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Chair

Mr. Greg Kerr

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC)): We're in business, looking at Bill C-27, an act to amend the Public Service Employment Act (enhancing hiring opportunities for certain serving and former members of the Canadian Forces).

We have three witnesses today from the Department of Veterans Affairs. We are going to get a brief overview of what the bill's about and then we're going to open up to questions in no particular order.

I welcome Charlotte Bastien, Elizabeth Douglas, and Sandra Lambe.

Charlotte, you've certainly been through our process at one point or another, so we're pleased to have you here today. If you'd like to proceed, we're looking forward to your presentation.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Charlotte Bastien (Director General, Field Operations, Department of Veterans Affairs): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Good afternoon.

[Translation]

My name is Charlotte Bastien. I am the Director General of Field Operations at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

[English]

I'm here today with my colleagues Elizabeth Douglas and Sandra Lambe.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to speak about veterans employment. It is an important topic, and we are pleased to provide an overview of what Veterans Affairs Canada does in that regard.

I'll start with Veterans Affairs programs and support, move on to the priority hiring act, and the hire a veteran initiative and finish by talking about Veterans Affairs Canada's partners in this file.

[Translation]

To provide some context, I want to mention that approximately 7,600 men and women are released from the Canadian Armed Forces each year. Men account for 86% of that figure, and women

account for 14%. About 1,000 of them are medically released, and the average age at the time of release is 37.

Thirty eight percent of those individuals have five years of service or less, 22% between 6 and 20 years, and 37% between 21 and 35 years.

The majority of those who leave the reserve forces have already had a civilian job. The unemployment rate among veterans is on par with the Canadian rate—around 8%—and the unemployment rate among veterans released following service-related injuries....

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Sorry, Mr Chair.

It's wonderful, but I can't hear as quickly as you're speaking. I'm sorry. It's really valuable information, but unfortunately I can't keep up with it.

Even at the risk of you giving her extra time, Mr. Chair, I think it's important that we hear this.

• (1535)

The Chair: We don't want to have our friend offended, so would you mind taking a little more time, please?

Thank you.

Ms. Charlotte Bastien: That's no problem.

As I was saying, the majority leaving the reserves would already have civilian employment. The unemployment rate for veterans is equal to the general Canadian rate—8%. The unemployment rate for veterans released due to injuries is about 15%.

Employment issues generally cluster around certain groups of veterans: younger veterans, those with fewer years of service, those in the lower ranks, and those who are medically released or involuntarily released.

The life after service study shows that 89% of regular force veterans released between 1998 and 2007 worked after release. The breakdown in numbers of veterans after release was as follows: 52.9% worked at a job or business; 20% worked at some point but were not currently working; 7.7% were looking for work; 10.3% were retired or not looking for work; 3.7% went from the regular forces to full-time work in the reserve force. The others included those who were not able to work, for example, because they were on disability, were caring for a family member, or were attending school.

Most veterans leaving the military reported adjusting well and beginning a normal life in the civilian world.

There are three key elements to VAC support in terms of employment: ensuring qualified veterans who wish to work at VAC have the opportunity to do so; providing benefits and services in a wide range of programs; and working with other government departments and not-for-profit and private sector groups to help people understand who our veterans are and what their needs are and to help develop opportunities to support veterans' employment needs.

Two key VAC programs to support releasing Canadian Armed Forces members are the career transition services and the vocational rehabilitation programs. In 2013 Minister Fantino announced changes that give more than 1,300 veterans taking part in our vocational rehabilitation program greater flexibility to access the tools they need for their training, which will cut down on wait times related to vocational assessments.

As a result of these changes, an expanded list of training expenses, such as those for required computer software, electronic books, campus parking, and training equipment are now considered in individual vocational rehabilitation training plans. Veterans are now also able to claim individual vocational rehabilitation expenses through an overall program funding envelope to a maximum total value of \$75,800 per person. In the last five years, 3,381 participants have accessed vocational rehabilitation and vocational assistance through our national contract. As of June 30, 2014 there were 1,355 active participants.

Career transition services help veterans and their survivors find civilian employment, and provide funding for related training and career services consultation. They are available for up to two years after a veteran's date of release from the Canadian Armed Forces. To date, 1,787 veterans have accessed the program. As part of Veterans Affairs Canada's initiative to cut red tape, the government has streamlined the service delivery model for the program by giving eligible veterans or survivors their choice of career transition services that best meet their needs. As well, VAC will reimburse up to \$1,000.

VAC has also taken several steps to ensure that eligible veterans are able to apply for a position at Veterans Affairs Canada if they choose to. They have expanded the area of selection for job competitions to allow the largest number of Canadian Armed Forces personnel to apply; reviewed all the work descriptions in Veterans Affairs to assess which positions could benefit from Canadian Armed Forces experience; and added the relevant Canadian Armed Forces experience as an asset qualification to these positions.

● (1540)

We are working with the Public Service Commission and others to implement new legislation to support veterans seeking positions in the federal government. This initiative is called "Priority Hiring".

[Translation]

The bill proposes to allow honourably released Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans to be given increased access to job opportunities in the public service.

[English]

The introduction of this legislation means that veterans whose medical release is deemed to be attributable to military service will

be eligible for statutory priority hiring status in the federal public service.

Veterans who have been medically released from the Canadian Armed Forces will now be eligible for up to five years of priority hiring status in the federal public service. Veterans who have been honourably released and who have had at least three years of military service will now receive preference in external advertised federal public service employment processes. Canadian Armed Forces serving personnel and veterans who have been honourably released with at least three years of military service will now be able to view and participate in internal advertised public service employment processes.

[Translation]

As for the next steps, Veterans Affairs Canada is working with the Department of National Defence and the Public Service Commission to ensure that Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans will benefit from those changes when Bill C-27 comes into force. The changes will take effect once the bill has received royal assent—probably in 2015.

[English]

I will now go on to the hire a veteran program.

[Translation]

I will explain what this program is about.

[English]

Through the hire a veteran initiative launched in December 2012, Veterans Affairs Canada partners with corporate Canada to help veterans and releasing Canadian Armed Forces personnel find civilian jobs. The hire a veteran employer partners send their employment opportunities and/or links to career pages to us, and we share the posting with a network consisting of front-line staff, our national vocational rehabilitation service contractor, and the Canadian Armed Forces. These postings are then shared with job-seeking Canadian Armed Forces personnel and veterans.

The hire a veteran website includes information for both job seekers and employers. To assist releasing military personnel and veterans in finding employment, the website provides links to Employment and Social Development Canada tools, public service priority hiring information, and other relevant sites.

The hire a veteran website also provides information for employers regarding the value veterans bring to the civilian workforce and information on the Canadian Armed Forces, such as military ranks, occupation, training, and skills developed in the military. This information helps employers better understand the military culture from which our veterans are transitioning. Therefore, employers are better positioned to help these veterans integrate into the civilian workplace.

Through the hire a veteran initiative, over 160 employers have committed to hiring veterans. Here are some examples of our employer partners: Bell Canada, Target, Walmart Canada, Cenovus Energy, Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, Intuit Canada, Cabela's Canada, Mount Allison University, Queen's University, and the Canadian National Railway.

Our employer partners would be able to contribute a valuable perspective to your committee in its work. In particular, we would suggest that you consider inviting Bell Canada, Target, Intuit Canada, or the Canadian National Railway to appear before the committee.

● (1545)

To sum up, I mentioned our partners helping with this important file. To maximize civilian employment opportunities, Veteran Affairs works with the Canadian Armed Forces in partnership with two key non-profit organizations: the True Patriot Love Foundation and Canada Company.

The department's partnership with Canada Company is primarily through the military employment transition program, which is creating direct links between Canadian Armed Forces personnel, reservists, and veterans who are seeking jobs in the civilian workforce, and employer partners who want to hire transitioning military personnel and veterans for their valued skill sets.

Through the military employment transition program, employer partners are required to report on veteran hires through an employer partner memorandum of understanding. Approximately 180 veteran-friendly employer partners have committed to working together to help veterans and releasing Canadian Armed Forces personnel find civilian jobs.

Our other key non-profit partner is the True Patriot Love Foundation, which leads the Veteran Transition Advisory Council. Established by the Minister of Veteran Affairs, the council is mandated to identify challenges and barriers faced by Canadian veterans during the transition from military to civilian employment. The council includes representatives from leading national companies, who work to raise awareness of the skill sets that veterans have to offer the private sector.

In the fall of 2013, the Council made interim recommendations regarding the transition to civilian employment, and, as a result, the council established five working groups related to these recommendations. The working groups are focusing on a one-stop-shop web portal, a marketing campaign, supported employment, a veterans membership program, and certification.

This concludes our presentation. We would be pleased to take any questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Charlotte.

What we're going to do is a little different; we're going to go a question at a time.

What I'll do to make sure that each party is involved is that we'll do the regular rotation for the first three questions. So Mr. Stoffer first, then you, and then Uncle Frank over there. Then we'll just go by hands. After the three questions, it will be show of hands, and the clerk will take note.

You have just one question if you would, Mr. Stoffer, please.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): For, say, five minutes?

The Chair: No, just ask a question.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: One question.

The Chair: And we'll get back to you later.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I have about nine questions.

The Chair: I know you do. That's why I'm asking you to ask one question now, if you wouldn't mind.

Thank you.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Since I have just one question, in the legislation it says that the spouses of those who have died in the line of service would be entitled to this prior to service hiring.

What happens to the spouse of an individual who is severely injured and can no longer work? For example, a person in Afghanistan who has lost both legs and an arm or something, and has psychological problems on top of that. They are released from the service. They can no longer work. They didn't die in the service but they can no longer work, and now it's up to the spouse to be the breadwinner, besides whatever benefits this person would get on the financial side.

The legislation doesn't say it's for those who are permanently disabled and cannot work anymore; it says if the individual dies....

My question is, are you willing to accept or at least look at an amendment that would include not just those who have died in the service of the country so that their spouses could be on the list, but also those who have become permanently disabled and can no longer work again? Would they also be entitled to be covered by this legislation?

I have more questions, but I've been told I can only ask one.

Thank you for coming.

The Chair: Who wishes to respond?

Okay, Ms. Lambe, please.

Ms. Sandra Lambe (Director, Program Policy and Outreach, Department of Veterans Affairs): I can only speak to what is in the bill before us, Mr. Stoffer, and it is not something that is addressed in the current legislation. I can't speak to what government may consider.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Can you bring it back to the minister?

● (1550)

Ms. Sandra Lambe: Yes, I'll absolutely take your question back.

The Chair: He did get two questions in. Did you notice that?

Mr. Hawn, please.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thanks so much.

Thank you all for being here.

My question revolves around medical release/disability, somebody who may be released but is not yet physically able to participate.

I'm going to quote something that's in the notes from the Library of Parliament. It says: Minister Fantino has stated that the PSEER [Public Service Employment Regulations] will also be amended so that the priority will be valid for five years following the date on which the member of the CAF asserts his or her right.

For example, a person could get out, be medically released, be going through rehab and so on, and not be in a physical or mental position to assert that five-year window. According to what I'm reading here, this means that all members released for medical reasons will have five years to recover, and once they are fit to work will be entitled to the priority right for another five-year period.

Is that correct? I'm hoping that it is.

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas (Senior Director, Strategic and Enabling Initiatives, Service Delivery Program Management, Department of Veterans Affairs): Thank you for the question.

Yes, you are correct. First, members cannot release until they are medically stabilized, following which there is a five-year eligibility period in which veterans must be deemed fit to return to work by a certified, accountable authority. Following that period, there is the new five-year priority entitlement.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: So it could be much longer than five years?

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: Yes, that is correct.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Valeriote, please.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: First of all, thank you for your presentation. I think I speak for all of us around this table that we're largely in support of this legislation, subject to some of our questions today.

I'm going to follow what Mr. Hawn and quote what he was referring to:

This means that all members released for medical reasons will have five years to recover, and, once they are fit to work, be entitled to the priority right for another five-year period.

I come from a legal background. Limitation periods usually commence from the time you knew or ought to have known, and a lot of liberty is given when you discuss the definition of "ought to have known". I won't speak for everyone, just myself. I have been involved in a number of cases where I've been acutely aware of how the medical attention given to some members of our forces has not been at its best: there have been misdiagnoses, they have been assumed to be fit and aren't, and they have died suddenly as a result of a misdiagnosis. I can give you those examples and names off the record at another time. Frankly, I'd be happy to share them. I'm speaking about those people who suffer PTSD symptoms seven years after they've been stabilized or thought to have been stabilized.

I had a thoughtful conversation with a government member of Parliament before coming here. He explained the difference to me, but I'd like you to tell us, if you could, why there is this period of five years, why there is that limitation, when we know that, notwithstanding the prognosis of someone being stabilized, it indeed isn't

always the case. What happens to that person when they destabilize and start looking for another job because they lost one as a result of a manifestation years later, say, of PTSD?

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: Thank you for the question.

First, I want to go back to the terms. The terms are a five-year period for eligibility. First, we would encourage veterans to first apply for regulatory priority. They could have regulatory priority for up to five years, during which time they could be deemed fit to return to work and be registered for priority statutory. That's when this kicks in.

Your question goes to what is over and above any of those periods. At that time, we're going to have to look at other VAC programs and services that could assist those veterans.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hayes, please.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to make sure that none of you have any challenges in interpreting this bill. I don't want it to be subjective in any way, so I need to have some assurance that the implementation is being planned and that from your perspective this bill's very clear. We're obviously going to be considering amendments. Do you see any challenges with implementing this bill, in terms of resources, administration, and communication? Changes are expected to take place in 2015, according to your outline. I just want some assurance that those changes can take place by 2015 with the bill as it's worded now.

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: Thank you for the question.

As the bill is worded now, we have been working quite closely with both DND and the Public Service Commission to ensure that there is a very robust implementation plan. On that note, and given that this is above and beyond the scope, I will close. Thank you.

The Chair: That was quick.

Mr. Chicoine.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank the witnesses for joining us today to provide explanations on Bill C-27.

My questions are about medical releases.

The bill distinguishes between different medical reasons. For instance, a veteran who has suffered a service-related injury would have a priority for appointment in the public service, while a veteran who has suffered a non-service related injury would always remain on the preferential list. Why has a distinction been made between the injuries?

I would like to know something else. Out of the thousands of military members released each year, how many are released following service-related injuries and how many are released for other medical reasons? Why has this distinction been made when it probably shouldn't have been, as suggested by the Veterans Ombudsman?

[English]

Ms. Sandra Lambe: Thank you. I'll address that question.

We do recognize, and the bill recognizes, that those CF personnel who are medically released have had their military careers end prematurely, and that is for reasons beyond their control. However, those whose military service is cut short because of a service-related injury or illness have made a significant sacrifice in service to their country, so that is why there's the distinction between those two groups.

In terms of your question on the statistics, I'm sorry, but I don't have that breakdown with me. There are approximately 1,000 to 1,200 medically released each year, but I would have to get back to you on the question of how many would be medically released with a service-related injury.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Valeriote, please. You had another question?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Yes, thank you.

I'm not going to lie to you: there are two questions in this.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Frank Valeriote: You'll catch on.

I spent very little time—five days—in the program that allowed me to join the forces out in Edmonton, and then five days in the program that allowed me to join the navy on HMCS *St. John's*, and I'm telling you, it was unbelievable. I couldn't believe the professionalism; I also could not believe the skills. I was overwhelmed with the skills, especially when I was in the armaments room on the ship and saw all the computers. It was just beyond me.

I look at the opportunities that our servicemen and -women are given when they leave, and I know you're only working with what you're given to work with. I understand that. But there are skills translation services out there that I know are used in the United States. I've seen them on computers in my office that have been brought to me, and they translate the skills of our servicemen and -women. When I was being shown that, I was thinking about what I saw on the ship and out in Edmonton, and my mind was shifting to materials management, leadership, human resources, logistics, computer software development, and transportation systems that school boards have to develop so their kids are moved around properly. These are skills that many people learn in our forces.

So I have to ask you about this. We're supportive of this legislation, but why would we restrict ourselves? You guys are in the position where you do this stuff. You eat, drink, and breathe this stuff every day. We don't. You do. Why would you not be looking at more effective skills translators that could be used to facilitate the proper translation and connection of those people? You mentioned it at the end in regard to the council that's looking at these four different areas, but I was listening for better skills translation as a fifth focus, and I never heard it. Why wouldn't you be looking at that so we could better help our servicewomen and -men into the skills of the present and the future?

My second question is, you didn't answer why the limitation period—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Frank Valeriote: No, he had two questions couched in his.

Why is it five years? Why a limitation at all? Why not no limitation?

• (1600)

The Chair: We will get to the second question after we do the other rounds. Your intro story was very cute, but it was so long—

Mr. Frank Valeriote: I was candid about the two questions.

The Chair: Please answer the one question and we will get back to them if we have time.

Ms. Sandra Lambe: In fact, skills translation, and a variety of tools like that are among the things that the Veterans Transition Advisory Council is looking at. As Charlotte mentioned, we also partner with Canada Company, which has the military employment transition program. If you look at their site, they do have a number of tools available to veterans and employers that try to make that connection between what you did in the military and how that translates into a civilian workplace.

We are using a number of tools along those lines, and there are, of course, always new tools and initiatives that come across our desks. We do explore any new things that come along to see if there are opportunities to partner.

The Chair: Monsieur Galipeau.

[Translation]

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for meeting with us today.

I also have a question for you. In his Economic Action Plan 2014, the late Jim Flaherty proposed amendments to the Public Service Employment Act to improve employment opportunities for veterans within the public service.

Can you tell us how consistent the bill is with the efforts the government is making to support the transition of veterans to civilian life? Can you compare this with other initiatives we have implemented to make it easier for veterans to find a job?

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: Thank you for the question.

There are four key changes to Bill C-27, the first of which is statutory hiring, and that is for all Canadian Armed Forces members who have been medically released and whose medical release is attributable to service. That then becomes the two five-year periods: the first one to deem eligibility and registration, after which comes the five-year period of entitlement.

Secondly, there is the regulatory priority. With regulatory priority, this bill extends the benefits from two to five years.

Thirdly, there is what we call “preference”. With preference, a veteran who has been honourably released, who also has a minimum of three years of service and is not employed indeterminately by the Public Service Commission, will receive preference for externally advertised Public Service Commission positions.

Fourthly, and finally, there is what we call “mobility”. With mobility, veterans, along with all Canadian Armed Forces members who have three years of service and veterans who have been honourably released and are not serving in an indeterminate position with the Public Service Commission, will now be able to view and apply for internally posted service positions with the Government of Canada.

That is how we meet the economic action plan 2014.

•(1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: With that kind of answer, Mr. Chairman, it looks as if I gave her notice of the question.

The Chair: That's called collusion, I think.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you, Chair.

In reference to my previous question regarding the disabled veteran who can no longer work and their spouse, the analyst has come up with something here that I think needs clarification. If a military person dies in the line of service, is the surviving spouse entitled to that five-year limitation for priority service hiring with the Government of Canada? The analyst thinks no, but I just wanted a verification.

Ms. Sandra Lambe: That's correct. There is not a change in the regulatory priority period for surviving spouses. However, the bill does propose that the surviving spouses of all Canadian Armed Forces personnel who are killed in the line of duty have access to the regulatory priority—so all classes of Canadian Armed Forces personnel.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Again, just to clarify, if I'm a military person who dies in the line of service and my wife then needs to go to work, does she qualify for this priority service hiring? Yes or no?

Ms. Sandra Lambe: The regulatory priority.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: No, I'm sorry. Like the woman here just said about the hiring—not medically released—but they.... It's quite clear. If I were to die, could she call up the Public Service Commission and say that her husband had passed away and that she'd like to apply for a federal public service job? Would she be given priority similar to that of a medically released veteran?

Ms. Sandra Lambe: She would be given regulatory priority. It's not the statutory priority; it is the regulatory priority.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Can you explain the difference, please? I'm ignorant about the difference between regulatory and statutory. I'm sorry.

Ms. Sandra Lambe: No, that's—

The Chair: I would ask the same question.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

Ms. Sandra Lambe: No, that's fine. I will try to clarify.

I know you are hearing from our colleagues at the Public Service Commission after this. They are very familiar with the.... It is their legislation, so they certainly have more expertise in it.

With the priority system, there is a statutory priority, which is a higher level. It is set out in the legislation. Then there is a regulatory priority, which is set out in the regulations. It is a different level of priority. So a statutory priority is a higher priority.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

The Chair: That would be a question, then, for the next witnesses.

Ms. Sandra Lambe: Yes, the Public Service Commission elaborate on it.

The Chair: I think they're hearing it as they're sitting there.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: They could write it down.

The Chair: Mr. Rafferty, please.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here.

I notice that the RCMP is not mentioned anywhere in this bill. I was wondering, if an RCMP member were to die while in service, would his or her spouse qualify for anything in this bill? And if not, why not?

Ms. Sandra Lambe: Yes. I would defer to my colleagues at the Public Service Commission to provide you with details on that. There is a regulatory priority for the RCMP. I will let them explain in further detail. Again, I don't want to miss any details and they are much more versed in the legislation.

The Chair: I think, John, that question will come up again before the day is over.

•(1610)

Mr. John Rafferty: Yes.

The Chair: Minister Hawn, please.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

I want to go back to Peter Stoffer talking about survivors. He says that clause 12 specifies that the definition of a survivor of a veteran hasn't changed in Bill and that the definition is restricted to survivors of veterans who served in the Second World War. So the survivor of a modern veteran would not be treated the same way. Am I misunderstanding that?

Ms. Sandra Lambe: Sorry, could you repeat that once more?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I'm sure you know this from the Library of Parliament. The definition of a survivor of a veteran previously was a veteran who served in the Second World War. That hasn't changed with Bill C-27 apparently. It's still restricted to survivors of veterans who served in the Second World War. I'm just wondering why that would be, or am I completely misunderstanding something?

Ms. Sandra Lambe: With this bill, the surviving spouse of a Canadian Armed Forces member whose death is attributable to performance of duties would be eligible for the regulatory priority.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Okay. I wonder why the Library of Parliament put that note in there. It confused me. But maybe I'm just easily confused.

The Chair: The analyst can provide an answer.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher): The difference is between a priority and a preference given in the legislation. Before that, in the Public Service Employment Act, the priority was given to veterans and their survivors, but as stated in the definition at the end, it only applied to veterans of the Second World War. After the Second World War, spouses of deceased veterans were eligible for this preference. Now it's only the regulatory priority that applies, not the statutory preference.

The Chair: Is that good enough?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes, that's fine—regulatory, statutory preference....

Mr. Peter Stoffer: We're going to get that explained.

The Chair: Is this on your second question?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Yes, I'm ready to go.

The Chair: If you're ready to go, go ahead.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: I don't get a lot of respect at this table, as you can see.

I think about how many men and women leave the forces at an early age. I think about how few jobs are out there, with the cutting of 27,000 jobs out of the public service. I think about how hopeful the intention of the bill is, but its practical application may fall far short of what is hoped for by the legislation.

So I'm going to ask you, why is there the five-year limitation period? As skilled as the minister is in whatever he did in his previous life, I know he didn't write this; somebody else thought of the five years. Why not leave it open?

Ms. Sandra Lambe: It's a good question. Unfortunately, I can speak only to what is in the bill before us. I can certainly take that point back, but the five—

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Where do you take it back to?

Ms. Sandra Lambe: To officials in our department.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Okay. On that and a previous one, they've undertaken to bring answers back. In court that's called an "undertaking", and they have to comply. Can we expect those answers soon?

The Chair: What I would say is that probably some of this should be passed to...because the PS is not here today. We'll make sure they're passed on to the minister's office, because in fairness, those are questions that get into policy in government.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Oh, I get it—as long as we get them.

The Chair: Yes, fair enough. We'll make sure that we get that. It will be recorded, then, Frank.

Now, we're at the end of our list. I know we're going to be cramped for time in the second round, but is there any other question around the table?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: We'll go to the next round.

The Chair: A number of these questions will be specifically asked of the next round of witnesses, and they're just anxious to get in their seats.

We thank you very much for coming in and appreciate your efforts today. Thank you.

We'll allow just a couple of minutes to change chairs. We'll suspend for a couple of minutes.

● (1615)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1620)

The Chair: We'll reconvene.

Committee members, we have about 15 or 20 minutes of business to do at the end of this process, so I'll give you notice of how much time we need and we'll go in camera.

I trust that other members will show up here for the government side, but we'll move right along anyway.

As you're well aware from what happened previously, we have the second group in who are the ones who probably really understand the background legislation. I'd like to welcome Anne-Marie Robinson, Gerry Thom, and Michael West from the Public Service Commission of Canada. We appreciate your coming today.

I understand that you'd like about eight minutes to open, then we'll go to the same type of round of questions.

Please, when you're ready.

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson (President, Public Service Commission of Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'm very pleased to be here today to discuss Bill C-27, the veterans hiring act.

[Translation]

The Public Service Commission administers programs under the Public Service Employment Act to support the public service staffing system.

There are three important mechanisms in this bill, which will support the hiring of veterans and current members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

[English]

Today, I'd like to walk you through the changes to all three of those mechanisms. The first is the priority entitlement for medically released veterans. These entitlements provide persons with a right to be appointed ahead of all others to any position in the public service for which they've been assessed and are found qualified. The second is a preference in a competitive process to appoint qualified veterans to jobs that are externally advertised. The third is the eligibility of current Canadian Armed Forces members, as well as veterans, to participate in all advertised internal hiring processes.

[Translation]

Under the current legislative regime, the PSC is responsible for administering priority entitlements, which have an extensive scope. They apply to jobs in all regions of Canada and in all organizations covered by the Public Service Employment Act.

[English]

Before filling a vacant position a manager must first consider priority persons. The PSC is responsible for referring potentially qualified priority persons to hiring managers. Managers are provided with a clearance to proceed with an appointment process only if the PSC is satisfied that there's no one in the priority system who meets the essential qualifications of those positions.

There are two different types of priority entitlements: statutory priorities and regulatory priorities. Statutory priorities take precedence over regulatory priorities. That determines the order in which they are referred to departments, and is the reason why the order of precedence is important.

Under the current system surplus employees occupy the top statutory priority for appointment in their own organizations. This means that they must be appointed to vacant positions for which they are qualified before a person with a regulatory priority. Medically released veterans currently have a regulatory priority. From 2008 to 2012, the appointment of medically released veterans had the highest rate of placement—72% of all priority groups. However, the implementation of the 2012 spending review resulted in more surplus employees entering the priority system and, as I have already mentioned, they are the ones who have top statutory priority.

In the summer of 2012, the PSC shared this information with the Department of Veterans Affairs on the impact that the influx of surplus employees, as well as the decrease in the staffing, was having on the placement of medically released veterans. At the request of that department, the PSC provided technical options to address the situation for their consideration.

[Translation]

Since April 2012, more than 2,000 priority employees have been appointed to vacant positions. The majority of these appointments were surplus employees. Over the same two years, 67 medically released veterans were appointed, compared with 307 appointed during the two previous years.

Under the proposed changes, qualified veterans who are medically released with a service-related injury or illness would become the top statutory priority with an entitlement period that has been extended from two to five years. In other words, they would be considered and, if qualified, they would be appointed before all others.

• (1625)

The legislation would amend the existing regulatory priority for those veterans medically released for non-service related reasons to extend the current entitlement period from two years to five years.

[English]

Once this legislation comes into force, the changes to the priority entitlement will apply retroactively to April 1, 2012. Once medically released, veterans have five years in which to activate their priority entitlement. The PSC believes that the amendments to the priority entitlements proposed in Bill C-27 will make a difference.

As well, we have made significant enhancements to strengthen the priority administration program to better respond to the needs of organizations and priority persons. For instance, we put in place a case management approach to work directly with medically released veterans to advise them of their entitlements and to assist them in their search for public service employment.

I would now like to turn to the veterans preference. The veterans preference is a different type of mechanism under the Public Service Employment Act. The proposed amendment would update the definition of a veteran to add modern-day Canadian Armed Forces members who are honourably released with at least three years of service. The proposed amendment would give veterans a preference, if found qualified, to positions that are open to the Canadian public. In this case, veterans would access the website jobs.gc.ca, where jobs are advertised externally, choose whether to apply for a position or positions, and enter a competitive process. This preference means that if these veterans enter a competitive process and are assessed and meet the essential qualifications, they must be appointed ahead of others in the appointment process. The ability to benefit from such a preference would be in effect for up to five years following their release from the Canadian Armed Forces.

To help provide context, during the past five years the PSC has seen an average of slightly more than 5,500 persons hired permanently into the public service through external job competitions. This represents about one in every six job competitions. During the same period, there were on average just over 31,500 internal staffing activities per year for comparison.

This brings me to the third mechanism, which will be changed to allow current armed forces members as well as veterans to participate in all advertised internal processes. Since 2005, deputy heads and their hiring managers have had the option of giving members of the Canadian Armed Forces access to internal job competitions, but this proposed amendment would make that mandatory.

[Translation]

This means that veterans and current Canadian Armed Forces members would have access to these opportunities, but once they apply, they would be treated the same as all other applicants.

[English]

Mr. Chair, these provisions apply only to organizations that come under the Public Service Employment Act. I understand that discussions are under way with several organizations as well that are not subject to the Public Service Employment Act. These organizations, which have regional operations, are exploring administrative ways in which they can also meaningfully participate in these efforts to find employment for veterans. Our experience shows there has been a high rate of success in placing medically released veterans in large operational departments with a broad geographic footprint. In a way, this corresponds to where many members of the Canadian Armed Forces are employed. The involvement of these organizations would increase the number of employment opportunities for veterans. The PSC is committed to supporting this process in any way that we can.

Mr. Chair, we will continue to do all that we can to ensure that entitlements of medically released Canadian Armed Forces members are fully respected and to support veterans, as well as current members, in bringing their valuable skills and experience to the federal public service.

I'd like now to answer your questions.

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

We're going to follow the same format, and we'll go one, two, three, and then by hands, so Mr. Rafferty is the first one for the NDP, please.

Mr. John Rafferty: Oh, no, you go ahead.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: No, no, fire away.

Mr. John Rafferty: Okay, thank you very much. I didn't mean to do that.

You were here for the last panel, and you probably heard my question. I'll repeat it.

There's no mention of the RCMP in this bill, which, of course, Veterans Affairs has a mandate for. So in the case of an RCMP officer who is injured or dies in service, it's my understanding that in this bill their spouse would not be eligible for any sort of preferential hiring. The RCMP is not included in this bill, and I just wonder why they were excluded. Could you maybe comment on that?

• (1630)

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: I'm going to ask Michael to clarify the entitlements of the persons you've just talked about.

Like my colleagues, I cannot speak to the reason. As the president of the commission I report independently to Parliament, and the policy authority rests with the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Under this legislation, it's my job, if the law is put in place and passed by Parliament, to ensure that I administer the legislation in accordance with the act.

Mr. Michael West (Acting Director General, Delegation and Accountability, Public Service Commission of Canada): Thank you for the question.

With regard to surviving spouses, we do have a priority for them in the public service employment regulations currently. It applies to the spouse of an employee of the public service, or a member of the RCMP, or a member of the Canadian Armed Forces whose death is attributable to the performance of duties. In this case, the priority entitlement, which would allow them to be appointed ahead of others if they're found qualified, would be for a period of one year, and it applies to all positions staffed through an external competition open to the public.

Mr. John Rafferty: I assume that I don't get a second question?

The Chair: You assume correctly. Thank you.

Mr. Hayes, please.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to ask a question specifically related to priority 1 hiring, so that's armed forces personnel, medically released. Let's assume we have a member who has served three years and a member who has served 10 years competing for the same position. The skill sets are 100% identical.

Is preference given to the Canadian Forces member who served longer? How is it determined in that situation? Has that been considered in any way, shape, or form?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: As far as I understand it—I'll have Michael correct me if I'm wrong—the duration of their service is not considered directly in the appointment process. However, as part of their experience, of course, that would be evaluated through an appointment process. In terms of priorities, we get to know the veterans when they register in our system, and then we refer them to jobs that come to us through departments, basically by matching their skills to the requests from departments.

In the case of a preference, for example, which is the second mechanism that's in the bill, if you have an external competition and there are one or more medically released veterans who qualify, a veteran would be appointed ahead of all others in that competitive process. If there are two or three veterans who are equally qualified, then the manager would use what we call “asset qualification”: additional qualifications to assess which person is appointed in a competitive process.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Valeriote, please.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: I think you were listening when I asked the previous panel about the five-year limitation. I had expressed concern about what I really thought was a reduction in the number of job opportunities because they're cutting back in the public service. I think 27,000 was the last number I heard; it could be more. Frankly, the manifestation of people's problems could occur after a five-year period, not having manifested before that, in which case I'm told they're entitled to regulatory but not statutory priority.

Now I'm reading something here that gives me even more concern, unless I'm reading this wrong. It says that it's retroactive to April 1, 2012. Looking at it, that means they could already have been within one of those five-year periods back in 2012. It might be their second five-year period. Let's say they've already been released for medical reasons before that, they've recovered, and they might be in their second five-year period in 2012, which leaves them only a couple of years. I may be reading that wrong and you can correct that, but it does cause me concern. But why five years? Why not just say “you assumed unlimited liability for us”?

It's unlimited, which is more than most around this table, although there are some at this table who have served and have assumed unlimited liability, Laurie.

Why five years? It sounds arbitrary to me.

• (1635)

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the question.

For the reasons I just mentioned, I can't comment on the five-year period, but what I can say about the retroactivity is that my understanding is that the retroactivity was there.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, there were a number of veterans who had been registered in the system in 2012 and 2013-14. Because of the way the current legislation works, when we had a large influx of surplus workers into the system, our rate for appointment of medically released veterans went from a normal rate of about 150 per year down to a range of 30 per year. I think the retroactivity in part is to allow those people whose entitlement may

have expired in the last two years, or been impacted through that difficult period, to have an additional five years of entitlement.

I'll ask Michael to confirm that, because it's an important part of this bill.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Can he talk about the five years?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: No, I don't think he can.

Mr. Michael West: The important thing about the duration of the priority entitlements of the second five-year period is that by making it retroactive it is a completely new period. So if somebody already has had their priority entitlement period, and it came to an end in April or May or June of 2012, and they couldn't have been placed because of the influx of the surplus priority people from the public service, these people will now be entitled to a completely new priority entitlement of five years. So the retroactivity doesn't hurt anybody. It's an advantage for them.

The Chair: Thank you for that. I would just point out that I appreciate the clarification on the five years. Our learned friend over here knows that his messaging is just going over to people sitting somewhere on this side here, so he doesn't really expect you would be able to give the policy answer. We appreciate your answer in that regard. I think I got that correct. I hope I did.

Mr. Galipeau, please.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Chairman, if I have a short question, can I have a second?

The Chair: Probably after supper, yes. Okay.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you very much for coming, and thank you for being here even during the first witnesses.

My short question is this. Given the spirit of Bill C-27 could you talk about how it would enhance the employment opportunities for our veterans in the public service.

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you very much.

Prior to 2012 when we had, as I said, an influx of surplus workers and saw the rate of medically released veterans' appointments fall, this was in fact the group in the appointment system that had the highest rate of appointments. I think it's because veterans and medically released veterans have the skills and experience the public service needs. So I think this mechanism will help meet the staffing needs in the future public service.

I would also say that notwithstanding the downsizing that's been going on in the past couple of years, the numbers in the priority system have almost returned to pre-2012 levels, and as I just reported in my annual report released last week, staffing activity picked up last year. The Treasury Board estimates there are in the range of 8,000 public servants who are eligible to retire each year. So even if the public service remains the size it is today, we will still need to recruit people into public service jobs. So all of these provisions are very helpful to the public service in providing

[Translation]

pools of candidates available to staff positions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Stoffer, please.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all very much for coming. I do get a bit of a kick out of it when I see reference made to creating new employment opportunities for the federal public service, because this was discussed in 2005 with the late Jack Stagg. In fact, prior to his service, hiring veterans was one of the key components of the New Veterans Charter. Unfortunately, not many departments picked up on this, except for DND and DVA, so I'm very pleased to see this is happening now.

But my question for you deals with the following scenario. Say I have 22 years in the public service and I get laid off because of downsizing by a federal government. A position opens up that I'm equally qualified for. A veteran who has five years of service, who say has an injury and is medically released, applies for the job and has five or six years of service within the government by having been in the military. They apply for the job and have similar qualifications to mine. I've served 22.5 years, and I'm qualified. This person served some five odd years with the military. Even though by law they are not considered to be public servants by virtue of that service, it says here that they would be appointed over and above me.

I wanted to verify if indeed that is correct, and if it is correct has it been discussed? I say this because I hope they are going to come here.

I don't know what the view of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the union, is of this. I haven't asked them because I don't know, but has the commission talked to them, or do they know of any conversations with the alliance in this regard to see if it supports this type of legislation? I hope they would, but it would be interesting to see what they said.

Have you had that conversation, or are you even entitled to that conversation with them?

•(1640)

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: As I mentioned previously, the policy authority rests with the Department of Veterans Affairs, so I think they may be able to speak to that issue.

Having said that, I think it's important as well to look at the numbers. Typically, at least up to 2012, we had in the range of several hundred, maybe 150, 200, 250, medically released veterans in the priority system at any given time. When the downsizing exercise happened, we had an influx of thousands of surplus workers. That had the effect of almost entirely displacing the appointments of medically released veterans. If that had been reversed, because there were fewer medically released veterans than workers declared surplus, it would have resulted, and will result in the future, if this law is adopted, in more of a rebalancing of the system. There would still be much opportunity. If this had been reversed at the time, we still would have appointed many surplus workers. In fact, we're proud to say that since April 1, 2012, we've appointed almost 2,500 surplus workers and other people in the priority systems. So there is a demand for people in the priority system and, as I said, staffing activity is picking up.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I should point out, by the way, that the union was invited and declined to attend.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: They declined?

The Chair: Yes. The clerk just confirmed that.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: That's so sad.

The Chair: We're interested in their views, but we can't force people to come.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: No? Well, carry on, then.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Hawn is next, please.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thanks, Chair.

And thanks to our witnesses again for being here.

I have just a couple of quick points relative to Mr. Valeriotte, and these aren't questions.

Mr. Frank Valeriotte: They're points, not questions.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Points, not questions....

This bill is not for the next couple of years, but for the next 50 years. Whether there are jobs today or not, this is long term. Also, the RCMP is under different legislation. In fact, they work for Treasury Board, so they wouldn't be covered under this.

Relative to the Public Service Staffing Tribunal and the appeal process—and it actually might go back to something that Mr. Stoffer just said, that a 22-year veteran of the public service might be crankier if a five-year veteran of military got appointed—could you brief us a little bit on the appeal process, and does anything in Bill C-27 change that appeal process?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: I'm going to ask Michael to clarify if anything will change, but my understanding is that it will not. What happens in the priority system is that there is an order in which people are referred. If this legislation is passed, then medically released veterans who are released for service-related reasons would be at the top of the list. They would get referred and considered first, and if found qualified, would be appointed. If there are issues in the appointment process, the commission has actually designed the process so that the controls are built in up front. If people have concerns, if veterans have concerns or departments have questions, we have officers available to deal with those in real-time as the appointment's being considered.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Up front and not...?

Okay, thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chicoine, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today to answer our questions.

I would like to know what happens when a position within the public service becomes vacant. I was under the impression that, when a position became vacant, it was first offered to surplus employees, advertised internally for all public service employees and then advertised publicly on websites, in newspapers and so on.

Is that how things work when a position becomes vacant?

• (1645)

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: I will ask Mr. Thom to explain our staffing process.

Mr. Gerry Thom (Vice-President, Staffing and Assessment Services, Public Service Commission of Canada): Thank you for this question.

That's not exactly how things work. It is important to bear in mind that the staffing of a position requires an authorization number. When a position is staffed internally, the competition is open only to public service employees. Priority positions are open to the general public.

When a position is staffed, either internally or externally, an authorization number is required. That is when my organization would check what the individual who needs to staff a position is asking for in terms of experience, education and so on.

We then match them with individuals who have priority access. That's done at the very beginning of the process. A position is not open to the general public because no one is found within government. The people who are in charge of staffing a position have to decide from the outset whether the competition is internal or external. Regardless of their decision, they must take into account priority appointments.

Before anything is done, if Bill C-27 is passed, medically released veterans will have priority access.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Is this always indicated on the Web?

Mr. Gerry Thom: Yes, always.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Okay.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Valeriotte.

Mr. Frank Valeriotte: I'm going to repeat an earlier question that I put to Charlotte, Elizabeth, and Sandra from the Department of Veterans Affairs. It was with respect to a skills translator. You'll recall that I talked about my experience, being both with the military and the navy, and how professionally trained many of these men and women are, frankly beyond what I expected to see.

In my own mind, I could see them moving into materiel management. I've written them down: leadership, human resources, logistics, computer and software development, and understanding transportation systems that could be applied in school boards, etc.

I understand that the council is looking at four areas right now. I look at a skills translator. I think about the costs, frankly, the insignificant costs, of using an effective skills translator and aligning our armed force members, women and men, with the jobs that are out there, far more than public service jobs, and private sector jobs.

I've seen it in application in the United States. It just seems to be a more effective way of doing this. Goodness, I bless you for the work you're doing, and I'm not criticizing you, but why aren't we thinking outside of the box in which we tend to think right now? Can we? Are you the people I should be asking about this? If you are, what are we doing about it?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Certainly, we will think about how that could be applicable in work that we do in supporting veterans and matching them to positions available in the public service, but I'd also like to comment on what you observed earlier.

Veterans do have a vast, diverse set of skills and linguistic qualifications. When we looked at the data coming into this committee, we saw that they were appointed to a wide range of occupations across the country: finance, engineering, clerical, trades.

They do have the skills that we need and we do anticipate the ability, particularly with the changes in this bill, to place an increasing number of veterans.

The Chair: Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Stoffer and I sat on the this committee, I believe, when we were elected in 2006. Once you've been on this committee, there's a place in your heart that's a little special, likely more special than it was before we came here.

With that, Bill C-27 is an incredible step forward in what we will do for our veterans that are leaving because of injury.

I want to follow-up on Mr. Valeriotte's question a little bit. There are two things. You talked about the number of skills that our veterans have when they leave. I've also had the same opportunity, as he had, of being a part of the air force.

I'm wondering what skill development they are going to. Is there a particular area where they are transferring their skills to? When they do that and meet the criteria, is skills development added to that when they get in? Is that also available?

• (1650)

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: As I previously mentioned, there is a wide range of skills that veterans bring with them. The commission matches those skill sets with the requests from departments. To date, 53% of medically released veterans have been placed in clerical and administrative-type functions. But others, as I said, have been placed in computer systems, purchasing and supply, electronics, engineering, and in some cases, executive functions. Again, there's a wide range of occupations.

I know, for example, that if you enter as a correctional officer or a border guard, those departments, as they do for anyone who enters the public service, provide individuals with the training they need to do their job. That's quite commonplace in the public service for any new entrants, regardless of where they enter, to have workplace training provided once they are appointed.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Chair, I just have a comment. We need not forget the private sector, which has played a major role in this. I think, as an organization, we should thank them for stepping up to the plate and being of assistance in the employment of our veterans.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Bev. I think it was a good clarification, and it's a little more complicated for them in prioritizing in terms of hiring, as they have a few more restrictions, I might say, or more things to consider. But they are making an effort. There's no question about it.

I'm not trying to drag this out at all, but there is some more time if anybody wants it.

Okay, that's for both sides, if you folks have any interest.

I think Mr. Rafferty, and then Mr. Valeriote.

Mr. John Rafferty: Thank you very much, Chair.

I was wondering if I would ask this question, because we usually ask this of witnesses. I get the sense that the Public Service Commission really likes this bill. Is there anything about the bill that you would change? Is there anything that is missing, perhaps, or anything that you'd like to see in this bill from a commission point of view?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: Thank you for the question.

I think it's fair to say that the commission does support the bill and thinks it will actually make a difference. As the entity that administers the program, these mechanisms will help us place more veterans and medically released veterans than it otherwise would have without the existence of this new legislation, if it's passed.

The one thing I would mention, as I did in my opening remarks, is that this legislation applies to entities that are subject to the Public Service Employment Act, which, if you look at the core public service, is approximately 200,000 positions out of a core public service of around 250,000 or so. Those are just estimates. There are a number of larger operational departments, like the Canada Revenue Agency, Parks Canada, and CFIA, as three examples, that would not be subject per se to this legislation because they're outside of the Public Service Employment Act. Having said that, I understand from talking to those departments and working with others that they are willing, through their own separate human resource regimes and legislation, to meet the spirit of intent of this legislation and to do their part in placing veterans.

The reason why I say that's important is that we know from our experience in administering the legislation to date that veterans tend to be in the regions of the country—and it's understandable that they seek employment in the various regions across the country—so the departments having broader footprints in the federal public service, I think, will make a great deal of difference to our overall success. Again, I was very pleased to know and talk to my colleagues and understand that they will also do their part, as I understand, in supporting the spirit and intent of this program.

The Chair: I appreciate your making those points. That's very useful information.

Oh, Mr. Valeriote has another question.

•(1655)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Understanding that neither the Department of Veterans Affairs here or the Public Service Commission of Canada can answer my question about the five-year limitation, who do I ask that question of? Who is responsible to give me an answer?

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: I think the Department of Veterans Affairs and the minister responsible for the legislation—

Mr. Frank Valeriote: But they said they weren't. They said it's not their responsibility to answer that.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: We'll get you those answers.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: No, I don't want you to get me those answers. I want it from someone in authority who—

An hon. member: The minister.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: The minister.

The Chair: Okay, rather than bog this down, I think we've made record of the fact three or four times that Frank has made it quite clear that he'd like an answer on that five-year deal.

It certainly is not incumbent on those who are implementing it to give the answer. It's up to those who develop the policy and pass it.

What we will do to assure Mr. Valeriote is that it will be a minister, whether it's Treasury Board or Veterans Affairs—

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Will be here?

The Chair: I didn't say that. I said that you want an answer, so we'll make sure it goes to the right person. You know what, I'm going to hire you a lawyer.

Some hon. members: Oh, Oh!

Mr. John Rafferty: I think Ms. Robinson has one more comment.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Anne-Marie Robinson: I just have a comment on the five years. I would like to point out that, as I said, up until 2012 we had a great deal of success in placing medically released veterans, with 72% placement rate. As I said, it was the highest rate of any group in the priority system. That was with a two-year entitlement, so I do believe that extending the period to five years will make a positive difference in our ability to appoint even more veterans if they can stay in the system for a longer period of time.

The Chair: I appreciate that. I'm sure whichever the minister, they will say that it's a great improvement over what was in place, because it's a much longer time. I think we'll hear a similar answer, I would hope, when it comes back from government.

Do you want to ask another question?

Mr. Royal Galipeau: No, certainly not on the mike.

The Chair: This is a different process today.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Let's go in camera.

The Chair: I'm going to thank our presenters, or witnesses, very much. It was very helpful, as we consider this.

We're going to have a two-minute suspension, then we're going in camera. So only the members of the committee and their staff can stay.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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