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## **Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs**

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**Tuesday, March 13, 2012**



**Chair**

**Mr. Greg Kerr**



## Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

• (1630)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC)):** I'm going to call the committee together.

You all understand that we're dealing with the delivery of front-line health and well-being services for Canadian veterans.

I welcome our witnesses and I apologize for the delay. This being Parliament, of course, anything can and does tend to happen. So I appreciate that.

We're going to start by dealing with a motion. Then we'll go to the witnesses. Whatever time we have left will be for questions.

In appreciation of witnesses, if we can't cover everything we want to today and there are questions passed, we'll send them along, if you don't mind, and then perhaps get a written answer.

Mr. Casey, would you move your motion, please.

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Chairman, the motion is before the committee. Do you require me to read it?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Okay. It reads:

That, in light of ongoing breaches of privacy, the Standing Committee on Veteran Affairs conduct extensive open and public hearings in order to better understand what safeguards currently exist to protect the privacy of veterans; That the Committee provide recommendations to the government to better protect the privacy of our veterans and ensure access to personal or medical records is properly restricted to prevent their use for political purposes or accessed by political officials to intimidate veterans; That the Committee be tasked with finding what "best practices" exists in other jurisdictions to protect the privacy of veterans and that the Committee report its findings back to the House within two sitting weeks after completion of its study.

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

I'm prepared to rule this motion out of order.

In my opinion, the motion proposed today does not contain sufficient variance to constitute a new question. The committee has already dealt with the original motion.

I'd like to refer the member to page 582 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which states that, "A decision once made cannot be questioned again but must stand as the judgement of the House."

That's the ruling.

Are you going to challenge the decision?

**Mr. Sean Casey:** No. I'm wondering—

**The Chair:** You can challenge the decision, if you like.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** I guess I'm looking for some clarification. Can the chair point me to some minutes, some publication that indicates the question has been dealt with? Does it appear in the minutes somewhere?

**The Chair:** We'll find the appropriate wording for you.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** The concern that I have is that there may be a breach of what happened in privacy, just on the basis of your ruling, sir.

**The Chair:** No. But as I say, if you want to challenge the ruling, that's your prerogative.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** You've made a ruling where there's been no debate. I understand your ruling, but you've ruled on it without anyone having an opportunity to discuss it. Is it normal that nobody gets a chance to even debate the motion?

**The Chair:** Yes. As I say, you can challenge the ruling, but there's no debate once I've made the decision, no.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** I challenge the ruling and I'd ask for a recorded division.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 5)

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

As I said to our witnesses earlier, we'll be constructive. We'll try to keep the committee in charge.

I'll introduce the witnesses as we get to them, if you don't mind.

From the Public Service Commission of Canada, we have Anne-Marie Robinson, president; and Hélène Laurendeau, senior vice-president, policy branch.

Please begin. Thank you.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson (President, Public Service Commission of Canada):** Thank you Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I am pleased to be here today as part of this panel to talk about the initiatives of the Public Service Commission of Canada in enhancing opportunities in the federal public service for current and former members of the Canadian Forces.

I am accompanied by H el ene Laurendeau, Senior Vice-President of the Policy Branch at the Public Service Commission.

The commission is an independent agency reporting to Parliament. It is mandated to safeguard the integrity of the public service staffing system and non-partisanship of the public service. For over 100 years, the commission has upheld its mandate to ensure a merit-based, non-partisan federal public service.

The commission has also made an important contribution to the reintegration of Canada's veterans into civilian society by helping them find jobs in the public service.

• (1635)

[English]

Under the Public Service Employment Act and the Public Service Employment Regulations, the PSC is responsible for creating and administering priority entitlements.

These entitlements provide persons with the right to be appointed ahead of all others to any position in the public service for which they meet the essential qualifications. Priority entitlements help persons who have been affected by career transitions. The priority entitlement system also serves the important objective of helping the public service to retain skilled and competent people who the Government of Canada has trained and developed.

[Translation]

Since 1997, there has been a priority entitlement for Canadian Forces members who were released as a result of injury in a special duty area. In 2005, as part of the New Veterans Charter, that priority entitlement was expanded to include former members of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP who were released from service for medical reasons. Once medically released, these former members have five years to activate their priority entitlement, which then lasts for two years.

[English]

A more recent amendment came into effect in May 2010 extending priority entitlement to surviving spouses or common-law partners of public service employees and members of the Canadian Forces or the RCMP who lost their lives in the line of duty. Qualified surviving spouses are granted a priority entitlement, for up to two years, for appointments to externally advertised positions in the public service. This priority applies retroactively to October 7, 2001, when Canada began its military actions in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

While my remarks will focus largely on those priority entitlements, I would also like to mention the initiative taken in 2005 to amend the Public Service Employment Act and allow Canadian Forces members access to internal public service jobs.

Prior to this amendment, Canadian Forces members were not eligible to participate in advertised internal appointment processes. The amendment provides the option to departments and agencies governed by the Public Service Employment Act to identify Canadian Forces members as eligible on internal job notices. Also, Bill C-40, which came into force in 2008, protects the jobs of public

service employees who serve in the reserve force and take a leave of absence for military service in Canada and abroad.

We have worked and will continue to work with people who manage programs that support veterans at the Department of National Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs, to ensure that all those affected by these amendments are aware of their entitlements.

[English]

Our annual report to Parliament provides information on priority entitlements and appointments. As the two-year priority entitlement for medically released Canadian Forces and RCMP members can be extended over a number of fiscal years, and to give you a better example of how the program works, it's probably more useful to look at the placement results over a longer period of time.

We have looked at three cohorts, or groups, of medically released members. We took a look at appointments for those who registered for the entitlement in 2007-08, as well as the two subsequent years, up to 2009-10, when the two-year entitlements had all expired.

For the first cohort, there were 177 appointments of medically released members, followed by 196 appointments for the second, and 201 for the third. For all three cohorts we saw an appointment rate that was, on average, 72%. This is the highest rate of appointments by category in the priority administration system. For those who were appointed, we found that more than 60% were appointed within six months from the start of their priority entitlement, rising to 80% or more within 12 months, and more than 92% within 18 months.

We also found that more than 95% of these former Canadian Forces members obtained their jobs in the region of their residence.

The departments most likely to have positions available as part of their regional operations include the Department of National Defence, Correctional Service Canada, and Human Resources and Skills Development, including Service Canada.

[Translation]

Of those who were not appointed, for instance, among the first cohort of 2007-2008, nearly half accepted other job offers in other sectors.

• (1640)

[English]

While I am pleased with the results, I think there are areas for improvement. We took a closer look at the priority administration program, and our evaluation identified areas where we could be proactive and strengthen the program for the long-term benefits of former medically released members.

We found that we need to improve coordination and share information about the public service at the earliest possible time, because medically released members are sometimes not familiar with the public service staffing system.

We believe a case management approach can be more effective in working directly with former Canadian Forces members to advise them of their entitlements, helping them better understand the language of staffing, and assisting them more when they apply for jobs.

We're in the process of consulting with our partners about these ideas, and I certainly welcome your views.

In addition, I will be carefully watching the impacts of the changes to the priority system as a result of the government's deficit reduction action plan. Based on this analysis, we will be exploring whether some administrative measures could be tailored to allow medically released members to maximize the value of their entitlements.

Mr. Chairman and honourable members, let me assure you and your committee of our strong commitment at the Public Service Commission to continually strive to enhance the work we do to support medically released Canadian Forces and RCMP members. While their military and policing careers have been cut short, we will continue to do all we can to help bring their valuable experience and competencies to the federal public service.

[Translation]

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Robinson.

We'll now go to Mr. Blakely, here on behalf of the Building and Construction Trades Department.

Welcome, and please proceed.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Blakely (Director, Canadian Affairs, Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO, Canadian Office):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Bob Blakely, and I am here on behalf of Building and Construction Trades Department.

[English]

Mercifully, I will continue in English.

Helmets to Hardhats is a program we have launched as a public-private partnership. Last January 6, in the boilermakers' union hall in Edmonton, the Prime Minister of Canada brought together a group of people who were going to launch an initiative to find ways to give transitioning Canadian Forces veterans, serving reservists, and disabled veterans careers in Canada's construction industry.

At 14% of GDP and 8% of all direct employment, construction is one of the high-paying, high-challenge, high-skill occupations in this country, and there are positions that are in demand.

The lead of the Government of Canada was followed up with a cash donation, so did the Government of Alberta step to the plate with money, and TransCanada Pipelines stepped up with \$1 million over five years. That money is being matched and sweat equity is being put in by the Building and Construction Trades Department, and by a number of our employer partners and their absolute

alphabet soup of various kinds of trade associations across the country. The objective is to get people good jobs in an industry that matters for this country.

We've launched the initiative. We've incorporated a not-for-profit corporation. We've established a board of directors. We've gone out with a request for proposals to create a website—a significant portion of the initial intake for people into Helmets to Hardhats will be through a web portal and through a website. We're looking to get initial staffing with an executive director and an administrative assistant.

In the interim, we've had some limited but significant successes actually placing people with companies that are looking for apprentices, or looking for people who need or want to access a job in construction.

At CFB Edmonton we've had a number of people go into the boilermakers. At CFB Esquimalt through the Vancouver Island building trades, we've had people who have gone to work in the shipyards, because it takes the same skills to build a ship as it takes to build a house—with a lot less wood nowadays, but that's neither here nor there. And the base in Toronto, a number of people have gone into the pipe trades.

These have basically been through local arrangements that we've made through the TAP program—the transition assistance program—as veterans have left, with assistance from Veterans Affairs Canada and with assistance from the various apprenticeship boards across the country, and we're finding ways to match people with apprenticeships.

In some cases, people leave the Canadian Forces with a full skill toolkit. The 500 series trades, all of the construction trades, the hull mechanics from the navy, some of the engineering trades, and the people who keep tanks running are the same people who keep heavy equipment running, so some of those are pretty easy transitions.

We're trying to find a way to build a good skills translator, which takes the skills someone learned in the Canadian Forces and puts them into a placement that would fit a) their interests and b) some of the skills they have.

We were a while in convincing government that this was something that was worth doing, but we certainly realized, together with our employer partners, a long time ago that there is an enormous resource in people who have served in the Canadian Forces. They are generally fit, they are drug free, they have self-discipline, and they understand to show up at 7 o'clock in the morning with their personal protective equipment on, their boots laced up, and ready to go to work. We want to maximize that in our industry.

Generally speaking, we've been successful in everything we've touched so far. We have a model in the United States, which is also called "Helmets to Hardhats", and is also done through the building trades there, and a number of other programs we're looking at that are going to give us some direction. There is, for example, through the plumbers union, something called the VIP program, Veterans in Piping, where people who are going to leave the American forces go to Camp Pendleton, the marine base in the U.S., and for the last four weeks of their enlistment, someone shows them how to thread pipe, how to weld, and some basic use of hand tools in the plumbing trade. So when they go home, they have a start on an apprenticeship.

• (1645)

So we're looking for some of those things to do. We have a concept. We have a number of partnerships, and we're looking forward to being able to put veterans of the Canadian Forces to work in one of Canada's best industries.

I'll respond to your questions in due course.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Blakely. It's a great initiative.

Now I want to turn to our friends, the commissioners. We have Mr. Bill Sutherland, chair of the national board of governors; Paul—and I'm always going to mispronounce it—Guindon?

**Captain(N) (Retired) Paul Guindon (Chief Executive Officer, Commissionaires Ottawa, Chairman, National Business Management Committee, Commissionaires):** Guindon. No problem.

**The Chair:** See? I'll get there. Give me another few years. Thank you, and of course, Douglas Briscoe.

Welcome, gentlemen, and we'll hear your presentation, so please proceed.

**Colonel (Retired) Bill Sutherland (Chair, National Board of Governors, Commissionaires):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much for the opportunity for us to appear before you today. We're here as probably one of the best-kept secrets, and probably one of the organizations that provides the best value for money in support of veterans that the country has.

We're one of the organizations—if not the only organization, apart from government—that has been providing transition services to veterans. We've been doing this longer than anybody else, since we were initially formed in 1925.

Rather than repeating what is in our written submission, let me just talk to you a little bit about who we are as Commissionaires. We are a not-for-profit organization. We're the largest employer of veterans in the country, and we are a volunteer-led organization of veterans for veterans. I am a veteran, as are my two colleagues. We understand what's important for veterans, and we try to adapt to their needs. We provide a spectrum of support—transitional support and employment support—to veterans, from Second World War veterans through to the veterans who are coming out of the Afghan experience, and everyone in between, whether they be peacekeeping veterans or war veterans.

We focus primarily on the security business in the country, because we have found over time that the security field is something that is directly relatable to many of the skill sets and the expectations

that veterans have when they're leaving the forces. It provides a very good stepping stone, a very good transitional point for veterans as they leave the forces to transition into something else in the civilian world.

We are driven by a social mandate. As a not-for-profit organization, our primary purpose is our social mandate, and our social mandate has been and remains providing meaningful employment to veterans. That is what we're about. We get no donations. We get no subsidies from anybody. We provide the employment that we provide as the largest employer of veterans in the country through being successful businesses and competing in the security field, head to head with private sector security firms. That means that we have to be smart at what we do. That means we have to be good at what we do, and that means that we have to be sensitive to the needs of veterans, and try to balance the needs and the competition that we experience in the competitive environment of the security industry in the country, with all of those things that are driven by our social mandate.

Ninety-five percent of our proceeds, of what we make by being successful businesses, is turned back into salaries and benefits for commissionaires, for veterans, and that's a pretty significant return, if you think about it. We concentrate on keeping our overhead as low as possible, so that we can return as much as possible in terms of salaries and benefits to veterans and to commissionaires across the country.

We are represented in 1,200 communities across the country from coast to coast to coast. We are organized in 17 divisions. Every province and every territory is a part of one of the divisions, and we have 50 offices across the country. We have a fairly significant reach.

We also have an 87-year proven track record of understanding and supporting veterans, and providing employment for veterans. We believe very strongly that the best way to look after the transitional needs and the health and wellness of veterans is to provide them with meaningful employment, so that they have the self-esteem, they have the time, and they have the firm footing in an organization such as ours that provides the understanding and the camaraderie that they have left behind in the military, so that they have those things at their beck and call, to their benefit. This allows them to have a better prospect of integrating well into the civilian environment.

• (1650)

We have about 1,000 to 1,200 veterans leaving the forces in any given year who come through us as commissionaires. They don't stay for a career, a second career. We don't expect them to stay for a second career. But what we do expect is that we can provide them with that safe haven, and that sort of assistance, that understanding assistance, in their transition so they can become meaningfully reintegrated into Canadian life.

We also find that we get veterans who return to the Commissionaires later in their life, so almost as a third career when they're sort of winding down and they want the same sort of camaraderie again. So veterans are coming back to us later in their lives. As an organization, we have to be flexible, we have to continually adapt ourselves to the changing needs of veterans. We have to be there for the older veterans, the Second World War and the Korean War veterans, as well as for that increasingly large number of younger veterans we're seeing who have come out of the Balkans, Afghanistan, and various peacekeeping operations.

We're a pretty well-kept secret because not a lot of people know about us. The veterans know about us. We also provide excellent value for money because we don't cost you any money, yet we are the largest employer of veterans in the country.

With that, I will leave it there and I'd be happy to answer any questions, and the difficult questions, because I am a volunteer, I will pass over to my colleagues.

• (1655)

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

Given the tightness of time, does the committee agree to four minutes for questions for the first round, to make sure we get everybody in?

Okay. Thank you for that.

We'll begin with Ms. Mathysen for four minutes, please.

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My first question is to Mr. Sutherland, and I'll try to make it not terribly difficult. I understand that in November 2010, the Commissionaires signed a return-to-work memorandum, a memorandum of understanding with the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, whereby you agreed to provide CF members, injured in the line of duty, with employment opportunities that met their needs.

I just wonder if you could explain how the MOU works and what it implies for commissionaires. Can you also provide examples of the employment opportunities tailored for these physically or psychologically injured CF members?

**Col Bill Sutherland:** Sure, I'd be happy to just answer that very briefly, and then I'm going to hand it over to Doug Briscoe, who is our point person on the MOU.

Because we have a social mandate that drives us—the meaningful employment of veterans—part of the social mandate is that, to the extent we are able, we will try to employ anybody who is a veteran who comes through our door. And we will try to adapt employment to their needs.

The MOU that you're referring to, I would describe it as being an innovative approach to working more closely with DND to help veterans transition earlier than would have normally been the case if we just waited for them to leave DND and come to us.

I'll hand it over to Doug to explain some of the details.

**Colonel Douglas Briscoe (Executive Director, National Office, Commissionaires):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The return-to-work program is essentially a rehabilitation effort where disabled veterans come to us, and they're still members of the Canadian Forces. I think the thinking is that the sooner they're back in the work environment, the speedier their rehabilitation. The types of work we provide them are limited to what their abilities are. So if the disability is one that doesn't give them the ambulatory ability that they need, it may end up being clerical work.

To date, we have 33 members we've assisted in this fashion. The individual can make a decision as to whether he wants to continue on in the forces, or he can await the outcome of a medical decision made by a proper medical authority. We hope that if at some time they do decide to transition and leave the forces they would do so through us. We think we can provide a mechanism that would give them a safe landing, so to speak, back into society.

I hope this satisfies that question.

**Ms. Irene Mathysen:** Thank you very much.

Madam Robinson, I noted in your brief that at the end you said you're watching very carefully the impacts the government's deficit reduction action plan may have. We are very concerned about that. We've raised that question a number of times.

You also say that based on analysis you're going to be exploring whether some administrative measures could be tailored to allow medically released members to maximize the value of their entitlements. I wonder if you could explain that, please.

**Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson:** Yes, two things. With respect to the deficit reduction action plan, once the government has made announcements about the changes or reductions that will be made to the public service, we'll have a better sense of the magnitude of those impacts. There will be a time where employees can make a certain number of decisions. Some affected employees will be deployed to vacant positions. Some will take retirement. There is some capacity for voluntary departure. This will likely happen within the first four months that someone is declared to have been affected, then in the fall, we will know the numbers of people who might go into the priority administration system. I'd be happy to come back to the committee at that time to share this information.

In respect of administrative measures, we're currently consulting with our partners. I will talk about case management as part of our evaluation. What we learned through that was that it's important to work closely with the veterans to ensure that we share information. We do this now, but I think we can do it better. Now that the program's been in place for four or five years, we can inform our people, on a more timely basis, about what jobs are available and what the impact will be on different occupations in different parts of the country. This way people will be able to make informed decisions.

Veterans have a five-year period in which to start their entitlement, so the more information they have about what's happening in the public service in general, the better we can equip them to make those decisions.

●(1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Robinson.

Now we're to Ms. Adams.

**Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC):** Thanks very much.

Mr. Sutherland, I'd like to commend you for the wonderful work you do in helping our armed forces to transition into civilian life. You mentioned that you place our veterans primarily in security fields. Are there any other fields, though, that you're placing them in?

**Col Bill Sutherland:** The security industry is more than just guarding. There is quite a range of security activities that we are placing veterans in.

I'm going to ask Paul to talk a little bit more about that. One of Paul's responsibilities is to coordinate the business aspects across the country.

**Capt(N) Paul Guindon:** We have developed several business lines over the years. Our core business is guard services, providing guards to federal, provincial, municipal, commercial, and private clients. We thoroughly believe in training: we train our workforce, and we provide that line of business to some of our competitors. We train guard forces.

We also have a full line of identification services. These include background verification—criminal, digital fingerprints, and pardon application processes. We also provide full security solutions. This includes threat-risk assessment on new, old, or planned facilities, as well as investigation services.

**Ms. Eve Adams:** Mr. Blakely, thank you for the extraordinary program that we announced and the wonderful partnership for Helmets to Hardhats. We're very proud of it, and I want to take this opportunity to thank you and your members for coming forward to provide this type of service to our veterans.

Could you elaborate on the types of incomes that vets who enter the construction field might expect to earn after their apprenticeships?

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** When someone starts an apprenticeship, he starts at half the journeyman's rate. If you live in my province, in Alberta, and you're a journeyman pipe fitter, your wage will be about \$44 per hour, plus 10% for holiday pay, and there will be an \$8 or \$9 benefit package on top of that. You can make \$150,000 per year without much difficulty. A first-year apprentice who is prepared to apply himself can make \$75,000.

**Ms. Eve Adams:** How long does it generally take for somebody to work his way up to the \$150,000 level?

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** It's a four-year apprenticeship for most trades. Some are three.

**Ms. Eve Adams:** That's truly remarkable. It's a very good income.

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** People have this idea that the only thing you need to know to be a plumber is that some things roll downhill and payday's on Thursday. It's actually wrong.

**A Voice:** Everything rolls downhill.

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** No, the trade secret is: don't chew your fingernails, but I'll have to kill you now that I've told you that one.

The truth of it is that our jobs are complex. We need people who are prepared to apply themselves. If someone is prepared to apply himself—and we wash out about 50% of the people who go into the first year of an apprenticeship—there are enormous rewards, both monetary and personal.

**The Chair:** Be very brief.

**Ms. Eve Adams:** I would imagine, though, that your veteran population might not wash out to that extent. These are folks that have given an entire career to being dedicated.

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** The truth is the military veterans that we've brought in, we don't lose any of them.

**Ms. Eve Adams:** I would imagine.

Thank you, sir.

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

We have Mr. Casey for four minutes.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Back to you, Mr. Blakely, we are aware that the government has contributed \$150,000 towards the development of a website. What other financial contribution has there been towards the program from the Department of Veterans Affairs?

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** The \$150,000 is it. We have had some discussions with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Once we get the website up and once we get an executive director in place, we're going to sit down and talk about some potential for other programs. But until we're actually up and running, and can show something that looks like a program, we're not going to go and ask Veterans Affairs or anybody else to give us money. We'll fund that ourselves, with our employer partners.

●(1705)

**Mr. Sean Casey:** So this much ballyhooed partnership is an injection of \$150,000, and an agreement to cooperate later?

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** Well, you know what, it's more than precatory words, words in the sky. The Government of Alberta has stepped up with money, and the Governments of Ontario and New Brunswick are also talking about doing it, because they see it to their advantage to help bring people into apprenticeships. Although it may not appear that \$150,000 is a lot of money, we actually established a partnership with the Government of Canada, which is something that, in the 142-year history of the building trades, never happened before.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Madam Robinson, I don't know whether you're aware, but in advance of this meeting we received a backgrounder from the Library of Parliament. Have you seen that?

**Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson:** No, I have not.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Okay. I just want to read you something that is in our background material.

In 2010–2011, of the 249 persons who registered for this entitlement...

—this is the priority appointments—



...154 CF or RCMP members who had been released for medical reasons were appointed to positions in the public service. This represents a decrease of 17% compared with 2009–2010, and is the first decrease observed since 2006-2007.

Now, this is the background document that we received. In your opening remarks you crunched the numbers differently and talked about cohorts. Can you square the two for me?

**Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson:** I think the difference is just between the years. I would have to verify it. I can certainly write to the committee to ensure that I'm accurate in my remarks, but I believe the cohort that you're talking about would be one that wasn't yet finished. It would end March 31. I was talking about two-year cohorts, or people through the full length of their entitlement.

However, I would say if your question, as well, is around an observation that the rate is declining, I think that we need to look at that closely. We do know that overall in the public service, in the last year in particular, and when we published our annual report in the fall, that the rate of new appointments is declining in the public service.

So when we finish this cohort, we will send that information to the committee. It may well be possible that the appointment rate has declined a little bit as a result of the fewer appointments within the public service.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Is it the case that the large majority of appointments are women?

**Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson:** I don't have that information. I could look at that and send it to the committee, but I don't have information on gender.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Gentlemen from the Commissionaires, I think I have this right, does the Commissionaires have a right of first refusal with respect to provision of security services in federal government buildings?

**Col Bill Sutherland:** Yes, we do.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, we're past. If it's a quick one, I'll let you finish it.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Is that a fixed-term arrangement, and when is it up?

**Col Bill Sutherland:** It is a fixed-term. It's up in 2016.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** Favouritism, Chair...

**The Chair:** I know.

I know it's going to happen at the very end, because you're the last witness and we're trying not to cut your time off.

Mr. Lobb, for four minutes, please.

**Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The first question I have for the commissionaires is around psychological evaluations and psychological exams. Certainly, we know that PTSD is a significant issue with our new veterans.

Do you require a psychological exam for the people who are coming into the Commissionaires?

**Capt(N) Paul Guindon:** That is done by the Department of National Defence medical authorities, and it's part of the return-to-work program we have with them. The case is managed by a case manager in the region, and each corps division has a staff person who liaises and manages with that person. We are given the information we need to know in order to make sure the person is well taken care of and protected, but we don't run our own. It's done by DND.

• (1710)

**Col Bill Sutherland:** Can I answer that as well? It's a part that is probably less formal.

Because we're a veterans' organization and our primary purpose is to employ vets, many veterans don't know how to talk about some of their experiences, or are uncomfortable talking about their experiences with non-vets.

One of the services we have provided over the 87 years we've been in place is the opportunity for vets to talk about their experiences with each other. It sort of softens some of the impact of critical incident stress, post-traumatic stress, or whatever kinds of cumulative impacts their service or experiences have created in their own minds.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Let's say that someone who is with you at the Commissionaires wants to apply to the RCMP. Because they've had the psychological exam with DND, are they exempt from taking it with the RCMP?

**Col Bill Sutherland:** I don't know.

**Capt(N) Paul Guindon:** The answer is no.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** I live about an hour away from London. That's where my riding is. Where is the closest Commissionaires office for a veteran in my community?

**Capt(N) Paul Guindon:** There is an office right in London.

**Col Bill Sutherland:** There's a fairly large district office in London.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Okay. That's good.

My next question is for Mr. Blakely. I commend you for what you're doing.

I'm trying to get my head around this website you're working on. Who is working in partnership on that website?

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** The Government of Canada, the various construction contractors, the building trades, and TransCanada Pipelines are working on it.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Is this website going to cost \$150,000?

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** No, it'll probably cost more like \$350,000.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Are there any other similar websites you can work together with, moving forward?

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** The short answer is no.

There is a similar one in the United States that was built at the cost of about \$1 million. It has a number of features that would allow a Canadian Forces member, deployed anywhere in the world, to access material in a confidential way. It could help them see, if they were going to leave, what opportunities they could apply for. It would let us take what they've learned in the Canadian Forces and see what we can do to match them to a good occupation or an occupation that would be suited to them.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** So this website is kind of a portal, like Monster?

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** The people from Monster talked to us. It is not unlike Monster's, but it has security features built into it that Monster's doesn't have.

**The Chair:** Okay.

We're at the time, Mr. Lobb. Thank you.

Ms. Papillon, you have four minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):** Thank you very much. I want to begin by thanking you all for joining us today to talk about what you can do.

I greatly appreciate the efforts you are making to help our veterans make the transition to civilian life. I would like to know what you have to offer, specifically, to our review of front-line health care and well-being services for veterans.

**Capt(N) Paul Guindon:** It is very difficult to give you a specific answer. So I will be more general. The Canadian Corps of Commissionaires provides a family environment, given the large number of veterans in our ranks.

As Bill was saying earlier, that atmosphere is well-known and veterans are very comfortable, not only in terms of social interaction, but also in terms of the way things are done. We are talking about a structure. In the past, we have been accused of being a paramilitary organization, which is not what we are. We are a private, non-profit organization, but we still have that side veterans are comfortable with.

• (1715)

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** So the front-line service primarily consists of the atmosphere you can offer them.

**Capt(N) Paul Guindon:** It's the atmosphere, the work environment, leadership and management at all levels.

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** Very well, thank you.

I have a few questions on the concerns voiced by veterans from my riding. They talked to me a lot about the Helmets to Hardhats Canada program. That program helps some veterans enter the labour market, more particularly the construction labour market. Knowing that an average of 2,000 Canadian Forces veterans have been released for medical reasons over the last few years, I was wondering how many of them you think will be able to find a job in the construction industry thanks to that initiative.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** We expect that we're going to need 240,000 people over the next eight years. In that set of circumstances, finding spots for a couple of thousand veterans shouldn't be a problem.

[Translation]

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** Okay, but how many of those 2,000 veterans could be integrated into the construction industry? We know that's a difficult task.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** Do you mean of those 2,000?

[Translation]

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** There are 2,000 veterans who could be asked to integrate the construction industry. That industry requires physical abilities that those veterans may no longer have or have never had. How many veterans are expected to be hired, through this new program, in the very specific and demanding construction labour market?

[English]

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** Each person and each case would be matched on its own basis. Presently we do a significant amount to modify the work for people who have been in the construction industry for a number of years. If someone can no longer climb or has some difficulty with balance or has other issues, we can modify the workplace. We can modify how the work is done. We can find equipment and tools that will allow the worker to do it. I wouldn't see it being any different for veterans.

The issue for the 2,000, I suppose, revolves around first, whether they're interested in working in the construction industry. If they are, are they prepared to work in an industry that's mobile? There are people who would love to have a job at home, without travel. Our business requires travel.

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

We'll now go to Mr. Harris for four minutes.

**Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations, as well, for the different roles you're playing in transitioning our vets into private life and the workforce.

It appears that you've all achieved a measure of success, and you should be proud of that, but you can't be successful by standing still. Could you maybe briefly outline how you think you could build on the success you have now over, say, the next five to ten years so that you're always on an upward path? Let's start with the public service.

**Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson:** Thank you very much for that question.

I think the study we did on the three cohorts was important. We looked at what has happened with the members since 2005, since we've had the larger entitlement. I think the more hands-on approach, which I discussed in terms of case management, will make a big difference.

I obviously have an important role to play inside the public service to ensure that departments are informed about this program and about their obligations. As the new president, I intend to take up that role very actively.

I can also say that I think we understand a little bit better from this study the types of professions people are being appointed to. There is a broad variety across the country. I think the better we can take that analysis and match it to the front end of the system, where people are being counselled and trained, the better we can increase our placement rate over time.

**Mr. Richard Harris:** Thank you.

Mr. Blakely.

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** I'm a veteran, like my colleagues from the Commissionaires.

One of the things that is really meaningful to people who have served is the camaraderie and the closed-loop system—you know somebody who knows somebody. You know that someone is the salt of the earth, and if that person likes someone, then he or she must be good.

Our industry is a lot like that. There are a lot of people in it, but it is a closed-loop system, and people, like in the Forces, move from job to job to job to job, because that's the only way we build things.

I think once people in the Canadian Forces understand that there is another regiment they can belong to, we will have a significant amount of success and will employ a number of our veterans in very good jobs.

• (1720)

**Mr. Richard Harris:** Thank you.

Commissionaires...?

**Col Bill Sutherland:** To begin with, we recognize that we're part of a continuum of service to veterans, whatever that might be. We're fully focused on the idea that gainful employment has been widely recognized as being probably the best thing we can do for the health and wellness of veterans on an ongoing basis.

We have to remain competitive in a competitive environment, so we have to constantly adapt and change to the changing needs of the environment in which we compete. That means we are constantly searching for different sorts of employment that better match the skills of the young veterans who are coming out of the service now, the more high-tech-savvy types of veterans. Traditional guarding—the commissionaire who is doing pass control on a building—is changing to remote monitoring and that kind of thing. We're constantly trying to find new ways to match the skill sets of veterans who are coming out of the forces with what we can offer them.

We're also constantly trying to find a way to better connect at the appropriate time of a veteran's transition from full-time military employment to their transition out of the forces and how best to plug into or work closely with the Department of National Defence, with Veterans Affairs, and with organizations such as those of my colleagues here, to provide this spectrum of opportunity.

We also need to get our message out that we are good value. We're self-sustaining, we cost no money, and we're the largest employer of veterans—and this provides something valuable.

**Mr. Richard Harris:** Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now, Mr. Storseth, you have more or less four minutes. I was going to give it to Mr. Allison, but it's all yours.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** More or less....

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to say at the beginning that I will be sharing my time with the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, in case he has some good questions.

I would like to thank the witnesses very much.

Mr. Blakely, I think you opened some eyes even around this committee table today when you talked about the types of jobs that are out there. These aren't just manual labour jobs for which a person is getting \$12 an hour. Some are very skilled, very hard, but very highly rewarding jobs, and not just in pay but in the end results as well, especially in our home province of Alberta. As you know, things are booming out there.

Many people around the table are wondering what I'm doing here, working for....

The questions I have for you are in regard to the program and the website. Did your organization ask for more than \$150,000, or was that the ask right now to get things started?

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** Our ask was: can we work with you to do this? The answer was, yes, and by the way, we'll give you some money to get you started.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** So it's a good news story.

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** We thought so.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Absolutely.

I wanted to touch base on the security features that this website will.... Can you elaborate a little on that? I know this is something the CF members in my area really pay attention to, when they start talking about going on some of these sites.

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** The short answer is that I'm a culture boatwain. If you want to know about the metaphysical poetry of John Donne, I can give you a great answer. To talk about the website...I'm a bit at sea.

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

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** That may be one of the best answers of the year. I'll leave the translation to Mr. Casey.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Could we make sure that gets in the report? That was great.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Perhaps you could enlighten us a little about the employers' point of view—how they perceive this program. I've talked to many of them, but I think it's something that would be of interest here.

• (1725)

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** We've had employers lining up to say they're interested in finding people who have a work ethic and have self-discipline. Our employers have been very good at saying they'll make spots for people.

Back home in Alberta, the Construction Labour Relations Association and the Boilermaker Contractors' Association have actively talked about funding this. We're going to make sure we set a number of places for veterans in our apprenticeship cohorts as they go through.

I would say that Canadian employers writ large, at least in our industry, are entirely prepared to step up and do the right thing by the people who went in harm's way for us.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Excellent. Thank you for that.

The last question I have for you on the program is to ask for a little bit of your vision, moving forward.

**Mr. Robert Blakely:** I think the vision is to develop a number of ways by which we can integrate people into the industry.

When someone leaves the Canadian Forces, they may leave with certain skill sets that are transferable. If people don't have those, we would look at trying to find a way to give them a skill set, so that when they go on a job they're not complete strangers there. When you join up and go through your recruit training, you learn enough to be able to say that you're a member of a proud organization. I think that's what we want to do with people who have no transferable skills.

For people who have transferable skills, we'd like to be able to translate those skills so that we can fit people into the appropriate spot in the apprenticeship programs. For people who are professionals—engineers, logisticians—there are HR people, the personnel selection officers or PSOs. Our employers need people who have those skills. They can't get them; they're in the paper all the time.

So we're looking at a way to try to get them into that and then to look at other occupations within the Canadian Forces which may, with a little bit of delta training, put people right at the top when they start. That's the three-year look ahead.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** We're actually a bit over, but you promised Mr. Allison a brief question, if he had one.

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC):** Sure, and I promise to keep it very brief.

Ms. Robinson, congratulations on your recent appointment. I think that's great.

In terms of the placements of the Public Service Commission, there is obviously a wide range—all those other kinds of things.

Just quickly, what types of jobs do you tend to find for vets?

**Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson:** I can give you again the results from that three-cohort study. Between 2007 and the cohort that ended in 2010, 64% of people were appointed to administration and clerical positions; 18% were in such fields as mechanics, chauffeurs, and manual labour; 13% were in technical areas, which includes engineers, informatics specialists, and aviation inspectors. There is another group as well. We've hired lawyers, nurses, border services inspectors, social workers, and correctional services officers.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. We are at the end of our time.

I just want to say that we assume Mr. Storseth's question about why he is here is a rhetorical one. No one has to feel obligated to answer.

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

**The Chair:** I want to inform the members that we will be in a different committee room on Thursday. You'll be informed; we're not sure which one it is right now.

I especially want to thank all of our witnesses for coming forward today. There's been a lot of very helpful and useful information for our study. If you get a few written questions, it's because we didn't have time today to finish.

Thank you very much for being here with us.

We are adjourned.

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