opening. There's a full college equivalency for that. What is another example that would be widely understood where the necessary skills and experience are demonstrated but the training and education have to be repeated, and this could be resolved through a PLAR process—a prior learning assessment review process—but there isn't a framework in place?

I used the example in the previous hour that there are some college programs where, when someone applies for a program, they take a look and say, "Once you've completed this program, if you do one year at this university, you'll also get a degree". You'll have both a diploma and a degree. I suggested to the witnesses who were here that perhaps we should be doing this when we're recruiting for the Canadian Forces and saying, "When you leave the telecommunication line trade"—that's the trade that I was in when I was in the army as a sergeant—"here's the civilian pathway to employment for you." Then it's not incumbent on industry or the educational institutions to build the solution. I think that the Canadian Armed Forces needs to come to the table and say, "Here's what we're looking to do," and talk to the experts about how to do it.

What's another example of that? Perhaps it would be illustrative of how we can close that gap.

[Translation]

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot (Vice-President, Academic and Research, Collège La Cité): That is extremely interesting.

A concrete example could be, for instance, a veteran who has developed skills in mechanics. However, the fact that they have skills in mechanics doesn't mean that they can be, for example, a mechanical engineering technologist. They need to round out their skills and get a degree as well, because that's recognized in the world of employment.

However, it's extremely interesting to start right from the beginning and to see a path in advance, to see what might be possible for a veteran, for someone who is in a reserve unit or the army, or for their family. There are various ways to recognize prior learning. There are paths that are already set up, from a job in the armed forces to a second career. Other times, it requires a more personalized approach. We're talking about a veteran who has not only acquired mechanical skills, but also acquired other types of skills in the course of the tasks they had to perform.

We were talking earlier about very useful skills such as leadership, teamwork and so on. That has value. At La Cité, our entire educational structure is based on skills. In a given course curriculum, we have linked skills and can say exactly, based on a person's skill set, what course they have left to take or what learning unit they have left to complete. Learning units are smaller components than courses. That leads to different streams.

• (1645)

[English]

Michael Barrett: Thank you very much for that response.

If I can pivot to you, Mr. Morrow, thanks very much for your testimony. Thank you for your service.

You talked about the problems with the IRB. I think your story was very clear about why it doesn't work in its current form to create an incentive that gives the dignity of continuing to work while also receiving the benefit you earned as a result of having provided service with unlimited liability to your country.

What do we do? What's the change? Is there really a 70,000-foot view of the design that we should develop that would solve for this?

David Morrow: It's a great question, and it's one I think we really need to study.

It comes down to what we want our veterans to become at the end of the day. Do we want them to be productive members back in society? The only reason why I know of a different world is that I spend a lot of time in the United States with a lot of American veterans. Literally everyone I interact with has their “dream job” but they're still collecting their injury benefits. Their injury benefits aren't as good as ours. We have very good injury benefits but to get them is so hard, and then you're locked out of working.

I can tell you first-hand that those veterans, despite their injuries, seem to be doing quite well. I would love to see that type of structure here. It's not like we haven't had it in the past. My grandfather got injured during the Second World War. He got his injury pension, or his pension, and then continued to work for CN for the rest of his life with no clawbacks. He then enjoyed the rest of his 40 years as an able-bodied working individual in Montreal.

That's kind of what we have to come to grips with. What are we doing long term, and why do we have this incentive structure in place? I think that would be the most important question.

Michael Barrett: I would say that it does seem like we have a tendency, historically, to nickel-and-dime veterans. We just don't show up in the same way that they've shown up for Canada. Again, you described a workplace that couldn't be repeated in the civilian world. This isn't something that happened in the recent past. We have a systemic problem that we need to solve. We have modern veterans with a modern need. They want to contribute to the workforce, but they've also earned those benefits. I appreciate your feedback and look forward to hearing the rest of your testimony.

I thank the three of you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now have Mr. Fanjoy for six minutes.

Bruce Fanjoy (Carleton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Morrow, I'd like to start with you.

I appreciate your testimony, and I heard you very clearly about the problem of a disincentive for people adjusting to civilian life. I think that having gainful employment that suits a person's skills is not just important for making a living but also important for recovering and moving on with one's life.

I would like to ask you what challenges veterans encounter when presenting their CAF-earned training and qualifications to civilian employers after release?

David Morrow: It's a great question.

I can speak to my own experience, having started in the education field. That was my training. I have a bachelor of science degree in education and a master of education degree as well.

When I left the military initially, there was no recognition of the decade's worth of experience I had instructing in the military, so I had to start at ground zero. I started my degree a bit later. I had to participate in the very basic level of instruction of a four-year degree at McGill, which seemed, I'll be honest, like a waste of time. There was no mechanism for me to say that I had 10 years' experi-

ence in instructing and that I was a senior, non-commissioned member who had done the following courses and was more advanced than the average education student.

That would be one avenue of approach. It's not just the skilled trades that could benefit from a translation of skills. It also speaks to a broader kind of incorporation of military culture within Canadian society. There are just so few of us, and so few employers know that we even exist. When we come in front of their desks with our CVs, leading with the military is usually a bad idea. That, unfortunately, is just the nature of the beast here in Canada.

To answer your question, I would say that there has to be a broader conversation. Putting veterans in the media in a successful light would start changing the culture and give a bit more recognition to the fact that we can contribute a lot of great work and competencies to people's companies and organizations.

• (1650)

Bruce Fanjoy: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Chartrand and Mr. Thibault-Chabot, from your perspectives as representatives of a post-secondary institution, what role can colleges play in helping veterans translate their military skills, training and experiences into educational and employment opportunities in the civilian sector?

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot: The first step is to recognize the skills of military members and assess them.

Post-secondary institutions, particularly colleges, are responsible for shorter training, usually between one and four years, that makes it possible to secure jobs directly related to the most important and in-demand fields in Ontario and Canada. Their expertise is also in assessing skills and shortening the pathway to graduating and accumulating micro-credentials.

Sometimes, veterans are not even looking for a degree, but looking to acquire skills in business administration, for example, or to get support for innovation when they have interesting ideas that meet dual-use needs, such as for the military, and they want to keep the intellectual property.

That's what colleges do when it comes to innovation.

[English]

Bruce Fanjoy: Okay.

Madame Chartrand, go ahead.

[Translation]

Annie Chartrand: We have experience in this area. For example, we already do this with our general arts and science program, through which we train about 30 military members seeking to obtain a college certificate, year after year. Veterans simply have to submit their basic military qualification and have two years of experience in the forces. That leaves them with only four courses to take instead of 10.

As a result, we're showing military members that we're there for them, that we're able to shorten the training and that we recognize from the outset what they have done in the forces.

Bruce Fanjoy: Thank you.

What role could partnerships with the Canadian Armed Forces, Veterans Affairs Canada, employers or professional organizations play in making this process more effective?

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot: We have already talked about sharing information, showing the pathways that are possible. There's a lot of value in demonstrating what colleges can bring to the process and to veterans. As a result, one of the aspects is to share information.

The other aspect would be to bring together all the transition services that link veterans' knowledge to the programs offered by colleges. I think we can absolutely work together.

Annie Chartrand: We're very close to many employers. In fact, the majority of our programs lead to a mandatory internship with employers, whether that internship is paid or unpaid. Our close ties with employers make us a liaison for veterans transitioning to civilian life. With how close we are to employers, I think we can certainly be a positive voice.

Bruce Fanjoy: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Witnesses, all three of you understand French, if I remember correctly.

[English]

Mr. Morrow, I know you do speak French. However, I want to make sure.

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille will speak to you in French.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for six minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I found the testimony very interesting.

Mr. Morrow, as I listened to you, I was reminded of my own experience after I lost my election in 2011. I'm a social worker by training, and to be admitted to my professional order, I was required to complete a one-year internship, despite the fact that I had served as the whip of a caucus of 49 members. People will tell you that being a whip is, in some respects, a bit like being a social worker. I prepared an application for recognition of prior learning, arguing that the skills I had acquired as a whip were transferable to my work as a social worker. My professional order agreed and

waived the internship requirement. In that respect, I found my professional order to be quite progressive in recognizing my skills. McGill University, however, treated you like someone beginning their studies in education despite your many years of experience.

Ms. Chartrand, I would also like to discuss the issue Mr. Morrow raised concerning the barriers faced by veterans who have suffered an injury and may not necessarily wish to work full-time, but still want to make an active contribution to society.

Have you encountered veterans who felt that pursuing such a path might create financial insecurity because they could lose their financial support if, for example, they did not successfully complete their courses or were unable to find employment after their studies? Beyond assessing skills, do you also provide support to reassure veterans to prevent them from losing their financial assistance?

• (1655)

Annie Chartrand: Actually, we offer a wide range of services, just as Veterans Affairs Canada provides a broad range of services. We do not replace the department; rather, we complement its work.

We assist our students in accessing financial aid through federal or provincial programs, depending on their province of residence. We also offer a wide range of scholarships and bursaries so that we can support students financially.

In addition, we provide extensive mental health services, as well as academic accommodations for students who face challenges or live with a disability, including accommodations during examinations.

Claude DeBellefeuille: If I understand correctly, beyond skills assessment and recognition of prior learning, you're also able to advise a veteran that it may not be the right time to undertake such a project and, following an assessment of their situation, not necessarily encourage them to proceed immediately.

Annie Chartrand: Yes. We offer a range of services, and we work with each individual to help them pursue the path they wish to follow.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Quebec has vocational diplomas that can be obtained after high school. Then there's CEGEP, followed by university certificate programs and, finally, university.

You appear to be a model institution when it comes to supporting veterans. To your knowledge, are there any institutions in Quebec that offer the same kind of program as yours?

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot: Quebec's model is different from that of the rest of Canada, as is often the case. It's not better or worse; it's simply somewhat different.

There's a network of colleges across Canada. The difference between colleges elsewhere in Canada and the Quebec model is that colleges are primarily intended to help veterans, or any student, prepare for employment rather than providing a general education, although some do offer general education programs. There is also a Canada-wide network, Colleges and Institutes Canada, or CICan, which allows students to transfer from one college to another and even from college to university. Similar arrangements also exist in Quebec.

In Quebec, certain institutions do provide prior learning assessment and recognition, as well as pathways leading to employment. There are probably fewer such options within the CEGEP system, since that's not its primary mandate, although some do exist. There are also vocational diploma programs. In Ontario and elsewhere in Canada, colleges are truly at the centre of this type of model.

Claude DeBellefeuille: So, if a francophone who has served in the army wants to have prior learning recognized, my understanding is that it's easier to pursue studies in Ontario.

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot: I would say that there are excellent programs in Quebec as well. They are valuable partners.

However, I would point out that La Cité is the largest French-language college in Canada outside Quebec, and we're well equipped to support veterans. That much I can say with confidence.

Claude DeBellefeuille: In Quebec, many non-profit organizations specialize in skills assessment and prior learning recognition, such as job search clubs, and they receive funding from both federal and provincial sources.

To your knowledge, have these organizations received training or been made aware of the realities faced by military personnel transitioning to civilian life? Is that something we might want to look into here?

Annie Chartrand: I'm not in a position to say whether they have received such training, but at La Cité, we are certainly ready to welcome military personnel and veterans.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Morrow, would you like to say a few closing words?

At the start of the meeting, I said that I had read the 2023 report, which contains a whole host of recommendations. Are you discouraged or encouraged? Deep down, I get the impression that, since 2021, we've been going round in circles a bit on the issue of the national strategy for the transition from military to civilian life. Is that the case?

• (1700)

David Morrow: Yes, you're right, I am a bit discouraged. In fact, that's why I'm here. I think that, slowly but surely, we'll see changes, but they'll come from the bottom up.

There will be a fairly large number of retired military personnel from my generation—the generation of the global war on terror. These people are still on active service and young—in their forties or fifties—and want to see changes. Gradually, we'll change the way Veterans Affairs Canada operates by demanding more. I'm very optimistic, and gradually, I think things will change a little.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would like to remind all the witnesses to always look at me so that we can manage speaking times.

We have now completed our first round of questions.

[English]

We have Mr. Tolmie for five minutes.

Fraser Tolmie: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate it.

I thank Mr. Morrow for putting me in the “young” category.

The Chair: Did he say that?

Fraser Tolmie: Yes, he did. He said, “forties and fifties”. I've told people that this is Arctic blond.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Fraser Tolmie: Thank you very much to the witnesses for coming today. We really appreciate it.

There's a lot of information we're trying to pull out. Obviously, what we want is for veterans to be able to transition into the civilian world, to use the skill sets they have, to be recognized for their service and to be given meaningful employment. For some reason, there are challenges. We feel there shouldn't be challenges, so we need to figure this out. I don't think it's very complicated.

Ms. Chartrand, I'd like to start off with you with regard to the colleges, understanding that each province has different requirements.

What kinds of conversations have you had with other provinces in trying to create a standardized system? It seems like a provincial problem and a federal problem, and there seem to be areas of responsibility that no one wants to break through, but we need to break through them.

[Translation]

Annie Chartrand: Discussions are still at a very preliminary stage. For several years now, Ontario has had an extremely advanced credit transfer system in place between colleges and universities. It may seem simple, but it isn't. The fact remains, however, that we now have a good way of working. We have developed a model. So it is possible. We are here to share this good news with you: It is possible to work together. Many college graduates who have completed a two-year program have only two more years to complete at university to receive their bachelor's degree. In our jargon, we call these “2 + 2 articulation agreements”.

If it is possible to do this between universities and colleges, it is certainly possible to do so between the armed forces and colleges across Canada. In colleges, we focus on very similar professions. Civil engineering springs to mind, amongst others. Many colleges in Canada offer this program. Graduates are known as civil engineering technologists. There are also the practical nursing and paramedic programs. These are professions that exist within the armed forces and for which we provide training at colleges. Therefore, the effort required to conclude agreements with the armed forces would not be very great. It would thus be easy for a service member leaving the forces to join the program of their choice, in the province of their choice, to obtain the qualification necessary for civilian life.

[English]

Fraser Tolmie: I support your efforts. I hope there will be some movement with respect to that, because veterans should be coming first here. We really need to help them out.

Mr. Morrow, thank you for coming back again. I always thank you for your service. I thank you for what you're doing "after" for veterans.

One thing that we see—I've encountered it and heard it during conversations with veterans—is a loss of identity after their service. I know this is something that you've touched on, with respect to how veterans feel. They go to apply for jobs, but they just keep getting rejection letters. What do you feel that does to veterans? When they've served their country, they feel as though they should be recognized. They don't get that recognition and then they get rejected from career opportunities? What are your thoughts?

• (1705)

David Morrow: The simple answer is, as you mentioned, the loss of identity. When you can't rebuild an identity...and let's be honest, the majority of veterans are men. We need to work to feel important. I need to work to feel important. If I can't, I don't feel like I'm worth the space that I'm taking up, and that 100% leads to the suicide crisis.

We had the most important job in the world when we were in combat. Then, when you come home and you can't even land a basic job...? I can't imagine what that feels like. I was lucky. I had my education to fall back on when I came home. I fell right back into my teaching career, but a lot don't have that luxury.

To be rejected from jobs because you're either overqualified or... Nine out of 10 times it's because you're way too qualified, or the other aspect is that I think a lot of Canadian employers don't want to take a risk on a veteran because of the stigma associated with veterans. I don't know how we fix that, but I think you're on the mark with your statement there.

Fraser Tolmie: Okay.

I'm sorry. With respect to the stigma, could you please unpack that, because—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Tolmie. I was so attentive to Mr. Morrow that I forgot to watch the clock. You have exceeded your time, sir, by about 30 seconds. I have to apologize—

Fraser Tolmie: Okay.

A voice: Does he not get a senior's discount?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I will not comment, but I will redirect....

Thank you, Mr. Morrow, for your time.

Mr. Tolmie, it's always nice.

[Translation]

Ms. Auguste, you have the floor for five minutes.

Tatiana Auguste (Terrebonne, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Morrow, thank you for your service.

I would also like to thank College La Cité for enabling francophone minority communities to study in French. I believe the work you do is important.

Mr. Thibault-Chabot, La Cité's policy allows for the recognition of prior learning gained through professional or personal experience by assessing it against the learning objectives of the courses. This is truly a mechanism that could provide a pathway for recognizing skills acquired during military service.

How does this process apply to a veteran who, due to their way of expressing themselves or their military records, is unable to describe their skills in the language commonly used by civilian institutions?

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot: That's a very good point. We need to be the interpreters of this language. We need to work with veterans. There are already well-established pathways in place, but it's important to create more and build the connections.

Veterans using the service shouldn't have to deal with complexity. They must be able to see exactly which pathways are available to them. Where these do not exist, we are able to assess their skills quickly and accurately to guide them towards a second career that will inspire them.

Tatiana Auguste: Does the fact that La Cité is a French-speaking secondary school attract more veterans? What effect does this have on your client base?

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot: In a minority-language environment, there are always slightly fewer clients, as we are targeting a smaller slice of the pie. Our mission is to offer programs in French, although the subject terminology is taught in both French and English. We offer language courses to all students to help them develop their bilingualism. I think this bilingual approach is a real asset. However, we obviously have fewer students overall.

The same applies to veterans. On the other hand, we do attract students thanks to the diversity we offer. We receive enrolments from all corners of the country from French-speaking or bilingual students who wish to continue their studies without losing their French-language skills, which are highly valued in the workplace.

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you very much.

My next question is perhaps for everyone, but mainly for Mr. Morrow.

How can we help veterans to recognize their own experiences? Sometimes they have their own way of talking about things. They tell themselves that what they know how to do is “just” this or that. How can we help them find the right words and understand that their experiences are skills that are valuable in the labour market?

• (1710)

David Morrow: That's a very good question, but I don't really have an answer, because there are programs that already exist.

For me, it was a bit difficult, but as I said earlier, I'd studied education, so it was quite straightforward to make the transition. However, for others, I don't have a good answer to give you. There are programs available, but it really is up to the veterans to seek them out. I don't know how to say this in French, but in English, we say:

[English]

“You can bring a horse to water, but you can't force him to drink.”

[Translation]

Annie Chartrand: I think it's up to us, the institutions, to have qualified and trained staff who understand the realities of military life. Here at La Cité, we are starting to develop this understanding, precisely so that we have staff who can act as interpreters when veterans come to apply. We need to support them by focusing not on the administrative side, but on bridging the gap between military language and the language of our college.

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you.

Earlier, you spoke about building on existing skills rather than having to relearn everything from scratch. Could you tell us a little more about the approach aimed at enabling veterans to build on what they already have rather than starting all over again?

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot: The approach aimed at supplementing skills already acquired is known as the recognition of prior learning. We must begin by reviewing a person's entire file. Some people may have undertaken prior studies, which leads to equivalencies. Others have no prior studies, but have developed expertise through work experience gained outside a formal educational program. We need people who are able to assess this.

We are currently developing tools that enable us to assess certain things based on evidence submitted by a veteran, for example. Evidence might be a CV, a letter of recommendation or a job description that outlines the tasks or skills developed. We can then assess certain aspects using authentic tasks, in a laboratory setting, for example, to see exactly which tasks the person is capable of performing and what skills they have at their disposal.

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for two minutes and thirty seconds.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Let's imagine that I am a veteran, that my skills have been assessed and that I am told I could pursue a career as a civil engineering technologist, for example. You have developed a great deal of expertise. I live in Quebec and decide to undertake my training at

La Cité. Do you have any agreements with Quebec to ensure that the qualification I obtain at La Cité is recognized in Quebec? Are there any formal discussions taking place with Quebec?

Annie Chartrand: We have formal agreements with various post-secondary institutions across Canada and with certain professional associations across Canada. So, it's not just with Quebec, but across Canada. We have agreements with Quebec in particular as well. It depends on the field. In some cases, students may need to take an additional course at an institution in Quebec.

However, it is certainly the case that interprovincial mobility is a factor for our students.

Claude DeBellefeuille: During discussions with the previous panel of witnesses, it was mentioned that there were many obstacles to implementing a strategy to better facilitate the transition from military to civilian life. I wondered whether there was a Canadian body that allows all provinces to be represented in order to advise national defence or Veterans Affairs Canada on the transfer of skills.

What are your thoughts on this?

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot: We are part of a network of colleges across Canada, including in Quebec, called Colleges and Institutes Canada. It really highlights what the college sector can achieve, not just locally, but across Canada, in both official languages.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Is your organization recognized by national defence as a key player in taking concrete action during the transition?

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot: Absolutely. We are a veteran-friendly institution. There is a registry of veteran-friendly institutions and we are listed on it. Any veteran who wishes to continue their studies can go wherever they prefer, but we are recognized as a veteran-friendly institution because we offer services and are continuing to introduce new ones to support veterans on their journey.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Next is Mr. Gill for five minutes.

Sukhman Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to start off by saying that I am a new member of the committee. This is my first time speaking officially at this committee, so I want to thank all of the members.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Sukhman Gill: Thank you very much.

I want to thank everyone who is here today and all of the members across the aisle for their continuous work and collaboration to make sure we can excel in matters of military personnel and excel at the veterans affairs committee. Thank you very much.

To those across the aisle, thank you. Congratulations to all our chairs and vice-chairs as well.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for attending today. It's been quite insightful listening to you guys.

I want to start with Mr. Morrow.

First of all, thank you very much, sir, for your 15 years of service.

Wow. I listened to your story and read a little bit about you before. The way that you transitioned into entrepreneurship was quite fascinating.

There are a couple things that I wrote down here while you were speaking. It was the part about being employable and how it came with a cost. You described it like being in a trap, and you said that we need to think about how we need to compensate our injured veterans.

Could you give me a little bit more and go a little deeper into that?

David Morrow: Absolutely. It's pretty straightforward. We have to choose between employment and our injury benefits. The unfortunate reality is that just because you find gainful employment doesn't mean your injuries go away. Like I said, you can work despite your injuries.

It's the framing of disability that we get hung up on. Because we've been determined to be, let's say, 40%, 50% or 60% disabled, the thinking is that it means you should be in a wheelchair and you shouldn't be able to do a basic manual labour position, but how can you be running a company if you're disabled? It's because of the terminology and the fact that we don't understand the fundamental difference between civilian disability and military disability.

I joined when I was 19. My quality of life will never be the same. I joined because I knew what I was getting myself into. I volunteered to go to war, and I knew it would come with consequences. All we're asking is that we get some monetary compensation. I will never reach the potential that I could have achieved. All of my friends who didn't join the military are CEOs and have C-suite jobs. They have beautiful careers.

I don't get to have that career. I don't get to have that life, because I decided to serve. I'm not resentful of it, but I would really appreciate it if I, and my brothers and sisters in arms, had the capacity to go to work and find the jobs that we really wanted so that we could contribute and give back and continue to serve while retaining benefits for injuries that don't go away just because we have jobs.

Sukhman Gill: Thank you for that.

What would you like to see from the federal government to make entrepreneurship a more realistic option for veterans and people who want to get into entrepreneurship after their retirement?

David Morrow: I've spoken before this committee on this very topic, and I'll make the same points.

I don't feel that entrepreneurship should be the domain of government, because—let's be honest—they're not good at it. That's why they're government. They have other functions. Opening up and getting rid of the roadblocks is the important part for government.

The current roadblock that exists right now is that there is no structure to identify veteran service organizations. Whether we're a for-profit, non-profit or charity, we operate as a veteran-owned company by name only. There's no official designation. If we were to incorporate that at the governmental level and open that up as part of what Veterans Affairs does, which is exactly how they do it in the United States, then we'd start seeing a better ecosystem. We don't really have what we in the military call "left and right of arcs" to function in between.

Sukhman Gill: Okay.

To continue on that, what kinds of supports would you highlight that made a difference for you or your fellow colleagues and friends in arms?

David Morrow: I started out with the Prince's operation entrepreneur program. It's no longer in existence, but it was a week of entrepreneurial training that was paid for by the charity. I think that is amazing.

Another example would be, essentially, the ability to get yourself healthy and well. I'm biased, obviously. That's what I do. In order to take the next step into entrepreneurial adventures, you need to be healthy. I always say that's the apex of the health pyramid. You need to have your financial stability and your health, and then from there, you can start looking at entrepreneurial ventures.

I think most veterans miss those first two steps. If they can get those secured with the help of Veterans Affairs, then the entrepreneurial journey becomes a lot easier.

• (1720)

Sukhman Gill: Thank you.

Is that it?

The Chair: Yes. I'm sorry, Mr. Gill. I was nicely reminded by my colleague on my left.

[Translation]

I will give the floor for five minutes to Mrs. Chatel, who is also new to this committee.

Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses.

Mr. Morrow, thank you for your service. If you have any specific proposals regarding these amendments, I would appreciate it if you could submit them to us in writing. It would be very interesting to examine them in greater depth and to look at the more technical aspects as well. You have made some good suggestions. Thank you very much for that.

I now turn to the representatives from La Cité. I am an MP for the Outaouais region. As you know, many of my constituents work for you. So, I would like to thank you for undertaking this excellent initiative to recognize skills. I think it will be very helpful.

Let me tell you something. I am concerned, because we are investing heavily in defence. It has been said that we are going to create 125,000 jobs in defence alone. We have dual-use technologies, meaning they are used in both the military and civilian sectors.

My question is very simple. We have a pool of veterans. This pool is set to grow, as more and more of them are approaching the age of 40. They are young people, like my colleague on the opposite side of the House. However, I went on a tour this summer. I met people from the aerospace sector on the south shore, particularly those involved in aircraft maintenance, technology or engines, in both the military and civilian sectors. They are turning down contracts due to a labour shortage. They are turning them down. One small business told me that it could employ 300 people and that it would have work first thing tomorrow morning, but that it has to turn down work.

You work in this environment; can you explain to me what is going on?

Frédéric Thibault-Chabot: I don't think we have the strategy to take people's skills and channel them towards where they want to go, if they wish to return to the same field—that desire is very important. However, we need to refocus them, recognize the skills they have developed and find the simplest pathway to connect them with those employers. This pathway must be much more structured and robust, because that is exactly what is needed.

We heard people say earlier that employers need to recognize the value of these skills. I do not understand how they could fail to do so, because veterans, by virtue of their experience, possess a wealth of skills not found among recent graduates. If we combine that with technical skills and all the other skills relating to interpersonal and practical abilities, it's the perfect combination. Bringing all of that together is complex.

Sophie Chatel: I have another question for you. Why wait until you're a veteran? The defence industrial strategy states that we need to bring the military and civilian worlds closer together. We have dual-use technologies. Artificial intelligence is going to play a part in all of this. Cybersecurity is just as relevant to banks and businesses as it is to the armed forces. So, we have all these dual-use technologies. Why not have dual-use skills? Whether we're in the armed forces or in the civilian sector, we work with the same technologies. Why wait until we're veterans to acquire this skill, rather than already having it by the time we become veterans?

Annie Chartrand: It is certainly true that, at present, we are working more closely with veterans. However, we are currently seeking to forge much closer links with reserve units, precisely so that reservists can undertake their military training whilst studying at college. We could adapt the timetables. It's up to us to adapt, and it's easy.

We could allow reservists who need to be deployed overseas or take part in an exercise to do so. We could easily adjust the timetables and create cohorts of reservists to train people in a particular field. This is something we're currently exploring.

Sophie Chatel: Thank you.

Mr. Morrow, do you have anything to add to clarify matters for us? What is your perspective?

David Morrow: I was a reservist for 15 years. While I was studying for my bachelor's degree at McGill University, there were often times when, if I had to be deployed or take part in a week-long exercise in Florida, my only choice was to go, and fail my course. I had no other choice.

So, I support schools that are able to provide an education for reservists. Reserve units have a very deep pool of skills, but we're not making use of them because we're not yet in that mindset.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes our second round of questions.

[English]

Mr. Morrow, it's always a pleasure to have you here, and thank you for your service.

As the chair, but also the proud member for Orléans, it was a pleasure to welcome you today, Mr. Thibault-Chabot and Madame Chartrand.

I have a bit of housekeeping before we officially say goodbye to our witnesses.

[Translation]

Our next meeting will take place on Thursday, October 8, 2026, at 8:15 a.m. We will be joined by the Minister of Veterans Affairs and representatives from Veterans Affairs Canada to discuss the supplementary estimates (A) 2026–2027.

The meeting is adjourned.

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